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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Integrating Gen Z perspectives in industry-aligned curriculum design

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of Generation Z (Gen Z) perspectives in designing industry-aligned curricula that are both relevant and future-ready. The research aims to identify the essential insights and values that Gen Z graduates contribute to curriculum development and to understand how their unique learning preferences, skills, and expectations shape the design of educational content. The study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing one-on-one interviews with college graduates aged 23-27 who are currently employed. Reflexive thematic analysis was conducted to analyze the data obtained from purposive sampling. Participants were asked about their experiences with current educational curricula, the alignment of their skills with industry needs, and their views on how technology influences learning and curriculum expectations. The findings highlight the critical role of adapting curricula to include Gen Z's preferences and skills, ensuring that future programs remain aligned with industry demands and prepare students for success in the evolving job market.

Keywords: Gen Z; perspectives; industry-aligned; curriculum design; integration

1. Introduction

As Generation Z (Gen Z) begins to enter the workforce, their unique expectations and perspectives are driving significant changes in both education and career development. This generation, born between the late 1990s and mid-2010s, seeks clear career paths, continuous upskilling, and dynamic learning environments. Unlike prior generations, Gen Z's workplace expectations emphasize the need for educational experiences that directly align with their aspirations and career goals[1]. By 2025, Gen Z is expected to comprise 27% of the global workforce. It is also projected that an average Gen Z individual will hold 17 different jobs, experience five career shifts, and move residences 15 times throughout their lifetime[2]. This growing presence in the workforce highlights the need for educational curricula that are adaptable and aligned with the demands of the modern job market.

Gen Z's approach to work is influenced by the expectation of frequent career transitions, requiring educational programs that emphasize flexibility and real-world application[3]. The modern workplace demands continuous learning, and Gen Z places a high value on upskilling and reskilling to stay relevant. Given that this generation is likely to encounter multiple career shifts, educational institutions must provide curricula that not only focus on foundational knowledge but also equip students with the adaptability needed

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to navigate these transitions. In this context, curricula that prioritize skills development, hands-on experiences, and opportunities to solve real-world problems will better prepare Gen Z for long-term career success.

The digital era in which Gen Z has grown up has significantly shaped their learning preferences and professional expectations. Gen Z has been exposed to unprecedented access to technology, making them both consumers and producers of digital content[4]. As a result, they expect educational programs to integrate technological tools, interactive platforms, and personalized learning experiences. Their ability to handle multiple devices and multitask effectively further drives their demand for learning environments that are dynamic, fast-paced, and rooted in practical application. Consequently, a traditional classroom-based curriculum may no longer suffice; instead, programs that incorporate experiential learning, digital engagement, and technology-driven methods are more aligned with Gen Z's needs.

For educational institutions to effectively prepare Gen Z for the workforce, it is essential to recognize the specific characteristics and learning preferences of this generation. Shofiyyah et al.[3] emphasize that aligning educational content with the traits of Gen Z is critical for ensuring that graduates are adequately equipped to meet the challenges of today's evolving job market. This generation prefers an education that goes beyond theoretical knowledge, with a strong focus on applied skills and real-world problem-solving. To meet these expectations, curricula must be continuously updated to reflect both industry trends and the practical needs of the workforce.

The employability of graduates has alwayss been a central concern for universities and employers alike. According to[5], the skill set that students develop during their academic journey plays a crucial role in determining their readiness for the workforce. Employers are increasingly seeking graduates who possess not only academic knowledge but also the practical skills required for success in a competitive job market. Gen Z learners, in particular, place a high value on the alignment between their education and future career opportunities. To meet these needs, educational programs must integrate industry-relevant content, employability skills, and modern pedagogical practices.

Additionally, Isa et al.[6] argue that universities are responsible for ensuring that students are not only knowledgeable but also capable of applying their learning in professional settings. Critical thinking, adaptability, and problem-solving are among the essential skills that universities must emphasize to enhance the employability of Gen Z graduates. This generation's preference for interactive, tech-driven learning environments reflects their desire for education that is directly tied to real-world challenges. To remain competitive and relevant, educational institutions must therefore ensure that their curricula bridge the gap between academic theory and the practical demands of the modern workplace.

This study aims to explore how Gen Z perspectives can be integrated into industry-aligned curriculum design, ensuring that educational programs remain relevant, flexible, and effective in preparing students for the workforce. Through the analysis of Gen Z graduates' experiences, this research seeks to identify how educational content can be adapted to better align with the skills, expectations, and career aspirations of this generation, ultimately ensuring that future graduates are equipped for success in an ever-changing professional landscape.

2. Literature

The integration of Generation Z (Gen Z) perspectives into industry-aligned curriculum design is increasingly vital as educational institutions strive to prepare students for the demands of the modern workforce. Gen Z, typically defined as individuals born after 1995, represents a cohort that is notably adept

with technology and social media. According to Deloitte[7], a significant percentage of Filipino Gen Z—65%—is engaged in part-time or full-time employment, showcasing their entrepreneurial mindset and pragmatic approach to career development. This trend necessitates a curriculum that not only acknowledges their experiences but also incorporates their insights into curriculum design to enhance relevance and applicability in the job market.

Research indicates that Gen Z's familiarity with digital technology fundamentally influences their learning preferences. Dimani[8] describes them as digital natives who thrive in environments that leverage technology and social media for educational purposes. Consequently, traditional pedagogical approaches may fall short in engaging this generation effectively. Educators must consider adopting innovative instructional strategies, such as technology-enhanced learning and collaborative projects, to resonate with Gen Z's skill set and values. Such adaptations will ensure that educational programs are not only engaging but also reflective of the practical skills required in today's diverse job market.

Curriculum design is a critical role in shaping learning outcomes, which ultimately influence the employability of graduates. Gaweł et al.[9] and Yuen et al.[10] assert that continuous improvement in curriculum and pedagogical practices is essential to bridge the gap between academic training and industry expectations. This alignment is particularly pertinent for Gen Z, who expect educational institutions to equip them with competencies that match current labor market demands. Recent literature has emphasized the urgency of addressing curriculum alignment, indicating that universities must be proactive in revising their programs to reflect the evolving landscape of required skills[11-12].

Moreover, the educational experiences of Gen Z differ significantly from those of prior generations, which calls for a transformation in learning models. Ronald[13] argues for the adoption of modern educational frameworks that emphasize digitalization, on-demand learning, and micro-learning strategies. Leveraging these approaches, educational institutions can cater to the unique preferences of Gen Z, thereby enhancing student engagement and retention of knowledge. These strategies not only provide flexibility in learning but also align with Gen Z's expectations for personalized and accessible education.

As Gen Z joins the workforce, organizations encounter the challenge of managing a diverse workforce that includes multiple generations, each with distinct work values and communication styles. Barhate et al.[14] highlight the complexities arising from this generational amalgamation, which can lead to conflicts in learning styles and workplace dynamics. To effectively navigate these challenges, it is crucial for educational institutions to integrate the perspectives of Gen Z into their curricula, fostering an understanding of collaborative work environments that reflect real-world dynamics.

Furthermore, Perilus[15] emphasizes the necessity for organizations to comprehend the characteristics and preferences of Gen Z employees. This understanding should begin within the educational sphere, where curricula must be intentionally designed to reflect the values and skills that Gen Z prioritizes. Incorporating their feedback into curriculum development, educational institutions can better prepare students for the complexities of modern workplaces, enhancing their adaptability and competitiveness.

The integration of Gen Z perspectives in curriculum design is essential for developing educational programs that are not only aligned with industry demands but also resonate with the unique characteristics of this generation. As digital natives who value flexibility, real-world applications, and personalized learning experiences. Gen Z's insights can guide the evolution of curricula to better prepare students for successful careers[16]. This alignment is imperative for ensuring that graduates possess the necessary skills to thrive in an ever-changing job market.

3. Methodlogy

This section outlines the methodology employed in the study, "Integrating Gen Z Perspectives in Industry-Aligned Curriculum Design," conducted from October 19-22, 2024, in Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines. The research aimed to identify the key insights and values that Gen Z students can contribute to the design of industry-aligned curricula and to examine the role of Gen Z's learning preferences, skills, and expectations in shaping relevant and future-ready curriculum content. The methodology is guided by the objectives of the research, ensuring that the instrument and the framing of the questions are aligned with the research goals[17].

3.1. Population and sampling

The study employed purposive sampling to ensure that the participants were able to represent the population. Purposive sampling helps researchers gather participants who are more likely to be involved in the subject matter[18-19]. In this study, purposive sampling allowed the researchers to collect first-hand narrative data from a limited number of respondents[20]. The participants were college graduates aged 23-27 who are currently employed, reflecting the target population of Gen Z individuals entering the workforce.

3.2. Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide (see **Table 1**). The interview questions were designed to elicit information relevant to the research objectives, such as exploring the participants' experiences with current educational curricula, the alignment of their skills with industry needs, and their views on how technology influences learning and curriculum expectations.

Table 1. Instrument of the study.

Objective	Interview Questions	Participants	N
To identify the key insights and values that Gen Z students can contribute to the design of industry-aligned curricula.	1. What values do you believe are essential for an industry-aligned curriculum? 2. How do you think your experiences and perspectives as a Gen Z student can inform curriculum development? 3. What specific insights do you have about the skills that are necessary for success in today's job market? 4. Can you share any examples of how your educational experiences have shaped your views on curriculum content? 5. What role do you think technology plays in shaping your expectations for industry-aligned curricula?	College graduates ages 23-27 with current work	40
To examine the role of Gen Z's learning preferences, skills, and expectations in shaping relevant and future-ready curriculum content.	6. What are your preferred learning styles or methods, and how do they affect your educational outcomes? 7. How do you believe your skills align with the requirements of your desired career path? 8. What expectations do you have for the types of skills and knowledge that should be included in a relevant curriculum? 9. How do you think curriculum design can better accommodate the diverse learning preferences of Gen Z students? 10. In your opinion, what skills or knowledge areas are currently lacking in your education that are critical for future success?		

3.3. Data gathering procedure

The primary data collection technique involved semi-structured one-on-one interviews with the participants. The interviews provided an opportunity to delve deeply into the participants' personal experiences with inclusive education in terms of compliances and obstructions[21]. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in exploring participants' thoughts, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into issues as they arose during the interviews[22]. Each interview was recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis. This approach not only facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives but also ensured that their voices were accurately represented in the research findings[23].

3.4. Data analysis

A qualitative research technique was utilized to find repetitive themes and patterns in the data that had been gathered[24]. The data analysis involved a process of reflexive thematic analysis, which is a systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and interpreting themes within qualitative data. This approach allowed the researchers to explore the data in a comprehensive and rigorous manner, ensuring that the findings were grounded in the participants' experiences.

4. Results

Objective 1. To identify the key insights and values that Gen Z students can contribute to the design of industry-aligned curricula.

4.1. What values do you believe are essential for an industry-aligned curriculum?

4.1.1. Flexibility and adaptability

Sixteen (16) participants highlighted the significance of flexibility and adaptability in an industry-aligned curriculum. These values are essential in keeping up with the ever-evolving industries, especially with advancements in technology and changes in consumer demands. By ensuring flexibility, students are better equipped to handle these shifts and remain competitive in the job market. The curriculum must stay dynamic, incorporating emerging fields such as AI and data analytics to prepare students for modern challenges. Adaptability in educational programs ensures a smoother transition from academic to professional environments, making graduates more industry-ready.

> "Flexibility and adaptability are essential, as industries are constantly evolving with advancements in technology and changes in consumer behavior."
>
> "It should prioritize flexibility to accommodate evolving industries, focus on providing real-world experiences, and incorporate up-to-date technological advancements."
>
> "The curriculum must be flexible enough to evolve with changing industry demands and emerging fields."
>
> "The curriculum needs to be flexible and include up-to-date skills like digital literacy and problem-solving."

4.1.2. Real-world application and practicality

Sixteen (16) participants emphasized the importance of practical application in the curriculum. Real-world experience through internships, hands-on projects, and industry collaborations is crucial in preparing students for the workforce. Practicality bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and workplace

demands, ensuring that students acquire applicable skills. The curriculum should focus on skills that are relevant to industry needs, such as creativity and problem-solving. By prioritizing real-world application, students are better prepared for the complexities and challenges of their chosen fields.

> "Innovation is another key value—curricula should foster creativity and problem-solving skills, as these are necessary in today's competitive job market."

> "Practical Experience, incorporating hands-on learning, internships, and real-world projects is crucial for bridging theory and practice."

> "For most students, it [internship] is done in an extremely scattered and unplanned manner. Internship cells must give options and curate them for students in different stages of their course."

> "The skills we learn should be applicable in real world settings."

4.1.3. Collaboration and inclusivity

Twelve (12) participants pointed out the importance of collaboration and inclusivity in preparing students for diverse and global workplaces. The curriculum should teach students how to work with people from various backgrounds, mirroring the realities of modern industries. Collaboration with industry leaders can help shape the curriculum, ensuring it meets the needs of both employers and students. Inclusivity fosters an environment where students from different cultures and experiences can thrive, making them better prepared for teamwork in their future careers.

> "Inclusivity and collaboration are critical; students must be equipped with the ability to work with diverse teams and in multicultural environments."

> "Another key value is inclusivity students come from diverse backgrounds, so the curriculum should consider different perspectives and experiences."

> "Collaboration, Partnerships with industry leaders can enhance curriculum design and provide insights into necessary competencies."

4.2. How do you think your experiences and perspectives as a Gen Z student can inform curriculum development?

4.2.1. Integration of digital tools

Sixteen (16) participants highlighted the importance of integrating digital tools and platforms into curriculum development. As Gen Z students who have grown up in a technology-driven environment, they believe that education should reflect this digital proficiency. They emphasize the need for curricula to include training on how to effectively use social media and other digital platforms for professional purposes, such as marketing, communication, and branding. This integration would not only equip students with essential tech skills but also align the curriculum with modern business strategies. In addition, participants stressed that digital tools can enhance interactive learning experiences, making education more engaging and relevant to today's digital world.

> "This perspective enables me to highlight the importance of integrating digital platforms, especially social media, into curricula."

> "I can advocate for integrating digital tools and platforms in learning, ensuring that students are equipped with necessary tech skills."

> "My experience with online learning platforms, social media, and real-time access to information suggests that curricula should emphasize interactive tools."

> "We've grown up surrounded by technology, and we're used to learning in non-traditional ways, like through YouTube or online platforms."

4.2.2. Hands-on learning and practical application

Twelve (12) participants underscored the value of hands-on learning and practical application in curriculum development. They believe that curricula should focus more on experiential learning, such as internships, projects, and collaborations with industries. This approach helps students not only grasp theoretical concepts but also gain practical skills that are directly applicable in real-world settings. Participants noted that this method of learning bridges the gap between school and professional life, preparing them for industry demands. By making education more hands-on, students can better connect with the material and be more equipped for their future careers.

> "Our generation's preference for experiential learning—learning by doing—means that curricula should include more hands-on projects, internships, and collaborations with industries."

> "My perspective favors active, hands-on learning—such as internships or project-based courses—that bridge the gap between theory and practical application."

> "I recognize the importance of catering to varied learning preferences, promoting a mix of traditional lectures, hands-on projects, and online resources."

4.2.3. Social awareness and inclusivity

Twelve (12) participants emphasized the significance of social awareness and inclusivity in shaping curriculum development. As Gen Z students, they are deeply attuned to societal issues such as sustainability, equality, and ethics. They believe curricula should reflect these values, ensuring that students are not only prepared for professional success but also equipped to address global challenges. This includes incorporating lessons on social responsibility and ethical decision-making into course content. Additionally, they mentioned the importance of inclusivity, where the curriculum should cater to diverse backgrounds and learning styles, making education accessible and relevant to all students.

> "I also value learning that is inclusive and mindful of social and environmental issues, reflecting the concerns of my generation."

> "We're also more socially aware, and I think we expect curriculum content to reflect current issues like sustainability, equality, and ethics in business or tech."

> "I value diversity and social responsibility, which should be reflected in course content."

4.3. What specific insights do you have about the skills that are necessary for success in today's job market?

4.3.1. Blend of technical and soft skills

Twenty-four (24) participants expressed that success in today's job market requires a combination of technical and soft skills. They emphasized the importance of technological literacy, such as data analysis, digital marketing, and AI, alongside soft skills like adaptability, creativity, and emotional intelligence. These

skills prepare students for the demands of modern workplaces, where both hard skills and interpersonal abilities are crucial for navigating complex challenges. This combination ensures students can both use technology effectively and collaborate across diverse teams. As industries continue to evolve, a well-rounded skill set becomes a significant advantage in any profession.

> "Success in today's job market requires a blend of hard and soft skills."
>
> "Technological literacy, creativity, and emotional intelligence are crucial in today's job market."
>
> "Digital fluency, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence are crucial."
>
> "Beyond technical skills, I think companies are looking for people who can think critically, adapt to new situations, and work well with diverse teams."
>
> "If you have the specific skills in the job market, you can do the acquired tasks that are given to you."
>
> "The skills that are really necessary for success in today's job market are preparedness and confidence."

4.3.2. Adaptability and problem-solving

Twenty (20) participants highlighted the need for adaptability and problem-solving skills in today's job market. They pointed out that modern industries are dynamic and fast-paced, requiring individuals who can think strategically and adjust to new environments and challenges. Problem-solving, especially in the context of emerging technologies, was mentioned as a critical skill to handle complex tasks efficiently. The ability to navigate changes and stay flexible is seen as an essential trait for thriving in professional settings. By incorporating adaptability and problem-solving into the curriculum, students will be better equipped for the uncertainties of the evolving job landscape.

> "Having grown up in a fast-paced world, we know how to navigate change, think strategically, and solve complex problems quickly."
>
> "Employers seek candidates who can effectively use digital tools, think outside the box to solve problems, and communicate well across diverse teams."
>
> "Critical thinking and emotional intelligence are crucial."
>
> "Companies are looking for people who can think critically, adapt to new situations."
>
> "Flexibility is key, being able to learn and apply new skills as the market changes."

4.3.3. Demand for digital fluency

Twenty (20) participants emphasized that digital fluency is indispensable in today's job market. They noted that skills such as coding, data literacy, and the use of digital tools are in high demand across industries. As technology continues to advance, these skills allow individuals to remain relevant and competitive. Additionally, proficiency in digital platforms is seen as a gateway to unlocking opportunities in various sectors, from business to technology. A curriculum that focuses on digital fluency will not only prepare students for current trends but will also future-proof their careers, ensuring they are ready for the digital challenges of tomorrow.

> "On the technical side, skills like data literacy, digital marketing, and the ability to work with new technologies (such as AI and automation) are crucial."
>
> "Technological literacy, creativity, and emotional intelligence are crucial in today's job market."
>
> "In today's job market, digital fluency, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence are crucial."
>
> "Skills in coding, data interpretation, and effective communication are in high demand across industries."

4.4. Can you share any examples of how your educational experiences have shaped your views on curriculum content?

4.4.1. Practical application of learning

Twenty (20) participants highlighted the importance of practical experiences, such as internships, hands-on projects, and simulations, in shaping their views on curriculum content. They emphasized that real-world applications provided more valuable learning experiences than theoretical lessons alone, reinforcing the need for curricula to integrate practical scenarios that prepare students for industry demands.

> "This type of practical, real-world training has allowed me to experience firsthand the direct connection between what we learn in the classroom and how those skills are applied in professional settings."
>
> "For instance, a marketing course that required us to develop an actual social media campaign was more impactful than theoretical discussions."
>
> "In one case, a business simulation course helped me understand real-world challenges by allowing us to manage a virtual company."
>
> "Internships and hands-on projects give a completely different learning experience compared to just reading textbooks."
>
> "In one of my classes, we worked on a project with an actual company, and that taught me so much more about the industry than any lecture could have."

4.4.2. Connection between theory and workforce readiness

Sixteen (16) participants expressed how the integration of theoretical knowledge and its application in the curriculum has helped them feel more prepared for the workforce. They noted that combining classroom learning with real-world scenarios improved their confidence and readiness for professional environments.

> "Learning about strategic planning in a classroom setting followed by implementing those strategies in a simulated or real-world environment helps to reinforce the importance of theory and its application."
>
> "It expands my views on the curriculum content that was taught to us during college, that all the learnings we acquire can be incorporated in real-world scenarios."
>
> "It made me realize that the curriculum needs to focus more on real-world application rather than just theory."

> "This hands-on experience was far more valuable than theoretical lessons alone."

4.4.3. Learning beyond the classroom

Twelve (12) participants mentioned how experiences outside of traditional classroom settings, such as research, podcasts, and social gatherings, have contributed to their educational development. These activities enhanced their understanding of the curriculum content by exposing them to diverse ideas and real-world situations.

> "By conducting a research on certain topics… I learn different ideas and experiences that help me in my future career."

> "Also the importance of social gatherings because communication skills is being challenged especially when you are not into socializing but needed in the job."

> "I also take note of what our teachers shared about the reality of working in our industry."

4.5. What role do you think technology plays in shaping your expectations for industry-aligned curricula?

4.5.1. Integration of advanced digital tools in curricula

Twenty (20) participants stressed that curricula should integrate advanced digital tools like AI, virtual simulations, and online collaboration platforms. They believe these technologies are essential for preparing students for modern, technology-driven industries. Incorporating such tools enhances the learning experience by allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical scenarios. This approach bridges the gap between education and industry demands, ensuring students are equipped with relevant, up-to-date skills. The participants emphasized that these digital tools are not just helpful but necessary to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving job market.

> "Technologies like AI, machine learning, and big data analytics are becoming core components of many industries, and curricula must reflect this by teaching students how to use and navigate these tools."

> "I expect curricula to incorporate cutting-edge tools like virtual simulations, AI-driven learning, and platforms for online collaboration."

> "I expect the curriculum to include advanced digital tools such as AI and online collaboration platforms."

> "We expect to use the same technology in class that we'll be using in the workplace, so the curriculum should include the latest tools and platforms used by industries."

> "Technology can be included into curriculum development through the use of educational software and applications, digital learning resources, online and blended learning models, and emerging technologies like data analytics, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence."

4.5.2. Personalization and flexibility in learning

Twenty participants highlighted that technology allows for personalized and flexible learning experiences tailored to individual needs. They emphasized that curricula should offer students the ability to learn at their own pace, adapting to diverse learning styles. This flexibility ensures that students can better retain knowledge and apply it in real-world situations. Personalized learning also fosters engagement by allowing students to focus on areas where they need the most improvement. Overall, they believe this approach better prepares students for the varied demands of modern industries.

> "Technology enables more personalized learning experiences, where students can access learning materials at their own pace and tailor their educational experiences to suit their individual needs."

> "Technology allows for personalized learning paths, making education more accessible and tailored to individual needs, which I believe is critical for preparing students for future industries."

> "I believe personalized learning platforms, where students can progress at their own pace, should be integrated to meet diverse needs and learning styles."

> "Technology is a huge part of how we learn and what we expect from the curriculum… learning should be more dynamic and interactive using things like virtual labs, simulations, or even AI tools."

4.5.3. Real-time access to industry-relevant information

Twelve (12) participants emphasized that technology provides real-time access to crucial industry information, shaping their expectations for a more informed and up-to-date curriculum. They expect educational programs to reflect current job market trends, allowing them to stay competitive and relevant. This constant access to information helps institutions adapt curricula to industry needs, ensuring students are job-ready upon graduation. By incorporating insights into what skills and knowledge are in demand, curricula can better align with the future workforce. Technology plays a critical role in keeping both students and educators informed about the ever-evolving demands of the job market.

> "Access to data on job market trends allows educational institutions to tailor programs to meet the evolving needs of industries."

> "You just browse your internet and look for in-demand careers for you to get informed and knowledgeable to your chosen program in college."

> "We're used to having instant access to information, so I think there's an expectation that learning should be more dynamic and interactive."

Objective 2. To examine the role of Gen Z's learning preferences, skills, and expectations in shaping relevant and future-ready curriculum content.

4.6. What are your preferred learning styles or methods, and how do they affect your educational outcomes?

4.6.1. Experiential learning

Twenty (20) participants emphasized the effectiveness of hands-on and experiential learning methods, such as group projects, real-world applications, and interactive activities, in enhancing their educational outcomes. They pointed out that these methods help them better retain information by allowing them to apply knowledge in practical scenarios. Many feel that traditional lectures lack engagement and are less effective compared to active, problem-solving tasks. Experiential learning, especially when connected to

real-world problems, has been noted as crucial for the development of critical thinking and teamwork skills. This preference for active engagement helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, which is vital for their future careers.

> "Project-based learning methods, where we work on real-world problems, have also proven effective in solidifying my understanding and helping me retain information longer."

> "I prefer hands-on and collaborative learning methods, such as group work and real-world projects. These methods allow me to better understand and apply concepts."

> "I learn best when I can apply what I'm learning, so I really prefer hands-on methods like labs, group projects, or case studies."

> "Using case studies in business courses has enhanced my problem-solving skills and prepared me for real-world challenges."

4.6.2. Technology-enhanced learning

Twenty (20) participants highlighted the significant impact of technology-enhanced learning on their educational outcomes. They discussed how digital platforms, such as e-learning resources, videos, and online collaboration tools, allow for a more engaging and flexible learning experience. These tools provide access to a vast range of materials, making it easier to explore different perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of subjects. Furthermore, the integration of technology into the curriculum helps prepare students for the tech-driven environments they will face in their careers, making learning more aligned with industry expectations. This blend of traditional and digital methods enhances critical thinking and knowledge retention.

> "Utilizing tools like laptops, online resources, and interactive platforms has broadened my knowledge and significantly improved my educational outcomes."

> "I also appreciate when courses are broken down into more interactive formats like using videos, quizzes, and discussion-based learning, instead of just long lectures."

> "E-learning platforms provide access to various materials beyond textbooks, such as videos, simulations, and forums where students can discuss ideas."

> "These methods make learning more engaging and practical, allowing me to better retain and apply knowledge."

4.7. How do you believe your skills align with the requirements of your desired career path?

4.7.1. Alignment of technical and soft skills

Twenty (20) participants emphasized that their combination of technical and soft skills aligns well with the requirements of their desired career paths. Many of them highlighted their technical skills, such as proficiency in digital tools, data analysis, and software relevant to their fields, which are essential in today's fast-paced industries. At the same time, they recognized the importance of soft skills like teamwork, adaptability, and communication, which are crucial for thriving in collaborative work environments. These participants acknowledged that while technical expertise is critical, soft skills are equally important in helping them adapt to changing industry demands and succeed in their careers.

"My ability to use digital tools and platforms has enhanced my productivity and innovation."

"My skills in technology, creativity, and communication align well with my desired career path in business or entrepreneurship."

"I've developed soft skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability."

"Critical thinking and leadership skills through various school projects will help me succeed in my career."

4.7.2. Continuous skill development

Twelve (12) participants pointed out the importance of continuously developing and enhancing their skills to remain competitive in their chosen careers. They stressed the need to acquire new skills or improve existing ones to meet the evolving demands of their industries. These participants expressed a commitment to lifelong learning, understanding that staying stagnant can hinder progress. They emphasized that even if they have gaps in certain areas, such as leadership or financial literacy, they are willing to work hard to address these shortcomings to ensure they remain aligned with the needs of their desired career paths.

"If there are some skills needed for my career, I don't let myself be stagnant; I strive hard to enhance and acquire those skills."

"There's definitely a gap in some soft skills like managing teams or making strategic decisions, which I think are important."

"My professors guide us in assessing what skills we need to develop and build to be ready for our chosen career paths."

4.8. What expectations do you have for the types of skills and knowledge that should be included in a relevant curriculum?

4.8.1. Emerging technologies and future trends

Twenty (20) participants mentioned the importance of incorporating emerging technologies and future trends into the curriculum. They expect courses to focus on areas like artificial intelligence, machine learning, data analytics, and sustainable business models, which are becoming increasingly relevant in various industries. These participants emphasized the need for students to stay ahead of the curve by learning about the latest developments in their fields. Preparing for the future through exposure to cutting-edge technologies will help them adapt to rapidly changing environments and become more competitive in the workforce.

"Courses that focus on emerging fields like AI, machine learning, and sustainable business models will better prepare students for future careers."

"Learning data analytics or negotiation techniques would be valuable across industries."

"Including emerging technologies like AI and data analytics is crucial."

"Curricula must incorporate adaptability and leadership development to stay relevant."

4.8.2. Practical experience

Twelve (12) participants highlighted the need for curricula to include practical, real-world experiences. They expect internships, case studies, and industry partnerships to be integrated into their education, as these provide invaluable opportunities for hands-on learning. These participants believe that exposure to actual workplace scenarios is essential for applying theoretical knowledge and developing the skills necessary to succeed after graduation. Practical experience also helps students gain a better understanding of industry expectations and prepares them for the challenges they may face in their careers.

> "I also expect more real-world integration, such as internships, case studies, and industry partnerships."

> "There should be an emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation, as many industries are shifting towards more flexible and independent work environments."

> "By letting students experience the skills they need to acquire, their abilities will flourish instead of stagnating."

4.9. How do you think curriculum design can better accommodate the diverse learning preferences of Gen Z students?

4.9.1. Flexibility in learning formats and assessments

Twenty (20) participants emphasized the importance of incorporating flexibility into curriculum design to accommodate Gen Z's diverse learning preferences. They suggested that offering a variety of formats, such as multimedia resources, project-based learning, and digital tools, would cater to different learning styles. Participants also highlighted the value of flexible assessments, allowing students to choose between projects, presentations, or traditional exams, based on their individual strengths. This flexibility in both learning formats and assessments ensures that students can engage with the curriculum in a way that best suits their preferences and helps them succeed.

> "Offering a variety of learning formats, such as multimedia resources, hands-on projects, and collaborative online platforms."

> "Allowing students to choose between completing a project through traditional methods or using digital simulations would provide flexibility."

> "Offering options, like more electives or project-based alternatives to exams, could help address the diverse learning needs of students."

> "Incorporating flexibility in assessments, such as allowing students to choose between projects, presentations, or traditional exams."

4.9.2. Blended learning and use of digital tools

Twenty (20) participants discussed the importance of blending in-person instruction with digital tools and online platforms to accommodate Gen Z's learning preferences. They mentioned that this hybrid approach provides students with more control over how they learn, combining the benefits of both face-to-face and digital learning environments. By incorporating e-learning platforms, digital simulations, and self-paced modules, the curriculum can meet the needs of students who thrive in a more flexible and technology-driven environment.

> "The curriculum should make use of blended learning techniques, combining in-person instruction with digital tools like e-learning platforms and simulations."

> "Blended learning, where you mix in-person with online options, could also be beneficial, as it gives students more control over how they learn."
>
> "Curriculum design can accommodate diverse learning preferences by offering a mix of interactive, self-paced, and collaborative options."
>
> "Hybrid learning is beneficial because it allows flexibility and individualized learning experiences."

4.9.3. Personalized and self-paced learning

Twenty (20) participants highlighted the value of personalized and self-paced learning as part of a curriculum designed for Gen Z. They suggested that allowing students to move at their own speed would provide more personalized learning experiences and help them achieve better outcomes. This approach ensures that students who prefer to work independently or at a different pace than their peers can still meet curriculum requirements while learning in a way that suits them best.

> "The curriculum should integrate more self-paced and personalized learning modules, allowing students to move at their own speed."
>
> "Incorporating adaptive technology that adjusts to individual learning speeds would ensure that all students can succeed."
>
> "Self-paced learning modules allow flexibility while ensuring that students still achieve the required outcomes."

4.10. In your opinion, what skills or knowledge areas are currently lacking in your education that are critical for future success?

4.10.1. Financial literacy and negotiation skills

Twelve (12) participants identified financial literacy and negotiation skills as areas that are currently under-taught in the curriculum but are critical for future success. These participants noted that understanding how to manage finances and negotiate effectively is essential, particularly in fields like business and entrepreneurship. Despite the importance of these skills, there is a noticeable gap in their inclusion in current education programs.

> "More emphasis on how to manage finances in real-world scenarios, how to negotiate in business."
>
> "Understanding how to manage budgets or negotiate deals is essential for business professionals, yet is often under-taught."
>
> "Financial literacy and negotiation…are critical for future success."

4.10.2. Critical thinking and leadership skills

Twelve (12) participants noted the lack of focus on critical thinking and leadership skills in the current curriculum. They argued that these skills are essential for problem-solving, managing teams, and navigating workplace dynamics. Leadership skills, in particular, were seen as crucial in preparing students for roles where they would need to manage others or start their own businesses.

> "Critical thinking…there could be more opportunities to develop these problem-solving skills in real-life scenarios."

"There's not as much emphasis on how to manage teams, solve conflicts, or navigate the complexities of workplace dynamics."

"Critical thinking is important for them to know their skills, weaknesses, and what they need to improve."

5. Discussion

Objective 1. To identify the key insights and values that Gen Z students can contribute to the design of industry-aligned curricula.

This study highlights the flexibility and adaptability are key components of an industry-aligned curriculum, enabling students to cope with rapidly evolving sectors, especially as industries face technological advancements and changing consumer demands. Jonker et al.[25] emphasized that flexible curricula allow for a more personalized approach to education, adapting to the needs and capabilities of students. Nataragan et al.[26] further support this by emphasizing that curriculum flexibility is essential for meeting students' curiosity and career goals, offering them multiple pathways to empower their learning experiences. This adaptability ensures that students are equipped to handle the dynamic nature of modern industries, making them more competitive in the workforce.

The emphasis on the importance of practical application, including internships, hands-on projects, and industry collaborations, plays a critical role in preparing students for their future careers. Internships serve as a bridge between theory and practice, offering students valuable experience that enhances both their personal and professional growth. Real-world learning experiences are crucial for reinforcing theoretical concepts and applying them in practical settings. Diane and Sunita[27] found that internships significantly improve job prospects, as they provide students with the skills and experiences necessary to succeed in their chosen fields. This aligns with findings from the study, which highlight the importance of curriculum designs that prioritize experiential learning.

The emphasis of collaborative and inclusive approaches in curriculum design are essential for preparing students to thrive in diverse and global work environments. Akintayo et al.[28] highlight that inclusivity in curriculum design addresses the varied backgrounds and needs of students, fostering environments that prioritize social improvement. This inclusivity ensures that the curriculum reflects diverse perspectives and learning styles, making it more relevant to all students. Through collaboration with industry leaders and inclusive course design, students can develop the competencies needed for teamwork in multicultural and diverse environments.

Gen Z's familiarity with digital technologies, integrating digital tools into the curriculum is crucial. Szymkowiak et al.[29] note that Gen Z students, who have grown up in a technology-driven environment, expect curricula to include digital platforms that enhance their learning experiences. This integration is not only about incorporating technology but ensuring that students acquire the skills needed to navigate modern digital tools for professional purposes, including marketing, communication, and branding. These digital competencies are vital for success in today's industries.

The hands-on learning and experiential learning, which emphasizes hands-on projects and real-world application, is seen as a powerful pedagogical approach for enhancing critical thinking and practical skills. Yaodum et al.[30] highlight that this method not only improves students' academic achievements but also fosters personal development. Prioritizing experiential learning, curricula can better prepare students for

industry demands by bridging the gap between theory and practice. Hands-on learning methods help students build deeper comprehension and skills applicable in real-world settings.

This study discuss social awareness and inclusivity, an inclusive curriculum promotes equity and social justice, addressing systemic inequalities within education. Allen et al.[31] emphasize the role of inclusive curriculum design in creating learning environments that support diversity, equity, and inclusion. Integrating social awareness and inclusivity into curriculum content, educators can ensure that students are equipped with the values and knowledge necessary to contribute to a more just and equitable society. This approach is especially relevant for Gen Z students, who are highly attuned to social issues such as sustainability and ethics.

Success in today's job market necessitates a combination of both technical and soft skills. Michaela et al.[32] stress the importance of digital literacy, highlighting data analysis and digital marketing as key competencies in technologically driven industries. Equally important are soft skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and creativity, which enable individuals to navigate complex work environments. These skills equip employees to remain adaptable and effective in a rapidly changing job market. Given the digital focus of modern industries, it is crucial for curricula to emphasize both technical proficiencies and the interpersonal skills needed for effective collaboration and innovation.

In modern industries, adaptability and problem-solving are paramount. Catarina et al.[33] point out that leveraging problem-solving skills within organizational strategies can enhance a company's competitiveness. Moreover, problem-solving enables individuals to address challenges efficiently, a capability that is increasingly necessary as industries continue to evolve rapidly[34]. The fast-paced nature of today's job market demands professionals who can quickly adjust to new environments and strategically navigate unforeseen obstacles. Gen Z graduates, as reflected in the research, expect educational programs to equip them with these problem-solving capabilities to tackle the real-world challenges they will encounter. Curricula must, therefore, provide opportunities for students to develop strategic thinking and adaptability, ensuring that they are well-prepared for a competitive and dynamic job market.

Digital fluency has become indispensable across various industries. Chanda et al.[35] highlighted that skills like coding, data literacy, and the proficient use of digital tools are not merely beneficial but essential for success in today's increasingly digitized workforce. As industries continue to integrate technology into their operations, the ability to analyze and apply digital information has become a core requirement for many professions. Curricula that emphasize digital literacy ensure that students are not only competent but also competitive in a rapidly changing job landscape.

Internships serve as a critical bridge between academic theory and professional practice. According to Anjum[36] internships provide students with structured opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, helping them develop both personal and professional skills. These programs are mutually beneficial—educational institutions can enhance their curricula based on industry needs, while students gain practical experience that prepares them for the workforce. Internships are crucial for students' career growth, as they help refine their professional competencies and improve their job readiness.

Universities have traditionally focused on theoretical knowledge, which serves as the foundation for future professional application. Benati et al.[37] emphasize that combining theoretical learning with practical experience better prepares students for the workforce. Theoretical knowledge is crucial for building a deep understanding of concepts, while its application through internships and projects enhances students' confidence and skills in professional environments. This integrated approach ensures that graduates are prepared for the complexities of today's job market.

Learning experiences outside traditional classroom settings contribute significantly to educational development. John[38] notes that activities such as research, podcasts, and social gatherings offer students a broader perspective and contribute to their learning in unique ways. These non-traditional learning experiences expose students to diverse ideas and real-world situations, enhancing their understanding of curriculum content and preparing them for the workforce. The integration of such experiences into the curriculum ensures that students can apply their knowledge in various contexts, furthering their academic and professional development.

Curricula should incorporate advanced digital tools such as AI, virtual simulations, and online collaboration platforms. Rafiq et al.[39] highlighted that these tools significantly enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic performance. However, challenges such as technical limitations and insufficient training can hinder their effective implementation. Despite these obstacles, digital tools offer substantial benefits in preparing students for technology-driven industries, as they allow for practical application of theoretical knowledge and provide insights into real-world scenarios.

Technology serves a critical role in providing personalized and flexible learning experiences. Shemshack and Spector[40] explain that learning is inherently a personalized experience, shaped by individual biases, backgrounds, and interactions. The integration of technology into education allows for learning models tailored to individual needs, enabling students to progress at their own pace and focus on areas that require improvement. This flexibility not only enhances engagement but also ensures that students achieve their educational goals in a manner that suits their unique learning styles.

Technology enables real-time access to industry-relevant information, which shapes students' expectations for an up-to-date and informed curriculum. Abid et al.[41] highlight how advancements in information technology have transformed educational practices by introducing digital learning tools such as mobile devices, simulations, and virtual laboratories. These tools allow students to stay informed about current trends in the job market, helping them remain competitive and relevant. Real-time industry data into curricula, educational institutions can ensure that their programs align with the latest developments in various fields.

Objective 2. To examine the role of Gen Z's learning preferences, skills, and expectations in shaping relevant and future-ready curriculum content.

The study by Kamran et al.[42] underscores the effectiveness of hands-on and experiential learning methods, including group projects, real-world applications, and interactive activities, in enhancing educational outcomes. The research findings highlight that these methods are instrumental in implementing interactive teaching strategies in higher education. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of promoting active participation, collaboration, and communication skills, which are essential in preparing students for the demands of the 21st-century workforce[43].

The study highlights the significant impact of technology-enhanced learning on educational outcomes, particularly how digital platforms such as e-learning resources, videos, and online collaboration tools enable more engaging and flexible learning experiences. The research findings underscore that the integration of digital technologies in education improves not only student engagement but also the digital competence of teachers[44].

The research findings underscore the importance of combining technical and soft skills to meet the demands of today's industries. Students frequently mentioned their proficiency in technical skills, including digital tools, data analysis, and industry-specific software, which are crucial in fast-paced sectors. The study by Lamri & Lubart[45] underscores the growing need for a diverse skill set, as both hard and soft skills are

vital for success. Hard skills, such as programming and accounting, complement soft skills like communication and emotional intelligence, making candidates more competitive in the job market[46].

The research findings underscore the necessity of continuously developing and enhancing skills to remain competitive in chosen career paths. Participants emphasized the need to acquire new skills or improve existing ones to adapt to industry changes. The study by Arulsamy et al.[47] highlights how training and development play a pivotal role in enhancing employee performance, job satisfaction, and innovation within organizations, ultimately leading to higher retention rates.

The emphasis on the importance of incorporating emerging technologies and future trends into curricula. Participants expect courses to cover artificial intelligence, machine learning, data analytics, and sustainable business models, which are becoming increasingly relevant across industries. The study by Dimitriadou & Lanitis[48] emphasizes the integration of AI and smart technologies in classrooms, fostering more efficient and creative learning environments that support both in-person and remote activities.

The study highlights the need for curricula to include practical, real-world experiences such as internships, case studies, and partnerships with industry. These hands-on learning opportunities are seen as crucial for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. According to Stijn et al.[49], internships have become significantly more common in higher education, with universities increasingly integrating them into their programs or promoting them as extracurricular opportunities[50].

The research findings underscore the importance of flexibility in curriculum design to accommodate the diverse learning preferences of Gen Z students. Participants suggested offering a variety of formats, including multimedia resources, project-based learning, and digital tools, to cater to different learning styles. The study by Wu[51] highlights how multimedia technology drives innovation in education by creating dynamic, interactive learning environments, thereby improving student satisfaction and job readiness.

The study highlights the value of blending in-person instruction with digital tools and online platforms to accommodate Gen Z's learning preferences. This hybrid learning model allows students more control over their learning process, blending the advantages of both face-to-face and online learning environments. According to Duong et al.[52], blended learning involves varying degrees of online content, ranging from 33% to 80%, with e-learning tools being used in lessons, presentations, and online discussions[53-54].

The study by Thomas[55] underscores the value of personalized and self-paced learning as part of a curriculum designed for Gen Z students. Participants suggested that allowing students to progress at their own pace would result in more personalized learning experiences and better academic outcomes. The research findings highlight the need for rigorous evaluation to determine the effectiveness of personalized learning in improving student achievement, given the diversity in student needs and instructional practices.

The study highlights the importance of teaching financial literacy and negotiation skills, areas that are currently underrepresented in the curriculum but are critical for future success. According to Susan & Alexandra[56], financial literacy refers not only to understanding basic financial concepts but also to applying them in decision-making, particularly in negotiation scenarios. The research underscores that increasing financial literacy could improve financial planning and decision-making.

The research findings highlight the lack of emphasis on critical thinking and leadership skills In the current curriculum. These skills are deemed essential for problem-solving, team management, and navigating workplace dynamics. Coşanay and Karalı[57] underscores the importance of developing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, as they prepare individuals to handle the complexities of today's world. Employers increasingly value these skills, which help individuals approach problems from multiple perspectives and

devise creative solutions. The research findings underscore the role of critical thinking in making well-reasoned judgments across various fields, including business and technology[58].

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of integrating Generation Z perspectives in designing industry-aligned curricula. The research emphasizes that curricula must prioritize flexibility, adaptability, and practical application to meet the evolving demands of modern industries. Specifically, the inclusion of digital tools, hands-on experiences, and a focus on real-world problem-solving aligns educational programs with the technological proficiency and learning preferences of Gen Z. Furthermore, the development of both technical skills—such as digital literacy—and soft skills like critical thinking and adaptability, is vital for preparing graduates to succeed in an increasingly competitive job market. The study's findings underscore the necessity of tailoring curricula to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and industry requirements, ensuring that students are not only academically proficient but also ready for real-world challenges. Moving forward, these insights provide a foundation for educators and policymakers to continually adapt curricula to emerging industry trends, ultimately fostering a generation of graduates who are well-equipped for future careers. Further research could explore more specific strategies for implementing these changes across diverse educational contexts.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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