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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring graduate programs' curriculum review discussions in partnership with industry players through social exchange perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Industry-school partnerships allow schools to align their curricula with the current demands of the industry, ensuring that students are equipped with relevant, practical knowledge that meets the needs of employers. Having collaboration with industry professionals, schools gain access to resources and expertise that might otherwise be unavailable, such as industry-standard equipment, specialized training, and real-world insights into job expectations. This paper explored the graduate program curriculum review discussions with key industry players through the lenses of social exchange perspectives. Curriculum designers (n=20) participated in one-on-one interview encouraging them to share their experiences in review discussions with their key industry players. Narratives were analyzed to identify recurring themes from participants' experiences. Findings indicated that curriculum designers viewed their interactions with industry partners positively, recognizing the mutual benefits reflected from sharing knowledge, expertise, and resources. This positive exchange encourages collaboration, as both parties gain insights into industry trends and skill requirements, leading to the integration of relevant feedback into the curriculum. Social exchange theory (SET) underscored the reciprocity in these relationships, where the positive actions of curriculum designers—seeking advice and collaboration—were likely to be reciprocated by industry partners, reinforcing long-term cooperation. The study also revealed that negotiated exchanges, though more formal, were essential when aligning curriculum with industry demands, especially in terms of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Notably, ongoing engagement and continuous feedback mechanisms help sustain these partnerships, creating an environment of trust, loyalty, and commitment that benefits both the education system and the industries that rely on it. Finally, formalized partnerships with long-term commitments, rather than one-off agreements, may be essential for aligning educational outcomes with evolving industry standards.

Keywords: collaboration; curriculum designing; industry-school partnerships; social exchange

1. Introduction

In the contemporary education environment, there is an escalating demand for high-caliber, application-oriented professionals, with a heightened focus on the quality of talent. The talent nurturing strategy of industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation in universities may significantly improve

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the quality of talent development and promote the high-quality advancement of education[1]. Following the increase in enrollment in education institutions, the graduates of these schools, while abundant in academic knowledge, frequently lack practical skills and experiential competencies. This has resulted in companies facing difficulties in locating the necessary talent, while a considerable percentage of graduates are unable to obtain positions that meet their expectations[2,3].

The effective cultivation of generic skills among graduates has been a longstanding difficulty for higher education institutions, prompting the implementation of various initiatives, including work-integrated learning[4]. Relevant industry experience may provide individuals with the skills needed to manage a broad clientele, along with industry-specific commercial acumen. For example, the ability to interact with clients who have specific company requirements seems essential for career success, although it appears to be lacking among many grads[4-6].

Industry-school partnerships are believed to be essential in the education system. For partnerships to be effective, parties should ideally convert a common vision into mutually accepted objectives and establish both formal and informal accountability mechanisms for inputs, decisions, and deliverables[4]. Plewa et al.[7] emphasizes that industry collaboration helps align the curriculum with current professional needs, ensuring it is relevant and effective in preparing students for the workforce. Meanwhile, Sjöö and Hellström[8] suggest that such collaboration also encourages innovation through the exchange of knowledge and ideas, which can lead to the development of new approaches, methodologies, or technologies within the curriculum.

Ejeka and Ebenezer-Nwokeji[9] further emphasize that such collaboration is a bilateral agreement, either formal or informal, aimed at fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between education and industry. Collaboration should help in addressing barriers between universities and industries, such as lack of trust and fear of knowledge leakage[10], where industry-university partnerships, through industrial training and joint curriculum development, can bridge skill gaps and enhance university goal achievement[11].

This paper was positioned to analyze how do social exchanges encourage collaboration in curriculum review discussions with industry players. Although researchers concur that a community's role is to actively participate in structured collaborative discussions, critical reflection, and inquiry to enhance professional growth, define practices, and make meaningful contributions to the field as a whole[12], there is still limited understanding of how this occurs in an educational setting, particularly in the context of collaboration and partnerships. Industry-school partnerships may also provide professional learning opportunities for teachers, with much of the literature on industry-school links focusing on school-to-work readiness[12]

This paper explored the implications of effective curriculum discussions through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (SET), which suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in interactions when there is a reciprocal exchange of resources[13]. These interactions, particularly with external organizations, are seen as key to enhancing intellectual capital, which is closely tied to social capital formed through network interactions. Lawler and Thye[14] examine the emotional aspects of social exchanges, arguing that emotions such as gratitude can signal future reciprocity, while Nahapiet and Ghoshal[15] emphasize the role of social capital and embeddedness in maximizing knowledge exchange within networks. These studies highlight how social exchange helps explain the dynamics of network-based knowledge sharing and its importance in curriculum development.

2. Literature review

SET has long served as a key framework for understanding workplace behaviors, particularly by elucidating how reciprocal exchanges between employees and organizations shape job attitudes and

performance outcomes[16] SET posits that individuals initiate exchanges, expecting reciprocity from their counterparts, which encourages relationships that rely on mutual benefit and reinforcement[17]. The theory is founded on principles extending back to early social science, involving anthropological, sociological, and psychological insights[18-20]. Homans[18] pioneered the concept of social exchange, proposing that behavior is motivated by expected returns, while Blau[19] highlighted the power dynamics inherent in exchanges, which align with the economic and psychological roots of SET. As Blau[19] argued, exchanges often evolve from transactional to more trust-based relationships, a shift especially relevant in organizational settings.

SET applications in organizational studies reflected its academic breadth, especially in understanding the development of employee commitment, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors[21,22]. Within this context, the role of reciprocal exchanges becomes critical, particularly when employees receive tangible or intangible resources, such as rewards, recognition, or developmental support[23]. The reciprocity rule, a central aspect of SET, suggests that employees are likely to reciprocate positive treatment by aligning their behaviors with organizational expectations, contributing to a self-sustaining cycle of exchange[16,24]. Reciprocity in SET, however, is not confined to overt exchanges; it also includes less visible "inactive" exchanges, such as withholding negative behavior, which can be equally impactful[17].

In the workplace, SET frames various relationships, particularly between employees and supervisors, by analyzing the exchanges of resources, such as socio-emotional support and developmental opportunities[25-27]. For example, developmental support from frontline managers can enhance job performance, engagement, and affective commitment[28,29]. Conversely, perceived breaches of psychological contracts can degrade performance and diminish employees' willingness to reciprocate positively[30]. Newman et al.[31] found that employees' turnover intentions decrease when supervisors exhibit concern for their well-being, reinforcing the idea that supportive exchanges foster stronger commitment and reduce turnover.

Reflecting from the applications of SET in workplaces, this paper explored how this can be used for curriculum review discussions with industry partners. In Philippine education, extensive research has concentrated on the curriculum's direct influence on its actual implementation. The themes of curriculum design and change are notably prominent in curriculum development. Barrot[32] study regarding the English curriculum reform in the Philippines examined the structuring of the English curriculum to prepare Filipino learners with abilities that align with global standards. Barrot poses significant inquiries: *What is the origin of these standards?* and Are these standards suitable for contemporary Filipino and other Asian students? For De Leon[33], addressing these inquiries necessitates a thorough evaluation of the foundation and coherence of curriculum standards. This reflection enables administrators to ascertain if the curriculum is authentically context-driven and designed to meet the needs and contemporary contexts. Following this direction, SET in this paper was used to describe the approaches in curriculum design discussions, particularly essential in understanding the role of industry players in curriculum development.

Cropanzano et al.[17] highlight SET as one of the most widely recognized theoretical frameworks in management, also finding broad application in sociology, social psychology, and anthropology. Given this cross-disciplinary acceptance, SET is often employed to analyze social phenomena at the individual level, helping researchers understand personal decision-making in contexts like negotiation and social interaction. Romani-Dias and Carneiro[34] applied SET to the internationalization activities of researchers, which entail a series of exchanges and negotiations between researchers and various stakeholders essential to their professional success. For instance, as researchers engage in international collaborations, they negotiate with audiences such as foreign academic institutions, peers, and funding bodies, all of whom have roles in the success of their international efforts, yielding internationalization of higher education systems.

The educational sector faces the challenging task of adapting to rapid knowledge innovation and evolving work practices, necessitating innovative solutions. Evidence from the business sector indicates that partnerships, which promote trust and the integration of differing viewpoints, are essential in promoting innovation[35-37]. For industry-school partnerships, this means that as they share resources and build trust, they can collaboratively implement educational programs directly benefiting both students and industry[38,39]. These programs can offer schools access to industry-grade resources and expertise, far exceeding typical school resources. This provides industry-standard equipment and access to skilled personnel, significantly enhancing educational relevance and the practical skills of students. Through innovative, industry-based curricula, industry-school partnerships not only contribute to knowledge transfer but also enhance students' workplace readiness, better preparing them for future employment[40].

The establishment of efficient and industry-responsive schools is hindered by the conflicting missions of stakeholders and their intrinsic norms of practice. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the varied perspectives of the individual partners, there is merit in reconciling challenges for the common good[41]. In the Philippines, some of the factors that deter industry players to participate in industry-school partnerships were *unclear goals*, *lack of awareness*, *trust* and *confidence issues*, and *inadequate emphasis on partnerships impact*[42]. In adapting SET to curriculum discussions, this paper highlighted how positive relationships between schools and industries can overcome existing challenges. Curriculum discussions with industry players involve negotiations to align academic training with industry expectations, ultimately creating a responsive and practically oriented educational environment. Understanding social exchanges in curriculum review discussions involved examining how interactions and reciprocal relationships between educational institutions and industry partners shape the curriculum to better serve both students and workforce needs.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This paper explored the experiences of school administrators in designing the curriculum for graduate programs. Exploratory studies are useful in research fields where understanding is limited, topics are new, or contexts are evolving[43-45]—like designing a curriculum for effective instructional practices. Characterized by open-ended, flexible methodologies, these studies enable researchers to examine new phenomena without the constraints of predefined hypotheses or variables, encouraging the emergence of perspectives that might be obscured in more rigid research designs[46,47]. Scholars[45,48] argue that exploratory research, although often seen as preliminary, follows systematic processes that improve its rigor, particularly in the social sciences. With qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups, researchers gain rich contextual data, facilitating the identification of initial themes, trends, and participant experiences[49]. Through this process, exploratory studies move beyond simple observation to actively draw connections, setting the stage for more formal research while maintaining adaptability to new data and insights[45,50]. Critics sometimes argue that exploratory studies lack scientific rigor due to their open-ended nature; however, many scholars defend their methodological soundness and practical value. Particularly, exploratory research often leads to the generation of hypotheses based on observed patterns, which lays a structured foundation for subsequent, hypothesis-driven studies[51,52]. As such, exploratory research is not only a prelude to more focused research but also a standalone, insightful approach to understanding poorly understood phenomena, helping bridge gaps in knowledge and paving the way for systematic analysis in later studies[53,54]. Having this study nature, this study explored the context of curriculum review discussions within graduate programs, highlighting the importance of industry partnerships in creating a career-aligned curriculum. This paper answered one critical question: *how do school administrators encourage curriculum review discussions with industry players?*

3.2. Participants and sampling

In exploratory research, participant sampling often prioritizes depth over representativeness, which is why small, purposefully selected samples are common[55,56]. Studies typically include between one and 20 participants to allow for a thorough examination of individual experiences and nuanced perspectives within a specific group[56]. Small sample sizes are especially valuable in capturing the detailed contextual data needed to understand complex interactions and variables unique to the group being studied[44,50,57]. Purposive sampling, a non-probability method frequently employed in exploratory studies[53], is designed to select participants who can provide information directly relevant to the research purpose[58]. This approach enriches data quality and relevance by ensuring that participants possess characteristics essential to exploring specific themes or variables[59,60]. Purposive sampling is also flexible, allowing researchers to redefine participant criteria as new themes emerge, which is particularly valuable in studies involving evolving concepts[53]. This flexibility supports the exploratory nature of research, facilitating the collection of in-depth data that lays a foundation for hypothesis generation and future research[45]. In selecting the participants to be interviewed, this paper imposed three guiding criterial for sampling: (1) *Professional Role* (currently hold a position in graduate education), (2) *Curriculum Development Experience* (must have at least three years of experience in curriculum development, curriculum review, or collaboration), and (3) *Involvement with Industries* (must have a history of direct involvement with industry partners). Following these criteria, 20 curriculum designers were interviewed in this study.

3.3. Research instrument

An interview guide was developed to gather the narratives from the participants. Semi-structured interviews are often used in exploratory studies because they allow interviewers to probe participant responses and explore emerging themes, adapting to unexpected perspectives while still maintaining focus on key topics[61,62]. This flexibility is especially beneficial in qualitative research, where a pre-planned but adaptable structure ensures that essential topics are covered while also permitting the interviewer to discuss more on significant but unanticipated responses[63,64]. The development of a semi-structured interview guide usually begins with defining the study's goals and conducting a thorough literature review to frame questions that align with the research objectives[63]. Researchers draft an initial set of open-ended questions to encourage narrative responses, allowing participants to express their perspectives fully[65,66]. This initial guide is then pilot-tested with a small group of participants, which helps to refine the questions for clarity, relevance, and engagement, ensuring that they effectively capture meaningful data[67,68]. This process enables adjustments based on participants' feedback, improving the reliability and usability of the guide[63,64]. Conversely, a panel of experts in curriculum design, sourced from various academic institutions, was consulted to review and validate the interview guide, ensuring that the questions were relevant, clear, and aligned with the study's objectives. This expert panel provided valuable feedback to refine the guide's structure and content, helping to improve its reliability and validity in capturing meaningful responses from participants[69,70]. Probing and follow-up questions were incorporated in the final interview guide, allowing the interviewer to clarify and expand upon participants' responses, contributing to the understanding of the topic[65]. Finally, the guide used in this study (**Table 1**) was composed of two main types of questions: primary thematic questions, which were systematically organized to draw out the contexts of participants' responses, and follow-up questions, which helped to clarify initial answers and ensure alignment with the research objectives.

Table 1. Final interview guide question.

Objectives	Interview Questions
To determine the nature of the process of discussions in reviewing curriculum in collaboration with industry partners.	a. What is the current process your program follows in reviewing its curriculum in partnership with industry players? b. How do you select or engage industry partners during the curriculum review process? c. What challenges do you encounter in maintaining industry involvement throughout the curriculum review?
To identify potential improvements in the curriculum review process to enhance engagement with industry partners.	a. What kind of engagement, collaboration, or partnership is the industry willing to contribute during the curriculum review process? b. How has industry feedback influenced curriculum changes or improvements in your program? c. In your opinion, what improvements can be made to the curriculum review process to create a better collaboration with industry partners?

3.4. Data gathering procedure

Semis-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted to gather the responses of the participants. In conducting qualitative interviews, researchers need to create a structured, yet flexible approach that allows participants to share in-depth narrative data, while also fostering a trusting environment[71,72]. This process generally begins with establishing clear research objectives and selecting a purposeful sample of participants who can meaningfully contribute to understanding the phenomenon under study[69]. Prior to each interview, researchers should thoroughly discuss the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and data use with participants, establishing a transparent foundation that builds participant trust and openness[66,73]. Transparency at this stage helps ensure that participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences without reservation, which is essential for gathering rich, detailed data[74]. An effective interview should feel conversational and natural, allowing for the flexibility to follow up on participants' responses as new themes emerge[75,76]. Using an interview guide (see **Table 1**), organized with thematic questions aligned to the research goals, is crucial to guide the conversation without overly constraining it[63,77]. Such guides help keep the conversation focused while allowing the interviewer to ask probing follow-up questions, which can clarify participant responses and add depth to the data[65,78]. In qualitative interviews, Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte[79] highlight the importance of maintaining a continuous narrative flow, developing a rapport, and minimizing interviewer bias. Building a positive interviewer-participant relationship enhances the depth of the conversation, encouraging participants to openly discuss their views and experiences[80]. Active listening and empathy during the interview further enhance this rapport, promoting a comfortable atmosphere that supports spontaneous, authentic responses[73,81]. Maintaining an open, neutral tone and showing interest in the participants' stories, rather than imposing preconceptions, is essential to avoid bias and ensure that participants' voices are represented and captured[82].

3.5. Data analysis

Narratives from one-on-one interviews were the primary data in this study. Narratives reflected the experiences, perceptions, ideas, and suggestions of the participants regarding curriculum designing. Thematic analysis, particularly, reflexive thematic analysis was conducted to analyze the narratives of the participants. Reflexive thematic analysis is a structured, yet adaptable method used to identify and interpret patterns within qualitative data, specifically effective for exploring participants' subjective experiences[83,84]. This analysis method is often *inductive*, meaning that codes and themes are reflected directly from the data rather than predefined frameworks, which allows researchers to prioritize meanings that represent participants' perspectives and experiences[85,86]. The process is grounded in six iterative phases (see **Figure 1**), which include: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing

themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report[85]. These stages encourage engagement with the data, as researchers revisit and refine codes and themes to ensure a critical understanding that resonates with the study's context[87]. Reflexive thematic analysis is inherently *reflexive*, recognizing the researcher's role in shaping results interpretations. This reflexivity allows researchers to consider how their own perspectives may influence analysis, ultimately contributing to a richer, more grounded representation of the data[88,89]. The approach encourage flexibility, enabling themes to evolve as researchers' understanding deepens, which is particularly advantageous in exploratory research focused on complex social phenomena[74,90]. Through an iterative coding process, patterns of meaning are carefully constructed, ensuring that themes go beyond surface-level descriptions to uncover underlying shared meanings central to participants' experiences[87,91]. Thus, reflexive thematic analysis offers a methodologically rigorous yet flexible framework for framing and interpreting the richness of qualitative data, balancing inductive analysis with reflexive interpretation to stay closely aligned with participants' narratives and personal experiences.

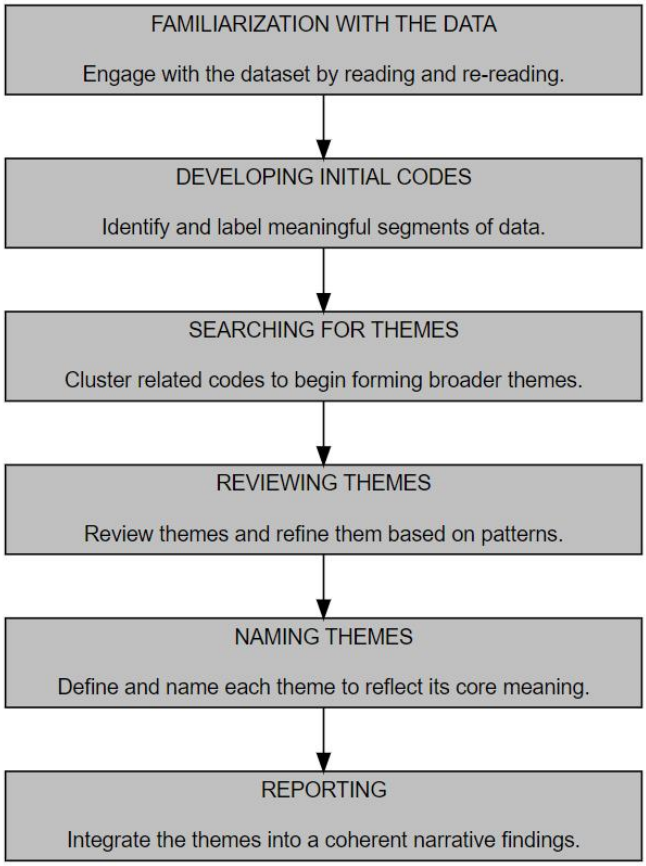

Figure 1. Six phases of reflexive thematic analysis

4. Results

Objective 1: To determine the nature of the discussions in reviewing curriculum in collaboration with industry partners.

Curriculum discussions reflected the *demand-driven approach* to curriculum design, highlighting a concerted effort to align educational content with industry requirements. This alignment was apparent as designers continually assessed whether course offerings matched industry standards, particularly focusing on *skills in demand*, such as *critical thinking* and *adaptability*. Further, industry representatives were considered *essential contributors* due to their status as future employers, and their expertise influenced curriculum

integration and the *design of realistic projects* for students. Discussions included *quality control* measures, as industry feedback was carefully evaluated before integration. Designers emphasized the importance of *rapport-building*, using guiding questions that aligned industry feedback with curriculum goals to ensure mutual understanding. The selection and engagement of partners aimed at establishing *beneficial relationships* and a shared vision, setting clear expectations to achieve alignment and *systematic improvements* in the curriculum based on industry insights.

Theme 1: Demands

Curriculum designers perceived the demands of industry partners as central to shaping the curriculum, emphasizing the importance of alignment with current industry *requirements* and *expectations*. They discussed the necessity of consistently evaluating whether the curriculum met the *demands of the industry*, particularly by incorporating *critical thinking skills* and other competencies that were highly valued in the workforce.

> "It's an industry partnership, right? So, we have to check whether what we are teaching, what the curriculum includes, are those that meet the demands of the industry."

> "Like, if the demands of the industry, like critical thinking skills, are the basis, it will be part of the curriculum."

> "First, we identify our programs, such as food technology, and select industry partners aligned with those fields. The key criterion is alignment with industry needs."

Their experiences also underscored a commitment to including practical, real-world elements in the curriculum, as they believed *guest lectures* and *real-world projects* offered students a direct understanding of industry *applications* and the *challenges* faced by professionals. Designers felt that these interactions with industry professionals not only enriched students' learning but also kept the curriculum grounded in real-world relevance.

> "Guest lectures and real-world projects help understand the practical applications of what we're learning. It's great to hear from people who are working in the field and learn about the challenges they face."

> "So, they look into the relevance. The relevance and the responsibility. That's the basis."

> "On one basis, it's relevant to what the industry needs."

Furthermore, they discussed adopting a *non-agile approach* that allowed for rapid curriculum updates to reflect *evolving industry needs*, particularly in fast-paced fields like *hospitality management*. This approach ensured that as industry trends and demands shifted, the curriculum could be adjusted to stay aligned with them. For example, with industry discussions, curriculum designers acknowledged the need to address feedback regarding *students' attitudes and behaviors*, suggesting that these aspects were considered essential in developing graduates who were not only skilled but also professional and well-suited to industry environments.

> "A non-agile approach is adopted for quick updates based on evolving industry needs, such as hospitality management, which is fast-paced with new trends and demands."

> "Recently, we've received concerning feedback about students' attitudes and behaviors, which highlights the need to address these issues."

Theme 2: Emphasis on Roles

Curriculum designers emphasized the importance of industry partners as *vital contributors* in curriculum development, viewing them not only as stakeholders but as *future employers* and integral players who could shape the direction of educational programs. Their discussions revealed a belief in the necessity of involving *the right people*—those with a strong background in *curriculum enhancement*—to ensure that the curriculum remained relevant and robust. Industry feedback was highly valued, with designers treating it as a *significant factor* capable of influencing *curriculum integration* and guiding essential *improvements* before finalizing programs.

> "We consider industry partners as vital contributors for curriculum as they are the future employers of graduates and may become the industry themselves."

> "It's crucial to involve the right people in the curriculum review process, specifically experts who have a strong track record in curriculum enhancement."

The designers recognized the substantial role that industry partners played in sharing *expertise on current trends*, *emerging technologies*, and the *skill requirements* that were in demand. By contributing insights on *best practices*, industry partners helped bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, which designers felt was essential for preparing students for the real-world challenges they would face post-graduation. Designers saw value in creating *real-world projects* with industry partners, as these opportunities enabled students to engage with *realistic scenarios* and *industry challenges*.

> "The educational aspect of curriculum development also undergoes screening, with industry players' feedback being treated with significance. If industry feedback provides solid influence, it may influence curriculum integration or improvements, making them important factors before finalizing a program or curriculum."

> "Technically, the industry partners contribute significantly to the process of reviewing the curriculum. They would offer valuable expertise on current industry trends, emerging technologies, skill requirements, and best practices in the industry."

> "They also help develop real-world projects for students in which they can apply their knowledge to very realistic scenarios often based on actual industry challenges or case studies."

Further, designers consistently defined and clarified *industry partners' roles* in the curriculum process, especially in areas like *guest lectures* and *mentoring*. They believed that these roles provided students with the chance to learn directly from those active in the field, helping them gain insights into the latest practices and skills needed. Industry input was particularly influential in steering curriculum revisions, with a focus on integrating *soft and hard skills* and ensuring alignment with *emerging technologies*.

> "We clearly define industry partners' roles in curriculum design, guest lectures, and mentoring."

> "Industry feedback significantly influences curriculum reviews, particularly in integrating emerging technologies. Focus should be on soft and hard skills."

Theme 3: System

In examining the curriculum review *system*, curriculum designers described a structured process marked by *collaboration with industry partners* and an organized approach to feedback collection. They highlighted the importance of *recognizing stakeholders* and ensuring that all *feedback mechanisms* were in place to capture relevant insights. Designers consistently prioritized *assessing needs* and *evaluating skills gaps*, ensuring that industry perspectives were integral to curriculum adjustments. This systematic approach was underpinned by *quality control*, where *industry contributions* underwent a *screening process* to confirm their relevance and value before integration into the curriculum.

> "The curriculum review process involves collaboration with industry partners, including recognizing stakeholders for feedback, assessing needs, evaluating skills gaps, and establishing a feedback mechanism."

> "The process of curriculum review involves quality control, with industry players' opinions and contributions going through a screening process."

Curriculum designers also expressed the need for effective *rapport-building* before formal reviews, which they saw as essential for creating a foundation of trust and openness. To achieve this, they engaged in *mindset conditioning* and developed *guiding questions* tailored to the curriculum's specific needs, which served to steer industry feedback constructively. Once *potential partners* were identified, designers took proactive steps to *establish mutually beneficial relationships*, ensuring that both sides maintained *clear expectations* and a *shared understanding* of the partnership's goals, which they believed was crucial for successful collaboration.

> "Before the formal review, we focus on engaging them through rapport-building and mindset conditioning. To facilitate effective participation, we provide guiding questions that align with the curriculum's needs."

> "After identifying potential partners, we reach out proactively to establish mutually beneficial relationships. It's crucial that both sides have clear expectations and a shared understanding of the goals of the partnership to ensure its effectiveness."

Further, curriculum designers structured feedback sessions where *industry feedback* could be presented in direct response to specific curriculum elements, ensuring alignment with *industry requirements*.

> "After selecting partners, we present the curriculum and gather their feedback to ensure our activities and programs meet industry requirements."

Objective 2: To identify potential improvements in the curriculum review process to enhance engagement with industry partners.

Curriculum designers highlighted several aspects of industry discussions that needed to be addressed. Curriculum designers emphasized the importance of enhancing engagement with industry partners by focusing on *sustaining active involvement*, *aligning objectives*, and ensuring *clear communication* throughout the curriculum review process. They discussed challenges in *aligning goals* between institutions and industry, noting that sometimes *differing objectives* and compliance with regulatory mandates could complicate collaboration. Designers expressed the importance of having *high-quality representatives*, such as *HR professionals* who could offer insights based on their evaluations of alumni performance. They noted that

this engagement allowed industry partners to *fulfill their social responsibility* by actively contributing to the development of future graduates, benefiting both students and the industry itself.

Theme 1: Engagement

Curriculum designers discussed *sustaining engagement* with industry partners as a central challenge in curriculum review, particularly when *aligning goals* between educational institutions and the needs of the industry. They noted that *differing objectives* between these two parties often complicated collaboration, especially when regulatory frameworks, such as *CMOs*, sometimes did not align with *industry needs*. Despite these tensions, they emphasized the importance of *clear communication* to ensure that industry partners understood their *roles* in the review process. In some cases, while industry representatives were not as deeply integrated into decision-making processes as in other countries, designers expressed their commitment to making these partners feel *comfortable* and *relevant* in the process.

> "Sustaining engagement is a key challenge, along with aligning goals between educational institutions and industry, as differing objectives can complicate collaboration. While we need industry feedback, we also have to follow certain CMOs, which sometimes don't match industry needs."

> "It's essential to ensure industry partners feel comfortable and relevant in the curriculum review process. In some countries, industry representatives are part of the boardroom discussions regarding program decisions. While we may not be as advanced in this practice, we prioritize clear communication, informing them of their roles in the review process."

Designers acknowledged that effective *engagement* had led to significant *realignment* within the institution, with adjustments to *programs*, *initiatives*, and *infrastructure* to better align offerings with industry demands. They highlighted that when certain programs or skills were no longer in demand, these were *adjusted or replaced* to ensure continued relevance.

> "Engaging stakeholders has led to significant realignment within the institution, including programs, initiatives, and infrastructure procurement. This ensures that our offerings match industry needs; if an item is no longer in demand, we adjust or replace it accordingly."

> "Industry representatives are generally very generous in providing feedback, particularly regarding the specific skill sets they expect from graduates."

> "They are willing to detail the qualities and characteristics they seek, recognizing that students will enter their industries after graduation."

Curriculum designers also emphasized that *active engagement* should not be limited to just industry representatives but should also extend to local stakeholders, such as *barangay leaders*, to ensure a broader scope of input. They stressed that engagement should be *ongoing*, advocating for *biannual meetings* to foster continuous collaboration and ensure that feedback was consistently integrated into curriculum updates. This commitment to long-term, sustained interaction reflected their understanding of the importance of regular, structured communication to keep the curriculum in sync with both educational standards and industry expectations.

> "Active engagement of industry stakeholders is essential, and this should extend beyond just industry representatives to include local officials and barangay

> leaders. This engagement should be ongoing, not limited to a one-time memorandum of agreement."
>
> "Ideally, stakeholders should meet at least biannually to foster collaboration and ensure their input is consistently integrated into the curriculum."

Theme 2: Response

Curriculum designers discussed the challenges of *engaging industry professionals* in the curriculum review process, particularly due to their *busy schedules*, which made it difficult for them to dedicate sufficient time for full participation. The designers expressed that it was often challenging to find *high-quality industry players*, especially in regions like *Mindanao*, where *scheduling conflicts* frequently arose. As a result, they noted that they sometimes had to settle for less-than-ideal representatives when time constraints were pressing. This issue highlighted the difficulty in aligning *academic priorities* with *industry needs*, which could sometimes create a *disconnect* between the two parties.

> "Industry professionals often have busy schedules, making it difficult for them to dedicate the time needed for full engagement in the curriculum review process."
>
> "It's difficult to find high-quality industry players, especially in Mindanao. We send out numerous invitations, but scheduling conflicts often arise, leading us to settle for less-than-ideal representatives when time is tight."
>
> "There's sometimes a disconnect between academic priorities and industry needs."

To address this gap, the designers emphasized the importance of *ongoing communication* and *collaboration* to ensure that both the educational institution and the industry were *heard* and *understood*. They also focused on the necessity of involving industry players who met *global standards*, which would allow the curriculum to remain competitive both locally and internationally. They believed that *greater participation* from *quality representatives* would deepen the *insights* provided during curriculum reviews, ultimately enriching the process. In cases where disagreements arose, the designers were confident in their ability to *moderate discussions*, ensuring that the review process remained productive and focused.

> "We strive to bridge this gap through ongoing communication and collaboration, ensuring that both sides are heard and understood."
>
> "To improve the process, we aim to involve industry players who meet global standards, ensuring we understand local conditions in comparison to global competitiveness."
>
> "Greater participation from quality representatives will enhance the depth of insights for our curriculum. If disagreements arise, we can effectively moderate those discussions during the review process."

The designers also stressed the need for clear *channels of communication* to ensure that all stakeholders remained aligned and engaged throughout the process. They proposed *increasing the visibility* of the curriculum review process to industry partners, emphasizing the importance of *transparency* and *inclusivity*. To further enhance the curriculum development process, they suggested the establishment of *advisory boards*, the integration of *real-world projects*, and the creation of a *continuous feedback mechanism*, all of which would provide more consistent input and help improve the curriculum's relevance and effectiveness.

"Establishing clear channels for sharing information, updates, and feedback can help keep everyone aligned and engaged."

"We also need to increase visibility of the curriculum review process to industry partners."

"To improve our curriculum development process, we should establish advisory boards, integrate real-world projects, and maintain a continuous feedback mechanism."

5. Discussion

Philippine education system faces challenges regarding the development, designing, implementation, and assessment of the curriculum. The current job market exhibits heightened instability and uncertainty, especially impacting college graduates as they navigate their career decision-making processes[92]. The work landscape in the Philippines is characterized by elevated levels of unemployment and underemployment, leading to financial losses, social and psychological difficulties, and insufficient job security[93]. Employment challenges may arise when an individual lacks the requisite educational qualifications for a position, with certain jobs necessitating a high school diploma while others demand a far higher degree of education[94]. Ineffective curriculum can also be linked to employability gaps among students, striking program managers to reconfigure their curriculum to develop new competencies for the education, training, and reskilling of present and future employees[95].

Given the need for realigning the curriculum to students' work career, this paper discussed the context of curriculum design discussions in partnerships with industry players through social exchange perspectives. Exchange theory offers a systematic framework for examining social interactions that lead to the transfer of resources, services, or behaviors that hold mutual significance[96,97]. This analysis examines the ways in which micro-level processes underpin the social structures they generate, as well as the pressures for social change that frequently arise from existing power inequalities. Investigating the emergence, transformation, and impact of these interactions on the groups and networks they inhabit constitutes a significant area of study[98].

Expanding upon fundamental concepts of exchange, SET represents one of the most persistent and extensively utilized theoretical frameworks[16]. Numerous significant themes in organizational behavior have, at various times, been examined under the framework of social exchange theory. This conceptual model has been effectively utilized to examine organizational commitment[99], citizenship behaviors[100], justice[101], as well as supervisory and organizational support[102]. Further, studies on curriculum designing suggested university-industry collaboration to address the needed competencies that will equip graduates to confront future career challenges[103,104]. This paper, consequently, tapped on social exchanges as key driver of collaboration efforts towards sustainable and effective curriculum.

The social exchange process occurs when an organizational actor, typically a supervisor or colleague, interacts with a target individual in either a favorable or unfavorable manner[17,105,106]. Following the initial action, the recipient, frequently a subordinate or colleague, may opt to respond with either positive or negative behavior in return[107]. Social exchange theory posits that, in response to positive initiating actions, individuals are likely to reciprocate with similar positive behaviors and/or reduce negative responses[17]. In discussions about the curriculum, designers expressed positivity about their communication with industry players regarding its development. For example, curriculum designers *"...define industry partners' roles in curriculum design, guest lectures, and mentoring"* where they as for *"...valuable expertise on current*

industry trends, emerging technologies, skill requirements, and best practices in the industry." The designers' positive perception of their interactions with industry partners is an indication of a social exchange dynamic in which both parties benefit from the exchange of knowledge and resources.

From an SET perspective, the positive behavior exhibited by the curriculum designers—such as seeking advice and collaboration with industry players—suggests that these individuals are likely to reciprocate this collaborative spirit. They may integrate the feedback and insights provided by industry players into the curriculum, reinforcing the value of the exchange for both the designers and the industry stakeholders. At its core, SET emphasizes the importance of mutual exchanges that generate obligations and commitments, often leading to the development of relationships over time[108,109]. Notably, initiation of social exchange takes place when a stimulus happens, like the need for *feedback* for or *change* in the curriculum. Apparently, curriculum designers had that positive belief that industry players are *"vital contributors for curriculum as they are the future employers of graduates and may become the industry themselves."* This encourages the curriculum designers to seek assistance from industry players, hence vitalizing the social exchange for curriculum development.

Further, negotiated exchanges tend to be more explicit and formalized, often based on quid pro quo arrangements. These types of exchanges are typically seen in economic or contractual settings, where parties negotiate the terms of the exchange and are more likely to rely on formal sanctions[97]. Studies comparing negotiated and reciprocal exchanges suggest that reciprocal exchanges, characterized by greater flexibility and trust, generally foster more positive relational outcomes, such as increased commitment and cooperation[110]. This context was evident in discussions about aligning curriculum systems with industry demands. In their discussions, curriculum designers stressed that one of the consistent demands from industry partners was the development of *critical thinking* and *problem-solving skills*.

Negotiation becomes essential in these discussions, particularly when industry feedback is direct and specific. For instance, when industry partners provide detailed feedback on the types of skills or competencies they expect from graduates, curriculum designers must weigh these requests against academic goals and standards. This negotiation may involve adjusting course content, incorporating industry-driven projects, or developing new training modules, all while maintaining academic integrity and meeting accreditation requirements. Reciprocity is perhaps the most examined principle of SET, emphasizing the bidirectional nature of exchanges. This notion is rooted in the expectation that individuals will repay others for their actions, whether positive or negative[20,111]. Molm[112] further elucidated the role of reciprocity, noting that mutual cooperation and the ability to reciprocate in kind are essential to the longevity and quality of relationships. Importantly, the absence of explicit bargaining in reciprocal exchanges contrasts with negotiated exchanges, where there are clear, explicit agreements[112,113].

One remarkable aspect of curriculum social exchange with industry players was the essence of *long-term engagements* in curriculum designing. Scholars argued that engagement signifies a positive disposition towards work, stemming from individuals advocating for their own well-being within the organization[114]. Similar mechanism for curriculum discussion review was observed in this study. For example, curriculum designers *"…strive to bridge this gap through ongoing communication and collaboration, ensuring that both sides are heard and understood"* wherein *"this engagement should be ongoing, not limited to a one-time memorandum of agreement."* The commitment to continuous engagement allows curriculum designers to incorporate real-time industry feedback, helping to identify skill gaps and emerging competencies required by industry players.

Because the primary objective of social exchange theory as the development of a framework embracing social structure and structural change as its essential variables[115,116], engagements encourage both parties contribute to shaping the curriculum, they create a sustainable partnership where each exchange reinforces the commitment to producing industry-ready graduates. Such engagement can be linked to the development of commitment, loyalty, and trust, which emerge from building relationships over time[16]. Following this, they suggested establishing *clear channels for sharing information, increasing visibility of review process,* and *maintaining continuous feedback mechanism.* These engagement strategies were believed to encourage engagement and strengthen commitment, trust, transparency, and sustainability of the discussions.

6. Conclusion

The findings reflected on the essence of social exchange dynamics in encouraging successful university-industry partnerships for curriculum development. SET provides a perspective to understanding the reciprocal and negotiated exchanges between curriculum designers and industry stakeholders, showing how these interactions can lead to a aligned, relevant, and responsive curriculum. Curriculum designers perceived industry players as essential contributors to curriculum design due to their insights on skill requirements and industry trends, which are integrated into educational programs. The positive reciprocation between curriculum designers and industry partners—evident in shared expertise, feedback, and resources—suggested that sustained, mutual engagement can effectively bridge the gap between academic training and market demands. This collaborative model holds potential for developing industry-ready graduates who are better equipped to deal with an uncertain job market in the Philippines.

Consequently, establishing a framework for sustained, transparent, and reciprocal communication between academic institutions and industry can enhance curriculum relevance and graduate employability. By recognizing and actively seeking industry input, universities can ensure that their programs equip students with current competencies. Further, embedding social exchange principles in curriculum development policies could develop formalized partnerships, where mutual commitments are reinforced through structured collaboration efforts such as regular reviews and joint curriculum planning sessions. Adopting a responsive curriculum approach can serve as a model for other educational institutions, potentially influencing policy-level changes that prioritize industry-academic partnerships across the educational landscape.

However, limitations emerged in this study that needed to be addressed. Study limitations include the scope of data, which was primarily based on the perceptions of curriculum designers and may not fully capture the industry's viewpoint on engagement challenges or expectations. The study relied on self-reported data, which may introduce bias or overemphasis on positive aspects of these interactions. The focus on SET also limits the analysis to exchange dynamics, potentially overlooking other factors such as institutional constraints or economic pressures that may influence curriculum design. Future research could benefit from analyzing different stakeholders, such as industry representatives and graduates, to provide a comprehensiveness to the curriculum-employment gap and to examine other theoretical frameworks that may shed light on additional dimensions of university-industry partnerships.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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