

Work Perception of K-to-12 College Graduates in the Philippines

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Abstract: The year 2022 marked the entry of the first batch of college graduates who underwent the K-to-12 program into the labor market. Their addition to the workforce poses a new challenge to companies and organizations in the Philippines, as little is known about their working perceptions, particularly regarding their ideal workplace and professional life. This study aimed to analyze the working perceptions of K-to-12 college graduates, specifically focusing on their views of their future careers, ideal workplaces, and career aspirations. The researchers utilized a survey questionnaire adapted from the research instrument used by Robert Half International Inc in their 2015 research. Microsoft Forms was used to disseminate the survey to the 2022 college graduates of a private university in Calamba, Philippines. These graduates belong to Generation Z and are the first batch of students who underwent the K-to-12 program. A total of 147 graduates participated in the study by completing the survey questionnaire. A quantitative approach was employed to analyze the gathered data to identify, determine, and analyze K-to-12 college graduates' work perceptions. The results showed that K-to-12 college graduates aspire to work in large international corporations. They predominantly prefer to collaborate with a small group in an office, and their top two priorities in choosing a full-time job are opportunities for career growth and having a manager from whom they can learn. Regarding the characteristics of an ideal manager, these graduates prefer managers who are compassionate and possess mentoring abilities. In five years, they envision themselves managing or supervising employees in a corporate environment. Lastly, these graduates perceive the top skills for a successful career to be the ability to learn new things and to listen and provide feedback. Given the current working conditions in the Philippines, which are significantly lacking in work-life balance, fair compensation, and safe workplaces, companies can use the results mentioned to develop policies aimed at improving these aspects. By doing so, they can create a safe and inclusive environment that encourages collaboration among K-to-12 college graduates.

Keywords: K-to-12 college graduates; generation Z; technological generation; work perception

1. INTRODUCTION

After twelve years in basic education and four years in college, the first batch of graduates who experienced the most recent educational reform joined the Philippine labor force. These graduates are infused with a different set of values, ambitions, and working styles. Not only do they belong to the same generational cohort, known as Generation Z (Gen Z), but they were also the first to experience implementing the K-to-12 curriculum in basic education and the revised general education curriculum (GEC) at the tertiary level.

As K-to-12 college graduates enter the labor market, companies face the challenge of understanding and adapting to their characteristics and behaviors to attract, manage, and retain them, particularly those with exceptional talents and

skills. Analyzing the needs and preferences of the youth-centered workforce will help companies develop policies aimed at human capital investments (Son, 2022), establishing a positive workplace that ensures the organization's success. By fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment where employees feel valued and appreciated, companies can boost employees' morale, motivation, and loyalty, resulting in higher productivity, retention, and lower turnover rates (Ganesh, 2024).

Different generations have distinct perspectives on what defines a quality work environment (Leslie et al., 2021). Understanding how to appeal to employees from all generations can promote cooperation and unity within a business and prevent problems stemming from a lack of understanding. Recent studies related to Filipino working perceptions have primarily focused on job satisfaction, overseas working conditions (Cases, 2021; Jalagat Jr. & Aquino Jr., 2021; Modesto, 2020; Debono & Vassallo, 2019), and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the working environment (RilleraMarzo et al., 2021; Walet et al., 2021; Caringal-Go et al., 2021). There seems to be a lack of studies specifically addressing the work perception of K-to-12 college graduates. A local survey of Son (2022) under the Institute for Labor Studies looked at the working perception of Filipino Gen Zs. However, implementing the K-to-12 curriculum and the revised GEC was not given due importance as undergoing such a curriculum was not a criterion in choosing respondents in the said study. The study of Son (2022) focused on generational differences without considering the unique educational experiences that may have influenced and changed recent graduates' working perceptions. Though several foreign studies have dealt with the work perceptions of Gen Z (Leslie et al., 2021; Bulut & Maraba, 2021; Mărginean, 2021; Böhlich & Axmann, 2020), they should be treated with caution as understanding the work perception of Filipino K-to-12 college graduates should not be solely based on the assumed shared characteristics of being members of the same generational cohort. These shared characteristics, based on studies from the West, do not fit well with the Philippines' recent college graduates.

The implementation of the K-to-12 program and the revision of the GEC are the Philippine government's responses to long-standing problems in the country's education sector and the means to address 21st-century demands. The K-to-12 program aims to create a functional basic education system through curriculum enhancement on par with international standards, producing graduates equipped with essential competencies and skills for both lifelong learning and employment (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2013). Thus, these K-to-12 college graduates are expected to have developed the skills necessary to thrive in today's globally competitive labor market.

To fill the aforementioned gap, this study aimed to analyze the working perceptions of the newest set of graduates who underwent K-to-12 and experienced revision in the GEC. Specifically, this study aimed to identify their perception of the ideal workplace and working conditions, determine their considerations in choosing a full-time job, identify the skills they perceive as necessary for developing a successful career, and determine their vision of their career paths.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *The K-to-12 Program and the Philippine General Education Curriculum*

The recent reform in the Philippine basic education curriculum was implemented to provide ample time for mastery of concepts and skills, develop lifelong learners, and prepare graduates for tertiary education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship (Department of Education [DepEd], 2019). The Philippines' K-to-12 education program, which stands for kindergarten plus 12 years of elementary and secondary education, focuses on learners' acquisition of twenty-first-century knowledge and skills essential for solving authentic problems, engaging with the community, and joining the labor market. In addition, the K-to-12 program is designed to prepare students to face contemporary challenges by promoting a healthy sense of self, respect and empathy for others, an appreciation for cultural diversity, awareness of social identity and civic duties, and a commitment to environmental care (DepEd, 2019). K-to-12 graduates are presumed to have the necessary physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, and moral preparation to meet the current and emerging needs of local, national, and global communities.

The transition to the K-to-12 framework led to the GEC's revision. CHED Memorandum Order No. 20, series of 2013, implemented a new GEC designed to expose undergraduate students to various domains of knowledge and ways of understanding social and natural realities, thereby developing intellectual competencies and civic capacities (CHED, 2013). As stated by CHED (2013), the objective of the revised GEC is to develop graduates who are reflective and grounded in humanist values, equipped with critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, mindful of the ethical and social consequences of their actions, and committed to lifelong learning. These qualities will enable them to live meaningfully in a complex, rapidly changing, and globalized world while engaging with their community and addressing the nation's development issues and concerns.

The primary goal of higher education extends beyond producing skilled and knowledgeable graduates in specific disciplines; it also aims to nurture well-rounded, open-minded individuals who appreciate learning, possess a strong sense of identity as individuals and Filipinos, and understand their responsibilities to the nation and global community. The GEC serves as the foundation for developing professionally competent, humane, and moral individuals. With the competency-based outcomes of the revised GEC, graduates are anticipated to collaborate effectively in teams and offer practical solutions to real-world challenges.

2.2 *Generation of K-to-12 College Graduates*

The concept of generational cohorts generally posits that individuals who undergo similar political, economic, and social events during their formative years are likely to espouse comparable beliefs, values, and behaviors (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Generations are commonly demarcated based on age range or year span, such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Gen Z (Bulut & Maraba, 2021; Dimock, 2019). Generational cohorts tend to display unique traits, values,

attitudes, and behaviors. While not every individual within a cohort shares the same perspectives or beliefs, common patterns of behavior and thought often emerge as a result of shared environmental influences (Bulut & Maraba, 2021). Generational differences in the pattern of behavior and thinking impact the workplace, leading managers to grapple with understanding new generations entering the workforce. Thus, it is imperative for companies to comprehend each of the generations of workers' motives, attitudes, and personality profiles to attract and retain talent.

The first group of K-to-12 college graduates, mostly born in the early 2000s, belongs to Generation Z. Numerous studies on Gen Z highlight notable generational differences in beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and values, particularly in the context of work and the work environment. It is widely acknowledged that individuals within the same generational cohort adopt similar mindsets due to shared unique cultural, political, and economic experiences (Parry & Urwin, 2011), resulting in analogous beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and values. Scholars and professionals contend that generational differences in the workplace can create conflicts and hinder communication, presenting challenges for supervisors in managing their teams effectively. Companies and organizations need to adapt their dynamics to navigate the intergenerational diversity they encounter.

Regarding work preferences, Gen Z is primarily driven by opportunities for advancement, competitive salaries, and meaningful work (De Witte, 2024; Merriman, 2023; Mărginean, 2021). When seeking full-time employment, they prioritize the nature of the job and work-life balance (De Witte, 2024; Anjum, 2024), as well as inclusivity and potential for learning development (Alves, 2024; Casic et al., 2022). Regarding the ideal workplace and working conditions, Gen Z tends to prefer working in small, local companies (Merriman, 2023) or in public or coworking spaces (Deloitte, 2022). When it comes to work habits, Gen Z is often described as individualistic, entrepreneurial, and financially cautious (Anjum, 2024; Merriman, 2023; Bulut & Maraba, 2021).

Salvosa and Hechanova (2020) proposed an alternative method of categorizing generations in the Philippines. Their study examined significant experiences, events, and trends that differentiated generations in the Philippine workforce. Their analysis posited the existence of two generational cohorts, namely political and technology generations. The political generation includes individuals who experienced significant events in Philippine history, spanning the administration of the late President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. to his removal during the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution. The technology generation, on the other hand, refers to those who grew up and adapted to technological trends such as the World Wide Web, search engines, and social networking. In terms of age, the political generation appears to encompass Baby Boomers and Generation X, while the technology generation seems to correspond to Millennials and Gen Z. K-to-12 college graduates are categorized under the technology generation.

The political generation is characterized as traditional, decisive, skilled at multitasking, family-focused, dedicated to work, diligent, and experienced. Conversely, members of the technology generation describe themselves as

carefree, laidback, tech-savvy, proud, individualistic, self-centered, arrogant, fickle, and adventurous (Salvosa & Hechanova, 2020). K-to-12 college graduates, as part of the technology generation, are anticipated to be technologically proficient, well-educated, financially capable, and culturally diverse, influenced by worldwide advancements in technology.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive approach to describe the working perceptions of Filipino K-to-12 college graduates. Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control variables of interest (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). A descriptive approach, on the other hand, examines phenomena as they naturally exist without attempting to manipulate individuals, conditions, or events (Mertler, 2021). This method can be utilized to explore a population's attitudes, opinions, behaviors, experiences, or other traits using surveys or questionnaires (Creswell, 2020). Additionally, quantitative research design is commonly used in human resource development studies (Swanson & Holton, 2005), particularly in examining employees' perceptions of their work.

3.2 Respondents

This study employed a non-probability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling, which involves choosing respondents who are readily accessible to the researchers. This method was chosen to conduct the survey among K-to-12 college graduates who were readily available and willing to participate at the time of the study, in compliance with the COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the Philippine Department of Health and differences in academic calendars. Consequently, 147 college graduates from a private university in Calamba participated in the study by completing the survey questionnaire.

3.3 Instrument

The researchers utilized a survey questionnaire adapted from the research instrument used by Robert Half International Inc. in their 2015 research on the working perceptions of college and university students belonging to Generation Z. The survey questionnaire comprised five sections. The first section requested participants' informed consent. The second section collected participants' personal information and professional experience. The third section consisted of closed questions aimed at identifying K-to-12 college graduates' perceptions of the ideal workplace and working conditions. The fourth section comprised closed questions intended to determine K-to-12 college graduates' considerations when choosing a full-time job. The fifth section focused on identifying the skills K-to-12 college graduates consider essential for building a successful career and their envisioned career paths. To ensure reliability, the survey questionnaire was pilot tested.

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers utilized an online survey, specifically Microsoft Forms, to collect the necessary data for the study. Online surveys are convenient, cost-effective, and ideal for rapidly collecting data from a widely dispersed population. Additionally, automatic data capture of survey responses offers a significant advantage by reducing data entry costs and preventing transcription errors (Tanner, 2018). The researchers chose to use an online survey to gather the required data in compliance with the COVID-19 health protocols in place at the time, which restricted physical contact. An informed consent section was incorporated into the online survey to explain the study's objectives and confirm that respondents willingly consented to participate in the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, specifically frequency distribution, were employed to analyze the collected data in order to identify, assess, and describe K-to-12 college graduates' perceptions of the ideal workplace and work conditions, factors influencing their choice of full-time employment, skills required for a successful career, and their envisioned career paths. Descriptive statistics are commonly used to describe aspects of sets of quantitative data to enable interpretation and comparison (Sheard, 2017).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All of the 147 respondents underwent the K-to-12 program and experienced the new GEC. Respondent's average age was 22 years old—classified under Generation Z and technology generation. Almost all of the respondents (90.5%) do not have prior full-time or part-time work experience. The result challenges the assumption behind the K-to-12 program, which suggested that the additional two years in basic education would enable graduates to secure a job or start their own business if they decided not to continue to college. On the other hand, this supports the results of a study by Orbeta & Potestad (2020), where it was revealed that K-to-12 students are not greatly confident that they would get a job after graduating from senior high school (SHS). This is accompanied with the belief that companies favor college graduates over them. The majority of students think that employers prioritize educational qualifications, technical skills, soft skills, and attitude when making hiring decisions. This justifies SHS graduates' decision to go to college and finish their education instead of joining the labor force. From the employer's perspective, though Philippine companies are open to hiring SHS graduates, few of them have policies in place to hire these graduates (Philippine Business for Education [PBEd], 2024). Similar to the result of the study of Orbeta & Potestad (2020), PBEd (2024) revealed that employers prefer applicants with college degrees as SHS graduates lack the skills companies are looking for.

Table 1. *K-to-12 College Graduates' Ideal Workplace*

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Entrepreneurial firm / startup	14	9.5
Midsized business / organization	35	23.8
Large international corporation	77	52.4
Nonprofit organization	14	9.5
Others	7	4.8
Total	147	100

Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents would like to work in a large international corporation. K-to-12 college graduates belong to the same generational cohort, Generation Z, and this may perhaps explain their preferred workplace. Studies by Bohlich & Axmann (2020) and Mărginean (2021) about the working preferences of Gen Z showed similar results. On the other hand, the result differs from that of Merriman (2023), who argued that Gen Z prefers working in small, local companies as they do not trust large organizations to do the right thing.

In 2022, the inflation rate in the Philippines continued to rise, leading to an increase in the prices of goods and services. Companies are hesitant to raise wages as they are still feeling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Filipino workers have to find a well-paying job with compelling benefits in order to meet their daily expenses. According to Suralta (2022), the leading companies in the Philippines are Smart Communications, Accenture, Shell, Metrobank, and Emerson—all of which are large international companies. This could explain K-to-12 college graduates' desire to work in large international corporations, as such companies offer salaries that will compensate for their daily living.

Table 2. *K-to-12 College Graduates' Preferred Work Environment*

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Collaborating with a small group in an office	56	38.1
Collaborating with a large team in an office	49	33.3
Working fairly autonomously in an office	21	14.3
Working fairly autonomously at an off-site location	21	14.3
Working collaboratively but off-site (virtual)	0	0
Total	147	100

Table 2 shows that the majority of K-to-12 college graduates mostly prefer to collaborate with a small group in an office, followed by collaborating with a large team in an office. The inclination to collaborate with colleagues is expected, as K-to-12 college graduates possess the skills required to work effectively in a team. Both the K-to-12 curriculum and the revised GEC are structured to enhance students' ability to participate in productive and creative projects collaboratively (CHED, 2013). In terms of K-to-12 college graduates being in the same generational cohort, the result contradicts the claim of Salvosa and Hechanova (2020). Based on their studies, the technology generation prefers independent work and seems reluctant to work in groups. On the other hand, the

result supports the study of Casic et al. (2022), where it was revealed that working in groups is important for Gen Zs as they prefer having in-person socialization with their colleagues. Even in a hybrid work environment, Gen Z prefers to socialize and collaborate with their colleagues. Additionally, K-to-12 college graduates' preference for working in smaller groups rather than larger ones can be linked to their ability to generate fresh ideas and innovate work processes, a skill that is enhanced in smaller teams (Wang & Evans, 2019).

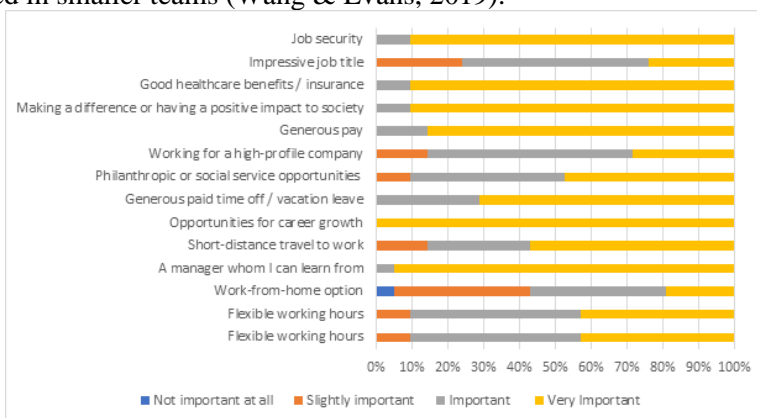


Fig. 1. *K-to-12 College Graduates' Priorities in Choosing a Full-time Job*

Figure 1 illustrates that K-to-12 college graduates' top two priorities when selecting a full-time job are opportunities for career growth and the presence of a manager whom they can learn from. One of the objectives of the new GEC is to produce graduates imbued with competency to learn continuously throughout life (CHED, 2013). This might explain K-to-12 college graduates' prioritizing growth and learning in choosing a full-time job as they are honed to become life-long learners. Furthermore, since K-to-12 college graduates belong to Gen Z, a similar result is observed in the studies of De Witte (2024), Anjum (2024), and Mărginean (2021). These studies indicate that Gen Zs prefer companies that provide clearly defined paths for growth and development when pursuing a full-time job. Furthermore, Casic et al. (2022) emphasized that Gen Z prefers managers who are empathetic and honest. Other studies suggest that job security (Bohlich & Axmann, 2020) and competitive pay (Merriman, 2023) are the top priorities for Gen Z when selecting a full-time job.

Table 3. *K-to-12 College Graduates' Most Valued Characteristic in a Boss*

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Honesty / integrity	28	19
Mentoring ability	42	28.6
Passion	21	14.3
Compassion	49	33.3
Intelligence	0	0
Other	7	4.8
Total	147	100

Table 3 indicates that K-to-12 college graduates prefer managers who are compassionate and possess mentoring abilities. This result aligns with the Springtide Research Institute (2021), which highlights the importance of mentorship for Gen Zs, who expect their managers to help them in setting performance goals. As previously mentioned, K-to-12 college graduates are regarded as lifelong learners due to the implementation of the K-to-12 curriculum and the revision of the GEC. This may account for their preference to work under managers from whom they can gain knowledge.

Moreover, belonging to the technology generation may help explain why these graduates seek these specific qualities in their managers or supervisors. Technology generation considers promoting good relationships, understanding, responsibility, and giving clear instructions as important characteristics and skills of a leader (Salvosa & Hechanova, 2020). Furthermore, being a member of Gen Z may explain K-to-12 college graduates' preference for compassionate managers. Studies by Anjum (2024), Merriman (2023), and Casic et al. (2022) showed that Gen Z prefer managers who are empathetic to their employees—acknowledging and prioritizing not only their physical well-being but also their mental health.

Table 4. *K-to-12 College Graduates' Career Aspiration in Five Years Out of College*

Career	Frequency	Percentage
Climbing the corporate ladder, though not yet in management	21	14.3
Starting my own business / being an entrepreneur	35	23.8
Pursuing higher education	35	23.8
Working for a nonprofit organization	0	0
Managing or supervising employees in a corporate environment	56	38.1
Total	147	100

Table 4 shows that K-to-12 college graduates see themselves managing or supervising employees in a corporate environment after five years out of college. Despite being new to the workforce, K-to-12 college graduates have a well-defined vision for their careers. As reflected in the earlier results, career growth emerged as their top priority when selecting a full-time job. These graduates are confident enough to take on managerial roles, believing that they possess the necessary skills to lead and the capability to work with others collaboratively. In the 2024 study of Loquias & Bauyot (2024), they revealed that SHS graduates believe that they have the leadership skills that they have acquired from the K-to-12 curriculum. According to Behbahani (2024), the presence of Gen Z managers has tripled over the last five years. Being members of Gen Z, K-to-12 college graduates may have followed the trend and soon occupy the majority of the managerial ranks.



Fig. 2. *K-to-12 College Graduates' Perception of Needed Skills for a Successful Career*

Based on the result, K-to-12 college graduates perceived that the top skills for a successful career are the ability to learn new things and to listen and give feedback. As previously mentioned, these graduates are lifelong learners, which supports their view on the essential skills needed to thrive in their chosen fields. Additionally, their preferences reflect the criteria they consider important when choosing a full-time job and the attributes they value in an ideal manager. K-to-12 college graduates exhibit a strong commitment to continuous learning and development, emphasizing the need for regular feedback and guidance from their supervisors.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Companies and organizations face the challenge of understanding and adapting to the characteristics and behaviors of K-to-12 college graduates. Work dynamics and company culture should be modified in order to draw and keep these graduates in the workplace. The Philippines currently falls behind in work-life balance, fair compensation, and creating a safe and inclusive work environment. In the 2024 Global Life-work Balance Index by Remote, the Philippines ranked second to last (59th out of 60 countries) when it comes to work-life balance, as Filipinos work an average of 40.63 hours per week while receiving 84.76 PHP per hour only. The International Trade Union Confederation's (2020) Global Rights Index ranked the Philippines among the top 10 most dangerous countries for workers, citing numerous instances of worker arrests and a work environment prone to violence.

The results revealed that K-to-12 college graduates aspire to work for large international corporations. They predominantly prefer collaborating in small groups within an office setting, with their next preference being collaboration with larger teams in the same environment. Their top two priorities in choosing a full-time job are opportunities for career growth and a manager from whom they can learn. K-to-12 college graduates value ideal managers who demonstrate compassion and possess strong mentoring skills. In five years, they envision

themselves in managerial or supervisory roles within a corporate setting. Lastly, K-to-12 college graduates perceived that the top skills for a successful career are the ability to learn new things and to listen and give feedback.

Considering the current working conditions in the Philippines, companies can use these findings as a foundation for developing policies to enhance the work environment. These improvements should focus on creating a safe and inclusive workplace that supports collaboration among K-to-12 college graduates. Philippine companies should do more when it comes to developing younger employees' skill sets by providing fair compensation and benefits, resulting in a happy and motivated workforce—a necessity for achieving company goals.

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