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Unleashing the Potential of Short Courses and Micro-Certifications for Employment and Economic Growth in the Philippines

Digital Pilipinas

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Introduction

The Philippines continues to struggle in the process of moving above its current education system ranking. A 2021 report by the World Bank showed that students in the country rated last in reading and second to last in science and mathematics among 79 countries.¹ The problem was all the more exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caught educators off-guard and necessitated schools to shift to remote learning.

The learning loss brought on by the pandemic added to pre-existing problems in the nation's education system—namely an education and job skills mismatch. It is estimated that about 40% of Filipinos are overqualified for the jobs they have.² Additionally, only 5% of Filipinos actually earned more for finishing their studies.

There are also arguments that aside from Filipinos being overqualified for the jobs they currently have, too many of them simply do not have the skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow. For example, one report finds that the Philippines' growing tech startup ecosystem will struggle to hire from a pool of tech and engineering graduates that have not grown in proportion to demand.³ Thus, there are increasing calls to provide reskilling and upskilling education not only to students but also to the current labor force.

This is where short courses and micro-certifications come in. Short courses and micro-certifications are complete training programs that typically last a few days to a few weeks. They are useful because they can quickly provide people with the knowledge needed to perform a specific job. Additionally, short courses and micro-certifications are less expensive than full courses, may be completed at the learner's own pace, and are specialized.

So far, short courses and micro-certifications still have a long way to go in proving their utility. Many employers, especially in the Philippines, still prefer their graduates to possess a 4-year degree from a college or university. For short courses and micro-certifications to become a

¹ Lugtu, R. (2022, July 7). *Education 5.0*. The Manila Times. Retrieved November 14, 2022, from <https://www.manilatimes.net/2022/07/07/business/top-business/education-50/1850032>

² Philippine Institute for Development Studies. (2022, August 24). *PIDS*. PIDS - Philippine Institute for Development Studies. Retrieved February 9, 2023, from <https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/news/in-the-news/40-of-filipinos-are-overqualified-for-their-jobs-job-mismatches-and-how-you-can-avoid-them>

³ Gobi-Core Philippines. (2022, November 23). *Gobi-Core Philippine Fund Releases State of Talent in Tech 2022 Report – Core Capital*. Core Capital. Retrieved February 9, 2023, from <https://corevc.ph/gobi-core-philippine-fund-releases-the-state-of-talent-in-tech-2022/>



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solution to the problem of jobs and skills mismatches, employers must be open to shifting their mindsets on their requirements for hiring.

Showing what short courses and micro-certifications can do

The future of short courses and micro-certifications depends on convincing employers of their reliability and legitimacy. First, it is worth pointing out that the traditional way of hiring—which is combing through an applicant’s resume for their educational background and past positions held—has its own shortcomings. What this method fails to showcase is what knowledge and skill sets applicants have actually learned (outside of their degree) and possible learning opportunities companies or prospective employers can provide. It is hard to discern what applicants actually know and how else an employer can help them develop new skills.

Short courses and micro-certifications have already been utilized in the IT industry. A survey conducted by Linux Academy and online cybersecurity massive open online course (MOOC) provider Cybrary in January 2017 revealed that 35% of approximately 6,000 IT professionals surveyed reported that micro-certifications have helped them secure a job or advance in their current positions.⁴ Additionally, 94% of the respondents agreed that entry-level candidates would have an advantage in the hiring process at their company if they possessed micro-certifications. The reasoning behind this is that micro-certifications help IT professionals demonstrate their ability to keep up with changes in technology.

There are, however, also plenty of use cases for micro-certifications outside of tech. In Denmark, the roadwork education center VEJ-EU delivers roadway safety certification via e-learning.⁵ After completing online pre-work, the training shifts to hands-on learning and exercises to reinforce what has been learned. The combination of personalized and hands-on learning means the program has had a 100% pass rate for achieving certification.

The increasing recognition of micro-certifications across industries has spurred Philippine business incubators to offer micro-certifications of their own. In early 2022, Mapúa University’s Think and Tinker Laboratory collaborated with Digital Pilipinas to carry out research and development initiatives, including micro-certification programs through Digital Pilipinas

⁴ (n.d.). Linux Academy. Retrieved February 9, 2023, from <https://linuxacademy.com/blog/linuxacademy-com/insights-and-trends-on-micro-certifications/>

⁵ Christensen, U. J. (2020, August 17). *How Micro-Certification Can Fill Skill Gaps In The New Normal*. Forbes. Retrieved February 9, 2023, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ulrikjuulchristensen/2020/08/17/how-micro-certification-can-fill-skill-gaps-in-the-new-normal/?sh=523a5ac17754>



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Academy.⁶ These micro-certifications will be open to the general public and will be developed with an advisory group including representatives from Microsoft Philippines.

Highlighting the examples above will be crucial when informing employers on the benefits of hiring based on short courses and micro-certifications. By legitimizing them as a path to gainful employment, it will be easier for employers to get the talent they need and for workers to get a head start on their careers.

Making credentials accessible for employers

While there is an increasing number of learning platforms to get micro-certifications, what is equally important is creating a safe, accessible place to store a learner's credentials. Credentials must be easily retrievable (to show potential employers, for example) while secure enough to be sure they will never be lost, corrupted, and/or tampered with.

One possible solution is to store credentials in digital wallets. Digital wallets use encryption technology to protect information - meaning that any information transmitted out is protected by an encrypted code. The information is only decrypted once the information finds its intended recipient. Digital wallets are also often protected by password or biometric authentication, adding an extra layer of security to the user's information. Some digital wallets also have security features such as multi-factor authentication and regular security updates to address potential vulnerabilities.

Digital wallets are already used today to safely store funds and personal information such as one's email, birthdate, location, and more. This indicates they are already in a good position to store important credentials like micro-certifications. The next step is to collaborate with existing wallets to tailor their solution for jobseekers and employers alike.

There are educational institutions already creating secure student wallets capable of storing digital certificates. For example, the University of Lille already issued no less than 20,000 blockchain certificates in 2021 and will be among the first, with the European University CIVIS, to provide its students with a virtual student wallet.⁷

⁶ BusinessWorld Online. (2022, January 28). *Mapúa launches fintech-focused business incubator*. BusinessWorld Online. Retrieved February 9, 2023, from <https://www.bworldonline.com/sparkup/2022/01/28/426485/mapua-launches-fintech-focused-business-incubator>

⁷ Jarry, L. (2022, February 7). *Verifiable Credential Use Cases in Education*. BCdiploma. Retrieved February 9, 2023, from <https://www.bcdiploma.com/en/blog/verifiable-credentials-uses-cases>



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Next steps

Because Philippine systems for education, hiring, and employment are strictly anchored on the traditional college degree, there needs to be a parallel effort and follow through to the proof of concept on how exactly employers can be spurred into accepting micro-certifications and credentials in the labor market.

The first step is to assess government and specific industry receptiveness to the use of micro-credentials for hiring, promotion, and executive appointments. This should be followed by establishing the benefits of digital identity and micro-credentials stored in credible wallets, benefits such as making it easier for employers to assess the competence of a potential hire and prevent fraud or misrepresentation by potential employees who may work in multi-job and multi-location capacities. Finally, it should be emphasized that courses will continually be updated to consider evolving technology and job market requirements.

The process should result in the reframing of employee assessment and hiring practices. Ideally, it will also result in the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) becoming more responsive in drafting new policies or regulations for employers. In the future, it may be helpful to engage the DOLE, employer confederations, and other umbrella organizations of entities which may help institutionalize and already recognize micro-certifications as valid and sufficient credentials for first-time hiring, granting pay raises, or promotion to posts of higher responsibility.



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Conclusion

The Philippines faces an urgent need for specialized, on-demand training to meet the demands of today's job market.

Now is the time for employers to start recognizing the legitimacy of short courses and micro-certifications as noteworthy accomplishments and credentials for hiring. After all, short courses and micro-certifications are more accessible to potential employees, flexible, lower in costs, and specific to a particular job or field. Stakeholders and policy influencers should also aim to grant initiatives to build the necessary infrastructure to store learners' and employees' digital credentials, perhaps through the use of digital wallets.

While there remains a lot of work to be done before short courses and micro-certifications become a staple and reliable source of credentials for job seekers, such micro-certifications are arguably the most potent weapon in combating the skills mismatch confronting employees and employers today. That in itself makes the process worthwhile.