

Bridging the gaps on architecture academic training and professional practice: A policy analysis on CHED CMO No. 61, series of 2017

Rodriguez, Franz Allan M. ✉

Holy Angel University, Philippines (farodriguez@hau.edu.ph; franz1286@gmail.com)



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Abstract

This policy analysis paper critically examines Articles IV and V of CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 61, series of 2017, which outlines the Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSG) for the Bachelor of Science in Architecture in the Philippines. This study seeks to identify the gaps between the CHED-required program outcomes, competencies, and the current industry demands of the architecture profession. This study employed various qualitative approaches. Documentary research was conducted to annotate and examine certain provisions of the said policy. By examining the policy's provisions, this study revealed key findings for its improvement to strengthen the alignment between academic training and professional practice. Interviews with architects and focus group discussion with fourth-year architecture students were also performed to gather stakeholder perspectives. The thematic analysis revealed persistent challenges in bridging academic training and actual fieldwork. These underscored deficiencies in digital proficiency, business management, project delivery and industry immersion that hinder the professional readiness of graduates. The study also emphasized that while the said policy promotes a structured and outcome-based curriculum, it is already outdated and behind the rapidly evolving global standards and industry realities. It concluded by highlighting the need for a systematic approach to policy implementation and for the government to address the identified gaps to advance the architecture education in the Philippines. The research calls for policy revisions to better align with the current architecture practices, streamline overlapping courses, and integrate experiential learning models responsive to post-pandemic architectural practices.

Keywords: architecture education, CHED CMO No. 61, policy analysis, curriculum alignment, professional readiness, experiential learning, higher education policy

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1. Introduction

The Architecture education in the Philippines is an academic training designed to not only equip students with the knowledge and skills but also imbue ethical foundations required to design built environments that are functionally, aesthetically and structurally sound. The Bachelor of Science in Architecture program, required by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to be taken up by aspiring Filipino architects, is an interdisciplinary program that combines art, science, technology and ethics. It is defined by the policy as a technical training program that equip students with the required competencies to design and build functional, stable and aesthetically responsive structures. It integrates courses in design theory, history, construction technology, building utilities, environmental systems, and professional practice. CHED further requires students to complete a total of 205 credit units for five years, culminating with a thesis project. This is followed by a 2-year post-graduation apprenticeship equivalent to 3,840 hours before being qualified to take Architecture Licensure Examination (ALE). The latest architecture curriculum aims to develop Filipino architects with a mindset to respond to Filipino culture, climate and social conditions (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2017).

CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 61, series of 2017 or the Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSG) for the Bachelor of Science in Architecture establishes the minimum standards for the execution of the program. This policy includes the program description, directives for the program outcomes, minimum curriculum structure, licensure preparation, instructional standards, required facilities and infrastructures, resources, program administration and governance, faculty requirements and qualifications, quality assurance, and linkage and industry engagement. The policy was developed through a consultative process by a technical working group, which involved architecture educators, industry practitioners, expert panels and representatives from the United Architects of the Philippines (UAP).

Despite the existence of the CHED policy, challenges continue to hinder the effectiveness and delivery of the architecture program in most institutions. Shih (2015) highlighted that the Philippines heavily rely on the traditional and inflexible pedagogical methods in instruction, uneven access of technology and limited exposure of students on actual design practice. Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) heavily rely on the minimum requirement of the policy that limits the engagement of students in creative and innovative thinking. Schools offering the program, particularly in the provinces, experience challenges in providing studio and laboratory equipment, design software and hiring academically qualified and industry-experienced faculty members. This exacerbates the inequality of learning experiences across the country. Graduates from these schools have lesser exposure to the current design trends, sustainability methods and digital workflows compared to those schools that are better equipped. In addition, society demands now for a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient built environment, which are ready to address latest issues such as climate change, socio-economic disparity and urbanization. Globalized architectural practice and digital transformation evolved drastically especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic further exposed the fragility of the architecture education system. The transition from on-site studio work to online and hybrid learning modalities revealed the gaps in digital infrastructure and digital divide for both students and faculty. Students experienced difficulties in translating studio-based works to virtual formats (Shih, 2015). This widens the competency disparities between architecture graduates.

In Asian context, architecture education should be able to embrace a holistic model, which focuses not only on technical and design competencies. It should likewise adopt community impact, cultural identity and environmental stewardship (Lee, 2018; Carrasco et al., 2024). The policy should continuously be reviewed to

ensure that it remains responsive to emerging technologies and progress. It should also be regularly studied to guarantee that graduates are competent enough to take off to their professional practice.

This policy analysis paper is grounded in the Philippine context. It focuses on the current state of the architecture education and its alignment with the current professional practice. This study also addresses a literature gap. Few architecture education studies critically evaluate the actual relevance and timeliness of CHED's associated policy in view of the developing global and local architectural landscape. Existing literature regarding architecture education aims on broader themes rather than focusing on the implications of the associated policy in academic training and professional practice. This study deeply concentrates on the examination of Articles IV and V of the policy, which were triangulated through stakeholder perspectives by interviewing licensed architects and conducting focus group discussions (FGD) with architecture students. It also introduces a critical and annotated review of a specific CHED policy clauses, uncommon to Philippine architecture education research, through the lens of current industry demands and stakeholder experiences. This study filled these gaps by offering a multi-perspective critique and recommending policy-level reforms that were rooted in the realities of architectural education and practice.

This findings of this study presents practical implications for multiple stakeholders in the field of architecture education and professional practice. Policymakers can benefit from the annotated review of the policy and valuable stakeholders' inputs concerning the gaps between the associated policy and the realities in academic training and fieldwork. It stresses the need for aligning program outcomes and curriculum with the demands of the actual industry. Administrators of academic institutions are motivated through the findings of the study to go beyond compliance with academic requirements and seek out learning opportunities that will better prepare their students for practice. For practitioners, the study highlights their significant role in shaping future architects. The findings highlight the gaps between what students are taught and the skills needed in actual practice. It also provides practitioners an overview of the current standing of architecture graduates who will be entering the profession. It calls for the practitioner's increased involvement in academic advisory councils or curriculum reviews. Students are advised to be more proactive in supplementing their education. The findings call for students develop their skills in digital tools, construction technologies, business and project delivery systems to become more competitive in the industry.

The study advances the discourse on the curricular relevance, graduate preparedness and professional alignment of the architecture education in view of the policy. This adds value by showing how education policy analysis can inform discipline-specific reforms.

2. Literature Review

One of the evident challenges in the Philippine architecture education is the disconnect between academic training and professional practice. This gap is often associated with the structural misalignment of the design and construction industry with the current minimum architecture curriculum. It offers an outdated pedagogical approach being implemented in Philippine architecture schools, which limits the students' capabilities to adapt to new context and technologies (Shih, 2015). This was further reinforced by Lee (2018) who critiqued that Asian architectural education, the Philippines included, seems to be focused on "design studios", failing to understand the holistic and interdisciplinary nature of the program. Hence, the unbalanced structure hinders the real-world challenges. It is asserted that architectural education systems have not evolved in pace with the complexity and interdisciplinary demands of the professional practice.

The concerns on the lack of entrepreneurship and business acumen among graduates is gaining traction as well. Architecture graduates should not only be fluent in design but also on business strategies, marketing and financial feasibility (Espino, 2024). An integrated model is recommended where graduates should be able to integrate design thinking with clients' needs, budget and regulatory frameworks (Carrasco et al., 2024). However, it is conspicuous that under the CHED policy, courses that are supposed to address these concerns and challenges

are underrepresented. This was also noted by Shih (2015), who pointed that graduates have received minimal exposure to project management of business modeling during their academic training. Thus, most of them only receive extensive business management training during their two-year diversified post-graduate training experience.

Literature also suggested that the current industry in Architecture, Engineering and Construction (AEC) would require graduates to have inclusive and collaborative skills (Carrasco et al., 2024). Graduates should prioritize participatory design over aesthetics. Despite the CHED's mandate to engage students in context-based design problems and community responsive solutions, graduates were trained under the traditional studio model, which is resistant to interdisciplinary, participatory and socially embedded design thinking (Shih, 2015). Graduates of the architecture program should not only be capable of creating aesthetically sound designs but should be able to demonstrate interdisciplinary competencies. They should be able to work with different professionals across various disciplines related to design, engineering and construction of built environment.

Post-pandemic disruptions further revealed that architecture education should go beyond the minimum prescription of said policy. Globalized practice and digital transformation evolved drastically after the pandemic. Hybrid and immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and collaborative design as crucial platforms in creating designs and digital adaptability (Al-Rqaibat et al., 2025). Immersive platforms like the metaverse are not only used as design tools but also as avenues to build imaginative and culturally rooted learning experiences (Carrasco et al., 2024). Architectural education, especially in hybrid and remote settings, should advocate for cross-platform collaboration and adaptive thinking (Hewidy et al., 2024). Students' resilience and problem-solving skills were better and more effective in institutions that have robust support systems and flexible pedagogies (Ekici et al., 2024). However, it can be argued that institutions failed to support students and faculty during the pandemic since they had to rely on their improvised virtual studios (Pinlac et al., 2023). Lack of digital competencies beyond software use was exposed during this period.

Transitioning from academic training to architectural professional practice reveals a disconnect between industry needs and school learning. Various literary sources have consistently identified "*education-practice gap*" in architecture program especially when it is still anchored to traditional and abstract design ideologies without being adequately exposed to actual design and construction realities and socio-economic contexts (Carrasco et al., 2024; Lee, 2018). The CHED policy has provided a structured and comprehensive curriculum aimed at producing architecture graduates with technical, artistic, and ethical competencies. However, Espino (2024) and Shih (2015) both agreed that the curriculum has not always been synchronized with industry expectations. Areas that need special attention includes courses that are aimed at developing business acumen, project management, and local governance.

One of the most important features that needs to be unlocked to improve the architecture education is the full implementation of the outcomes-based model of CHED CMO No. 61. This contextualized learning model mirrors global innovations while being responsive to the local realities. International models tend to be more adaptive by employing mixed instructional modalities and practice-integrated curricula (Carrasco et al., 2024). They further discuss that these are notably absent or inconsistently applied in local settings. Literature suggest that holistic studio-based education should go beyond aesthetic and technical skills to include community-responsive and inclusive design thinking (Lee, 2018). Despite being already mentioned in the framework of the policy, implementation often falters especially on impoverished or provincial educational institutions due to resource inequalities and pedagogical rigidity (Shih, 2015). Conversely, international educational frameworks reveal that learning resilience, collaborative studio culture, and experiential linkages to real-world problems strengthen student preparedness and professional relevance (Ekici et al., 2024; Hewidy et al., 2024).

Various reforms in architectural education are emerging, often to address the challenges in transitioning from being a graduate to a professional. However, the policy landscape should move beyond curricular

checklists to facilitate more inclusive, practice-integrated, and locally grounded architectural academic training. This would truly prepare the graduates as they transition to the multilayered realities of the architecture discipline.

Research Question - This study focuses on the question: “How can architecture education in the Philippines be improved to address the gaps between academic training and professional practice?”

The following sub-questions complements the central issue:

- What are the gaps between what architecture students learn in school and what is expected in professional practice?
- How well does the current architecture curriculum align with the professional competencies set in the policy and the actual demands of architectural practice?
- What challenges do architecture graduates face when transitioning from school to the professional field?

3. Methods

Research Design - This policy analysis employed qualitative research design to critically examine the relevance and responsiveness of the CHED policy. This study utilized three primary methods of data collection i.e. documentary research, interviews, and a focus group discussion (FGD). Documentary research was conducted to examine the content and provisions of the said policy, particularly Article IV (*Program Specifications*) and Article V (*Curriculum*). This method focused on identifying the program outcomes, competency standards, and curricular structures. It was employed to evaluate the policy’s alignment with the current realities and expectations of the architectural profession. Interviews were also conducted. The interview findings provided valuable insights on perceived gaps between academic training and workplace readiness. Additionally, an FGD was employed to explore student’s perception on how academic experiences prepare them for actual practice.

Participants - This paper a purposive sampling to determine the participants who could provide relevant perceptions based on their knowledge, experiences and roles relevant to the research questions. Participants from the interview were selected from a pool of design professionals, while those participants from the FGD were selected from a group of architecture students. Separate sets of inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed for the interviews and FGD. This is to ensure participant relevance and data credibility. The following are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Interview Participants

| Category / Criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Professional License | Registered and Licensed Architects | Unlicensed or unregistered individuals |
| Industry Involvement | Actively engaged in the design and construction industry | Not currently practicing or inactive in the field |
| Years of Experience | At least 8-10 years of professional experience | Less than 8 years of experience |
| Exposure to Young Professionals | Has supervised OJT students and worked with newly graduated architects | No experience working with students or fresh graduates |
| Relevance of Perspective | Can provide insights on perceived gaps between academic training and industry practice | Unable to offer relevant insights due to lack of exposure or professional alignment |

Table 2*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for FGD Participants*

| Category / Criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Academic Level | 4th year BS in Architecture students | Students below 4th year or not in the Architecture program |
| OJT Experience | Recently completed on-the-job training | No OJT experience |
| School Representation | Enrolled in different HEIs offering BS in Architecture in the Philippines | All participants from a single institution or from unrelated programs |
| Purposeful Relevance | Able to discuss transition from school to work immersion | Unable or unwilling to share relevant experiences |

These criteria ensured that all selected participants are qualified and appropriate for this study. They also provided relevant experiences and insights aligned with the objectives of this policy analysis paper. The selection of participants captures diverse yet targeted perspectives on the alignment between the alignment of academic training and professional practice.

Research Instruments - An annotation guide was prepared for the document research. The guide was used to review and extract relevant information from the policy. It centered on program outcomes, competencies, curriculum structure and alignment with industry needs. The research also deployed a semi-structured interview guide and a FGD guide. The semi-structured interview guide was developed to solicit the perspectives of the architects. It comprises of open-ended questions focused on their experiences on handling OJT students and new architecture graduates. This allowed for in-depth discussions and was able to provide flexibility to further identify emerging themes. The FGD guide was designed to elicit reflections from 4th year architecture students. The questions were structures to extract detailed narratives and insights from the participants. Both research instruments were reviewed for content validity by a group of research experts and members of faculty in the architecture education.

Data Collection - The annotation method was also employed to closely read Article IV (*Program Specifications*) and Article V (*Curriculum*) of the policy. Notations were incorporated, by phrase and by line, so that key concepts, policy intentions, potential challenges and underlying assumptions of CHED can be extracted. Data collection was also carried out using individual interviews and an FGD. Informed consents were secured from all the interview and FGD participants. The semi-structured interview with the architects was conducted for at least 30 minutes each. With permission from the participants, the researcher used a mobile device for the audio recording. The data collected from the interviews were centered on their experiences on supervising OJT students and working with recent architecture graduates. Meanwhile, the FGD was conducted via Zoom application. Participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. Recording was made after securing the consent of the participants. The session lasted for 1 hour and 14 minutes. Data from interviews were transcribed verbatim while the FGD data were converted to text using AI-assisted transcription software (*Tactiq for Zoom*). Additionally, the sessions were conducted in Filipino and English. The actual responses were translated into English for analysis and presentation. Translations were reviewed by bilingual speakers familiar with both architectural terminologies and research. The data were manually reviewed for accuracy. All collected information were stored securely for subsequent thematic analysis.

Data Analysis - Data gathered from annotations were reviewed to describe, identify patterns, intentions, and areas for improvement of the policy clause. On the other hand, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and FGD were examined using thematic analysis. The responses were read multiple times after the transcription to ensure familiarity with the content. Initial coding was conducted to identify recurring ideas, phrases and concepts that responds to the research questions. The codes were grouped into broader themes. The themes presented captured the patterns and relationships across the data. The coding process was conducted manually and was cross-checked against the raw transcripts to ensure reliability. The interpretations were validated by a research expert to minimize bias. Direct quotes from participants were also included in the reporting.

Ethical Considerations - The study adhered to ethical standards involving human participants. The participants from the interviews and FGD were made aware of the purpose of the study, assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any time through a Research Information Sheet. The written informed consents were secured to ensure that they fully understood the scope and nature of their involvement. It included information on how the data obtained would be recorded, used, and protected. The participants were likewise informed that the final report would not disclose any identifiable personal information. Pseudonyms were used in the presentation of findings to protect the identity of the participants. The data, including the transcript and Zoom recordings, were stored on a private cloud storage to maintain privacy and data integrity. All the data stored are for academic purposes only. Participants were given opportunities to pose questions, clarifications and queries before proceeding with the sessions. Additionally, they were informed of the translation process after each session. Separate consents were secured for this procedure, and the process was carefully undertaken to accurately reflect the original meanings of their responses. They were treated with respect and consideration throughout the research process. These methods ensured that study adhered to accepted ethical standards in research involving human participants. The study is committed to transparency, voluntary participation, and the protection of all participants' rights and well-being.

4. Results

This section presents the findings resulting from the documentary research of Article IV (*Program Specifications*) and Article V (*Curriculum*) of the policy using the annotation method. It also shows the findings gathered from the interviews with industry practitioners and FGD with the architecture students. The results are organized into key themes that emerged from the qualitative data. These themes highlight the alignment and gaps between policy provisions and actual industry expectations. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to the policy objectives. It draws connections between the goals of the policy versus the lived experiences of students and professionals in the field.

Alignment of Article IV Curriculum Provisions with Industry Competencies - Article IV of the policy sets the program specifications of the Bachelor of Science program. It defines the scope of the profession, program objectives and learning outcomes. To better understand the expectations from the graduates of the BS in Architecture program, the study presents an annotation of the Program outcomes as established in Article IV Section 6 of the same memorandum.

Common to all programs in all types of schools

a. To keep abreast with the developments in the field of architecture practice. This clause intends to encourage lifelong learning. It also advocates for HEIs to be adaptable to change as the architecture field and practice evolves rapidly. Nonetheless, the section of this policy does not clearly state how students will be trained to ensure that they are updated with the latest trends and emerging technologies such as those previously identified in the literature readings (BIM, AI tools, etc.).

b. The ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing using both English and Filipino. This section promotes bilingual proficiency among the graduates. This prepares them for diverse communication settings in the professional practice. However, it should be noted that the Filipino courses were removed from the curriculum.

c. The ability to work effectively and independently in multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural teams. This competency highlights collaboration and cross-cultural sensitivity. This is reflective to the demands of the global practice.

d. A recognition of professional, social, and ethical responsibility. The aim of this outcome is to produce ethically grounded professionals. Graduates should be able to consider social accountability in their work. However, the clause does not explain clearly how students will be exposed to real-world ethical dilemmas and

how they are assessed in the academic settings.

Common to the discipline

a. *Creation of architectural solutions by applying knowledge in history, theory, planning, building technology and utilities, structural concepts and professional practice.* The intent is to foster integrative design thinking by connecting diverse knowledge areas. It is noted that this section does not include sustainability, digitalization and technology and sustainability, which are essential in today's architectural practice.

b. *Use of concepts and principles from specialized fields and allied disciplines into various architectural problems.* This clause promotes interdisciplinary learning. It also encourages students to draw from other disciplines. This was also found in the literature readings where students are encouraged to work with different professionals across various disciplines related to design, engineering and construction as part of their academic training.

c. *Preparation of contract documents, technical reports and other legal documents used in architectural practice adhering to applicable laws, standards and regulations.* This highlights technical competence and regulatory compliance. This section of the policy agrees with the literature readings i.e. to ensure students are equipped with technical skills in preparing contracts and other building construction documents.

d. *Interpretation and application of relevant laws, codes, charters and standards of architecture and the built environment.* The purpose of this clause is to ensure legal literacy and professional responsibility among graduates.

e. *Application of research methods to address architectural problems.* The policy promotes that students undergo research activities. It highlights the need for students to adapt inquiry-based design and evidence-based decision-making.

f. *Use of various information and communication technology (ICT) media for architectural solutions, presentation, and techniques in design and construction.* The intention of policy is to ensure that students are exposed to digital tools in design processes. Nonetheless, the language used in the clause is outdated and broad. Global trends in the industry such as BIM, parametric design software, cloud collaboration, AR/VR, and AI are missing in the statement.

g. *Acquisition of entrepreneurial and business acumen relevant to Architecture practice.* The policy advocates for students to develop their business acumen. This supports the literature readings where special attention should be given on the areas business and project management.

h. *Involvement in the management of the construction works and Building administration.* It is also highlighted through this outcome that students should be able to align their design works with construction processes and administration responsibilities. However, it is noted that simulation of site supervision or building administration is not part of the studio or course-based activities.

Common to a horizontal type as defined in CMO No. 46 s. 2012

For professional institutions: A service orientation in one's profession. The policy promotes social responsibility and public service. However, it can be noted that there is an absence of social design studios or humanitarian architecture modules.

For colleges: An ability to participate in various types of employment, development activities, and public discourses particularly in response to the needs of the community. The intent of the policy is to support employability and civic engagement. Literature readings also suggest that academe and industry should evolve from simply conducting meetings into co-contributor to the learning environment.

For universities: An ability to participate in the generation of new knowledge such as pioneering concepts and ideas of site and building designs beyond the regular physical and location boundaries and contexts. The policy encourages students to have a vision for research and innovation. However, it is noted that this fails to align with global digital transformation, indigenous knowledge integration, or sustainability research. It was also stressed that research is often detached from actual design practice and lacks significance to cultural identity or technological innovation. Students should be able to create forward-thinking and locally rooted design ideas.

Article V: Curriculum Structure - Article V of the policy outlines the minimum curriculum structure for the Bachelor of Science in Architecture program. This section presents annotations in Sections 7 and 8 of Article V to offer a critical and contextualized understanding of how this CHED CMO aligns with the provisions of industry competencies. The next sub-headings present the annotations for the said policy clauses.

On Section 7. Curriculum Design

7.1. The BS Architecture program has a total of 205 credit units. This clause identifies the scope and academic workload of the BS in Architecture program. It signals that the program is quite comprehensive and intensive given that graduates are required with professional licensing requirements by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). The 205-credit requirement reinforces the development of technical depth and design rigor. However, the high units may limit the flexibility in course design. This may restrict inclusion of emerging themes in the architecture curricula such as climate-adaptive design, smart cities, digital design, among others. This heavy unit requirement may also pose strain and stress among students.

The program comprises of general education, technical courses (mathematics, natural sciences, basic engineering sciences, professional, allied, and specialization courses). This statement outlines the composition of the BS in Architecture curriculum. It presents a combination of foundational knowledge with discipline-specific skills. The program's structure aligns well with the industry standards and architectural practice. However, it should be noted that the global practice requires greater integration of sustainability.

7.2. The general education courses are in accordance with the requirements of the CHED Memorandum Order No. 20, s. 2013 – General Education Curriculum. This clause suggests that the program aligns its general education component with another policy i.e. CMO No. 20, s. 2013. Soft skills demanded by the industry such as communications, ethical reasoning and cultural sensitivity are often developed in General education courses. However, the curriculum provides that general education and professional courses are taught separately with little to no thematic integration. With this setup, student often sees general education courses as irrelevant to architectural design rather than appreciating them as foundational knowledge that should inform their design decisions.

Holistic Understanding, Intellectual and Civic Competencies to equip graduates with a basis for critical thinking abilities and values formed from other methods and theories of other disciplines. It is the aim of the country, through CHED, to produce graduates who think critically and act with civic responsibility. It also encourages HEIs to produce graduates who may apply ideas in philosophy, sociology, psychology, and other fields into their design thinking. International practice put high emphasis on graduates who can lead public consultations, work in multi-disciplinary teams, and ethically address user needs through design. Civic competencies in the curricula, however, are more integrated in general education courses. They should be included in professional courses to prepare graduates for complex real-world problems.

5. Findings for the Interviews and Focus Group Discussion

This section presents the significant findings from the focus group discussion and interviews. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis. There are six major themes that emerged from these investigations. The findings not only highlight the experiences of the students but also integrates the perspectives from the professionals. These layered viewpoints provide the study an understanding of the gaps and opportunities for the

improvement of the architecture education.

Theme 1: The Gap Between Academic Preparation and Actual Practice

Findings suggest that classroom and studio knowledge do not always translate into actual practice. Students immerse themselves in practice through their OJT but are challenged when faced with site realities.

“Iba talaga kapag nasa field ka na, parang mas valuable ‘yung real-world experience kaysa sa theories.” (Student C, FGD)

“It is really different when you are on the field, real-world experience feels more valuable than theories.”

“Hirap po ako sa material selection... hindi ako familiar sa cost at sa labor and installation time.” (Student A, FGD)

“I struggled with material selection... I was not familiar with the cost, labor, and installation time.”

These disconnects were validated by Interviewee A:

“Copy-paste lang yung ginagawa nila sa construction drawings pero they are unaware of how these drawings look in actual construction. Alam nila i-drawing pero di nila ma-visualize sa actual.” (Interviewee A)

“They just copy-paste construction drawings, but they are unaware of how these drawings appear in actual construction. They know how to draw, but they cannot visualize it in actual.”

Theme 2: Deficiencies in Digital and Technical Tools

Both set of participants highlighted the insufficient training in digital tools and software essential in actual practice. Students are often left on their own to learn highly sophisticated software such as Revit, Lumion, Enscape and SketchUp. Sometime, already too late in their academic journey.

“Late kami nagkaroon ng exposure sa digital tools... DESIGN6 pa lang kami pinayagan gumamit ng CAD.” (Student B, FGD)

“We were exposed to digital tools quite late... we were only allowed to use CAD starting in DESIGN6.”

The participants from the interview noted that the architecture industry has rapidly evolved. This has probably left some graduates behind.

“May Revit, Lumion, Enscape, even AI meron na din ngayon. Kung hindi ka hasa sa ganoong software... you would be left out from the industry.” (Interviewee A)

“There are Revit, Lumion, Enscape, and even AI now. If you are not skilled in those kinds of software... you would be left out of the industry.”

“Most graduates are proficient in design software... but not in project management tools like Excel or scheduling platforms.” (Interviewee B)

Additionally, Interviewee A pointed out a surprising weakness in fundamental tools:

“Sa Excel, I feel weakness nila yun... basic kasi ang Excel for estimates, project management,

etc.” (Interviewee A)

“I feel Excel is one of their weaknesses... and yet Excel is basic for estimates, project management, and similar tasks.”

Theme 3: Lack of Business and Project Management Preparation

Students also expressed that they were not adequately prepared for office operations, budgeting, or project coordination.

“Feeling ko kulang pa ‘yung knowledge ko sa paghandle ng firm.” (Student B, FGD)

“I feel that I still lack the knowledge needed to run a firm.”

“Sa business side, medyo hesitant pa rin ako... iba pa rin talaga pag architecture firm na.”
(Student C, FGD)

“I’m still somewhat hesitant when it comes to the business side... it’s really different when it’s an actual architecture firm.”

Interviewee A echoed these sentiments:

“They are trained overly in Design... but business, project management, finances, medyo na-leleft out.” (Interviewee A)

“They are trained heavily in design... but subjects like business, project management, and finances are somewhat left out.”

Interviewee B affirmed the imbalance:

“Many are not prepared when it comes to cost estimation, project finance, or managing architectural businesses.” (Interviewee B)

Theme 4: Confidence and Emotional Readiness for Practice

Students also reflected on their insecurities and anxiety about their readiness to transition into professional practice.

“Siguro po 6.5/10. Ready to try, pero hindi pa talaga fully prepared.” (Student B, FGD)

“Maybe around 6.5 out of 10. I’m ready to try, but I’m not fully prepared yet.”

“Worried ako sa construction side... baka ma-culture shock ako.” (Student A, FGD)

“I’m worried about the construction side... I might experience culture shock.”

Interviewee A confirmed that even graduates can lose motivation quickly:

“Nabibigla sila... Kapag habitual na, medyo nagsasawa sila. They always look for something new to do.” (Interviewee A)

“They get overwhelmed... When the work becomes repetitive, they tend to lose interest. They’re always looking for something new to do.”

This was also echoed by Interviewee B. He added that some young professionals resign just months due to stress:

“Some adapt quickly, but others become overwhelmed and emotionally stressed, sometimes

resigning after just a month or two.” (Interviewee B)

“Some adapt quickly, but others become overwhelmed and emotionally stressed, sometimes resigning after just a month or two.”

Theme 5: Value of Hands-on Learning and Industry Integration

Students also agreed that their most meaningful learning happened during their OJT exposure and immersions:

“Nakita ko kung gaano kaimportante ‘yung networking.” (Student A, FGD)

“I realized how important networking really is.”

“Projects usually come from connections.” (Student D, FGD)

“Projects usually come from connections.”

Interviewee A strongly supported these immersions:

“Let them swim, sabi nga nila... Ok lang ma-pressure pero usually effect yun nung hindi nila maintindihan yung ginagawa nila.” (Interviewee A)

“Let them swim, as they say... It’s okay to feel pressured, but that usually happens when they don’t understand what they’re doing.”

Interviewee B also highlighted the importance of reinforced collaboration between firms and schools:

“There should be more collaborative events, workshops, and mentorship opportunities involving both firms and schools.” (Interviewee B)

Theme 6: Recommendations for Curriculum Reform

Students and professionals suggested that the architecture curriculum should be reformed. It should be recalibrated toward relevance, inclusivity, and efficiency. Students also called for more applied, socially aware design content.

“Sana po mas bigyang pansin ang inclusive design, ‘yung pang low-income families din. Hindi lang para sa elite.” (Student A, FGD)

“I hope more attention is given to inclusive design—something for low-income families too, not just for the elite.”

Interviewee A proposed streamlining and restructuring overlapping content:

“Bawasan nila yung mga subjects sa school. I-merge yung mga subjects na related... mag-focus hindi lang sa design pero pati sa construction, planning, estimates, and business.” (Interviewee A)

“They should reduce the number of subjects in school and merge those that are related... and focus not just on design but also on construction, planning, estimates, and business.”

Interviewee B further encouraged benchmarking against international models and urge innovation in delivery and assessment.

“Schools should adopt innovative, project-based, and impact-driven strategies... aligned with top international institutions.” (Interviewee B)

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Article IV of the CHED CMO No. 61, s. 2017 reflects a good effort in setting the foundation for the architecture program through studio work. Nonetheless, there are some areas that need to be updated and improved. The policy does not clearly indicate digital tools such as BIM, parametric software, or online collaboration. Students report late exposure to basic digital tools like CAD, Revit, and Excel. There are also no concrete plans on how to improve students' business acumen. Students also stated that they were not sufficiently prepared for business operations and development, budgeting, or project coordination. Professionals confirm that graduates enter the professional practice with strong design portfolios but weak technical grounding. This undermines the CMO's intended learning outcomes on applied practice, business literacy, and project management. The findings suggest that the architecture curriculum should strike a balance between design, business, entrepreneurship, and professional ethics modules to prepare students for the demands of the actual practice. Additionally, the policy concentrates mainly on developing skills within the discipline but lacks ways to support teamwork across fields such as engineering, planning and real-world experience. This strong concentration on design studio work leaves a little room for flexible thinking, experiential learning, applied problem-solving, business skills development and immersion to actual projects. The responses from the architects during the interview validated these gaps. Furthermore, the policy also misses out the provision for OJT or practicum. The students' OJT trainings were just offered beyond the curriculum requirement. Students revealed that their most significant learning happened through their OJT exposure and immersions.

Article V of CHED CMO No. 61, s. 2017 outlines the curriculum structure that is outcomes-based, integrative, and responsive to evolving industry demands. However, implementation of the curriculum appears uneven throughout the country especially in terms of experiential learning and industry immersion. The paper highlights notable deficiencies in competency requirements that the CMO requires such as integration of business management, construction processes, and emotional preparedness of students. These were also highlighted in the interview and FGD findings. The curriculum, nonetheless, presents business management, professional practice and allied courses to address these shortages. However, the absence of OJT and practicum evaluation framework, field exposure, and industry collaboration in the curriculum is disturbing. This limits the students' ability to navigate real project constraints, workflow and ethical responsibilities. This also weakens the bridge between education and employment. These findings also support constructivist and experiential learning models, which would reinforce the essence of context-rich, industry-based learning for long-term competence.

6.1 Conclusion

This policy analysis presents findings revealing a persistent disjunction between academic training and architecture professional practice. It also exposes gaps between the competencies developed in the architecture program versus the expectations from the global practice. The architecture program shows a strong emphasis on professional and technical competence. However, the curriculum prescribed by CHED CMO No. 61 is outdated. It is notable that the policy has not gone any updates as of this writing. Based on the findings and themes developed in the investigations, the curriculum reflects several critical gaps in preparing students for professional practice. Students and professionals highlight a theory-practice divide, especially in field application, digital proficiency, business and project delivery. Students reported being overwhelmed when confronted with real-world constraints such as business development, budget, labor, and project site coordination. These difficulties faced by both students and professionals match the gaps found in the literature readings. The issues and challenges revealed in this study should be addressed to better prepare future architects for the current challenges.

6.2 Recommendations

To improve the architecture education in the Philippines, the government should address these gaps through its policy. The policy should be revised and updated to address the gaps presented in the findings. A curriculum

reform must move beyond compliance and into contextual application. CHED should consider streamlining overlapping courses and reallocate content toward a balance between design studio work, business operations, project planning, and collaboration. The policy should be re-examined to integrate post-pandemic global movements such as the use of parametric design, simulation software (virtual and augmented reality, etc.), cloud-based digital collaboration platforms, immersive internships, co-developed studio projects, remote teamwork and cross-platform design tools. HEIs and academic institutions, on the other hand, should audit and recalibrate the course offerings to make them more context-sensitive and practical without diminishing core design instruction. CHED should also consider developing the CMO to enhance quality assurance mechanisms to assess not only curricular alignment but also the depth of field integration and student readiness. CHED needs to include school-to-work transition mechanisms to minimize the disconnect between the policy's curricular intentions versus the operational realities. Benchmarking against international architecture schools implementing project-based, impact-driven, and interdisciplinary approaches should also serve as a roadmap for improvement.

The effective implementation of CHED CMO No. 61 to improve architecture education depends not only on its structural provisions but also on the willingness from all the stakeholders to commit themselves towards their roles in aligning curriculum delivery to the dynamic multiple demands of the contemporary architecture practice and beyond.

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