

The Internationalization of skills – Skills without borders

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The globalized economy has necessitated a shift towards the internationalization of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). This paper explores the process, benefits, and challenges of internationalizing TVET education while presenting practical strategies for its successful implementation.

Concept of Internationalization of TVET Education

Internationalization in TVET education refers to the process of integrating global perspectives into curricula, training methods, and institutional partnerships. This ensures that graduates acquire competencies that are applicable across multiple countries and industries (Knight, 2004).

Internationalization encompasses a variety of activities, including partnerships between institutions across borders, student and faculty mobility, curriculum development, and the implementation of programs that prepare students for a global workforce.

In the context of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), internationalization emphasizes the need to align educational outcomes with global labor market demands. It aims to equip students with not only technical skills but also soft skills necessary for functioning effectively in a multicultural environment. This approach fosters an understanding of diverse practices and methodologies, enabling aspiring professionals to adapt to varied workplace cultures and expectations.

Internationalizing TVET is essential in a rapidly globalizing economy, where industries increasingly operate across borders. By embracing internationalization, TVET institutions can:

- Expand opportunities for learners through exposure to international training and qualifications.
- Foster collaborative programs that enhance the quality and relevance of vocational education.
- Address local skills shortages by preparing graduates who can compete **internationally**.

Understanding the Skills Gap

The skills gap is a significant barrier to economic growth. Many industries struggle to find workers with the required technical skills, a challenge exacerbated by globalization and technological advancements (OECD, 2019). Addressing this gap requires a shift towards competency-based education aligned with international standards (UNESCO, 2021).

The skills gap refers to the disparity between the skills possessed by the workforce and the skills demanded by employers in the job market. This phenomenon can arise from various factors, including technological advancements, changes in industry practices, and shifts in

consumer expectations. As economies evolve and industries innovate, the skills required for specific jobs can change rapidly, often outpacing the current training and education systems.

Grasping the principles of internationalization in education and the skills gap is essential for formulating effective strategies to strengthen TVET systems. By tackling the skills gap through global collaboration and curriculum advancement, nations can equip their workforce to meet the challenges of an increasingly interconnected world. This strategy not only supports individuals and industries but also fosters overall economic growth and social equity. The following sections highlight key areas where skills gap concerns are most evident.

1. Employment Challenges:

Individuals may find it challenging to secure employment or advance in their careers if their skills do not meet the needs of employers. This can lead to high unemployment rates, particularly among young graduates who lack relevant experience.

2. Economic Impact:

A significant skills gap can hinder economic growth by limiting productivity and innovation. Industries may struggle to find qualified candidates, leading to unfulfilled job vacancies and decreased competitiveness in the global market.

3. Inequality:

The skills gap can exacerbate income inequality, as those with in-demand skills command higher wages while others may remain stagnant or face underemployment. This disparity can affect social mobility and overall economic stability.

4. Changing Role of Education:

Traditional education systems may need to evolve to better align with industry needs, emphasizing the importance of vocational training. TVET institutions play a crucial role in addressing the skills gap by providing relevant training and fostering partnerships with industries.

5. Lifelong Learning:

The skills gap highlights the necessity of continuous professional development and lifelong learning. As industries change, workers must adapt by acquiring new skills and competencies to remain relevant in their fields.

Act of Internationalization

Internationalization involves policy development, cross-border education initiatives, and institutional collaborations. However, challenges include regulatory barriers, differences in qualification frameworks, and the financial burden on institutions and students (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Process of Internationalization

The internationalization process can be broken down into several key components:

1. **Curriculum Development and Alignment** – Standardizing curricula to match international industry requirements (World Bank, 2020). This refers to:
 - o Developing internationally aligned curricula that meet both local and global industry standards.
 - o Incorporating competencies and skills that are recognized across borders.
2. **Partnerships and Collaborations** – Establishing agreements with foreign institutions and industries (British Council, 2018).
 - o Establishing partnerships between educational institutions, businesses, and governments across countries.
 - o Creating collaborative programs, such as student and faculty exchanges or joint research initiatives.
3. **Mobility Programs** – Facilitating student and faculty exchanges to promote cultural and technical skill integration (European Commission, 2022).
 - o Implementing student and staff mobility programs to foster cross-cultural learning and experience sharing.
 - o Encouraging internships and training opportunities in international settings.
4. **Accreditation and Quality Assurance:** – Harmonizing qualification frameworks for mutual recognition of credentials (ASEAN, 2021).
 - o Developing frameworks for mutual recognition of qualifications and competencies.
 - o Engaging with international accrediting bodies to ensure quality standards are met.
5. **Digital and Open Learning** – Leveraging online platforms to broaden access to global TVET education (Schwab, 2016).
 - o Leveraging technology to offer online courses that are accessible to a global audience.
 - o Utilizing platforms that facilitate international learning and resource sharing.
6. **Market Research and Stakeholder Engagement:**
 - o Conducting research to understand the demand for specific skills and qualifications in the global job market.
 - o Engaging stakeholders—industry leaders, educators, and policymakers—in the planning and implementation process.

Challenges of Internationalizing TVET

While the internationalization of TVET offers significant opportunities for enhancing skill development and employability, it requires careful planning, collaboration, and adaptation to overcome the inherent challenges. Addressing these processes and challenges is crucial for creating a robust TVET system that can thrive in a globalized community. The following sections highlight key challenges of internationalizing TVET.

1. Cultural Differences:

- o Navigating diverse cultural attitudes toward vocational education and differing expectations of employers.
- o Adapting teaching methodologies to fit cross-cultural learning environments.

2. Resource Constraints:

- Limited financial resources and infrastructure can hinder the development and execution of international programs.
- In many regions, there may be inadequate facilities and technology to support international learning.

3. Regulatory and Policy Barriers:

- Variability in governmental policies regarding international education can complicate partnerships and mobility.
- Difficulties in obtaining visas and accreditation for international students and staff.

4. Quality Assurance Challenges:

- Ensuring consistent quality across different countries and institutions can be challenging.
- Transferring and recognizing qualifications can lead to discrepancies in skill levels and competencies.

5. Stakeholder Resistance:

- Resistance from local educational institutions or industries that may prefer traditional approaches.
- Misalignment between industry needs and educational outcomes can create obstacles.

6. Skill Mismatches:

- Addressing the needs of rapidly changing industries and job markets can be difficult.
- Ensuring that TVET programs remain relevant and adaptable to technological advancements and global trends.

Skills Without Borders

International collaboration plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs by leveraging shared resources, knowledge, and best practices among countries.

International collaboration serves as a catalyst for enhancing the quality of TVET programs by enabling institutions to share resources, expertise, and best practices. Through curriculum alignment, faculty development, quality assurance, and industry partnerships, collaborative efforts can create TVET systems that are responsive to both local and global workforce needs. As economies continue to globalize, the importance of such collaborations will only increase, making them essential for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of TVET education. The "Skills Without Borders" initiative aims to:

- Support **global learners** by equipping them with adaptable skills.
- Enhance **TVET quality** through internationally benchmarked programs. (ILO, 2019).

Strategies for Implementation

Implementing the "Skills Without Borders" policy in the Philippines requires a multifaceted approach involving diverse stakeholders. By prioritizing policy support, curriculum

innovation, faculty development, and continuous evaluation, the Philippines can enhance the internationalization of its TVET system, ultimately empowering its workforce to succeed in a globalized economy. These strategic initiatives will foster collaboration, enhance student employability, and help bridge the skills gap in the region. To successfully implement internationalized TVET, stakeholders should focus on:

1. **Policy Support** – Governments should create policies that facilitate international partnerships (UNESCO, 2022). A strong policy framework is essential for guiding the internationalization of TVET. It ensures that all stakeholders are aligned and have clear objectives and resources. Policies should focus on creating pathways for recognition of qualifications and enhancing international cooperation among institutions.
2. **Curriculum Development and Faculty Training** – Ensuring educators are equipped to teach globalized curricula (OECD, 2021). The curriculum serves as the foundation for quality education. A well-designed curriculum aligned with international standards is crucial for ensuring that graduates possess the skills needed in the global job market. Continuous curriculum review processes should be established to adapt to evolving industry demands and technological advancements.
3. **Enhancing Faculty Training and Development:** Educators equipped with the latest knowledge and skills can significantly impact student outcomes. Faculty training ensures that instructors can deliver updated content and effective teaching methods. Investing in faculty development fosters a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, essential for a dynamic educational environment.
4. **Continuous Monitoring & Evaluation:** Establishing feedback mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of internationalization efforts (British Council, 2020).
5. **Promoting Student Mobility:** Possible activities could include the establishment of Exchange Programs: Creating robust student exchange programs with international schools, allowing students to gain skills and exposure to different cultures and work environments. As well, consideration of developing scholarship programs or subsidies that enable students to undertake internships or training abroad, thereby enhancing their global employability needs to be in place.
6. **Utilizing Technology in Learning:** Policies should focus on creating pathways for recognition of qualifications and enhancing international cooperation among institutions.
7. **Need for Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** The global job market and technological landscapes are constantly evolving; thus, TVET programs must be adaptable. Continuous evaluation allows for timely updates and interventions.

The internationalization of TVET is a crucial step in preparing a workforce that can thrive in a globally connected economy. By embracing international collaboration, curriculum alignment, and digital learning, TVET institutions can equip learners with the skills necessary to meet global industry demands. Addressing the skills gap through strategic partnerships and policy innovations ensures that graduates are competitive and adaptable in the evolving job market.

Furthermore, the "Skills Without Borders" initiative highlights the importance of fostering mobility programs, accreditation frameworks, and faculty development to enhance the quality of vocational education. Governments, educators, and industry stakeholders must work together to implement these strategies effectively, ensuring sustainable workforce development that contributes to both national and global economic growth.

Ultimately, the integration of international perspectives in TVET benefits not only individual learners and industries but also enhances social and economic equity. By investing in continuous improvement and cross-border cooperation, TVET systems can create inclusive opportunities for lifelong learning, workforce resilience, and a more prosperous global economy.

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