

Why Technical-Vocational Education Must Be a National Priority

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In the Philippines, technical-vocational education has long been seen as a “second option”, something students turn to if they don’t make it to college. But that mindset is not only outdated, it’s dangerous. In a country where thousands of jobs in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, caregiving, hospitality, and IT remain unfilled, we cannot afford to overlook the value of skilled labor. The future belongs to those who can do, not just those who know.

Many Filipino families still push for four-year degrees, believing they are the only path to success. But what happens when a college graduate can’t find a job, while someone with an NC II certificate lands a stable position abroad or starts a small business at home? This reality is visible nationwide—from welders in Subic earning more than entry-level office workers to TESDA graduates successfully operating their own auto-repair shops and salons (Generalao et al., 2025). In fact, research has shown that technical-vocational education in the Philippines has matured into a viable, long-term alternative to traditional higher education when properly developed and supported (Edralin & Pastrana, 2023). These outcomes challenge the traditional assumption that only academic degrees lead to respectable careers.

The challenge is that TVL tracks in senior high school and tech-voc programs in general remain underfunded and underpromoted. In rural areas, workshops lack proper tools and updated equipment. In some public schools, there are no qualified instructors to deliver the required competencies (Orbeta & Corpus, 2024). This creates the impression that TVL is less significant, and as a result, many students with practical talents are discouraged from pursuing what could be their most viable path to success.

If the government and society continue to treat technical-vocational education as an afterthought, we will continue seeing recurring issues: vacant skilled jobs, a growing mismatch in labor supply and demand, and a generation of youth left behind (Epetia & Villena, 2023). We often talk about creating opportunities, yet we ignore the very form of education that can provide them fastest. Across various schools, students attempt to learn welding, baking, and automotive repair with incomplete facilities. Some go through entire semesters without a teacher. Without access to proper tools and guidance, how can students gain the competence they need to move forward?

But when TVL is implemented properly with adequate tools, passionate instructors, and real recognition can transform lives. These programs provide students with direct routes to employment and teach them how to build sustainable livelihoods (Mariano & Tantoco, 2023). A graduate might open a motorcycle repair shop, eventually employing others. A certified caregiver might secure stable work overseas. A cook may start a small food business that becomes essential to their community. These are not theories, they are lived experiences that prove the power of vocational Education when backed with serious commitment.

Beyond economic outcomes, technical-vocational education also builds self-worth and community resilience. When young people develop real skills, they begin to see themselves as capable, independent, and valuable. A student who learns how to fix electrical systems or bake bread not only earns a living but also contributes to their community’s everyday needs. These abilities foster confidence, dignity, and a mindset

of productivity. In regions where opportunities are limited, these skills empower individuals to create their own paths instead of waiting for handouts or luck.

The Philippines doesn't just need more graduates sitting at home with diplomas and no job. It needs more people who can get things done, who can fix a leak, build a roof, care for the sick, and run a small business. That's why technical-vocational education is not something we should do "if there's budget." It should be part of the plan and part of how we grow as a country. Because the future we want sadly built by titles or prestige. It's built by people who know how to work with their hands, their minds, and their heart.

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