PHILIPPINE QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND SOUTH KOREA'S NEW SOUTHERN POLICY : TOWARDS QUALITY TECH-VOC EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to revisit the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) vis-à-vis South Korea's New Southern Policy (NSP). The focus is on the tech-voc education given PQF mandates concerning NSP's agenda. The PQF-NSP alignment in the context of tech-voc is emphasized as inputs are provided towards quality tech-voc education in the Philippines. This qualitative study uses policy document analysis as a methodology, primarily involving PQF and NSP. According to Cardno (2018), policy document analysis is a significant instrument for leaders in the education sector as it also functions as a research technique. Policies are accessed through retrieval from website searches (Patel, et al., 2017). Harmonizing mandates provisions, and agenda of the NSP and PQF provides clear-cut directions towards quality tech-voc education in the Philippines. Institutionalizing qualifications and standards through the PQF serve as a mechanism to complement existing practices not just in the country but in the ASEAN region as well. As PQF acts as an instrument to advance policy planning, creation, and implementation, the Philippines affirms its role in contributing to the region's qualifications framework by gaining recognition and impact. This is a prime invitation for NSP to maximize and be an active partner in upholding quality and standards, and in this case, through the context of tech-voc education.

Keywords: Tech-Voc Education, Policy, Qualifications, Quality

I. INTRODUCTION

Technical-vocation (tech-voc) education provides avenues and opportunities for individuals to maximize their skills and contribute to society. While formal education is available for those who desire to pursue it, tech-voc education offers programs that suit one's capacity depending on interest,

strengths, and preference. According to Forster et al. (2016), a vocationally qualified individual possesses "higher employment probability" at the early career state. It is without a doubt that focusing on one's particularly chosen technical know-how can boost motivation towards a successful life career. The attention needs to be focused on the "wellbeing of individuals" as tech-voc education affirms its share in effecting societal transformation (McGrath & Powell, 2016). These changes are informed by reforms in the field of education that impact tech-voc education and training in the context of lifelong learning (Persson Thunqvist, 2019).

While Forster and Bol (2018) noted the decrease in early benefits of vocational training later in one's career, Ozer and Perc (2020) opined that the vocational path directs the "labor market demands." When it comes to creating programs that cater to the needs of the industry, tech-voc entities play a significant role in enhancing industry effectiveness (Lund & Karlsen, 2020). Also, the teacher plays a crucial role in ensuring that students are guided and given the appropriate attention (Jossberger et al., 2018).

As policy attempts on tech-voc training emphasize "school-to-work transition" (Hanushek et al., 2017), appropriate and supplementary provisions should be in place in projecting tech-voc as an interesting field of study (Yulastri & Hidayat, 2017). Andragogy is seen to be an approach to knowledge building in the context of tech-voc (Arifin, 2020). Choi et al. (2019) argued that systemic perspectives on tech-voc education need to impact policy efforts concerning educational systems.

This study is an attempt to revisit the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) concerning South Korea's New Southern Policy (NSP). The focus is on the tech-voc education given PQF mandates concerning NSP's agenda. The PQF-NSP alignment in the context of tech-voc is emphasized as inputs are provided towards quality tech-voc education in the Philippines.

The Philippine government plays an active role in maximizing the potential of tech-voc education in the country towards capacitating individuals as prime contributors to economic growth and development. Various agencies have harmonized programs and functions to realize tech-voc education's significance in the human capital realm.

The Technical Education Skills and Development Authority (TESDA) is the government arm that is primary tasked to steer the direction, create and implement programs, policies, and standards leading to quality tech-voc development in the country. TESDA is part of the tripartite agency together with the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED).

Table 1. Appropriations for TESDA (in thousand pesos)

	2016 Actual	2017 Actual	2018 Estimate	2019 Proposed
TESDA budget (GAA)	7,561,299	8,183,280	7,560,385	14,830,090
Budget for major programs				
Training for Work Scholarship Program	2,206,000	2,415,000	2,784,887	2,273,961
Private Education Student Financial Assistance	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
Special Training for Employment Program	566,245	908,873	933,053	1,725,099

Source: TESDA

Table 1 presents TESDA's budget appropriations from 2016 – 2019. It could be gleaned from the table how government funding covers numerous projects for the operations of tech-voc education programs of TESDA for each fiscal year, namely training

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for the work scholarship program, private education student financial assistance, and special training for employment program. There has been a consistent appeal for higher state funding over the past years to sustain pipelined projects despite a limited national budget.

Table 2 showcases how tech-voc contributes to the Philippine workforce particularly in the industry and services sectors. When scrutinized according to occupation classification, the tech-voc significantly delivers employments especially in the Skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery, and craft and related trades. Given these scenarios, tech-voc in the country poses a promising outlook which when given enough attention, funding, and policy mandates could undeniably contribute to economic growth and development.

Table 2. Employed Persons by Sector, Occupation, and Class of Worker, Philippines (in %)

Sector / Occupation / Class of Worker	July 2019	July 2018
EMPLOYED PERSONS	**42, 953**	**40,650**
Number (in thousands)		
SECTOR	**100.0**	**100.0**
Agriculture	23.5	23.1
Industry	18.7	19.4
Services	57.8	57.5
OCCUPATION	**100.0**	**100.0**
Managers	11.0	15.8
Professionals	5.4	5.5
Technicians and associate professionals	4.2	4.4
Clerical support workers	5.8	5.7
Service and sales workers	18.8	15.1
Skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers	12.0	11.8
Craft and related trades workers	7.7	8.2
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	7.3	6.5
Elementary occupations	27.6	26.7
Armed forces occupations	0.3	0.3
CLASS OF WORKER	**100.0**	**100.0**
Wage and salary workers	63.4	65.3
Worked for private household	4.3	5.0
Worked for private establishment	49.7	51.0
Worked for government or government corporation	9.1	9.1
Worked with pay in own-family operated farm or business	0.3	0.3
Self-employed without any paid employee	27.3	26.2
Employer in own family-operated farm or business	2.8	3.8
Worked without pay in own family-operated farm or business (Unpaid family worker)	6.4	4.6

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority, *July 2018 and July 2019 Labor Force Survey*

What role does tech-voc education play in the context of the PQF? How does NSP advance its agenda through tech-voc mandates? What inputs may be provided to align PQF and NSP towards quality tech-voc education? These inquiries direct the discussion of this study to arrive at significant inputs as a contribution to advocating quality tech-voc education in the Philippines.

The significance of this study is outlined in four major dimensions: qualifications, regional cooperation, teacher training, and tech-voc innovations. It is high time to recognize how the Philippines has been putting a premium on qualifications framework in the dawn of ASEAN integration and cooperation.

With South Korea at the forefront of NSP, its role is crucial in advancing the regional

agenda and engagement as it looks at tech-voc education as an avenue for cooperation and assistance. Teacher training in the tech-voc contributes to genuine efforts in accelerating the country's economic growth and development, strengthening employment quality, and increasing employment opportunities. Tech-voc innovations address the challenges brought about by unemployment, technical and technological know-how, and others.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Harmonizing mandates provisions, and agenda of the NSP and PQF provides clear-cut directions towards quality tech-voc education in the Philippines. As PQF presents how qualification outcomes are set vis-à-vis educational qualification levels, the framework acts as a quality assurance mechanism that contributes to the genuine effort in the "development, recognition, and award of qualifications" to individuals towards nation-building and development. For this matter, the role of tech-voc education is significant, thus great attention should be given to realize the successful implementation of various tech-voc education-related mandates.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study
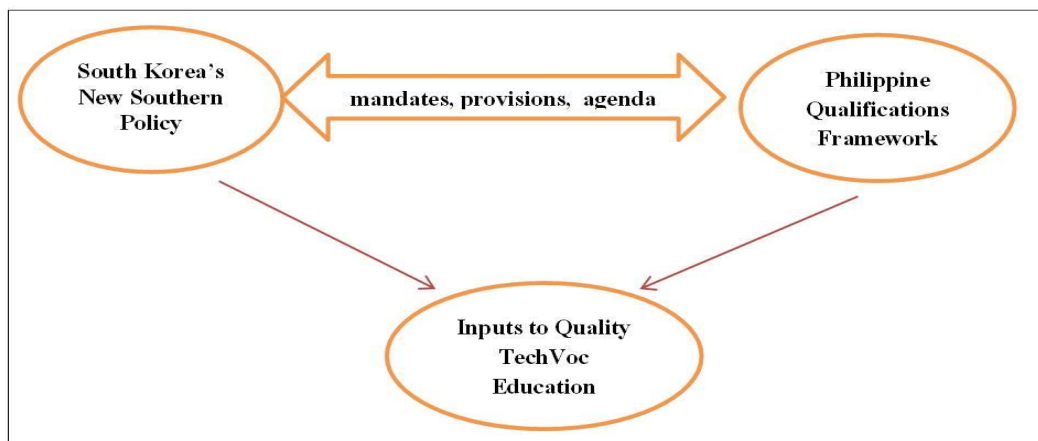
The NSP is South Korea's frontrunner effort in fostering "communal spirit" in the region. NSP is projected as a vehicle in strengthening and harmonizing the relationship between South Korea and the ASEAN community. The NSP upholds various provisions that span the political, economic, and social spectrum, including the education arena, particularly the context of tech-voc.

Looking at both the PQF and NSP and their alignment in the tech-voc realm provides directions to common goals and sound policies. NSP as an opportunity could be utilized as a mechanism to beef up aspirations to realize plans and programs for tech-voc education in the Philippines through the PQF.

After scrutiny of PQF and NSP vis-à-vis tech-voc education provisions, inputs will contribute to effectively attain goals through quality education. These inputs can be considered as significant feedback towards sound policy planning, policymaking, and policy implementation.

III. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study uses policy document analysis as a methodology, primarily involving PQF and NSP. According to Cardno (2018), policy document analysis is a significant instrument for leaders in the education sector as it also functions as a research technique. Policies are accessed through retrieval from website searches (Patel, et al., 2017). To be particular with document analysis, Kayesa and Shung-king (2020) noted the methods to "apply robust data

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coding and analysis and link contribution to findings."

A specially created website (pqf.gov.ph) has been put up to showcase PQF and other related documents. Other government agencies (DepEd, TESDA, CHED, Professional Regulation Commission or PRC, and Department of Labor and Employment or DOLE) also provide online access to PQF. The policy As for NSP, an official website (http://www.nsp.go.kr/) is also available which is managed by the Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy under the Presidential Commission on Policy Planning.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main discussion of this study. It is divided into three main parts. The first part deals with the PQF focusing on tech-voc education, the second is about the NSP, and the third section showcases the inputs of the study.

The PQF and Tech-Voc Education: From Learning Outcomes to Labor Market

The PQF has 8 levels of qualifications in which the first level starts after an individual finishes senior high school (SHS), or when a student becomes eligible to receive qualifications after specific training in SHS. Specifically, the TESDA is in charge of the National Certificates (NCs) which also correspond to the first four levels of the qualifications.

One of the identified objectives of PQF, which is *"to align domestic qualification standards with the international qualifications framework thereby enhancing recognition of the value and comparability of Philippine qualifications and supporting the mobility of Filipino students and workers."* With this, NSP plays a major role in the international policy response towards the regional implementation of qualifications and standards. NSP acts as an umbrella initiative for tech-voc education policy coordination and cooperation.

NSP's mandates on the human capital exchange, specifically in the field of tech-voc education could substantially support the establishment of a playing field in the ASEAN region. By doing so, skills and qualifications, and standards could be ensured, thus strengthening a greater comparative advantage in the international arena.

A PQF describes the different levels of educational qualifications in the Philippines, standards for qualification outcomes are reflected in the framework as anchored on numerous international qualifications scheme. The PQF presents a competency-based approach, labor market-driven, and assessment-based-qualification (Sorolla, 2017).

Figure 2. The Philippine Qualifications Framework
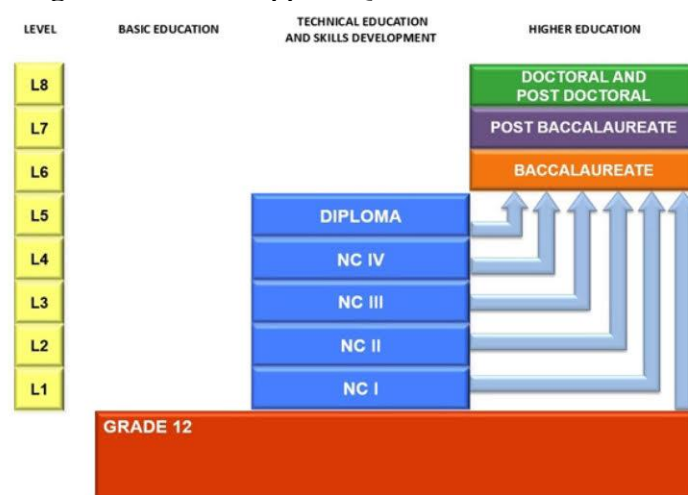
Source: Philippine Qualifications Framework

TESDA plays a crucial role in advancing the PQF through tech-voc education. As the Philippine education system continues to integrate technical skills in the curriculum (Buan, 2020), NSP could be seen as an opportunity to take in promoting relevant and responsive global skills. With the mandate of TESDA being the forerunner in policy through plans, implementation, and regulation, harmonizing tech-voc education goals with NSP could get directions towards quality assessment and skill certification.

One of the stated benefits of the PQF is the promotion of mobility as the framework upholds the capacity of individuals to "move and progress through." This could be seen in consonance with the pillars of NSP that highlight people and prosperity.

As the levels of qualifications are identified by the PQF, three domains highlight the "expected learning outcomes." Three domains classify each level's outcomes: knowledge, skills, and values; application; and degree of independence. As the person's capacity and skills are being enhanced and recognized, PQF warrants demonstration of skills and knowledge, its application, and a varying degree of independence in numerous conditions and situations.

Institutionalizing qualifications and standards through the PQF serve as a mechanism to complement existing practices not just in the country but in the ASEAN region as well. As PQF acts as an instrument that advances policy planning, creation, and implementation, the Philippines affirms its role in contributing to the region's qualifications framework by gaining recognition and impact. This is a prime invitation for NSP to maximize and be an active partner in upholding quality and standards, and in this case, through the context of tech-voc education.

The NSP: People, Prosperity, and Peace through Tech-Voc Education

South Korean President Moon Jae-in noted during the 2017 Korea-Indonesia Business Forum that through the NSP, *"ASEAN countries thrive together through mutually beneficial economic cooperation."* As NSP is anchored on three major pillars of people, peace, prosperity, the policy eventually aspires to promote ties with ASEAN member states and South Korea in the political, economic, social, and cultural realms.

The NSP document presents 16 implementation strategies and 16 policy tasks anchored on the 3Ps (people, peace, prosperity). The NSP diagram highlights the Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy as the core which acts as the "cooperation and communication channel" between the local (Korea) and NSP-involved countries. At the base is a complementary "people-centered diplomacy" and "national interest-centered diplomacy."

While education, training, and programs are mentioned in NSP, only one particular provision on the technical and vocational program is included in the NSP document under the third policy task of the People domain, which states;

> ***Providing support to build human resources capacity***
> *• Increasing the number of students invited to study in Korea on scholarships*
> *• Expanding exchanges among public officials and experts*
> *• Enhancing Technical and Vocational Education Training programs*

Source: Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy, Republic of Korea

Based on the statement, the NSP is significant in boosting available tech-voc education in the ASEAN region. While only one particular mandate explicitly covers the context of tech-voc education, the NSP on the other hand highlights related opportunities and provisions on education and training on which tech-voc could also be integrated and eventually anchored on. These provisions present avenues for possible integration of

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formal and tech-voc education in various mechanisms and capacities.

Under the implementation strategies of the three domains of people, peace, and prosperity, tech-voc education can also find its niche through numerous provisions. Although these mandates do not explicitly cover tech-voc education schemes, integration can be possibly done. Particularly highlighting tech-voc education as one of the main pursuits of NSP could address the concerns posed by Oh (2020) who stated that NSP's "pursuit of comprehensiveness and all-inclusive engagement makes it difficult to set priorities".

Through the People Domain's third implementation strategy, *strengthening capacity building for students, teachers, and public officials from the NSP target countries,* tech-voc education could be seen as a promising avenue to beef up stakeholders for training and development. This echoes the policy recommendation of Kwak and Lim (2019) which supported determining NSP's "flagship projects," and in this case, tech-voc education can be significantly identified. Moreover, Choi (2020) has recognized that NSP still has room to improve in terms of explicitly identifying a "vision of how to jointly address uncertainty in the strategic environment of the region."

As NSP projects considerable geopolitical significance and potential (Ha & Ong, 2020), it is imperative to maximize its width and depth capacity to serve as a vehicle of diplomacy and economic ties.
The 16 policy tasks of NSP also consist of prospective measures in which tech-voc education could also thrive, specifically the third statement which echoes *providing support to build human resources capacity*, together with "boosting programs related to training on technical and vocational education."

Moreover, the tenth policy task, *enhancing the capacity for innovative growth through cooperation in "smart" technologies and new industries,* could also be employed as advance cooperation efforts through tech-voc education. NSP must widen and reinforce its regional reach and coverage (Lee, 2020) and

tech-voc is an area waiting to be tapped. It is indeed noteworthy to recognize how the ASEAN community has put a premium on crafting policies that project the region as a center for innovation (Dobrzanski & Bobowski, 2020).

People, prosperity, and peace as the three main pillars of NSP could proactively shape the future of Korea's economic and diplomatic relations to the ASEAN region. While NSP poses areas for enhancement, its potential could still be recognized through genuine efforts to harmonize and uphold mutual benefits among concerned nations.

Tech-voc education is an aspect that could be utilized to advance NSP goals, and the Philippines as one target country undeniably shares this vision through its present conditions and prospects. Indeed, accelerating NSP through the Philippines' tech-voc education as a major area brings definite and significant pathways both for South Korea and the Philippines and beyond.

Harmonizing the PQF and NSP: Inputs to Quality Tech-Voc Education

Given the scrutiny on the PQF and NSP, this section presents inputs to quality tech-voc education in the country. Providing inputs to enhance NSP based on contemporary setting and drawn through a specific lens significantly captures prospects and potential avenues for policymakers to explore.

As tech-voc education becomes one of the central aspects of NSP, it brings new hope for the sector as it gradually redeems its worth and societal regard. Putting a premium on tech-voc education means uplifting its potential as the Philippine economy's forerunner, given the country's population and resources. By doing so, it creates a synergy by boosting tech-voc education's capacity as it addressed the industry needs for high-skilled and technically-trained individuals.

The Philippines could learn from South Korea regarding tech-voc education management and planning which could eventually be aligned to lifelong learning.

These lessons could serve as vital inputs to reinvent tech-voc education as an attractive field of study: anchored on skills, interest, and potentials.

The concept of 'exchange' in NSP could be considered as a vital practice in terms of inbound and outbound programs involving South Korea and ASEAN target countries. Experts and individuals with technical know-how could be involved in this venture. Tech-voc education specialists could serve as mobility partners who train individuals in various technical and vocational fields. A strong tech-voc education sector in the Philippines and ASEAN region could be one of NSP's concrete outcomes: homegrown to the community, especially needed in the industry.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Tech-voc education in the Philippines surely offers a viable and sustainable option in supporting individuals to realize their maximum potentials as contributors to the country's economic growth and development. The tech-voc education landscape in the country as well as in the ASEAN region projects a promising leap towards opportunities not just for personal and professional gains, but for nation-building as a whole.

With PQF at hand, tech-voc education can be redesigned as an attractive track to take as qualifications and standards are explicitly aligned to the job and industry needs. Moreover, with these qualifications, education and training are considered to be responsive to the stakeholders, the enterprise, and the future industry.

As NSP navigates its way to the south, the tech-voc education realm is waiting to be explored and utilized as a mechanism for diplomacy and cooperation. The tech-voc education could serve as NSP's banner to its target countries: skills and expertise of people, leading to prosperity and peace. Quality tech-voc education in the Philippines requires genuine efforts from policymakers and stakeholders that concerned individuals could deliver the desired qualifications based on accepted standards and requirements. The PQF serves as the Philippines' blueprint for navigating an individual's achievements and competencies. The NSP presents South Korea's cooperation initiative which can be channeled through tech-voc education as its strong foundation.

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