
Mapping national and regional TVET initiatives in Southeast Asia and beyond in response to students and labour mobility

Abstract

Most countries in Southeast Asia are positioning Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the mainstream of education systems and setting it as a priority in their education agenda in view of the fact that this type of education plays an important role in the socio-economic development of a nation. New national and regional initiatives in TVET have been created in response to various changes in social, political, and technological landscapes. This paper intends to map out salient TVET initiatives especially those that have the potential to have a greater impact not only on the individual country but also on the whole region or beyond. Some of the selected initiatives include addressing TVET quality and qualification frameworks. At a national level, all countries are raising the bar to benchmark their TVET quality. Quality assurance mechanisms via proper guidelines and accreditation have been established in most countries. Many countries in the region have also recently adopted National Qualification Frameworks in response to student and labour mobility as well as to encourage the implementation of life-long learning and the Education For All (EFA) agenda. At regional and global levels, the issue of student and labour mobility are also very prevalent particularly in anticipation of full ASEAN Integration in 2015. In response, there has been progression toward mutual recognition arrangements for education and training certificates and credentials between countries, regional qualification frameworks, and regional quality assurance frameworks. These are some of the significant TVET initiatives that have been discussed at various regional meetings such as those organized by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO), International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Colombo Plan Staff College (CPSC), Regional Cooperation Platform (RCP), East Asia Summit, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM). This map of TVET initiatives will provide a picture of what has been addressed nationally, regionally, and internationally to be used as a reference and simultaneously stimulate ideas and collaboration for improving TVET policies and practices.

1 Introduction

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) plays an extremely vital role in preparing the current and future labour forces that could drive economic and social development. It becomes imperative that the development and expansion of technical and vocational education as continuing education, both within and outside the formal education system, with either public or private funding, and within the framework of lifelong learning, should be a prioritised objective of all educational strategies.

TVET plays important roles in (1) providing the skill sets required by enterprises and across national economies; (2) supporting pathways into employment for young people; (3) strengthening mobility between occupations for experienced workers; and (4) supporting the development of new skills and assisting workers to be prepared to change or progress in their occupations/careers. Furthermore, TVET should be able to adjust the capacity more quickly as the pace of change regarding industry products and processes increases (Bateman et al. 2012).

Many countries in the Southeast Asian region are prioritising TVET in the national agenda propelled by the view that it is the prime mover in socio-economic development. Policies and initiatives have been formulated. Resources have been allocated to upgrade the TVET facilities and ensure its continued operation within the whole educational system. Likewise, many multi-national organizations such as UNESCO, ILO, ASEAN, SEAMEO locate TVET highly on their important agenda.

Nonetheless, implementing TVET poses a great challenge to many countries. Issues and concerns have hampered the implementation of policies including the issue of financing of TVET, relevance of the curriculum to industry needs, horizontal and vertical articulation within TVET qualifications and to higher education qualifications, quality assurance in TVET provision, and teachers' competence (Omar & Paryono 2008). In meeting these challenges, some certain Southeast Asian and other countries have developed innovative policies and practices to solve the most prevailing issues within their TVET system. Many multi-national organizations have also following suite, by addressing these issues.

The ASEAN community is to be fully integrated in 2015. This means that the flow of goods, students and workers across regions will be greater. To facilitate this integration, many multi-national organisations have begun initiatives to accommodate student and labour mobility, such as the development of mutual recognition of certificates, qualification frameworks, etc. This paper will discuss both national and regional initiatives relevant to TVET that facilitate ASEAN integration.

2 National initiatives in TVET

Numerous TVET initiatives have been taken in the ASEAN member countries to facilitate ASEAN integration. The most vital initiative has been the creation of National Qualification Frameworks to be used as a means for promoting the development, implementing and facilitating of a transparent mechanism used in the assessment, certification, and recognition of skills. A comprehensive NQF has the potential to recognize any learning regardless of the site (where the learning takes place), the form of provision (formal, informal, and non-formal), and the type of pedagogy and curriculum used. "It is argued that NQFs are necessary to overcome the barriers between different national subsystems of education and training, notably between vocational education and training and higher education and between initial and continuing education and training." (Bjornavold & Coles 2008, 204) Further on it is argued that all NQFs aim to establish a basis for improving the links between qualifications and the quality, accessibility, and public or labour market recognition of such qualifications within a

country and internationally. A comprehensive and outcomes-led NQF requires intensive preparation and strong commitment.

Table 1: **Comparing NQFs in selected ASEAN member countries**

Indonesia		Malaysia		Philippines		Recognition of Prior Learning
Level	Credential	Level		Level		
9	Specialist/Doctor	8	Doctoral degree	8	Doctoral & Post Doctoral	↑
8	Master	7	Master/Postgraduate Certificate & Diploma	7	Post Baccalaureate	
7	Professional					
6	Baccalaureate/DIV	6	Baccalaureate/Graduate Certificate & Diploma	6	Baccalaureate	
5	DIII	5	Advanced Diploma	5	Diploma	
4	DII	4	Diploma	4	NC4	
3	DI	3	Skills Certificate 3	3	NC3	
2	HS	2	Skills Certificate 2	2	NC2/Grade 12	
1	Elementary/Primary	1	Skills Certificate 1	1	NC1/Grade 10	

From Table 1, we can see great similarity between the three NQFs. The noticeable differences are that Indonesia has 9 levels whereas the other two have eight and use different terms and qualifications to describe diploma and certificate levels.

Some countries have “partial” NQFs whereby not all education and training qualifications are included in the framework. Some place emphasis on higher education while others emphasize TVET more. Thailand, for instance, has a National Qualification Framework for Higher Education. It has 6 levels: Level 1 (Associate Degree), Level 2 (Bachelor), Level 3 (Graduate Diploma), Level 4 (Master), Level 5 (Higher Graduate Diploma), Level 6 (Doctorate). The Office for Vocational Education Commission (OVEC) of Thailand has also developed a qualification framework consisting of 7 levels: Level 1 (semi skilled), Level 2 (Craftsman/skilled), Level 3 (highly skilled), Level 4(technician), Level 5 (senior technician), Level 6 (specialist), Level 7 (senior specialist). Some developments combine the two to create a “comprehensive” NQF.

The Singapore Workforce Development Agency (SWDA) developed the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualification that is more associated with a TVET Qualification Framework. It is made up of 8 levels: Level 1 (pre-beginning), Level 2 (beginning/certificate), Level 3 (high beginning/higher certificate), Level 4 (low intermediate/advanced certificate), Level 5 (high intermediate/diploma), Level 6 (advanced/specialist diploma), Level 7 (high advanced/graduate certificate), and Level 8 (proficient/graduate diploma). The higher education qualifications have yet to be integrated in the framework.

Other countries like Brunei Darussalam, Lao PDR, and Vietnam are still in the process of developing their NQFs. To a certain degree the differing status of NQF development among ASEAN member countries affects the progress of the Regional Qualification Framework, even though it is not the pre-requisite.

3 Regional initiatives in TVET for ASEAN integration

3.1 East-Asia Summit on TVET Quality Assurance Framework (EAS TVET QAF)

In response to the growing mobility of students and workers, the countries have been venturing into improving the connectivity of their TVET systems to support regional economic integration via cross-border investment and the mobility of skilled labour. Currently, these processes have striven towards mechanisms for improving cross-national connectivity, particularly regarding occupational standards and qualifications (Bateman et al. 2012).

In TVET, the globalisation of economies and the international flow of students and workers require more attention in improving the effectiveness of qualifications and skills recognition across the economic regions by improving connectivity of TVET policies and practices among member countries. “A key strategy for improving connectivity is to develop a common understanding of effective approaches to key elements of the education system in order to eliminate unnecessary barriers to recognition and mobility and provide a basis for the alignment of systems.” (Bateman et al. 2012). The development of Regional TVET Quality Assurance and Qualification Frameworks serves the purpose for building connectivity among various education and training modalities across the region.

EAS has a commitment to strengthen, expand and advance regional TVET cooperation between the EAS participating countries and reiterated the pivotal role of TVET, not only in promoting human resources development, but also as a means for bridging development gaps, enhancing regional competitiveness, achieving sustained economic development, and promoting friendship and mutual understanding among people in the region. One of the EAS initiatives is on the TVET QAF intended to provide a set of principles, standards and quality indicators to assist EAS countries to develop, improve, reform, guide and assess the quality of their TVET systems, and provide a basis for alignment between national TVET systems (ASEAN 2012).

The objectives of the EAS TVET QAF are to (1) enable countries to promote and monitor the improvement of their quality assurance systems; (2) facilitate cooperation and mutual understanding between member countries; and (3) support other initiatives within and across the region that enhance connectivity, integration, education and labour mobility, e.g. the ASEAN Regional Qualifications Framework. This is a coherent package capable of guiding the design and implementation of measures to strengthen quality assurance at the country level as well as providing a basis for alignment between national TVET quality assurance strategies (ASEAN 2012).

Currently, the EAS TVET QAF has been discussed at various regional meetings and was presented at the Seventh ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education (7th SOM-ED) in Bangkok on 29th November 2012. There is a need for subsequent dialogues to finalise the EAS TVET Quality Assurance Framework, capacity building programmes in individual countries, and the ongoing management of the framework and related referencing activities.

3.2 Regional Qualification Framework

There have been several attempts by various organisations to develop an ASEAN Regional Qualification Framework in Southeast Asia. Many hold that an RQF will provide a reference point and translation grid for all qualifications throughout Southeast Asia and that it will benefit employers, education providers and job seekers to recognize qualifications issued within the region. Others feel that the RQF will only function if all member countries recognize the benefits of it and support the initiation and the implementation of it whole-heartedly.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Bangkok, UNESCO Bangkok, and SEAMEO have been actively involved in the discussions and development of documents that support the implementation of RQF. In some countries pilot testing of certain areas of qualifications, such as hospitality and tourism has been initiated. Bilateral efforts have also been pursued to recognize each other's qualification for credit transfer and employment.

Table 2: **Major development towards ASEAN RQF**

Date	Major Development
1998	ASEAN Labour Ministries begin a project on enhancing skills recognition system in ASEAN
2001	UNESCO Bangkok discusses Regional Qualification Framework
Oct 2003	It is agreed that Mutual Recognition Arrangements should be developed by 2008 for accountants, architects, surveyors, and engineers. Up to this time only one existed: Architecture is mutually recognized in Malaysia and the Philippines.
2004-2007	ASEAN Project on Regional Skills Recognition Arrangements
Sep 2004	ASEAN Engineering MRA is completed
2005	MRA on Engineering Services is implemented
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEAMEO VOCTECH's Project on Enhancing SRA in CLMV countries is completed. • ILO Bangkok publishes Guidelines for Development of Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS) that addresses skills standards not qualifications thus recognizing not only skills acquired from formal but also either without training or informal training. • ILO Bangkok publishes Regional Model Competency Standard: tourist industry • ASEAN MRA on Architectural Services, Surveying Qualifications, and Nursing Services is implemented
2007	UNESCO Bangkok acknowledges the need for the development of Regional Skills Recognition and to establish and harmonize Regional Qualification Framework CLMV + Thailand creates sub-Regional SRA

	ILO discusses and completes a report on Skills Recognition for Migrant Workers
	ILO publishes Regional Model Competency Standard : Manufacturing Industry
Jun 2008	East Asian Summit: Harnessing Educational Cooperation in the EAS for Regional Competitiveness and Community Building (ASEAN Secretariat). One of the focuses is to follow up Regional Skills Recognition Arrangement
Nov 2008	Corporate HRD and Skills Development for Employment: Scope and Strategies (InWent, UNESCO-UNEVOC, SEAMEO VOCTECH). One of the agenda was to discuss the Master Plan/Roadmap of Regional Qualification Framework and Skills Recognition ASEAN MRA on Medical and Dental Practitioners, and Accounting Services is implemented.
2009	ILO publishes book: Making Full Use of Competency Standards: A handbook for governments, employers, workers and training organizations CPSC's conference on Harnessing Qualifications Framework to Integrate Quality Assurance in TVET 1 st to 2nd December 2009.
May 2011	ASEM, Budapest ASEAN Regional Qualifications Framework: Workshop 5: External dimensions of the European Qualifications Framework and potential of policy co-operation with other regions
Feb 2012	Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) on TVET, <i>Putting Frameworks into Practice: Demand, Development and Decision</i> , Berlin, Germany
30 Oct-1 Nov 2012	ASEAN Australia New Zealand Free Trade Area meeting on the National Qualifications Framework , Bangkok, Thailand

An outline of ASEAN RQF in TVET is agreed by 5 SEA countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) (Dang 2011), see Table 3.

Table 3: **Initial development of ASEAN RQF in TVET**

Job level	Certificate	Descriptors (Generic Competencies for each level)
1. Semi-skilled worker/ assistant/helper	Certificate 1	Understands safety requirements, has basic practical skills and operational knowledge in a defined range of tasks, is able to carry out routine tasks given clear direction, takes limited responsibility.
2. Skilled worker	Certificate 2	... Is able to carry out skilled tasks, takes limited responsibility for his own output.
3. Advanced skilled worker	Certificate 3	Has some theoretical knowledge, a range of well-developed skills, is able to apply solutions to routine problems, is able to interpret available information ...
4. Supervisor/Foreperson	Certificate 4	Has a broad knowledge base, is able to apply some theoretical concepts, identify and apply skills and knowledge, identify, analyse and evaluate information, understand and take responsibility for quality, safety & environmental issues.
5. Manager	Diploma	Assistant Professional
6. Senior manager	Advanced Diploma	Associate Professional
7. Professional	Degree	Professional

Based on the current status, the development of a comprehensive ASEAN RQF still has a long way to go. To move forward, there is a need to identify major obstacles including reaching a mutual understanding between the “sending” and the “receiving” countries and identifying key players to be in the taskforce. It requires strong and long-lasting commitment by the participating countries and entails strong collaborations within and across Ministries, and other stakeholders in the participating countries (Paryono 2010). Nevertheless, there have been significant steps towards an ASEAN RQF that will facilitate student and labour mobility in the region.

4 Concluding remarks

The importance of TVET has been highlighted in both national and regional education and development agendas. Three TVET salient initiatives in response to student and labour mobility in the Southeast Asian region and beyond have been mapped out in this paper: the development of National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs), Regional Quality Assurance Framework (RQAF), and Regional Qualification Framework (RQF). These are some among many initiatives in anticipation of full ASEAN integration in 2015.

The state of NQF development varies between ASEAN member countries. Examining the current trend, however, it seems that all member countries are moving towards the development and implementation of comprehensive NQFs which integrate all levels and types of education and training schemes. A comprehensive and outcomes-led NQF requires intensive preparations and strong commitments. Even in countries that have successfully developed the framework, it doesn't always translate into successful implementation. Communication is required between the various Ministries, education and training providers, and industries for successful implementation.

All countries have their own way of assuring TVET quality. The development of a Regional TVET Quality Assurance Framework will facilitate in promoting continuous improvement of TVET within the country and enhance cooperation and mutual understanding between member countries. This will eventually improve connectivity, integration, education and labour mobility. Once the framework is successfully developed, it will be a useful tool for self-assessment or accreditation. It will be up to the participating countries to utilize the framework that best fits their needs. To support this initiative, it is vital to establish a smaller TVET quality assurance, such as focusing on teacher quality standards. This can be a useful reference for all teachers to benchmark their competencies set against standards that help them gain awareness of their current status and give ideas and impetus to continuously improve their skills and get to the next level.

The most challenging initiative is the development of a Regional Qualification Framework. It is a great challenge developing a comprehensive NQF, let alone the development of RQF. The initiation requires strong commitment of various bodies/organizations from various countries. Learning from other RQFs such as the European Qualification Framework and the Australia-New Zealand Qualification Framework, however, one can anticipate that ASEAN RQF will

help learners and workers wishing to move between countries or change jobs or move between educational institutions at home more easily and efficiently. Last but certainly not least, this framework will hopefully contribute to the improvement of regional competitiveness.

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