

# NAVIGATING FUTURES: PATHWAYS BEYOND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL



TVET BRIEF: INDUSTRY TRENDS | ISSUE NUMBER 2 | SERIES OF 2024



*“How can Multiple Pathways create a flexible and agile workforce?”*

## I. Introduction

Is the next generation of workers ready to enter the labor force? By and large, the current crop of high school and college graduates in the world is not certain.

In the United States, for example, the employment rate of high schoolers has risen from 15.7% in 2010 to 22.5% in 2023. Yet, three-fourths of them still said they are underprepared or not at all prepared to make career decisions after graduation (i.e., find work or go to college) simply by virtue of the skills and knowledge they currently possess. Those in the Philippines face a different, albeit still relevant, obstacle in that employers generally still prefer to hire college students than high school graduates, if only because the former’s skillset is perceived to be “better” than the latter. 87% of employers in the world say they are likely to train or retrain their current workers (McKinsey 2021) in anticipation of a significant skills gap to happen in the near future, to say nothing of what comes after in the decades to come.

Therefore, it is agreed that as early as high school, workers must already exhibit the most important traits expected of them when they enter the workforce: “flexibility” and “agility”. It is these traits that shape the current world of work that has become more dynamic thanks to continuous adoption of digital technologies, work processes, and so on, as well as help them fill-in the skills gap that employers are anticipating now.

A “flexible and agile workforce” refers to workers who can quickly adapt to changes in job roles, industry standards, and technological advancements. This adaptability is cultivated through a robust education and training system that equips individuals with diverse skills, enabling them to take on various roles throughout their careers. This call for adaptability is not only made in the sense of needing to acquire or relearn skills needed for the workplace, but is also about having the sense of agency *to be* flexible and agile for the task at hand. Central to this concept is the emphasis on lifelong learning, where individuals continuously seek knowledge and skill development through formal education, informal learning, and self-directed study.

The adaptability of this workforce significantly drives economic growth by enhancing productivity, innovation, and global competitiveness. Digital transformation may render certain jobs obsolete thanks to generative artificial intelligence, but employers put greater stock on those who are fast enough to adapt to sudden shifts in work priorities and schedules (Forbes 2024). Thus, they are more likely to be retained in an ever-changing work environment that is shaped by technology and algorithms. As industries evolve due to globalization and technological advancements, an agile workforce helps organizations quickly respond to new opportunities and challenges, contributing to a more resilient economy. To do that, however, there needs to be pathways in education to enable students to enter the workforce via multiple levels and avenues, while still being effective at the occupation.

### **Principles of Multiple Pathways**

The Iowa Department of Education defines “pathways” (in this context) as “programs of academic and technical study that integrate classroom and real-world learning organized around multiple sectors of industry”. They incorporate career preparedness into higher-level learning so that students understand why they need to learn certain knowledge and skills: they will need these in the line of work they wish to engage in.

Ideally, pathways are incorporated as early as high school (Hoachlander 2008) due to the following guiding principles:

- **Pathways prepare students for both postsecondary education and a career** - at the end of a pathway, high schoolers should be well-equipped to be able to transition to higher-level education and a career if they so choose.
- **Pathways connect academics to real-world applications** - learning should have practical applications in the real world; high schoolers are therefore taught authentic problems and encouraged to tackle them using practical solutions.
- **Pathways lead to the full range of postsecondary opportunities** - simply put, pathways should have a broad appeal to high schoolers that entice them to enter into any industry, trade, or higher-level learning, rather than be limited by them.
- **Pathways improve student achievement** - learning outcomes should improve a student’s skills, knowledge, attitude, and everything in between, which include critical thinking that can be applied to improving their earning potential, or to anything outside of school or work.

### **Philippine Context**

Programs offered by institutions like TESDA and CHED play a crucial role in supporting upskilling and reskilling, ensuring that workers stay relevant and aligned with the demands of the job market. By fostering a culture of adaptability and continuous learning, the Philippines can develop individuals with the necessary skills for diverse sectors, boosting employability and ensuring that industries can meet current and future demands. Investing in such a workforce is essential for maintaining a competitive edge in the global economy.

The Philippines has developed a holistic educational framework that integrates Basic Education, Higher Education, and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs. This structure is part of the country's effort to modernize its education system under the **K to 12 program**, which extends the basic education cycle to 13 years. The goal is to equip students with a strong foundation in both academic and technical skills from a young age. Senior High School (SHS) students can choose specialized tracks, including **Technical-Vocational-**

**Livelihood (TVL)**, which prepares them for immediate employment, further training, or entrepreneurship. Through this design, students can seamlessly transition from basic education to vocational training or higher education, based on their interests and career aspirations.

In addition to formal education, enterprise-based training models, such as **apprenticeships**, are designed to provide hands-on, industry-relevant skills. These programs offer alternative pathways for learners who may opt either to pursue traditional higher education, or to enter the workforce earlier and develop specific technical competencies through TESDA programs. By fostering collaboration between the education sector and industries, we ensure that students and trainees can move fluidly between educational institutions and work environments, making it easier for them to adapt to the demands of various career paths. This system not only supports lifelong learning but also contributes to a more versatile and skilled workforce across different sectors of the economy.

In building a flexible and agile workforce, it is crucial to define the multiple pathways for SHS graduates. By offering diverse options such as TVET, higher education, and enterprise-based training, the system equips learners with both specific technical skills and the adaptability needed to shift across industries. This structure fosters lifelong learning, allowing graduates to continually upskill, adapt to technological advancements, and pursue further education or employment locally or abroad. As a result, SHS graduates are better prepared to contribute to various sectors of the economy, ensuring resilience, global competitiveness, and national development.

## II. **Situational Analysis**

The studies conducted by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) highlight critical issues and opportunities within the Senior High School (SHS) program, especially in relation to the employability of its graduates and the potential of Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a valuable career pathway.

- **Employers' Cautious Attitude Toward Hiring SHS Graduates**

The 2018 PIDS research titled *Senior High School and the Labor Market: Perspectives of Grade 12 Students and Human Resource Officers* reveals a significant challenge in the employment landscape for SHS graduates. Employers remain hesitant to hire SHS graduates, primarily due to a lack of understanding of their skills and capabilities. This uncertainty arises from the absence of skills assessment requirements in the academic track of the SHS curriculum, which leaves employers unsure about the graduates' competencies and job readiness.

Moreover, this research emphasizes the need to reassess the SHS program's goals regarding employment and entrepreneurship. While the program aims to produce work-ready graduates, many firms and enterprises still perceive SHS graduates as lacking the necessary technical and behavioral skills. This gap between employer expectations and the graduates' abilities suggests that the SHS curriculum might need adjustments to better align with industry requirements, particularly in terms of technical training and soft skills development.

- **Employment Trends Among SHS Graduates**

The findings from the 2020 PIDS study, *Employability of the Senior High School Graduates: Evidence from the Labor Force Survey*, indicate that only 20% of SHS graduates enter the labor force, with the majority, over 70%, opting to continue their education. This trend points to a need to reevaluate how well the SHS curriculum prepares students for the workforce. If most graduates choose further education rather than immediate employment, it raises questions about the effectiveness of the SHS program in fulfilling its objective of producing job-ready individuals.

The preference of SHS graduates to pursue higher education could also imply that the labor market does not yet fully recognize or value the competencies gained from the SHS program. This underscores the importance of strengthening partnerships between the education sector and industries to ensure that the skills taught in SHS are directly aligned with market needs.

## **Key Policy Guidelines:**

### **1. Alignment with the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF)**

The **Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF)** plays a pivotal role in this integration by setting standards and competencies across different educational levels, from Basic Education to TVET and Higher Education. The PQF provides clear guidelines for:

- **Credit Transfer:** It allows learners to carry over academic and technical credits when shifting from one educational track to another.
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** Skills gained through informal or non-formal learning, such as work experience or enterprise-based training, can be formally recognized, reducing the timeline needed to gain formal qualifications.

### **2. The K to 12 program (RA 10533 - Enhanced Education Act 2013)**

The K to 12 SHS program adds two years (Grades 11 and 12) to the basic education system, allowing students to specialize in tracks that are aligned with their interests and career goals. The four tracks are Academic, Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL), Sports, and Arts & Design, each offering relevant strands for future higher education or employment. Core subjects are also required, ensuring students to gain a balanced education in languages, math, science, and social sciences. SHS includes practical experiences such as work immersion and on-the-job training to prepare students for real-world challenges. Graduates can choose to pursue higher education, join the workforce, or start their own businesses. The program is designed to enhance employability, global competitiveness, and lifelong learning for Filipino students.

At Grade 10, learners already have a grasp on their choice for higher/TVET education, and/or employment.

- **SHS TVET Embedment**

The integration of TVET into the SHS curriculum under the K to 12 program allows students to acquire relevant technical skills and competencies while completing their basic education. This approach aligns with the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF), which emphasizes skill development as early as the secondary level, enabling SHS graduates to seamlessly transition into the workforce or pursue further education.

Through TVET, SHS students are trained in various vocational fields such as automotive technology, electronics, and information and communication technology (ICT), among others. By embedding TVET in the SHS curriculum, students can earn National Certificates (NCs) from TESDA, which enhance their employability immediately after high school. This not only bridges the gap between education and employment but also strengthens the alignment of basic education with industry needs.

The embedment process involves careful alignment of Contents of the academic subjects with the units of competency of TVET qualifications. The attainment of both the learning competencies and the learning outcomes can be done by developing learning activities. These learning activities should be planned by the subject teachers with the technology teacher trained by TESDA to ensure attainment of learning objectives.

A Joint Memorandum Circular was signed among DepEd, DOLE, CHED, and TESDA to formalize the arrangements for embedment of TVET learning competencies into the basic education learning outcomes.

- **Mandatory Assessment for SHS TVL**

To ensure adherence to quality standards, SHS graduates from the TVL track are provided free competency assessments as part of TESDA's Quality Assurance mechanisms. This provision guarantees that the skills and competencies acquired by students during their TVET training meet the national competency standards set by TESDA. The competency assessments are designed to validate students' proficiency in their chosen fields, ensuring that they are job-ready and equipped to meet industry demands.

By offering free assessments, the government not only promotes equitable access to certification but also supports the continuous improvement of TVET programs. This initiative strengthens the credibility of the SHS TVL track, assuring both students and employers of the quality and relevance of the skills being imparted. In turn, it enhances the overall employability of graduates, contributing to the creation of a skilled and competitive workforce.

To actualize the implementation of the agreement, a Joint Memorandum Circular was signed between DepEd and TESDA.

### 3. House Bill 7893 (K+10+2)

House Bill 7893, filed by Representative Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, seeks to replace the current K to 12 program with a "K+10+2" model. This would make Grades 11 and 12 optional, allowing students to complete basic education after 10th grade and only pursue two more years if they intend to enter professional degrees like law, medicine, or engineering. The bill was introduced to address concerns that Senior High School (SHS) graduates are not as employable as originally anticipated. Many employers still prefer college graduates, and SHS graduates often face limited job prospects with only entry-level positions available.

The optionality of Grades 11 and 12 can reduce the emphasis on SHS as a preparation for immediate employment or further technical education, shifting the focus back to higher education. This may limit the readiness of students entering vocational or technical fields directly from SHS or seeking apprenticeships. It can also reduce the pathways from SHS to TESDA programs and enterprise-based training, as students might opt to skip SHS entirely and transition directly into either work or specialized training post-Grade 10 leading towards higher education.

### 4. Industry Linkages and Workforce Alignment

One of the strengths of this framework is its strong **industry linkages**. The integration of enterprise-based training and TVET ensures that learners develop competencies directly aligned with labor market demands. Partnerships between TESDA, CHED, and industries foster the development of skills that are current, relevant, and in demand, improving employability and career flexibility for graduates.

This holistic, flexible system builds a workforce that can meet the evolving needs of industries in the Philippines and globally. By offering multiple pathways to skill acquisition, the framework helps individuals develop diverse competencies, providing them with various career options and opportunities for lifelong learning.

## IV. Education Development and Career Progression

The overarching goal of this system is to offer **flexible and multiple learning pathways**, recognizing that individuals have different learning needs, career goals, and circumstances. By offering several educational routes—whether through academic education (CHED), technical skills (TESDA), or workplace training (apprenticeships)—the system provides opportunities for individuals to:

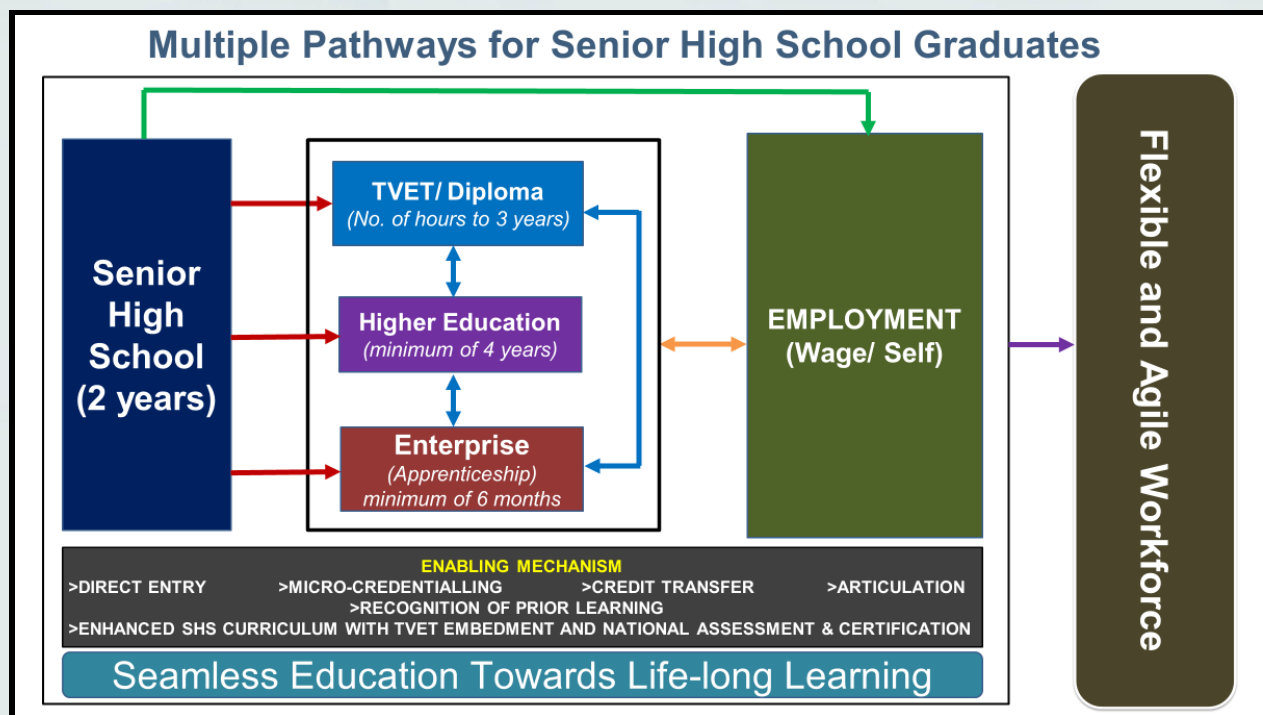
- **Acquire Skills for Immediate Employment:** Learners can opt for TVET programs or apprenticeships to enter the workforce after Basic Education, enabling them to earn a living while continuing to upskill through further training or education. **SHS graduates have a growing range of career options, including self-employment and wage employment.** While wage employment offers a steady income and benefits, self-employment provides the flexibility and autonomy to pursue personal passions and entrepreneurial ventures. With the right skills and support, SHS graduates can explore both paths and find the best fit for their individual goals and aspirations.

- **Pursue Higher Education:** Those aiming for higher academic qualifications can transition smoothly into higher education, with options to integrate TVET learning, making it easier for them to complete degrees aligned with labor market needs.
- **Apprenticeships:** Graduates can take part in apprenticeships, where they gain practical work experience while continuing their education or training. These opportunities bridge the gap between school and industry, enhancing employability.

These multiple pathways ensure that SHS graduates have diverse opportunities to advance their careers, whether through further education, training, or immediate employment.

- **Lifelong Learning and Career Flexibility:** This is designed to support lifelong learning by enabling professionals or workers to reskill or upskill through accessible TVET programs, higher education courses, or enterprise-based training.

## V. Seamless Transitions Across Educational and Employment Sectors



*This framework illustrates the essential steps and processes that enable students to transition from secondary education into higher education, vocational training, or the workforce.*

*This framework provides multiple flexible pathways for students, ensuring that education does not follow a single rigid path. Instead, it offers opportunities for learners to move between academic and vocational tracks, with mechanisms such as credit transfer and credentialing ensuring smooth transitions. Ultimately, it aims to produce a workforce that can adapt to the demands of the modern economy, emphasizing lifelong learning and skills development.*

The integration of Critical and Reflective Skills (CRS) in General Education is crucial for developing students' higher-order thinking abilities. It equips them to analyze, evaluate, and solve complex problems while encouraging reflective learning. This prepares learners for future education, the workforce, and active citizenship by fostering adaptability and independent thought, essential for personal and societal growth.

### **1. From Basic Education to TVET (TESDA Programs):**

Students who complete Basic Education (particularly those in the Senior High School Technical-Vocational-Livelihood or TVL track) can easily transition into TVET programs offered by TESDA. The TVL track equips learners with foundational skills aligned with TESDA qualifications, enabling them to pursue certifications and diplomas in technical and vocational fields immediately after high school. These programs range from short-term courses to three-year programs, providing students with specific skills and qualifications for various industries. This pathway allows students to quickly gain employable skills and enter the workforce or continue progressing through higher-level TVET courses.

To acquire a terminal course under the TESDA Diploma programs, a learner will have to attend formal learning for up to three years

### **2. From Basic Education to Higher Education (CHED Programs):**

The framework also supports the direct transition from Basic Education to Higher Education programs offered by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Senior High School graduates, especially those from the Academic Track, can proceed to university or college programs. Additionally, the integration of TVET and higher education through the **PQF** allows for the recognition and transfer of credits, enabling TVET graduates to pursue further studies at the tertiary level, such as degrees or specialized certifications, without having to repeat prior learning.

To earn a degree, a learner will have to attend a minimum of four years of formal higher education. This includes enrolling in universities or colleges for at least four years to obtain bachelor's degrees or other higher education qualifications.

### **3. From Basic Education to Enterprise-Based Training (Apprenticeships)**

The Philippines has established a pathway from Basic Education directly to apprenticeships, which is a form of **Enterprise-Based Training (EBT)**. This model allows students, especially those from vocational tracks, to learn on-the-job in a real-world enterprise setting.

Apprenticeships enable students to gain hands-on experience, enhance their technical skills, and acquire industry-relevant knowledge. TESDA, in collaboration with industries, facilitates apprenticeship programs that adhere to national competency standards, ensuring that learners are equipped for specific roles within the industry while still learning.



There should be a robust curriculum and training plan co-developed by TESDA and the Industry for the apprenticeship program, identifying the learning outcomes to be achieved.

Countries bridge basic education to apprenticeships through career guidance, vocational tracks, and industry partnerships. Globally, systems like Germany's dual education combine school and work-based learning. Switzerland and the UK offer early career exposure between academic or vocational paths after lower secondary education, with early career guidance and short internships. This system lets students split time between vocational school and hands-on work with companies.

In the ASEAN, Singapore provides career counseling and work-study programs, while Malaysia uses dual training systems. Thailand and the Philippines offer vocational tracks in secondary education, with work immersion and apprenticeships integrated. Indonesia and Vietnam connect vocational schools with industries to offer practical experience and smooth the transition from school to work. A learner of SHS may decide to directly proceed to Apprenticeship after graduation.

#### **4. From Basic Education to Employment (Wage/Self)**

This pathway enables students to enter the workforce immediately after completing senior high school, providing them the opportunity to gain early work experience and earn an income, which enhances their financial independence and flexibility. It allows graduates to pursue jobs as wage earners in various sectors or to embark on entrepreneurial ventures, offering the potential for career advancement through practical on-the-job training. However, while this option can be advantageous, it also presents challenges, such as the possibility of limiting further educational pursuits or specialized skill development, and the difficulty of securing stable employment in a competitive job market. TESDA can play a crucial role in supporting this pathway by offering tailored programs that provide students with essential skills training and entrepreneurship development courses. By facilitating access to resources such as mentorship, business development support, and a network of industry partnerships, TESDA can help ensure that students are well-equipped to navigate the labor market, improve their employability, and successfully establish their own businesses, while still having options for future education and training if they choose to pursue it later.

### **Enabling Mechanisms**

The listed mechanisms play a distinct role in ensuring that students are adequately prepared and recognized for their learning experiences, whether formal or informal.

- 1. Direct Entry** - allows students to transition from senior high school into higher education or vocational institutions.
  - Bridging Programs - are crucial for those who may need additional support to meet entry requirements or fill gaps in their learning. The bridging program addresses any gaps between a student's current qualifications and the demands of higher-level programs. For instance, students coming from different educational strands or technical-vocational backgrounds may need preparatory courses to ensure they meet the necessary competencies in their chosen field. This mechanism ensures a smooth transition and maximizes student success in higher education or specific industries.

**2. Micro Credentialing** - is a way of recognizing a student's competencies and achievements outside of traditional degree programs. It covers several categories. Credentialing serves to equip students with validated skills that can be immediately applied to their careers. Micro-Credentials - Short courses or certifications focused on specific skills or competencies that may be industry-specific.

**3. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** - Process of identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying a person's competencies, acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning, based on established qualification standards. It provides a cost-effective, alternative pathway to formal education and training and to facilitate multi entry–exit between the education system and the labor market. Due to a lack of appropriate qualifications, a large proportion of people around the world face severe disadvantage in getting decent jobs, migrating to other regions and accessing further education, even though they have the required competencies. The RPL process can therefore help an individual acquire a formal qualification that matches their competencies, thereby improving their employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion and self-esteem UNESCO UNEVOC, 2015)

- *Skills certificates* - Validations of specific technical skills acquired either through formal training or workplace experience.
- *Work immersion / experience / work-based* - Programs that allow students to gain hands-on experience while still studying, making them more employable.

**4. Credit Transfer (TVET to Higher Ed)** - Credit transfer is the process by which students' completed coursework in technical-vocational education and training (TVET) is recognized by higher education institutions. Credit transfer plays a vital role in ensuring that students who begin in a TVET program are not required to start over if they pursue higher education later on. This mechanism not only saves time and resources for students but also encourages lifelong learning by reducing redundancies in education. It is also important for career mobility, as students can shift from vocational pathways to academic tracks, broadening their opportunities.

- **Block credit** - Entire blocks of courses or modules are recognized, allowing students to skip entire sections of a higher education program.
- **Specified credit** - Specific courses or subjects are matched with higher education equivalents.
- **Unspecified** - Credits are accepted, but not tied to any specific course within the new program.

#### **Equivalencies to Promote Credit Transfer:**

- **National Certificates (NCs):** TESDA awards NCs to individuals who have successfully completed TVET programs. Certain NCs may be equivalent to specific levels of the PQF.

- **Certificate of Competency (COC):** refers to a document awarded to individuals who have demonstrated specific skills or competencies within a particular area of a technical-vocational qualification. Unlike National Certificates (NCs), which cover the complete set of competencies for an entire qualification or occupation, COCs certify that a person is competent in a specific, defined area of the occupation or qualification.
  - **Diploma Programs:** TESDA Diploma programs are typically equivalent to Level 5 of the PQF. Diploma programs play a crucial role in the Philippine education system by providing accessible, high-quality training that aligns with the PQF. Their equivalence to Level 5 underscores the importance of technical and vocational education in fostering a skilled workforce that meets the evolving demands of the economy. As the landscape of work continues to change, these programs will remain essential for promoting lifelong learning and supporting individuals in achieving their career aspirations.
- 5. Higher Education:** Higher education refers to the stage of learning that occurs at universities, colleges, and other institutions beyond secondary education (high school). It typically encompasses undergraduate and postgraduate education, providing students with advanced knowledge, critical thinking skills, and specialized competencies in various fields.
- 6. Enhanced SHS Matatag Curriculum with TVET Embedment and Mandatory Assessment and Certification**

The enhanced SHS Matatag Curriculum is a significant overhaul of the Senior High School (SHS) program in the Philippines, designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for the 21st century workforce. One of the key features of the curriculum is the embedment of TVET into all SHS strands. This approach aims to ensure that all students acquire industry-relevant skills, making them more employable upon graduation.

The enhanced curriculum also places significant importance on the development of soft skills and 21st-century competencies. These skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, and global citizenship, are essential for success in the modern world. By cultivating these skills, the curriculum empowers students to become lifelong learners, innovative thinkers, and responsible citizens.

Another important aspect of the enhanced SHS Matatag Curriculum is the implementation of mandatory assessments and certification. Students will undergo comprehensive assessments to evaluate their mastery of the curriculum, and upon successful completion, they will receive a National Certificate (NC) from the TESDA. This certification can enhance students' job prospects and provide a solid foundation for further education or training.

It is one of the key features to incorporate a comprehensive career guidance program in the curriculum from junior to senior high school. This program provides students with the necessary tools and resources to make informed decisions about their future careers. It includes activities such as career counseling, aptitude tests, and industry

visits, helping students explore different career paths and identify their strengths and interests. By offering guidance and support, the career guidance program empowers students to make informed choices and pursue their aspirations.

Overall, the enhanced SHS Matatag Curriculum has the potential to significantly improve student outcomes and contribute to the country's economic development. By combining academic knowledge with practical skills, the curriculum aims to empower students and prepare them for a rapidly changing world. However, successful implementation will require adequate resource allocation, teacher capacity building, and strong industry partnerships.

These mechanisms ensure that students are not only provided with multiple pathways but also have their prior learning and skills acknowledged at various stages. This approach contributes to a “**flexible and agile workforce**, where learners can transition between education and employment at different stages of their careers. In this way, the system fosters continuous learning and adaptability, helping individuals meet the demands of an ever-changing job market while offering recognition for both formal **education and real-world experience**.

#### **Implications of the different mechanisms:**

- **Smooth Transition:** highlights the potential of achieving seamless transition from SHS to higher education, TVET, and/or enterprise- based training.
- **Enhanced Employability:** by leveraging their skills and competencies, SHS graduates can increase their employability and career prospects.
- **Flexibility:** the different mechanisms provide flexibility for individuals as they transition into education and employment pathways.

Further, the various considerations in creating multiple pathways should be handled with great care, as there are multiple factors to consider for the student, the school, and the end-user—the last of whom is the industry group or employer if working in the context of education leading to employment. These considerations pertain to limitations that should be considered or factors that should be strengthened to allow for multiple pathways:

1. **Diverse client profile** - The pathways are dependent on the students' individual values, desires, and priorities. As said before by Hoachlander, pathways should be designed in such a way that they improve a student's skills, knowledge, attitude, and the like. There is no one-size-fits-all approach for learning as not all students are the same in terms of ability and preference.

With this in mind, it is imperative that multiple pathways are also flexible enough to fit diverse client profiles. Microcredentials may be taken into account, as these provide students access to individual competencies that fall under a particular umbrella of skills suited for their chosen trade.

2. **Industry requirement(s) and collaboration** - Industry requirements tend to change drastically and quickly due to technological progress, market shifts, and so on. Thus, an institution that incorporates multiple pathways should do well to establish a strong partnership with industry groups to keep abreast of these changes, and in turn adapt their multiple pathways accordingly for the students' benefit. Industry scanning is vital

in that students should be prepared for what awaits them outside of school, perhaps by introducing practical exercises at the actual work place.

- 3. Standards and certification** - Multiple pathways require standards and certification to enable students to transition to employment or to higher-level learning, whichever they choose. It is important for each pathway to result in competencies that are easily transferable, in that they are recognized by employers or other institutions from the moment that the student exits the pathway.

The quality of each pathway's program(s), as well as the quality of the certification/evaluation tied to each, thus needs to be in sync with one another. Doing so also helps industry groups or other higher-level institutions to understand the value of the learners in terms of their competencies, especially considering that TVET students may possess full competencies and microcredentials.

- 4. Infrastructure** - It goes without saying that the institution that wishes to offer multiple pathways should also be well-equipped to take on the task. "Infrastructure", in this case, pertains to physical assets required for learning, such as workshops and similar facilities, as well as the capabilities of the institution's trainers and evaluators. Obtaining proper infrastructure may be achieved with industry collaborations or similar partnerships with government agencies.

## VI. Conclusion

A "**flexible and agile workforce**" refers to a labor force capable of swiftly adapting to changes in the job market, industry demands, and technological advancements. This adaptability is the direct outcome of a well-structured education and training system, which equips individuals with a diverse set of skills and competencies, allowing them to thrive in various roles throughout their careers.

### 1. Adaptability

- An adaptable workforce can respond effectively to changes in job roles and responsibilities. This includes the ability to learn new technologies, adjust to shifting industry standards, and take on different functions as needed.
- In today's rapidly changing economy, industries are continuously evolving due to globalization, technological innovations, and shifts in consumer preferences. Workers who can adapt are invaluable as they can seamlessly transition into new roles, contributing to organizational resilience.

### 2. Lifelong Learning

- Lifelong learning is the continuous, voluntary pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional development. It encompasses formal education, informal learning, and self-directed study.
- As industries evolve and new skills emerge, the concept of lifelong learning ensures that workers remain relevant in the job market. Continuous learning opportunities—such as workshops, online courses, and certifications—enable individuals to stay updated on the latest trends and technologies in their fields.

- Higher Education and TVET offer a variety of programs and initiatives to support workers' upskilling and reskilling. TESDA provides vocational training and certification programs in various technical and vocational fields, while the CHED oversees higher education institutions that offer degree programs and specialized courses. Both agencies collaborate to ensure that the education and training programs they offer are aligned with the needs of the job market, providing workers with the skills and qualifications necessary to succeed in their careers.

### **3. Economic Growth**

- A flexible and agile workforce significantly contributes to economic growth by meeting the changing demands of the labor market and enhancing overall productivity.
- An adaptable workforce helps organizations innovate and improve their services or products, leading to increased competitiveness in the global market. This adaptability results in a more robust economy, as businesses can respond quickly to opportunities and challenges.

Building a flexible and agile workforce is essential for thriving in a dynamic global economy. By fostering adaptability and lifelong learning through a well-structured education and training system, the Philippines can produce individuals equipped with diverse skills that are necessary for different sectors of the economy.

This not only enhances individual employability but also contributes to broader economic growth, ensuring that industries can meet current and future demands. Investing in the development of such a workforce is essential for countries aiming to remain competitive in the global economy.

## **VII. Policy Recommendations**

### ***Recommendation 1: Promote TVET as the Most Viable Pathway for SHS Graduates***

Pursuing a TVET program offers numerous advantages for SHS graduates compared to traditional higher education. TVET programs are closely aligned with current job market needs, emphasizing practical skills and competencies applicable in various sectors, such as manufacturing, hospitality, and healthcare. The programs typically last between one to two years, allowing graduates to enter the workforce quickly, which helps alleviate the financial strain associated with longer educational paths. Additionally, TVET institutions are often more accessible, especially in rural areas, enabling more students to pursue vocational training without the challenges of relocation or extensive commutes.

In contrast to the challenges faced by SHS graduates in securing employment, the data from 2020 presents a strong case for TVET as a promising pathway. Nearly 80% of TVET graduates find employment, with over 90% securing jobs within their localities. This is a significant improvement from 2013 when less than 80% of employed TVET graduates worked within their provinces. The success of TVET graduates in finding local employment highlights the program's effectiveness in bridging regional skill gaps and meeting local industry demands.

This trend demonstrates the relevance of TVET for SHS students as it provides them with practical, job-ready skills that match the needs of local employers. By choosing TVET, graduates are more likely to find employment opportunities close to home, reducing the necessity to migrate to urban areas in search of jobs. This local employment not only supports the graduates but also contributes to economic development within their communities by addressing workforce needs specific to regional industries.

TVET programs not only enhance employability but also provide industry-recognized certifications, validating the skills acquired and equipping graduates to meet the evolving demands of the job market. This makes TVET a viable alternative for SHS graduates seeking immediate job opportunities while addressing the skills mismatch that exists within various industries.

Implementable strategies to enhance the adoption of TVET programs for Senior High School (SHS) graduates, based on the advantages and successes of TVET compared to traditional higher education:

- 1. Promote Awareness Campaigns Highlighting the Benefits of TVET:** Develop and implement nationwide awareness campaigns that educate SHS students, parents, and communities about the advantages of TVET programs. These campaigns should focus on the high employability rates of TVET graduates, the shorter duration of the programs, and the alignment of TVET with local job market needs. By emphasizing the practical skills, faster entry into the workforce, and economic benefits of TVET, students can make informed decisions about their career paths.
- 2. Strengthen Industry Partnerships to Align TVET with Local Job Market Needs:** Forge stronger partnerships between TVET institutions and local industries to ensure that training programs are directly aligned with the skills and competencies required by employers in the region. By tailoring TVET curricula to meet the specific demands of local sectors like manufacturing, hospitality, and healthcare, graduates will be better equipped to secure jobs within their communities, reducing the need for migration to urban areas.
- 3. Expand Access to TVET Programs in Rural Areas:** Increase the accessibility of TVET institutions in rural and underserved areas to reduce barriers to entry for students who may face challenges in relocating for education. Investing in the expansion of TVET facilities and programs in these regions will enable more students to pursue vocational training close to home. This strategy not only

supports local workforce development but also contributes to the economic growth of rural communities by addressing regional skill gaps and creating job opportunities locally.

- 4. Reinforce TVET Institutions Capacity:** TESDA empowers TVET institutions through various strategies to enhance their training delivery capabilities. One key approach is to upgrade their training facilities, acquire modern equipment, and trainers and personnels' capacity building. This ensures that TVET institutions have the necessary resources to deliver high-quality training programs. By regularly reviewing and updating curricula, TVET Institutions ensure that their program offerings remain relevant to industry needs and equip learners with the latest skills and knowledge. This involves conducting regular industry consultations and incorporating feedback from employers to align training programs with current labor market demands.

### ***Recommendation 2: Strengthen the Integration of TVET in General Education***

Integrating Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET) into the Senior High School (SHS) curriculum is crucial for developing a workforce equipped with the skills that employers need. Emphasizing TVET within the SHS program can significantly enhance students' technical and practical abilities, making them more attractive to employers who prioritize job-specific skills and competencies. This integration ensures that SHS students receive hands-on training that directly aligns with industry standards and demands, bridging the gap between education and employment.

Additionally, the provision of free competency assessments for SHS TVL graduates, as part of TESDA's quality assurance mechanisms, plays a vital role in validating the skills of these students. These assessments help to certify that graduates meet industry standards, thereby boosting their credibility in the job market. For employers, this certification serves as a reliable indicator of a candidate's capabilities, reducing uncertainty about the graduates' skill levels and increasing their willingness to hire SHS graduates for entry-level positions. This focus on validating skills not only strengthens the reputation of TVET programs but also enhances the employability of SHS graduates.

Promoting TVET as a practical and viable option for SHS graduates aligns the educational system more closely with the needs of the labor market. By doing so, it creates a direct pathway for students to transition from school to work, offering both immediate employment opportunities and potential for long-term career development. This strategic emphasis on TVET contributes to economic development by producing a workforce that is not only skilled and job-ready but also adaptable to the ever-changing demands of the modern job market. A stronger integration of TVET in the SHS curriculum ultimately leads to a more resilient and capable workforce, driving sustainable growth and competitiveness in various sectors of the economy.



Implementable strategies to strengthen the integration of TVET and General Education in the Senior High School (SHS) curriculum:

- 1. Curriculum Alignment with Industry Standards and Needs:** Develop partnerships with industry stakeholders, employers, and sector-specific experts to align the SHS curriculum with current market demands and emerging trends. This includes regularly updating the TVET modules to reflect technological advancements and industry-specific requirements, ensuring that students gain relevant, up-to-date skills that enhance their employability. Establishing industry advisory boards can also provide insights into the skills most needed by employers, directly influencing curriculum development and hands-on training opportunities.
- 2. Expansion of Free Competency Assessments for SHS TVL Graduates:** Strengthen TESDA's role in providing free competency assessments to all SHS TVL graduates to certify their skills and ensure they meet industry standards. This initiative should be supported by increasing the number of accredited assessment centers and making them more accessible, particularly in underserved areas. By validating the technical skills of SHS graduates, these assessments can boost employers' confidence in hiring them for entry-level positions, ultimately enhancing the job readiness of SHS graduates.

### ***Recommendation 3: Enhance Support Mechanisms for Seamless Transitions***

Enabling mechanisms play a crucial role in facilitating students' movement between educational pathways, ensuring that they have the necessary resources, support, and guidance to transition smoothly. One key strategy is to establish clear guidelines for credit transfer and articulation agreements through the Philippine Credits Transfer System (PCTS), which allows students to transfer credits seamlessly across different educational institutions and programs. This system helps maximize the value of their prior learning, reducing redundancies and accelerating their academic progress. Additionally, providing counseling and guidance services is essential to assist students in making informed decisions about their educational and career options, helping them choose pathways that align with their goals and aspirations. Expanding access to financial aid and scholarships further supports students by alleviating the financial barriers that might hinder their pursuit of education, ensuring that more learners have the opportunity to complete their studies and achieve their career objectives. Together, these strategies create a comprehensive support system that empowers students to navigate their educational journey with confidence and flexibility.

Microcredentialing serves as a powerful enabling mechanism that facilitates students' movement between educational pathways by recognizing specific skills and competencies acquired through short-term learning experiences. This approach allows learners to earn credentials for smaller, focused units of study, which can then be stacked or combined into larger qualifications, aligning with their career or academic goals. Microcredentials empower students to showcase their skills to employers or educational institutions, the recognition of which enhances their employability and educational mobility. Implementation strategies to support this mechanism include establishing clear guidelines for credit transfer and

articulation agreements through the Philippine Credits Transfer System (PCTS), ensuring that microcredentials can be easily recognized and integrated into formal degree programs. Providing counseling and guidance services is also essential to help students navigate their options, make informed decisions about their learning pathways, and understand how microcredentials can fit into their long-term career plans. Additionally, expanding access to financial aid and scholarships for microcredential programs ensures that all students, regardless of their financial background, have the opportunity to participate in these flexible learning opportunities, ultimately leading to a more skilled and adaptable workforce.

Implementable strategies to facilitate students' movement between educational pathways using enabling mechanisms, with an emphasis on microcredentialing:

- 1. Establish Clear Guidelines for Credit Transfer and Articulation through the Philippine Credits Transfer System (PCTS):** Develop and standardize guidelines for the seamless transfer of credits earned through microcredentials and traditional courses within the Philippine educational framework. The PCTS should be enhanced to recognize microcredential achievements, allowing students to integrate these short-term learning experiences into broader academic programs. This strategy maximizes the value of students' prior learning and ensures that microcredentials contribute directly to their educational progress and qualifications.
- 2. Strengthen Counseling and Guidance Services for Students:** Implement comprehensive counseling and guidance services within educational institutions to assist students in navigating their learning pathways, including the strategic use of microcredentials. These services should provide personalized support, helping learners make informed decisions about how microcredentials can align with their career goals and educational objectives. By offering tailored advice, students can better understand how to utilize microcredentials to bridge skill gaps, enhance their employability, or transition smoothly between academic programs.
- 3. Expand Access to Financial Aid and Scholarships for Microcredential Programs:** Increase financial support mechanisms specifically for students pursuing microcredentialing opportunities. Developing dedicated scholarships, grants, and financial aid options for microcredential programs will enable a wider range of learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to participate in these flexible learning options. By removing financial barriers, this strategy ensures that all students have equitable access to short-term, skills-based education that can enhance their career readiness and adaptability.

#### ***Recommendation 4: Strengthen Enterprise-based Training***

Enterprise-based training models, such as **apprenticeships**, are designed to provide hands-on, industry-relevant skills. These programs offer alternative pathways for learners who may opt either to pursue traditional higher education, or to enter the workforce earlier and develop specific technical competencies through TESDA programs. By fostering collaboration between the education sector and industries, we ensure that students and trainees can move fluidly between educational institutions and work environments, making it easier for them to adapt to the demands of various career paths. This system not only supports lifelong learning but also contributes to a more versatile and skilled workforce across different sectors of the economy.

It is important to facilitate a structured transition for students from basic education to industry-oriented training through a well-defined Apprenticeship Program that enhances their employability and aligns with the demands of the labor market. By aligning curriculum with industry standards, developing structured apprenticeship programs, and fostering partnerships between educational institutions and businesses, a seamless pathway from basic education to enterprise-based training can be facilitated. It emphasizes integrating technical skills in senior high school, promoting dual education models, and enhancing soft skills. Key strategies include incentivizing industry participation, establishing mentorship frameworks, and implementing continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This approach aims to create a skilled workforce ready to meet labor market demands while encouraging lifelong learning and inclusivity in training opportunities.

Implementable strategies to enhance enterprise-based training models and foster collaboration between the education sector and industries:

- 1. Develop Structured Apprenticeship Programs Aligned with Industry Standards:** Establish well-defined apprenticeship programs that align with industry standards and directly respond to the demands of the labor market. This strategy involves creating a curriculum that integrates both theoretical knowledge and practical, hands-on training within industry settings. By doing so, students gain valuable work experience and technical skills that are immediately applicable in their chosen career fields, making them more competitive in the job market.
- 2. Incentivize Industry Participation in Training Programs:** Create incentives for businesses to participate in enterprise-based training models, such as tax breaks, subsidies, or recognition awards for companies that offer apprenticeships, internships, or mentorship opportunities. Encouraging industry participation ensures that businesses invest in developing a skilled workforce while also helping to bridge the gap between education and employment.
- 3. Implement Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Establish a framework for the continuous monitoring and evaluation of apprenticeship and training programs to ensure their effectiveness and relevance to the evolving needs of the labor market. This includes gathering feedback from participants, tracking employment outcomes, and regularly updating the curricula to incorporate emerging industry trends and technological advancements. Monitoring and evaluation help maintain the quality of training and ensure that programs remain aligned with current job market requirements.

## VIII. Call to Action

Collaboration among policymakers, educators, and industry leaders is essential to creating a robust framework that prioritizes TVET as a key pathway for SHS graduates. Such collaboration should involve continuous dialogue and partnership to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant to industry needs while equipping students with the necessary skills and competencies. Policymakers can play a critical role by providing the necessary funding and resources to support the integration of TVET into the educational system, while also establishing incentives for industries to participate in training programs, mentorships, and apprenticeship opportunities.

Investing in this collaborative approach will lead to the development of a resilient and skilled workforce that is better prepared to adapt to the challenges posed by a rapidly evolving job market. A focus on TVET will not only enhance the employability of SHS graduates but also contribute significantly to sustainable economic growth in the Philippines. By aligning educational outcomes with labor market needs, we can address the skills gap that exists in various sectors, ultimately driving innovation and productivity. Furthermore, a well-trained workforce can attract investments, stimulate local economies, and improve overall job satisfaction among workers, fostering a cycle of continuous growth and development within communities.



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