

The Impact of International Exchange on Vocational Education Development

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction. International exchange becomes a key driver in strengthening vocational education systems along with rapid globalisation, technological advancement, and evolving labour market demands. Exposure to diverse pedagogical models, industry standards and cross-cultural learning environments enables institutions to innovate and develop programs in alignment with the global economic needs. However, research on how international exchange concretely influences policy, institutional practices, teaching capacity and student outcomes remains scattered.

Aim. This study aims to analyse the multi-level impact of international exchange on the development of vocational education, including its effects on policy adaptation and formation, institutional improvement, teacher professional development and student competencies.

Methodology and research methods. The article employs a structured conceptual review of the international and regional literatures, including (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) UNESCO, The Organisation for Economic Co- operation and Development (OECD) and national policy sources. Empirical findings and theoretical works were synthesised to identify the mechanisms, benefits and challenges associated with international exchange in vocational education.

Results. The analysis demonstrates that international exchange promotes policy modernisation, enhances institutional quality assurance, strengthens teacher pedagogical and digital competencies, and improves learners' employability through exposure to global standards. It also supports the adoption of flexible learning pathways and technological integration.

Scientific novelty. The study organised fragmented findings into a coherent four-pillar framework (policy–institution–teacher–student), offering a new conceptual model for understanding how exchange initiatives drive the development of vocational education.

Practical significance. The results guide governments, institutions and programme designers in planning international partnerships, mobility programmes and curriculum reforms that enhance the relevance and resilience of vocational education systems.

Keywords: vocational education, vocational education and training (VET) , international exchange, globalization, development, impacts.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globalisation can be understood as a process that connects countries through trading, politics, culture and social interaction [1]. Hence, globalisation also leads to international exchange, capital movements and the spread of knowledge. International exchange is not a new historical trade network like the Silk Road already connected distant societies for commerce and knowledge sharing [2]. The trading along the Silk Road not only involves materials such as goods and products, but also non- material items. Those non- material items largely contribute to the development and civilisation today, namely technologies, languages, cultures and religions [3, 4]. As ideas and technologies circulate across borders, daily living standards have steadily improved. Even simple innovations, such as buttons from China, reflect how global knowledge transfer reshapes everyday life [5]. Over time, societies have recognised that education and technology play a key role in improving well- being. This understanding contributed to the establishment of formal learning institutions designed to build skills and spread knowledge more widely [6].

A nation's progress is often shaped by how effectively it develops and applies knowledge, particularly in fast- changing economic environments. In many countries, economic focus has gradually shifted away from agriculture or manual production toward industries built on technology, finance and innovation [7]. Hence, there is an increase in demand for a modern workforce, especially in the business, administrative and financial sectors. Despite these trends, vocational education is sometimes overlooked, even though it plays a crucial role in preparing individuals for professional and technical careers. A key strength of vocational education is its emphasis on hands- on skills. Students gain hands-on experience that directly aligns with workplace needs, strengthening their employability. For students who struggle with purely theoretical or exam-based approaches,

vocational education offers a more practical, engaging, and accessible form of education.

The idea of international exchange is not new; cross-border academic cooperation has been evolving since the beginning of the century [8]. Internationalisation involves multiple dimensions: student and staff mobility, joint curriculum design, shared accreditation frameworks, and cross-country recognition of qualifications. It also includes institutional partnerships, often known as “twinning” programs, which link education providers and industries across borders [9]. Historically, these efforts were concentrated within universities, where institutions aimed to build programs that would be recognised worldwide. More recently, vocational education has also become a target for internationalisation. This shift supports global priorities such as digital innovation, green technology, youth employability, and stronger partnerships with industry [10]. Vocational systems naturally vary across nations, with each country developing particular areas of expertise based on its economic and industrial strengths. For example, the vocational education in Germany is expected to be better in the automotive sector, with a strong reputation. Without international exposure, however, vocational education can become outdated or overly focused on local conditions, limiting graduates' relevance in a global labour market. Although participation in international vocational exchange is increasing, the full impact of these programs is not yet well documented. While the advantage of international exchange is assumed, more comprehensive empirical evidence should exist to support it. Yet, vocational education cannot be evaluated solely by policies or frameworks. Its effectiveness depends heavily on the people involved — particularly teachers, and ultimately, the students they serve. This paper aims to identify and evaluate the impact of international exchange on the development of vocational education across multiple dimensions.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Vocational Education: Definition, Evolution and Global Trend

Vocational education focuses on practical training that prepares learners for specific careers, especially those in technical, industrial or service-based fields [11]. Several papers are identified describing the vocational education of different countries in their history and evolution [12-15]. The existence of vocational education dates back to the beginning of mankind. Skills are needed to prepare weapons for hunting or self-protection, and to build shelter for protection from an unfavourable environment. The knowledge is passed to the next generation in the group without a proper 'institute' as informal education. Transformation in the role and aim of vocational education is gradually seen when society is more developed and civilised. As societies grew more complex, vocational training expanded beyond basic subsistence. It became a means of cultivating specialised skills, supporting economic productivity, and nurturing entrepreneurship [13].

In earlier periods, particularly under colonial rule, vocational training was designed mainly to supply labour for local industries and occupations. Small business which produces hand-crafted products or mass production from powered factories are the main practice of the economy. The phenomenon is replaced by the information era, when the focus is on electronic devices or information technology involving telecommunication and semiconductors. Human life is more digitised with many services, including online shopping, e-learning, banking and gaming. This transition has reduced reliance on manual labour and challenged traditional vocational programs to stay relevant. On top of that, the recovery of the global economy from the attack of the pandemic disease Coronavirus (COVID-19) also urges the transformation of vocational education to adapt to the global trend. Recent bibliometric reviews suggest several global trends: stronger collaboration between industry and educational institutions,

the integration of soft skills into training, data-informed program design, and alignment with international standards while still meeting local workforce needs [16].

2.2 International Exchange in Vocational Education

Student and staff exchanges have long been part of university systems, where cross-border mobility supports collaboration and cultural exposure. This process can occur through a few different ways, including reciprocal physical exchanges, virtual collaboration using live video platforms, and entirely online instructional sharing [17]. The availability of international exchange in vocational education enables the training to be conducted beyond the limits of the national border with an international perspective. This aims to introduce the international educational concepts, curriculum design, faculty, educational resources and management models. The concept is not new. It emerged in the early twentieth century alongside global economic integration [18]. International bodies, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), have renewed attention on vocational training as a key driver of global education and workforce development. They target Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which ensures inclusive and quality education for lifelong skills development amongst youth and adults [19]. Meanwhile, Europe Union is launching 73 new international projects in vocational training to help students gain skills according to the market trends and needs through Erasmus+ (Europe Union programme for education, training, youth and sport). Those projects are funded to support the cooperation between European and non-European organisations in vocational education to target the market beyond Europe. Similarly, Asian countries, including China and Southeast Asia, have participated in joint workshops focusing on digital innovation and rural advancement [20]. With all the information available, those developments show that international exchange is becoming a standard

feature of modern vocational education, powered by globalisation and fast-moving technological change. The value of vocational education is much appreciated in this era of globalisation, and progression is accelerated with the pace of technology advancement to achieve the market's requirements.

2.3 Impact on Policy Development and Education System

Cross-national collaboration often leads governments to revise policies or reshape vocational education frameworks. In Bangladesh, for example, the vocational sector has adopted elements from Australia's qualification system, allowing diploma holders to transition into higher education instead of entering the labour market immediately. This policy is considered an adaptation of the Australia and higher participation theory from London [21, 22]. Most of the time, vocational education aims to enhance skills and increase the rate of employment with a diploma. After completion of the diploma, the students or learners are expected to start working in the industry with those skills. The knowledge or academic performance is neglected, especially when qualifications are becoming more important nowadays. As such, the assessment of skills from vocational education is taken into account for higher education enrolment in Australia Qualification Framework. The opportunity to acquire higher education and the dream of achieving better academic performance increase with this system. This model widens participation, particularly for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, and acknowledges vocational learning within national qualification frameworks [23]. By adapting this system, Bangladesh is able to approximate the inequality in society because most of the universities do not accept vocational education to enrol on higher education [22]. Through this system, the benefit of vocational education is not only limited to how well equipped the skills are, but also provides more opportunities to acquire

different knowledge for academic recognition through higher education.

With the involvement of international exchange and industries from different countries, the role of the vocational educational system is no longer limited to the nation or local needs. The investment from another country brings along new technologies and also different knowledge. Transformation is therefore needed for students to update themselves with advanced curriculum content, more advanced technology and international technical standards such as the National Occupational Catalogs and Occupational Quality Standards. Moreover, the involvement of UNESCO in vocational education via SDG4 also introduces a more comprehensive framework in schools and institutions for easier assessment in learning programs. Instead of focusing only on the specific skill and knowledge in one industry, vocational education is currently providing the opportunity in research, community outreach and institutional governance and management [24].

Besides the change in the framework of this education system, language policies are also shifting. Traditionally, vocational programmes were delivered in the local language, but globalisation has increased the use of multilingual instruction. As international exchange becomes more popular, the vocational education system is currently conducted in at least 2 languages, depending on the future aim or the collaborative industry [25]. By collaborating with international enterprises, the vocational education system is now similar to the twining program of higher education. The students complete theoretical training locally and then gain practical experience through internships abroad. The presence of a joint programme transformed the old educational system to provide a dual certificate programme for students with the collaboration of companies from foreign countries.

In alignment with SDG4, UNESCO now emphasises lifelong learning pathways within vocational systems, ensuring people can reskill

throughout their lives [10]. Under this system, vocational education is open to the population of all ages. It is believed to benefit everyone under the institution of UNESCO. They also offer high- quality training online for free for all members. As such, students from all age groups are entitled to the opportunity to learn at home at any time. The free trainings include digital sector, entrepreneurial skills, green skills and mentorship programmes. The new educational systems enable everyone to acquire knowledge at any time without age limitations.

Besides the availability of online teaching, the transformation of the education system is being affected by artificial intelligence (AI) nowadays. As the technology advances, the global data is collected and analysed without boundaries after international exchange [26]. The focus of education is changing from time to time in order to match the labour market requirements. The educational system is more flexible with the involvement of AI in terms of study material. Virtual reality (VR)- assisted simulations, remote examinations, personalised learning analytics, and cross-border online teaching are becoming increasingly common.

2.4 Impact on The Institution and Teacher Development

International exchange places new demands on teachers who must now engage with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds [25]. Proper communication is important to understand the needs of students and for better training in future. Effective communication and cultural understanding are essential for maintaining student engagement and instructional quality [27]. This led to an improvement in the proficiency of language as well as cultural understanding of the teachers toward foreign students. If the domestic teachers face difficulty in mastering the skills in communicating with the foreign students or companies, the institution needs to recruit professional staff from another country. Therefore, mobilisation of teachers or training providers occurs as a result of international exchange. Apart from the difference in culture,

belief and etiquette, the foreign teachers might have different teaching methods or styles. This can further enhance the institution in adaptability and innovation through the process of cross- cultural management [28].

Teachers are the most important asset of the institution and play the most important role in education. Their role might be limited as a teacher in a school- based centre to prepare students with knowledge of the skills for future training. At the same time, the teachers might have another role as the site supervisor to monitor the site training of the students. The concept of “dual-qualified” teachers—educators who possess both academic credentials and industry experience—is gaining prominence [29]. These teachers can deliver theory, supervise workplace learning, and translate industry practices into classroom instruction. This dual capacity helps vocational institutions stay aligned with real-world practice. This is important for the career development of teachers to be more competitive with not only academic performance, but also hands-on skills and practical experience to nurture the next generation.

The development of an international program is essential to achieve a higher ranking for the institution. Core training for the teacher is one of the performance indicators in the evaluation of the ranking of the institution. Overseas training program for the teachers not only fulfils the criteria to improve the ranking of the institution, but also directly benefits the teachers, allowing them to improve in the teaching methods, skills, education concepts and overall professionalism [30]. The international training program allows teachers to keep themselves updated with knowledge and skills. As such, international exchange provides a positive drive to improve the quality of the institutions and the teachers to compete at the international level.

Nevertheless, one of the most important advantages for teachers is the improvement in competency. Participation in the international programs and projects allows the teachers to be

more capable in handling the situation when troubles arise. The improvement in personal enrichment, self-confidence and courage greatly reflects the professionalism of a teacher [31]. Teachers are more ready to express their thoughts and feelings as they are more motivated. Ultimately, international exchange benefits educators by broadening their skills, enriching their professional identity, and increasing motivation [32].

As teachers are closely related to the core evaluation of an institution's ranking, the positive impacts on teachers will be reflected in the ranking of the institution as well. Besides, the reputation of the institution also improves with international participation. With international projects or collaboration with enterprises from other countries, the institution can also obtain financial support in terms of training for teachers and students [31]. Scholarships that are provided by the enterprises can help to reduce the financial burden of the institution. For example, the European Training Foundation (UTF), which supports the modernisation of vocational education, the support from the World Bank on public-private partnership and UNESCO, which provides scholarships for fellowships.

2.5 Impacts on The Students' Development

International exchange brings along the cultural diversity, including the language, problem-solving skills and interaction. Communication is utmost important to prevent misunderstanding in the process of discussion, especially on the international stage. Students are expected to be more competent in communication in the collaborative program. This transformation is clearly revealed, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic [33]. With the help of international resources, the students are given more opportunities to expose themselves to international enterprises and the real scenario which they might encounter in the future. Meanwhile, students are able to master the latest technology around the world through international exchange. Overall competency of students has much improved in all aspects [25].

Through international exchange, the students are able to join a twinning program with an international qualification. The ultimate goal is not only to educate the students with skills in vocational education, but also to improve the employment rate. This phenomenon is not due to the poor skills of the students, but is also partly contributed to by their qualifications. For those students who are freshly graduated without working experience in the specific field, the qualification in their curriculum vitae becomes one of the factors that will affect their employment. From the analysis, better qualification is positively linked to higher employment [34, 35].

With the involvement of international organisations such as UNESCO, there is a change in the goal of vocational education globally. This might be due to population ageing; the life expectancy is longer with a better healthcare system nowadays. Lifelong learning and free education online are easily available nowadays, with advancing technology [10]. More options are available for students across different age groups who have the intention to pursue further study in higher education. Scholarships that are provided enable them to obtain further qualifications, instead of a degree only, such as the involvement of UTF. This can reduce the financial burden of students who are married but intend to continue for fellowship. Hence, age is not a limiting factor to gaining knowledge and continuing education.

2.6 Challenges of the Vocational Education Development

Despite its expanding role, vocational education still faces a number of persistent constraints. Funding for vocational education can be obtained from public financing, enterprise financing, private or public sponsorship and international donor assistance. Funding remains limited in many countries, where public allocations rarely exceed 12 per cent of the education budget [36]. Most of the larger companies can conduct internal training at minimal cost [37]. In smaller companies that are unable to do so, students often shoulder the

burden of tuition, travel, and learning materials. Financial strain limits the development of education and also stops students from studying.

Enrolment rate of vocational education is lower compared to the traditional academic education. Social perceptions also play a role. Vocational systems are still sometimes viewed as second-tier educational options meant for learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds [38, 39]. The public also questions the viability of a career and the need to attend formal vocational education for employment in future.

Technological advances pose another challenge. Advances in AI and automation are reshaping industries, with machines taking over tasks once performed by human workers, raising new challenges for skills training. There will be doubt on the need for vocational training as humans will be replaced by robots sooner or later. In some countries, the number of industrial robots already exceeds 600 per 10,000 workers [40]. Vocational education is affected as humans' skills are easily copied and repeated by robots. The labour force, hence, mainly focuses on skills related to operating, managing, and maintaining automated systems rather than replicating tasks that machines can perform.

3.0 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global economy and halted education during the lockdown period. The goals of vocational education are changing after the recovery from this pandemic disaster. Due to international exchange, the rise of global data analysis with AI, and the integration of 3C

(computer, communication, consumer electronics) products into teaching and automated production lines with robots, labour is gradually being replaced. As such, the future of vocational education seems bleak, and the effort of the graduates is not appreciated. Further study should be conducted to identify the negative impacts of AI and robots towards vocational education and the employment rate. Moreover, the effectiveness of incorporating AI into teaching should be reviewed, especially in online teaching or project presentations at an international level. Last but not least, the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of international exchange should be explored in detail. The rationale behind every new policy preference needs to be assessed for any specific interest toward a single party.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Through international exchange, there are positive impacts on the development of vocational education, including institution partnership, transnational curriculum, self-enhancement of students and teachers. Globally, the role of vocational education in economic growth is important, and transformation is necessary in adapting to the market's needs with the resources that are available. Lifelong learning and the presence of higher education for vocational education are excellent moves to change the public perception that the journey is not ended at a diploma only. Students are given the chance to study abroad in collaboration with international enterprises, similar to traditional academic education.

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