

SITUATING VENDOR TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION IN PHILIPPINE TVET

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How can vendor training and certification be situated in Philippine TVET?

I. Background

There has been discussion within the Philippine technical-vocational education and training (TVET) sector regarding vendor certification. TVET involves preparation of technicians, paraprofessionals and middle-level workers in the performance of their jobs, and the performance of these jobs require knowledge and skills on the use of specific vendor tools and equipment. Some of these vendors have their training and certification programs, and some of these programs are valued not only by employers but also by individuals undergoing the certification process.

II. Purpose of vendor training and certification

Vendor-specific training programs provide detailed instruction, and whose curriculum are focused on current and widely used technologies and products.

Some of these training programs are recognized by industry when their products enjoy relative popularity.

In a study by Watson (2008), employers gave the three main reasons for the use of vendor training and certification: 1) vendor trainers were the only suitable provider; 2) expertise was not available elsewhere; and 3) vendors provided specialized knowledge relevant to the industry. Since vendors are responsible for technological developments and innovations, vendors can be relied on to get people to learn about up-to-date and cutting-edge technology. Employers value vendor training and certification “in order to remain competitive in the adoption of new technology.” Vendor training and certification helps in ensuring that the new skills are provided in a timely, flexible, and tailor-fit to the needs of the users of vendor technology.

Also, in the study by Watson, he covered three (3) industries in New South Wales that make use of the vendor training system: retail trade, manufacturing, mining, construction and information and communications technology (ICT).

For the retail sector, vendor training is primarily used for new and emerging technologies. The division between large and small retailers is an important one from the point of view of vendor training. Product knowledge is important for all types of retailers. New technology features is more prominent for large retailers, while software systems is the focus of small retailers.

For the construction sector, it shares a similar situation with the retail sector as the smaller contractors are also focused on learning software systems like MYOB or spreadsheets, or the use of estimating packages or project management software. For the larger employers, the software training may come from vendor agents after they have set up a system, like a project management system, for the client. The very large employers get vendor training for the customized software packages that they have commissioned for development.

For the manufacturing sector, it utilizes vendor training and certification because of the new technologies and specialized knowledge that can only come from vendors.

For the ICT sector, here are some examples of vendor certifications:

Courses	Certification
IT Analytics	 Microsoft
Cloud and Virtualization	 aws
Programming	 ORACLE
IT Security	 paloalto [®] NETWORKS
Operating System	 Red Hat

Source: PSIA Presentation at the Region 6 Skills for Prosperity Capability Building 27 July 2021

Certain levels of integration of the formal education system and vendor training are also being implemented, such as the Cisco Network Academy. Vendors also utilize accredited partners to provide their training and certification.

III. Implementation of vendor training and certification

In an effort to respond to rapid technological changes and to provide students with curriculum that reflects current technology and practice, educational institutions partner with IT vendors and professional associations to offer IT certification training (Computer Science and Telecommunications Board, 2001).

Once authorized by a certification entity to deliver their curriculum, these institutions are permitted to use a variety of pre-packaged instructional materials such as software, hardware, self-study materials, online courseware, lab exercises, practice exams,

assessment tools, student communities, and technical support. Turnkey curriculums from vendors come at varying costs for schools and carry different participation requirements.

Some implementations of vendor training and certification include partnership models between the vendor and academic institutions.

According to Randall and Zirkle (2005), vendor certification programs usually dictate both the content and delivery time of the curriculum. They also provide ready-made assessments, so the difficulty arises when trying to differentiate between different educational levels using the same certification program.

In addition, according to Koziniec and Dixon (2001), vendors do not usually require any evidence of training and are not particular on how candidates prepare for their exam. These are some of the reasons why someone who was certified may not have the necessary work-relevant skills.

IV. Advantages and Disadvantages

- Advantages

As mentioned in the early part of this brief, reliance on vendor training and certification hinges on the need to be updated on the current and specific technologies, and this also satisfies the needs of companies and their workers. The rapid pace at which technology evolves creates a need for highly skilled individuals. As IT

certifications represent a standard measurement for specific IT skills, companies are seeking out professionals with these credentials, because they serve as an indication to human resource managers that specific precursory knowledge or competencies have been met.

Further to IT Certifications, Pearson VUE released the 2021 Value of IT certification report which summarized results from more than 29,000 persons who prepared for and earned IT certifications in 2020. The results below present the findings on why people pursue IT certifications:

1. 73% of respondents cited the need for IT certification because of the necessity to gain updated skills in order to keep abreast with technological changes.
2. 56% of respondents believe that IT credentials enhances their professional profiles, as well as increase their chances of career advancement and promotion.
3. 26% of respondents thought that they can use the certification to pursue other or better employment opportunities.

Figure 1. Reasons for pursuing IT certification

What prompted you to pursue an IT certification?								
Top Motivation	Global	N. America	L. America	MEA	India	G. China	Japan	Rest of APAC
Obtain skills, knowledge, or competence	72.5%	67.6%	75.6%	75.5%	73.0%	67.1%	73.6%	74.8%
Enhance professional profile and résumé	56.8%	59.4%	68.2%	63.0%	61.0%	51.7%	29.5%	63.6%
Advance or be promoted in my current job	56.2%	50.1%	64.7%	53.7%	60.7%	61.7%	43.1%	59.3%
Obtain a specific IT role	32.4%	25.3%	24.4%	40.0%	33.6%	52.5%	16.9%	34.8%
Make a job change	26.2%	30.8%	25.0%	31.6%	30.6%	22.7%	14.0%	27.9%
Fulfill a work or school requirement	19.7%	23.0%	15.5%	15.2%	12.2%	30.7%	22.7%	19.8%
Find work (I was/am under or unemployed)	13.4%	15.9%	8.1%	21.8%	16.2%	13.8%	4.4%	13.5%
Supplement my application for program or college admittance	5.6%	4.5%	6.4%	7.2%	7.9%	5.8%	0.9%	6.5%

When asked whether the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their decision to earn a certification, 30% said that it had. Many candidates found themselves with more time on their hands due to COVID-19 lockdowns. Others voiced concerns about job security. Additionally, an increased reliance on technology for remote working and learning created an urgency for candidates to gain skills in related areas.

Of those who received a certification, 28% of them received a salary or wage increase. Of those who earned a pay increase, 55% were rewarded within three (3) months of earning their credential. Within six (6) months, that jumped to 77%. 50% of candidates received a pay increase of between 6% to 20%.

Employers also benefit from certified employees because of the respondents' perceived increase in work quality, productivity, efficiency, innovation, and the ability to mentor others.

- 81% of respondents reported increased quality and value of work contributions
- 80% - greater ability to mentor and support co-workers
- 77% - increased ability to innovate and enhance work processes and outcomes
- 75% - able to perform a task or fill a role that he/she was not able to before
- 72% - increased efficiency
- 71% - increased productivity

In addition, because of the command authority of some vendors on training and certification due to the growth of their market share globally, the vendor certification is recognized by employers in other countries, and helps with the mobility of skilled labor.

- Disadvantages

Vendor certifications have indeed attracted major criticism in recent years for being too biased toward their own solutions and technology and are seen as only being interested in building a pool of trusted technicians

who know how to implement and support their product, if possible at a worldwide level. This can likely be a detriment to sound quality control. Some literature has also pointed out that the vendor training curriculum is focused solely on their product or equipment. Many vendor-specific certification programs are too focused on a particular vendor's product and does not integrate the vendor's products with different technologies.

Koziniec and Dixon (as cited by Randall and Zirkle, 2005) assert that:

1. IT certification may be perceived as too vocational for the university level,
2. vendor-sponsored curricula may carry an overt amount of marketing for the vendor's product,
3. the limited lifespan of IT certifications place pressure on instructors to achieve re-certification, and
4. certification exams are usually based on multiple choice questions that test memory and not reasoning or skills and may not be a reliable indicator to employers of a student's ability to perform in an IT job role.

Other disadvantages also include:

5. a lack of a single standard for certification because preparation is offered by several organizations, vendors, and educational institutions
6. some employers may recognize IT certification and others may not, and

7. a certification may lose its value as a result of both technology changes and as the number of people obtaining a certification increases.

One of the more important issues surrounding vendor training and certification is the use of public funds for these types of training and certification. Definitely there are costs associated with the adoption of a vendor certification program can be significant and generally fall into one of the following categories:

- **Capital setup costs** – The purchase of any necessary software and hardware.
- **Annual maintenance** – Fees associated with running the program, maintaining licenses and equipment maintenance contracts.
- Periodic equipment replacement costs for equipment-oriented certifications.
- Instructor training costs.

These costs are known or can be estimated and most institutions will use these figures to perform at least a rudimentary cost benefit analysis before deciding to adopt a certification program. Less obvious costs that can be overlooked in this process include:

- Costs attributable to new delivery formats.
- Instructor training investment, including the risk of this instructor leaving.

There should be a proper justification or cost-benefit analysis considering the sizable amount of investment. One of these justifications is whether vendor-certified individuals are better able to perform in job role than non-certified individuals.

In the study of Cegielski, Rebman, and Reithel (2003) comparing network end-users' perceptions of local area networks managed by certified network administrators to network end-users' perceptions of local area networks managed by non-certified network administrators.

The purpose of the study was to determine if certified network administrators significantly affected the end-users' perceived attitudes towards network usefulness and ease of use. The data for the study was gathered from 299 subjects from eleven different financial services firms. Six of the eleven firms, representing 173 end-users, had networks managed by a certified network administrator.

The findings of the study indicated that no significant difference exists for either perceived usefulness or perceived ease of use among between end-users of networks managed by certified network administrators and end-users of networks managed by non-certified network administrators.

The findings also provide support in contrast to the assumption that an individual holding a certification is a better facilitator of technology than a non-certified individual.

The study further points out that certification should not be used as the sole indication of competency or level of compensation in a hiring decision.

V. Vendor-neutral certification

Vendor-specific certifications and curricula are developed and monitored by a particular vendor and focus primarily on a discipline surrounding a company's technology, service, and product line. Vendor-neutral certifications are developed and monitored by a consortium of experts from industry, public, and private sectors, and focus on methodology and technology surrounding a particular job role.

A vendor-neutral certification can be considered an alternative to in order to put more technical focus, and also consider the comparison and contrast of competing technologies from various vendor training and certification programs.

Another alternative is to suggest vendor-specific certifications to become specializations that are added to more broad-based vendor-neutral certifications.

Here are the advantages of vendor-neutral certification programs:

- The independence of vendor-neutral providers allows for the creation of programs and curriculum not tied to one technology or product.

- Vendor-neutral providers offer an unbiased view, delivering a balanced coverage of topics.
- Vendor-neutrality allows the opportunity to address shortcomings or issues related to a product or technology.
- Eliminating the need to promote individual products allows vendor-independent providers to focus on relevant technology issues.
- Vendor-independent providers can develop programs that cover products from more than one manufacturer, thereby providing a more realistic perspective.
- The generic nature of vendor-neutral certification often makes it well-suited for those new to the IT industry.
- They provide a certification option for those who have not yet chosen a product specialization.

VI. TESDA Initiatives

TESDA recognizes the need for the TVET system to be agile and flexible in order to be able to respond to the changing labor market demands for skills and competencies. This also requires TESDA to have a system where it can ensure supply and availability of workforce that possess the necessary skills and competencies. TESDA can truly look into and consider vendor and other industry and globally recognized training and certifications in its various programs, as these certifications can form part of a demand-driven TVET.

Here are some TESDA programs where these trainings and certifications can be incorporated in:

- **Micro-credentialing**

Through micro-credentialing, TESDA recognizes small and discrete learning, as well as credentialing existing knowledge and skills. These micro-credentials can then be used by graduates or workers as part of their portfolio of skills that are transferrable across jobs. Those that have trained and have gained certification from vendor-based programs can gain their Micro-credential Certificate of Achievement for as long as these programs meet the requirements of TESDA's quality assurance system.

- **Tulong Trabaho Scholarship Program**

The Selected Training Programs (STPs) eligible for the Tulong Trabaho Scholarship Program takes into consideration the new and emerging skills requirements, as well as the industry-specific and area-based skills requirements that are not covered by Training Regulations. Vendor training and certifications may fall in any of these STP types. Companies, industry groups and MSMEs can propose their identified requirements through the Tulong Trabaho Scholarship Program, and be subject to the requirements for the recognition of TESDA.

VII. Way Forward

1. The pursuit of demand-driven TVET by TESDA is to be able to be adequately responsive to the skills requirements of the industry. It is noted in this brief that there is a reliance of employers on workers who are skilled in particular technologies where the vendor or those that they have accredited, can provide in terms of training and in recognizing individuals' skills through their certification mechanisms.

Seeing that those skilled in the technologies are necessary for the industry, TESDA can incorporate industry-recognized vendor training and certification in its arsenal of programs in order to satisfy the alignment with industry needs while fulfilling its mandate of developing Filipino middle-level manpower.

In addition, vendor training and certification have long been part of TESDA's conversations with its industry partners and stakeholders. This paper seeks to shed light on the advantages and disadvantages of investing in vendor training and certification.

Considering this, TESDA may consider implementing the vendor-neutral route of training and certification, and consider competing vendors in order to not be too biased on particular vendors or technologies.

Further, incorporating any form of vendor training and certification in the current and future TVET programs, if they are to be funded using public funds, require proper justification such as a cost-benefit analysis.

TESDA may consider preparing a concept paper that will provide information specific to the Philippines to make better and more informed decisions on vendor training and certification, which can be used in the development of corresponding policies. This includes but not limited to the following:

- o Current workforce indicators related to projected labor demands and skill shortages for vendor certifications
- o The number and types of vendor training and certification programs currently in place
- o The list of institutions offering vendor training and certification broken down by type of certification
- o The number of students enrolled in each of these training and certification programs, and their retention rate
- o The certification rate of students or participants of the vendor certification programs

- Appropriateness of the vendor training and certification program to TVET
- Benefits of vendor training and certification to students
- The vendor training and certification program costs and contractual obligations by vendor
- The vendor training and certification costs per student

Further, it is recommended that the agency through its Certification Office, will establish a policy on the recognition of vendors that will facilitate the certification. With the new developments like the area-based and demand driven TVET and the Tulong Trabaho Act, 4IR which resulted in creation of new jobs; a clear reference on the requirements and process in implementing vendor training and certification is an urgent concern of the agency.

2. The Recognized Industry Board (RIBS) at the national and regional levels can both provide assistance in providing TESDA signals and information on the different certifications being used in their respective sectors/industries.
3. Vendor certification should also be considered in the context of the area-based and demand driven TVET as this will support ensuring the quality of the TVET graduates especially on programs that are specific to the region or to the province.
4. Vendor certification can also contribute or influence the development of TVET Trainers as this will provide TVET trainers a wider range of competencies that can help them in the delivery of programs and development of their learning materials.

Further, in the future trainers acquisition of certification by different entities (national or international) should as well be given corresponding recognition.

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