

Social and Political importance of CTE

Career and technical education combine academic skills with technical skills and focuses on providing training for these skills so that students can succeed in the future labour market. The labour market is extremely competitive in today's world. Especially during Covid-19, unemployment rates are high, due to which many people have been finding it hard to fulfill their basic needs. A report by CBPP (2022) found that the unemployment rate during April 2020 was the highest since 1930, and was recorded to be at 4.9% in October 2020. The pandemic led to a virtual work environment and the trend of working remotely became popular which is being adopted in most places even after the pandemic is mostly gone. Due to pandemic and work from home culture, downsizing happened because there was no need for a lot of workers. Another aspect of the importance of CTE can be seen through the lens of technological advances in the world. In the last few decades, industries have moved towards more machine and technology-based operations, and it has become important to teach students and the workforce to be competent in such technological fields to get jobs and compete in the labour market. CTE has various implications for social and political aspects of society and the importance of these aspects must be understood by parents as they serve as the external stakeholders in this scenario. CTE provides students with skills that can help them succeed in the labour market which is why it has the potential to drive policy making in the employment and education sectors. Career and technical education can be important in dealing with social issues like unemployment, gender gap, and dropout ratio, and CTE can become the platform for student empowerment and for policymakers to use as a benchmark to drive industrial and educational policies.

Career and technical education can prove effective in reducing unemployment. Prior to Covid, CTE was proven to be effective and gave significant return rates when the earnings of the students, who completed CTE, were analyzed. Students who cannot afford a four-year college

degree see CTE as an effective alternative. But the studies in past showed a decline in earnings among students who did not receive a four-year degree. A study by Stevens and colleagues (2019) observed the effects of CTE in a community college in California and analyzed the return rates. Results showed that the return rates from CTE ranged from 14% to 45%, with a majority return rate in the healthcare sector. The non-health-related sectors reported a return of 15-23%. The results of this study showed how CTE has proved to be one of the few concrete pathways to encourage increased earnings and a better lifestyle among students that do not possess a four-year degree. Thus, the importance of CTE in reducing unemployment among students with less than a four-year college degree is significant.

Another area where CTE can prove to be helpful is reducing the dropout rates among students. A vast majority of students all over America drop out of college at one point or another due to various reasons. According to Volsova (2020), approximately 33% of students drop out of college every year whereas 57% of students take longer than six years to complete their degree. This dropout rate can be due to various reasons, but it must be solved in order to ensure a competitive job for students in the labour market. One of the ways to address the issue of dropout rates is career and technology education. CTE has been linked with a decrease in the trend of dropout rates. A study by Gottfried and Plasman (2018) observed the impact of CTE on the dropout rates and compared the effectiveness of CTE in degree completion rate when it is implemented at different stages. The results showed that when implemented in the later stages of the high school degree, CTE proved to be effective in reducing the dropout rates and ensuring completion of the degree on time. The study showed that students who took part in a higher number of courses provided by CTE had fewer chances of dropping out and higher chances of graduating on time. Another reason for dropout rates is the high costs of four-year degrees which

most low-income students cannot afford. The cost of a four-year degree in the U.S. in 2017-2018 was \$20,770 for public and \$46,950 for private colleges (Song, 2019). Due to these higher costs, students saw CTE as an alternative to a four-year degree as CTE had funding like Perkins V which makes CTE almost 100% free. Thus, the role of CTE is clear in order to reduce the dropout rates among students, which is why CTE should be given the importance that it needs to increase graduation rates and encourage enrollment in CTE courses.

CTE should be focused on reducing the gender gap in various courses. For a long time, there have been a few fields that have been dominated by men. One of such fields is STEM education, in which women are underrepresented. According to a study by Hamilton and colleagues (2015), STEM courses had a higher male participation (64.1%) as compared to women (35.9%) and other courses of CTE showed opposite trend with a female majority. For a long time, gender gap has been in society and has assigned certain roles to men and taken them away from women. CTE can be used to reduce this trend and provide higher gender equity. A study by Chuang and others (2019) suggested that with proper policies and frameworks, CTE could be used to reduce the gender gap and increase equity. The study claimed that this gender gap was due to limited access for female students to schools and sexual healthcare services which reduced the participation of females in educational activities. The study suggested that by incorporating appropriate policies which allow women easy access to schools and sexual healthcare services female participation in CTE can be increased. The study also suggested that the perception of society and parents towards women in STEM subjects must be changed and science and math clubs should be made for girls. Another approach suggested by the study was to visit girls in school and encourage them to develop an interest in STEM subjects. Thus, by proper policies and training, gender equity in CTE can be improved.

CTE can be used to empower students and inspire policymaking for increased job opportunities. Student empowerment is, to some extent, a political idea as it creates a sense of community in students and makes them aware of their responsibilities to the community. A study by Luaces and others (2018) described CTE as an emerging platform for promoting student empowerment and suggested that CTE helped in the attainment of bachelor's degrees and reduced dropout rates, which ultimately led to increased employment rates in students. For policymakers, employment is one of the most important factors when it comes to making policies in favor of students. A study by Blissett (2020) suggested that the ability of CTE to resolve problems like unemployment, involvement of local businesses, and local flexibility compelled policymakers to make policies in favor of Perkins V, which could make it possible for all CTE programs to be 100% free. From this development, the importance of CTE becomes quite clear as the evidence has shown the effectiveness of CTE and it still works as a driving factor for policymaking. These policies, when implemented, can lead to an increase in the employment rate and literacy as well as provide big companies and industries with the workforce that they need. Thus, the political importance of CTE can be understood through its ability to empower students and provide the workforce for large and small businesses.

Industries benefit from CTE as well because it provides skilled labour. The social impact of CTE cannot be ignored as it proves helpful in removing the unemployment rate, gender gap, and dropout ratios from schools, which ultimately works in the favor of all students regardless of their race and gender. Evidence has shown various occasions where CTE proved to be a significant factor in reducing unemployment by providing skills and reducing dependency on a four-year degree. CTE was also linked with the decrease in dropout ratios as higher involvement in CTE courses is linked with higher on-time graduations, and it did not put any extra financial

pressure on the student. There are studies that point out the importance of CTE in reducing the gender gap and suggest a CTE framework in order to reduce the gender gap. The political aspect of the CTE has always been concerned with preparing the youth for the future labour market and providing skilled labour for large and small businesses, which can help them thrive and ultimately help the economy of the country. Studies have shown how the success of CTE in that area has motivated policymakers in making policies that facilitate students and promote CTE. CTE is not perfect, and it needs to remove the factors of discrimination and the gender gap that exist. Policy makers must ensure that CTE becomes more inclusive and up to date, in order equip students with skills that will help them compete in the modern labour market.

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