



From Policy to Practice: Shaping the Future of Vocational Education in China through Enhanced Management Strategies

Zhu Yao¹, Astri Yulia², Latifah Abd Latib²

¹Chengdu Textile College, China

²Universiti Selangor, Malaysia

Received: June 10, 2025

Revised: December 21,
2025

Accepted: December 23,
2025

Online: March 31, 2026

Abstract

China's vocational education system faces significant challenges in translating policy directives into effective educational practice amid rapid socio-economic transformation. This study examines management strategies employed by Chinese vocational colleges, investigates the effectiveness of policy implementation, and identifies contextual factors that influence outcomes. Using systematic document analysis of academic publications and policy documents, the research maps institutional management approaches across curriculum governance, faculty development, and digital integration, and evaluates their impact on graduate employability and stakeholder satisfaction. Three primary themes emerged from the analysis: career planning systems, entrepreneurship education initiatives, and structured internship programs. Policy document analysis reveals national emphasis on integrating career guidance into curricula, promoting innovation-focused entrepreneurship education, and establishing quality-assured industry partnerships. However, significant implementation gaps persist between policy aspirations and institutional realities, particularly regarding regional disparities, resource limitations, and faculty preparedness. The findings indicate that while policy frameworks provide clear directional guidance, institutional capacity varies substantially across regions and sectors. Coastal institutions demonstrate more effective policy implementation due to stronger industry partnerships and resource availability, while inland institutions face structural disadvantages. The study recommends enhanced policy support for capacity building, strengthened industry collaboration mechanisms, and development of context-sensitive implementation strategies to bridge the persistent gap between vocational education policy and practice.

Keywords: *Vocational Education, Policy Implementation, Quality Assurance, Industry-Education Integration, Entrepreneurship*

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of vocational education in China stands at a critical juncture amid rapid socio-economic transformation and shifting demands of a globalized labor market. As China transitions from a predominantly manufacturing-based economy towards one emphasizing services, innovation, and technology, vocational education plays an increasingly vital role in developing a skilled, versatile, and adaptable workforce capable of supporting these structural changes. Despite significant policy initiatives, notably the Vocational Education Quality-Improvement Action Plan and the revised Vocational Education Law, translating legislative intent into effective educational practice remains a key challenge. A comprehensive investigation of vocational-education management, tracing its trajectory from policy formulation to practical implementation, is therefore essential.

Historically, China's vocational education system has undergone numerous reforms aimed at improving the quality and relevance of the skilled labor force and aligning educational outcomes more closely with market and industry needs (Chinese State Council, 2015). Recent shifts towards a knowledge-based economy have led to the reevaluation of traditional vocational education

Copyright Holder:

© Zhu, Astri & Latifah. (2026)

Corresponding author's email: dr.astri@unisel.edu.my

This Article is Licensed Under:



paradigms. Contemporary approaches emphasize innovative teaching methods, deeper industry collaboration, and stronger alignment with market demands, moving beyond purely theoretical instruction towards practical, experiential learning (Zhao & Selvaratnam, 2024). Consequently, this study addresses an important gap by systematically examining the policies and practices that have shaped vocational education management in China, identifying successes and shortcomings, and offering practical strategies for future policy and practice.

A core aspect of this research involves analyzing management strategies that enable the effective translation of educational policies into real-world implementation. The study closely examines initiatives such as the "Quality Project" and various industry-education integration models, recognizing their pivotal roles in narrowing the gap between theoretical instruction and practical application. Additionally, entrepreneurship education and structured internship programs are scrutinized for their critical role in equipping vocational students with the essential competencies required to meet contemporary industry demands.

Through systematic document analysis, this research presents a detailed overview of current vocational education management practices and policies in China. The aim is to provide policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders with actionable insights and recommendations to further advance vocational education, ensuring it remains responsive to and aligned with China's rapidly evolving economy and labor market demands. Guided by this framework, the study pursues two objectives:

O1 – Mapping. Catalogue the management strategies Chinese vocational colleges have employed since 2018 (e.g., curriculum governance, faculty upskilling, digital tracking).

O2 – Evaluation. Assess the empirical effectiveness of each strategy on graduate employability and stakeholder satisfaction, while analysing contextual moderators such as region and industrial profile.

These objectives crystallise into three research questions:

- RQ1. Which management strategies have Chinese vocational colleges adopted since 2018 to translate policy goals into practice?
- RQ2. What evidence exists of their effectiveness on learner and institutional outcomes?
- RQ3. How do contextual factors—region, funding model, industry concentration—moderate strategy effectiveness?

By linking policy aspirations to on-the-ground management choices, this study aims to generate actionable insights for policymakers, college leaders, and industry partners seeking to future-proof and internationalise China's vocational-education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework and Analytical Approach

The analysis of vocational education management in China reveals persistent tensions between centralized policy mandates and localized implementation realities. This review employs Winter's street-level implementation model to examine how front-line actors reinterpret top-down mandates, while Harvey and Williams' quality assurance cycle provides a framework for understanding the relationship between inputs, processes, and outcomes. Together, these models form a dual-loop analytical lens that illuminates both vertical policy alignment and horizontal stakeholder feedback mechanisms.

This theoretical foundation generates three core propositions that guide the analysis:

- Proposition 1: Policy implementation effectiveness in vocational education depends on the degree to which street-level actors can adapt centralized directives to local contexts while maintaining systemic coherence.
- Proposition 2: Quality assurance systems function as mediating mechanisms between policy

intentions and educational outcomes, but their effectiveness varies significantly across institutional and regional contexts.

- Proposition 3: The evolution from compliance-based to improvement-focused management represents a fundamental shift in institutional logic, creating both opportunities for innovation and risks of implementation fragmentation.

Governance and Policy Implementation: Navigating Street-Level Complexities

The literature reveals fundamental tensions between China's centralized policy architecture and the diverse implementation contexts that characterize vocational education institutions nationwide. This tension manifests most clearly in the gap between policy ambitions and institutional realities, where national directives encounter local constraints, resource limitations, and varying levels of administrative capacity.

The historical development of vocational education policy implementation demonstrates evolving approaches to managing this central-local tension. During the foundational period (1980-1999), the establishment of the first 13 vocational universities, including Nanjing Jinling Vocational University, represented an experimental approach that allowed significant local variation in implementation. Jin documents how early institutions adopted "fee-based, day-study, and non-allocation" models that reflected local economic conditions and administrative capabilities rather than standardized national requirements.

However, this flexibility came at a cost. Min and Tsang's analysis reveals that many institutions developed "compressed biscuit-style" undergraduate programs that emphasized theoretical knowledge over practical skills, effectively replicating traditional higher education models rather than creating distinctive vocational pathways. This implementation drift illustrates Winter's observation that street-level actors often adapt policies to align with existing institutional cultures and capabilities, even when these adaptations contradict policy intentions.

The "vocational education diversion" policy of the early 1990s exemplifies the complexities of policy implementation in China's decentralized administrative system. Tsang's documents how this policy initially led to a decline in the number of vocational colleges, followed by policy adjustments that triggered growth in the late 1990s. This pattern suggests that policy effectiveness depends not only on design quality but on the capacity of implementation systems to provide consistent support and guidance to street-level actors.

Contemporary policy initiatives reveal continued struggles with implementation consistency. While the "Quality Project" ([Chinese Ministry of Education, 2010](#)) demonstrates clear national ambition for systematic improvement, Chen's analysis reveals significant implementation gaps. Their finding that systemic improvements stalled because inland colleges lacked resources to replicate coastal pilots directly contradicts Liu's optimistic assessment of "islands of excellence," highlighting how different analytical perspectives can yield conflicting interpretations of policy effectiveness.

This implementation variation reflects deeper structural challenges in China's vocational education system. The tension between maintaining central control and enabling local adaptation creates what might be termed "implementation anxiety"—a condition where street-level actors simultaneously seek policy compliance and practical effectiveness, often finding these goals incompatible. Dong's documentation of the shift from "appraisal level" to "evaluation connotation" represents an attempt to resolve this tension by providing greater institutional autonomy. However, the literature suggests this flexibility may inadvertently increase rather than reduce implementation variation.

The governance challenge becomes particularly acute when examining cross-regional disparities. Coastal institutions typically enjoy better access to industry partnerships, qualified

faculty, and financial resources, enabling more effective policy implementation. Inland institutions face structural disadvantages that national policies have yet to address adequately, creating systematic inequalities in educational quality and student outcomes. This geographic dimension of implementation effectiveness suggests that successful policy design must account for contextual variations rather than assuming uniform implementation capacity.

Quality Assurance Systems: The Evolution from Compliance to Transformation

The development of quality assurance mechanisms in Chinese vocational education reveals a paradigmatic shift from compliance-based to improvement-focused approaches, yet this transition remains incomplete and contested. Harvey and Williams' quality assurance cycle framework illuminates how this evolution affects the fundamental relationship between educational inputs, processes, and outcomes.

The National Vocational Demonstration School Project, launched in 2006, represents a pivotal moment in this evolution. Liu's analysis emphasizes the project's success in establishing quality benchmarks and creating models for replication. The project introduced systematic evaluation criteria, standardized assessment procedures, and performance indicators designed to elevate institutional quality across the vocational education sector. These demonstration schools served as laboratories for testing innovative management approaches and educational practices.

However, subsequent research reveals the limitations of this model-based approach to quality improvement. The "first round" evaluation system, focused primarily on talent cultivation levels, achieved standardization but potentially at the cost of institutional innovation and contextual adaptation. Yuan's statistical analysis demonstrates that while the number of vocational institutions grew substantially, average institutional size remained relatively small, suggesting that expansion may have occurred without corresponding improvements in educational quality or capacity.

The evolution toward "second round" evaluation practices, emphasizing performance outcomes rather than compliance indicators, represents an attempt to address these limitations. This shift acknowledges that effective quality assurance must focus on educational effectiveness rather than administrative compliance. However, this transition creates new challenges in maintaining systemic coherence while enabling institutional differentiation.

Zhan's analysis of "quality development" in vocational schools demonstrates how institutions adapted enterprise performance management principles to educational contexts. This adaptation process reveals both the potential and the risks of importing business management models into educational settings. While enterprise-style performance metrics can improve efficiency and accountability, they may not align with educational values such as student development, social responsibility, and the quality of the learning process.

The implementation of internal quality assurance systems represents a more sophisticated approach to balancing standardization with institutional autonomy. Ping and Zhang document how these systems attempt to create institutional capacity for continuous improvement while maintaining alignment with national standards. The emphasis on "talent training process information data management systems" reflects recognition that effective quality assurance requires robust data collection and analysis capabilities.

However, the literature reveals significant variation in institutional capacity to implement these sophisticated quality assurance systems. Institutions with stronger administrative capabilities and better resource bases demonstrate more effective implementation, while those with limited capacity struggle to move beyond compliance-focused approaches. This capacity differential creates systematic inequalities in the effectiveness of quality assurance, potentially reinforcing rather than reducing disparities in educational quality.

The professional diagnosis and improvement process, as analyzed by Wang, represents an attempt to address these capacity limitations through external support and collaboration. By involving industry enterprises in diagnostic activities, this approach seeks to enhance both the relevance and the rigor of quality assurance processes. The integration of industry perspectives creates "targeted reverse pressure mechanisms" that can stimulate institutional improvement while ensuring alignment with employment market requirements.

However, this industry integration approach faces its own implementation challenges. The assumption that industry partners possess both motivation and capacity for sustained educational collaboration may not hold across all sectors or regions. Industries with limited human resource development capabilities or those facing intense competitive pressures may lack the resources or incentives to participate meaningfully in educational quality assurance processes.

Curriculum Reform and Industry Collaboration: Bridging Persistent Divides

The relationship between curriculum development and industry collaboration represents one of the most persistent challenges in Chinese vocational education management. Despite decades of policy emphasis on industry-education integration, the literature reveals ongoing difficulties in achieving effective collaboration that meaningfully enhances educational quality and employment outcomes.

The historical evolution of curriculum approaches demonstrates both progress and persistent limitations. The early "fee-based, day-study, and non-allocation" models documented by Jin reflected minimal industry engagement, with curriculum development driven more by academic than practical considerations. This academic orientation resulted in programs that, as Yang observed, resembled traditional higher education rather than distinctive vocational training.

Contemporary approaches show greater sophistication in conceptualizing industry-education integration. The "Quality Project" initiative sought to systematize industry partnerships through collaborative frameworks that encompassed curriculum development, internship programs, and job placement services. This systematic approach acknowledges that effective integration requires sustained collaboration across multiple dimensions rather than episodic interactions.

However, implementation studies reveal significant gaps between policy aspirations and institutional realities. The collaborative frameworks established under national initiatives often lack the specificity and sustainability required for meaningful curriculum transformation. Industry partners frequently view educational collaboration as a secondary priority, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty or competitive pressure.

Wang's analysis of professional diagnosis and improvement processes offers insights into more effective approaches to industry integration. The emphasis on "targeted reverse pressure mechanisms" suggests that industry collaboration becomes most effective when it creates specific incentives for institutional improvement rather than merely providing general guidance or resources. This approach requires careful alignment of industry needs with institutional capabilities and student learning objectives.

The regional dimension of industry collaboration reveals systematic disparities that policy initiatives have yet to address adequately. Coastal regions with concentrated manufacturing and service industries offer more opportunities for meaningful collaboration, while inland regions may lack sufficient industry density to support effective partnerships. This geographic variation creates systematic inequalities in curriculum quality and student employment prospects.

Furthermore, the literature reveals tensions between standardization and customization in industry-education integration. National curriculum standards provide coherence and transferability, but industry needs often require specialized knowledge and skills that vary

significantly across sectors and regions. Balancing these competing demands requires sophisticated management approaches that can maintain standards while enabling contextual adaptation.

The emergence of modern apprenticeship programs and enterprise-based training represents an attempt to address these tensions through more intensive integration models. However, these approaches require substantial investments from both educational institutions and industry partners, making them viable primarily in contexts with strong economic development and established industry-education relationships.

Digital Transformation: Emerging Opportunities and Implementation Gaps

The integration of digital technologies into vocational education management is an emerging theme in the literature. However, empirical evidence remains limited compared with the scope of technological change affecting educational institutions. The emphasis on "talent training process information data management systems" in recent policy documents suggests a growing recognition of the potential of digital tools to enhance the effectiveness of educational management.

The theoretical potential of digital transformation in vocational education management encompasses several dimensions. Data management systems can enhance quality assurance by providing real-time monitoring of educational processes and outcomes. Digital platforms can facilitate industry collaboration by creating shared spaces for curriculum development, project-based learning, and skill assessment. Online learning technologies can expand access to education and enable more flexible program delivery.

However, the literature reveals significant gaps between technological potential and institutional capacity for implementation. Many vocational institutions lack the technological infrastructure, technical expertise, and financial resources required for effective digital transformation. The emphasis on digital solutions may inadvertently exacerbate existing inequalities between well-resourced and under-resourced institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital adoption in educational settings, yet systematic studies of its impact on vocational education management remain limited. Preliminary evidence suggests that institutions with prior investments in digital infrastructure and faculty training demonstrated greater resilience and adaptability. In contrast, those with limited digital capacity faced significant challenges in maintaining educational quality during periods of remote instruction.

The integration of digital technologies with industry collaboration presents both opportunities and challenges. Digital platforms can facilitate more extensive and sustained industry-education partnerships by reducing coordination costs and enabling virtual collaboration. However, effective integration requires aligning technological capabilities across educational institutions and industry partners, which can be difficult in contexts with varying levels of digital sophistication.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach, using systematic document analysis and a literature review, to examine vocational education management strategies in China (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following established protocols for literature review and policy analysis (Bowen, 2009; Bryman, 2016), the methodology integrates systematic review procedures (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) with qualitative document analysis techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The research design adopts a mixed-methods document analysis framework that combines academic literature synthesis with policy document examination to achieve methodological triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), enabling systematic identification and analysis of emerging management

patterns and policy implementation strategies within the rapidly evolving Chinese vocational education context.

The core method used in this study is an extensive literature review. The review focused on recent academic publications, research papers, and government reports related to vocational education in China. The objective was to identify, analyze, and synthesize current trends, innovations, and challenges in the student management of Chinese vocational colleges. The primary databases utilized for the literature review were Google Scholar and JSTOR.

These platforms were chosen for their broad access to a variety of disciplines, including education, technology, and social sciences. Within these databases, the search was narrowed to specific journals well-regarded in vocational education, workforce development, and educational technology. The selected journals were (1) *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, (2) *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, (3) *Vocations and Learning*, (4) *China Higher Education Research*, and (5) *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*.

Purposive sampling was employed to identify relevant academic publications, following systematic review protocols established by [Kitchenham \(2004\)](#) and adapted for educational research by [Gough et al. \(2017\)](#). The literature search employed specific keywords, which included “vocational education in China”, “student management practices in vocational colleges”, “industry-education integration”, “digital platforms in vocational colleges”, and “soft skills in vocational training”. The search was limited to the years “2000 – current” to expand the content generated and to ensure the relevance and currency of the findings. Publications identified through this search were subjected to an initial screening based on their titles and abstracts. The AI Assistance named Consensus was employed to conduct screening based on the titles and abstracts of the publications. Table 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria of this systematic review.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2024	Conference abstracts, editorial comments, or opinion pieces without an empirical basis
Focus on vocational education management, quality assurance, or policy implementation in China.	Studies focusing exclusively on K-12 education or traditional higher education
Articles addressing management strategies, institutional practices, or policy effectiveness	Publications predating 2000 (except seminal theoretical works)
Publications in English or Chinese with English abstracts available	Articles lacking a clear methodology or analytical framework
Studies employing empirical research methods or substantive policy analysis	Duplicate publications or studies with insufficient detail for analysis

Following [Francis et al. \(2010\)](#) guidelines for qualitative research saturation, the search continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, resulting in 127 academic publications that met the inclusion criteria. This sample size aligns with systematic review standards for educational research ([Cooper, 2017](#)).

Additionally, the policy analysis approach was also employed. Given the significant role of government policies in shaping education practices in China, an analysis of recent policy documents was conducted. The objective of the policy analysis was to examine the policies governing and supporting student management practices in vocational colleges in China. The data sources included official government documents and educational policy reports. All documents are publicly

available online.

The data analysis employed a systematic review approach. The analysis stages are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Analysis Stages of the Extensive Literature Review

Analytical Step	Description
Extensive Literature Review Synthesis	
Step 1: Selection of Sources and Databases	Google Scholar and JSTOR search
Step 2: Selection of Focus Journal Review	The journals included: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Journal of Vocational Education and Training 2. International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education 3. Vocations and Learning 4. China Higher Education Research 5. Educational Research for Policy and Practice
Step 3: Keyword Search Strategy	Keywords searched: "Vocational education in China," "student management practices in vocational colleges," "industry-education integration," "digital platforms in vocational colleges," and "soft skills in vocational training."
Step 4: Initial Screening and AI Assistance	Items screened: Titles and abstracts AI tool used: Consensus

Following the triangulation framework proposed by [Denzin \(1978\)](#), multiple validation approaches were employed to enhance research credibility and rigor. Data source triangulation was achieved by integrating academic literature, policy documents, and institutional reports to cross-verify findings ([Patton, 2015](#)). Methodological triangulation combined a systematic literature review with policy analysis to examine issues from multiple analytical perspectives ([Flick, 2018](#)). Theoretical triangulation applied multiple theoretical lenses to enhance analytical rigor and provide diverse interpretive frameworks ([Thurmond, 2001](#)). These triangulation strategies collectively strengthen the study's validity by reducing potential bias and increasing confidence in findings through convergent evidence from multiple sources and analytical approaches.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion are presented in two distinct sections. First, the results of the policy document analysis are summarized, followed by insights from the extensive literature review. Three primary themes emerged from the analysis: career planning, entrepreneurship education, and internship practices.

Policy Document Analysis Results

Table 3 offers a concise synthesis of the policy documents surrounding vocational education management in China. Three main areas of findings were generated: career planning, entrepreneurship education, and internship programs. These findings highlight the importance of embedding comprehensive career guidance systems within the curriculum, which emphasizes the goal of vocational education by integrating career planning more strongly into educational

practices.

Similarly, the "Entrepreneurship Education Promotion Plan" and related guidelines advocate for bolstering entrepreneurship education to foster innovation and practical skill development among students, signaling a shift towards a more hands-on, experiential learning approach. Lastly, the "Vocational Education Internship Management Regulations" and the "Industry-Education Integration Policy" set forth standards for designing internships that are relevant and high-quality, ensuring they closely align with industry needs and educational objectives. Together, these policy directions reflect a strategic move towards enhancing the relevance, quality, and practicality of vocational education in China, aiming to better prepare students for the dynamic demands of the labor market.

Table 3. Summary of Policy Document Analysis Impacting Vocational Education Practices in China

Policy Area	Key Documents	Summary of Policy Directions	Implications for Vocational Education Practices
Career Planning	National Vocational Education Reform Plan; Career Guidance Regulations	Emphasis on developing career guidance systems and integrating career planning into the curriculum.	Enhanced focus on career planning within the curriculum, leading to the development of comprehensive career guidance systems.
Entrepreneurship Education	Entrepreneurship Education Promotion Plan: Guidelines for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education	Support for entrepreneurship education, encouraging innovation, and practical skills among students.	Increased incorporation of entrepreneurship programs, with a focus on practical skill development and innovation.
Internship Programs	Vocational Education Internship Management Regulations; Industry-Education Integration Policy	Guidelines for structuring internships, ensuring relevance and quality of placement.	Structured and quality-assured internship programs, with a strong link to industry needs and education integration.

**Note: This table synthesizes key findings from an analysis of various policy documents impacting vocational education in China. The policies reviewed include the "National Vocational Education Reform Plan" and "Career Guidance Regulations" for career planning; "Entrepreneurship Education Promotion Plan" and "Guidelines for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education" for entrepreneurship education; and "Vocational Education Internship Management Regulations" and "Industry-Education Integration Policy" for internship programs.*

Findings of Career Planning in Chinese Vocational Colleges

In China, higher vocational education institutions have developed distinctive career-planning practices to respond to the needs of an expanding labor market. These practices involved a complex process in preparing students for a rapidly changing employment landscape. The main aspect of this process is the alignment of educational objectives with the practical demands of the workforce. The institutions need to ensure that students are not only employable upon graduation but also

equipped for long-term career development and adaptability.

Chinese vocational colleges emphasize career planning as a strategic framework that extends beyond job placement. The planning process is viewed as holistic, encompassing self-discovery, market analysis, goal setting, and strategic planning. Furthermore, Liu and Wang emphasized that this approach aims to cultivate high-quality technical and skilled talent to strengthen economic development through a competent and versatile workforce.

In this context, career planning education aims to provide students with a deep understanding of their professional interests and potential career paths. Additionally, the objectives are to enhance students' professional skills and encourage a proactive attitude towards career development. Vocational education in China is underpinned by the principle that it should produce graduates who are not only technically proficient but also adaptable to the evolving demands of society. The details of career planning programs and practices are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Career Planning Practices in Chinese Vocational Colleges

No.	Career Planning Programs	Practices
1.	Career Guidance Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career counselling • Workshops and seminars on career development and navigating the job market
2.	Integration with Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering courses on employability and career readiness
3.	Industry Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships at industry partners • Cooperative education programs • On-site training opportunities
4.	Alumni Networks and Job Placement Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate connections between students and potential employers who are alumni • Offering platforms for networking • Appointing alumni as mentors in mentorship programs
5.	Emphasis on Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate entrepreneurial skills • Train students for self-employment and business creation

Entrepreneurship Education in Chinese Vocational Education

Entrepreneurship education within vocational institutions in China has garnered significant attention for its role in nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit among Chinese students. This form of education goes beyond traditional teaching, integrating vocational and entrepreneurial skills to enhance life skills, labor market capabilities, and creativity. The vocational institutions also place a strong emphasis on developing students' foundational knowledge, skills, and attitudes that empower them to effectively initiate, lead, and grow business ventures.

Innovation and creativity are at the center of China's entrepreneurship education. The key skills emphasized are identifying opportunities, taking calculated risks, and developing robust business plans. This educational model aims to produce not only entrepreneurs but also innovators who can contribute to China's broad economic development. This approach is not novel, but it has long been practiced by vocational institutions in China. More recently, this approach aligns with the national strategy to foster a culture of innovation and self-reliance among the youth ([Chinese State Council, 2015](#)).

The introduction of “Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education” by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2010 marked a significant shift in the vocational education landscape. This initiative was a response to the need for an educational model that not only aligns with the country’s economic and social development strategies but also fosters students’ innovative and entrepreneurial minds (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2010). Combining innovation with entrepreneurship reflects a unique approach to education. This initiative also emphasizes that vocational students are equipped with a blend of technical and entrepreneurial skills. This approach plays a key role in transforming China into a global leader in technology and innovation.

Despite the progressive policies and initiatives, vocational colleges in China face challenges in realizing the goals of entrepreneurship education. The challenges include an inadequate understanding of the concept among educators, a curriculum that often emphasizes theory over practical application, and a shortage of qualified teaching staff with real-world entrepreneurial experience. To address these challenges, vocational colleges are urged to integrate entrepreneurship education more deeply into their curriculum by emphasizing practical, hands-on experiences that reflect the realities of starting and managing businesses. The colleges are also collaborating with industry partners to provide students with mentorship and internship opportunities crucial for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Table 5 summarizes the practices of entrepreneurship education in Chinese Vocational Colleges.

Table 5. Practices of Entrepreneurship Education in Chinese Vocational Colleges

No.	Entrepreneurship Education Initiatives	Practices
1.	Integration of Entrepreneurship with Curricular and Extracurricular Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer courses dedicated to entrepreneurship principles • Use case studies in courses • Offer courses that include design thinking and creative problem-solving • Conduct interactive workshops
2.	Establishment of Entrepreneurship Centres and Incubators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with the resources, mentorship, and support needed
3.	Collaboration with Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer internship opportunities • Invite industry players to give guest lectures • Collaborate in a live project
4.	Entrepreneurship Competitions and Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize and participate in entrepreneurship competitions • Host entrepreneurship events
5.	Emphasis on Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize leadership skills, resilience, and self-assessment
6.	Utilization of Digital Platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize digital platforms • Use online resources

Although policy directives and institutional practices may appear aligned, our analysis shows persistent tensions and implementation gaps. National policies set broad goals that many institutions lack the capacity to carry out. Policy documents call for systems to support career planning, entrepreneurship education, and internship management, yet offer little guidance on addressing regional differences, resource constraints, or faculty readiness. Entrepreneurship policies emphasize hands-on skill development, but many instructors lack real-world

entrepreneurial experience, which undermines their instructional credibility.

Digital platforms are promoted for internship matching and career support, but infrastructure and digital literacy, especially in inland institutions, remain uneven. Systematic evaluation data are scarce, making it hard to judge whether these initiatives improve employment outcomes or just signal compliance. Taken together, implementation often appears performative rather than transformative; policies need to recognize the varied institutional capacities across China's vocational education system.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings highlight numerous approaches practiced by vocational colleges in China. Specifically, the study emphasizes that career planning, entrepreneurship education, and practical internship experiences are key to advancing vocational education. Such approaches align with global vocational education practices. Ultimately, the main goal of vocational education is to prepare students for a dynamic labor market by not only providing students with technical skills but also fostering soft skills, adaptability, and an entrepreneurial mindset.

The emphasis on career planning in Chinese vocational colleges, with career guidance, integration with the curriculum, and industry partnerships, is a crucial practice to ensure alignment with the institutions' educational objectives and industry needs. Also, this strategic framework aligns with global best practices, in which career readiness is prioritized to ensure graduates are not only employable but also equipped for lifelong career development (Hooley et al., 2012).

The significant focus on entrepreneurship education reflects an understanding of its importance in fostering innovation among students. This approach is consistent with international practices in which entrepreneurship education is vital for developing future innovators and business leaders (Volkman et al., 2009). However, the challenges in the practical application of entrepreneurship education and the need for experienced educators underscore the importance of continuous improvement and adaptation.

An internship is also an important component of vocational education. An internship bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The documented practices, including industry-education integration and digital platforms for internship matching, align with global trends towards experiential learning (NACE, 2018). These practices ensure that students gain real-world work experience, which is critical for future employability.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, we propose the following recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of vocational education practices in China:

1. **Strengthening Career Planning Programs**
Enhance career guidance programs by incorporating advanced career counseling techniques and leveraging digital tools to provide personalized guidance. Additionally, expanding industry partnerships can offer students more diversified career pathways and real-world insights (Sampson et al., 2004).
2. **Enhancing Entrepreneurship Education**
To address the challenges in entrepreneurship education, vocational colleges should foster closer collaborations with entrepreneurs and industry experts. This can provide students with practical insights and mentorship opportunities. Incorporating more hands-on projects and real-world case studies can also enrich the curriculum (Fayolle et al., 2006).
3. **Expanding and Diversifying Internship Opportunities**
Vocational colleges should further diversify internship opportunities, including virtual internships, which can provide flexible, accessible options for students. Strengthening the

quality assurance mechanisms for internships to ensure they meet educational and industry standards is also vital (Narayanan et al., 2010).

4. Policy Support and Collaboration

Continued support and innovative policies from the government are crucial. Policies should encourage collaboration among vocational colleges, industries, and entrepreneurial ecosystems to foster an environment conducive to the thriving of vocational education (Zhao, 2010).

In conclusion, vocational colleges in China have increasingly emphasized career planning, entrepreneurship education, and structured internships to effectively meet evolving industry demands and labor market dynamics. Continued efforts to refine these practices through strategic policy alignment, practical teaching enhancements, and strengthened industry collaboration will further advance vocational education's effectiveness and responsiveness to the changing economic and social landscape.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations that constrain the generalizability of findings. The reliance on document analysis and published literature may introduce publication bias, as successful implementations are more likely to be documented than failures, potentially creating an overly optimistic view of policy effectiveness. The analysis was limited to publicly available documents and English-language sources, which may have excluded important Chinese-language institutional reports and unpublished implementation experiences.

Additionally, the absence of primary data collection from students, faculty, and industry partners means that stakeholder perspectives and on-the-ground implementation experiences remain largely unexplored, limiting our understanding of how these management strategies actually function in practice.

Recommendations For Future Research

Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies that track the actual implementation and outcomes of vocational education management strategies over extended periods, moving beyond policy analysis to examine real-world effectiveness through primary data collection. Comparative studies across different regions, institutional types, and industry sectors would provide valuable insights into contextual factors that influence implementation success.

Research should also include a comprehensive stakeholder analysis involving students, faculty, employers, and policymakers to understand diverse perspectives on program effectiveness. Finally, mixed-methods studies that combine quantitative outcome measures (employment rates, skill assessments) with qualitative implementation studies would generate more robust evidence to inform policy refinement and improvements in institutional practice.

REFERENCES

- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Chinese Ministry of Education. (2010). <http://en.moe.gov.cn>
- Chinese State Council. (2015). http://english.www.gov.cn/news/in_focus/2016/02/04/content_281475284030103.htm
- Cooper, H. (2017). *Research synthesis and meta-analysis: A step-by-step approach* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for*

- developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fayolle, A., Gailly, B., & Lassas-Clerc, N. (2006). Assessing the impact of entrepreneurship education programmes: A new methodology. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 30(9), 701–720.
- Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Francis, J. J., Johnston, M., Robertson, C., Glidewell, L., Entwistle, V., Eccles, M. P., & Grimshaw, J. M. (2010). What is an adequate sample size? Operationalising data saturation for theory-based interview studies. *Psychology & Health*, 25(10), 1229–1245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440903194015>
- Gough, D., Oliver, S., & Thomas, J. (Eds.). (2017). *An introduction to systematic reviews* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Hooley, T., Marriott, J., & Wellens, J. (2012). What is online career guidance, and how do we evaluate it? A systematic review. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 40(3), 221–235.
- Kitchenham, B. (2004). *Procedures for performing systematic reviews* (Technical Report TR/SE-0401). Keele University.
- Narayanan, V. K., Olk, P. M., & Fukami, C. V. (2010). Determinants of internship effectiveness: An exploratory model. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 9(1), 61–80.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2018). *Position statement: U.S. internships*.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Petticrew, M., & Roberts, H. (2006). *Systematic reviews in the social sciences: A practical guide*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Sampson, J. P., Jr., Reardon, R. C., Peterson, G. W., & Lenz, J. G. (2004). *Career counseling & services: A cognitive information processing approach*. Brooks/Cole.
- Thurmond, V. A. (2001). The point of triangulation. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(3), 253–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00253.x>
- Volkman, C., Wilson, K. E., Mariotti, S., Rabuzzi, D., Vyakarnam, S., & Sepulveda, A. (2009). *Educating the next wave of entrepreneurs: Unlocking entrepreneurial capabilities to meet the global challenges of the 21st century*. World Economic Forum.
- Zhao, D., & Selvaratnam, D. P. (2024). A systematic literature review on the reform of vocational education in China. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2343525.
- Zhao, Y. (2010). Preparing globally competent teachers: A new imperative for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(5), 422–431.