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TRANSLATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM
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Abstract:

This study examines how vocational education and training (VET) reform policies in China are translated, recontextualised, and operationalised across different levels of governance through the lens of policy borrowing and translation theory. The research aims to explore how globally circulating VET reform ideas are selectively adopted and reshaped within China's centralised governance structure. A qualitative document analysis was performed on 16 official policy documents published between 2013 and 2024 at the national, provincial, and municipal levels. Data were analysed using iterative thematic coding to identify patterns of policy discourse, governance expectations, and institutional responsibilities associated with VET reform. The findings reveal that although Chinese VET reforms rhetorically align with international agendas emphasising modernisation, integration, employability, and digital transformation, these global ideas are strategically reinterpreted within China's developmental-state framework. Four major themes emerged: (1) policy ambiguity and strategic interpretation, (2) compliance-driven performance governance, (3) fragmented capacity and uneven implementation, and (4) future readiness through integration and digitalisation. The analysis demonstrates that national policies employ broad and aspirational language that allows flexibility in interpretation, while provincial and municipal authorities translate reform objectives into measurable

compliance-based tasks. Furthermore, institutional capacities vary considerably across regions, producing uneven implementation outcomes despite common policy directives. The study concludes that VET reform in China is best understood as a process of policy translation rather than policy transfer. International policy ideas are selectively borrowed and adapted to fit local political, administrative, and developmental priorities. These findings contribute to the comparative and international education literature by highlighting the importance of governance structures in mediating policy translation and demonstrating how global reforms are transformed within centralised educational systems.

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Keywords:

China; Comparative and International Education; Governance; Policy Borrowing and Translation; Vocational Education and Training (VET); VET Reform



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Introduction

As observed in the previous two decades, vocational education and training (VET) has emerged as one of the key policy concerns in different national settings (Ciantar, 2024; Mende et al., 2025), owing to higher levels of anxiety related to a higher rate of unemployment among younger individuals, mismatches between acquired skills and industrial demands, and more intense competition in different economic sectors (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2010; Busemeyer, 2015; McGowan & Andrews, 2015; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). Accordingly, several global organisations, particularly the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), have developed integrative systems catered to VET, aiming to drive a closer alignment between educational programmes and industrial demands, foster more flexible learning journeys, and facilitate a higher level of system-wide coordination (OECD, 2025; Klassen, 2025). Similarly, China, which has one of the largest systems of VET in the world, has initiated a large-scale plan of VET reformations to help drive modernisation, improve its current socioeconomic status, and guarantee a closer alignment between skills acquired at higher educational institutions (HEIs) and industrial demands since the middle of the 2010s, primarily focusing on the aspects of educational digital transformation, integration, and system modernisation, as described in its national policy documents (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2019; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019a; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China & Nine Other Departments, 2020).

Despite higher academic traction on the reformations of VET across the world, the current body of knowledge has mainly concentrated on institutional arrangements, policy objectives, and implementation challenges in isolation, whereas the process of translating international frameworks for VET reformations into the local contexts of governance in each country and how the above reformations can reshape the existing obligations of governmental agencies at different levels has been received with limited attention. As such, there is a gap in the current literature, especially in a large-scale, centralised framework of governance such as China. However, this limitation is not merely empirical but also conceptual. Existing comparative and international education research have tended to treat policy borrowing primarily as a process of adaptation or localisation, without sufficiently theorising how hierarchical governance structures mediate and actively shape the translation of global policy frameworks across administrative levels. In large-scale, centralised systems, policy translation is not only a matter of contextual adjustment but also a mechanism through which authority, responsibility, and institutional obligations are redistributed within the state. As a result, the governance-mediated dynamics of multi-level policy translation remain under-theorised, particularly in non-Western developmental contexts such as China.

Hence, to bridge the above disparity, this investigation sought to examine the process of reformations on VET in China by applying the theory of policy borrowing and translation, which extended beyond the models of policy adoption or convergence to determine how global perspectives on VET reformations were adapted at the national level and recontextualised at both the provincial and municipal levels within the Chinese governance system (Phillips & Ochs, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Because policy translation is primarily manifested through the discursive framing, interpretation, and recontextualisation of policy texts across governance levels, systematic analysis of official policy documents provides an appropriate and analytically sufficient basis for examining these processes. As a result, the present study outcomes could enrich the existing literature on comparative and international education by performing an empirical examination of the process of translating international reformation agendas on VET into the multi-tier system of governance in China. At the same time, this study provided theoretical discourses on policy mobility, explaining the process of selective borrowing of policies in a non-Western, government-driven setting and offering comparative viewpoints, complementing existing convergence-based results related to VET reformations (Phillips & Ochs, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

Research Question

Guided by a policy borrowing and translation perspective, the current study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do national policy texts frame vocational reformation priorities?
2. How are reformation expectations communicated and modified across governance tiers?
3. How do policy discourses construct institutional responsibilities within the VET system?
4. In what ways do China's VET reformations align with, diverge from, or reinterpret internationally circulating VET imaginaries?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framing: Policy Borrowing and Translation

Comparative education scholarship has often challenged the linear assumptions of policy transfer, emphasising instead the contextualised and political nature of educational reformations. As a conceptual framework, the theory of policy borrowing and translation explains how educational ideas can circulate across borders and are selectively reinterpreted within national settings, which helps conceptualise borrowing as a dynamic process heavily influenced by governance structures, priorities, and institutional constraints in local contexts, instead of regarding reformations as the adoption of optimal practices from external contexts. As described by Phillips and Ochs (2003), policy borrowing generally includes a multi-phase process, wherein frameworks in other nations are first adopted, before being recontextualised and adapted to local settings, reflecting how policymakers will selectively employ elements that are more relevant to national reformation agendas instead of simply adopting the entire frameworks. In a similar vein, Steiner-Khamsi (2004) explained that global frameworks often serve as a platform for relevant policy discourses in the local contexts and a key reference for any reformations to be implemented in the later stage, rather than functioning as a guide for full adoption. Therefore, global frameworks mainly serve symbolic and political roles, as local adoptions usually will have different adapted models, including the frameworks for VET reformations that emphasise HEI curricula corresponding to industrial demands and integrated systems of VET, in which there will be different outcomes of reformations in each country, rather than convergence.

Empirical Research on Reformations on VET

Research Focusing on China

Referring to existing studies conducted in China, it has been demonstrated that reformations on VET have often been based on the scope of the latest policies, especially those developed and implemented in the late 2010s (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2019; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019a). Specifically, there has been a gradual higher priority placed on the modernisation of existing educational systems, a closer alignment between education and industry, and the improvement of the societal status of VET, focusing on the cultivation of skills in line with the latest demands from different industries and sectors, relevant economic transformations, and larger goals of national development (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2019). Concurrently, there has been a higher awareness of the process of digitalisation in relevant reformations on VET, in which digital technologies have been steadily adopted into existing programmes, teaching approaches, and governance frameworks, serving as important responses to rapid advancements in technologies and the latest requirements of employers (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2021; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023b). Another gap in the current literature is that existing research performed in China has mainly used evaluative or descriptive approaches, often focusing on HEI reformations, policy objectives, or adoption challenges, rather than on the changes of discourses on educational reformations across different levels of governance, or the reconceptualisation of global policy frameworks in local settings (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As such, there has been a dearth of comparative perspectives to have a deeper understanding of how international agendas of VET reformations are

translated into national, provincial, and municipal settings (Phillips & Ochs, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

Research at the International Level and Comparative Findings

On a global scale, there have been numerous comparative investigations related to reformations on VET, which have often concentrated on the common objectives of policymaking, especially lifelong learning, employability, and system integration (OECD, 2010; OECD, 2025). Particularly, existing reports by global organisations have frequently positioned VET as one of the central mechanisms for resolving the challenges posed by skill gaps and economic restructuring to help foster more coordinated systems of governance and higher levels of employer engagement (OECD, 2010; International Labour Organization, 2022). Scholars from the background of comparative education have also admonished against existing research trends that have increasingly shown the pattern of convergence to a unified pathway of educational reform (including VET), which can obscure a more holistic picture of different priority areas of politics, the legacies of different HEIs, and the distinctions in different frameworks of governance that collectively influence the processes of reformations (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Therefore, VET reformations in China occupy an ambiguous position compared to international discourses, as relevant reformations have been conducted in a highly centralised system of governance, which distributes key responsibilities to provincial and municipal authorities using mainly performance-based mechanisms, despite existing policy documents often incorporating international concepts, including quality assurance, integration, and digital innovation. Thus, analytical techniques, which extend beyond convergence, are important to have a clearer picture of international alignment and local distinction (Phillips & Ochs, 2003).

Policy Translation

As demonstrated by the current literature, VET reformations have been both internationally grounded and locally adapted, although a gap remains, namely, only a few scholars have investigated the process of translating international frameworks of VET reformations into different levels of governance in local settings, and also the influences of the latest discourses on the obligations of governmental institutions and the expected outcomes of adoption (Phillips & Ochs, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Hence, to bridge the above disparity, policy translation can act as one of the key methods, which can help describe the pathway of recontextualising pertinent narratives on reformations as they transition from national visions to adoption at both the provincial and municipal levels (Phillips & Ochs, 2003). Specifically, the current study would appraise how international frameworks of educational reformation policies were selectively adopted, reconceptualised, and operationalised in a multi-tier system of governance in China.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative method, namely document analysis, was used in the present investigation to determine how existing discourses on VET reformations were translated (selectively interpreted, recontextualised, and operationalised) through shifts in policy meaning and governance expectations into different levels of governance, including national, provincial, and

municipal, in China, which was guided by the theory of policy borrowing and translation. Instead of assessing the effectiveness or outcomes of relevant policies, the current investigation concentrated on discursive framing, changes in the focus areas across different levels of governance, and the building and distribution of responsibilities across various governmental institutions. The main reason for using the document analysis was that it could offer a more systematic way to assess policy documents, aiding in acquiring important meaning, improving understanding, and garnering empirical viewpoints (Bowen, 2009). As such, policy documents were regarded not as neutral documents but as socially developed documents that could more accurately indicate the key priority areas of policymaking, the rationales of the process of governance, and pertinent strategies of legitimising different enacted policies (Prior, 2003), with the key goal of having a deeper understanding of how reformations traverse and obtain meaning within specific contexts of governance instead of just determining the success of adoption such policies.

Dataset

In the current dataset, there were a total of 16 official policy documents with regulatory or strategic authority, which were published from 2013 to 2024 at the three levels of governance, namely national, provincial, and municipal (D1 to D16). Purposive sampling was employed to select the above documents by determining how relevant they were to the current study topic, namely policy translation across different levels of governance (Bowen, 2009), which allowed for a comparison vertically and facilitated analysis of how discourses on VET reformations were reconceptualised when they shifted from national visions to provincial and municipal levels. The sample size was determined by analytical sufficiency rather than numerical representativeness. The selected 16 documents comprise key authoritative policy directives issued across national, provincial, and municipal levels between 2013 and 2024, and were therefore considered adequate for examining the vertical translation of VET reform within China's governance system (Bowen, 2009), representing major phases of VET reform development across the study period. The policy documents were originally published in Chinese and were translated into English using Google Translate, with translations reviewed and adjusted by the author to ensure conceptual and contextual accuracy. To enhance translation reliability, key policy terms and meanings were backchecked against the original Chinese wording to ensure conceptual consistency.

Data Analysis

In the present investigation, an iterative, manual process of thematic coding was used to capture the process of translating discourses on VET reformations across different levels of governance, as the method could facilitate closer engagement with the contextual nuance, policy language, and changes in existing discourse, which were key to policy translation analysis. Furthermore, the above method could enable more flexible processes between data analysis, coding, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process began by having multiple rounds of reviewing all policy documents to have a higher level of familiarity with key languages of reformations, recurring concepts, and changes in the areas of focus in each of the levels of governance. Particularly, analytically relevant terms, phrases, or sentences, which were pertinent to the priorities, frameworks of governance, and institutional responsibilities of global VET reformations, were determined and extracted.

Each extract, labelled with its document identifier (D1–D16) and corresponding governance level to retain its contextual position, was coded in inductive ways through descriptive and process-focused codes (performance assessment, capacity constraints, institutional responsibility, integration, and digitalisation), following iterative pattern identification. Every coding decision was refined by having continuous comparison between all 16 documents and the three levels of governance, guided by the recursive thematic analysis procedure of Braun and Clarke. In addition, the use of the process of manual coding could allow longer attention to implicit presumptions of governance and strategies of existing discourses involved in the policy language.

By reviewing the coded tables in iterative ways, conceptually relevant codes were grouped into higher-order themes, which produced four main categories, including (i) policy ambiguity and strategic interpretation, (ii) compliance-driven performance governance, (iii) fragmented capacity and uneven implementation, and (iv) future readiness via integration and digitalisation, refined using multiple rounds of comparison between empirical extracts and the theory of policy borrowing and translation until clear distinction, internal coherence, and consistent traceability could be observed across the three levels of governance. Subsequently, the above four themes were interpreted analytically by referring to the theory of policy borrowing and translation, mainly concentrating on the process of selectively adapting, reconceptualising, and operationalising international frameworks of VET reformations. Additionally, to increase the degree of transparency of the analysis process, three appendix files were also provided, in which Appendix A encompassed the entire policy dataset (D1 to D16), namely the level of governance and the type of documents, whereas Appendix B included the framework of coding that demonstrated how initial codes were arranged into respective themes across different levels of governance. Meanwhile, Appendix C contained sample extracts of the policy documents, supported by coding annotations, which depicted how raw text assisted in the process of thematic interpretation.

Trustworthiness of the Outcomes

Generally, in qualitative research, methodological rigour is guaranteed by assessing the degree of trustworthiness instead of statistical reliability and validity. In the current study, established criteria of dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transparency were used to determine the degree of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, the level of credibility was improved by having multiple rounds of reviewing the policy documents and systematic comparison across the three levels of governance, whereas a clear audit record, which included all coding decisions, the development of themes, and analytical revisions, was maintained through the entire research process to guarantee satisfactory dependability (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In addition, reflexive attention was given to the authors' interpretive positioning throughout the process of coding and interpretation (Tracy, 2010). On the other hand, the transparency of analysis was guaranteed by having a closer alignment between themes, codes, RQs, and the theoretical model, thereby reinforcing the methodological rigour of the present study while addressing key concerns about the validity and reliability in qualitative research, together with the other three metrics of trustworthiness.

Results

Theme 1: Policy Ambiguity and Strategic Interpretation

RQ1: How do national policy texts frame vocational reformation priorities?

According to the current policies, the latest discourse on the VET reformations at the national level is observed with larger-scale and aspirational objectives, accompanied by intentionally unspecified key concepts, which aim to serve as a governing mechanism through a certain level of ambiguity, allowing a closer alignment of local policies with international frameworks of reformations while encouraging different types of interpretation in each level of governance. At the national level, broader and more normative language has often been used in policy documents to position VET reformations, and one of the examples, as indicated in the *National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan*, is “*Vocational education and general education are two different types of education, but both are equally important*” (State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2019, D1). Although the statement has, in symbolic ways, uplifted the status of VET, it does not provide adequate operational clarification on how the above distinction can be actualised in the process of developing curricula, allocating funding resources, or determining more effective institutional pathways. Therefore, the idea of “*equal importance*” acts as a legitimising discourse instead of a concrete directive of implementation.

There is a similar trend in national policies, which seeks to foster a closer integration between education and industry, as reflected in the *Several Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Industry and Education*, which positions integration as one of the key economic tools, namely, “*Industry-education integration should be regarded as an important measure to promote coordinated economic and social development...*” (General Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2017, D2), demonstrating that integration is considered a strategy for macro-level development instead of an educational or institutional tool. Despite the language highly corresponding to the global frameworks of VET reformations that prioritise a higher degree of responsiveness of the labour market, its meaning remains ambiguous, which has enabled it to serve as a more flexible signal of policymaking. At the same time, the process of selectively borrowing certain concepts from the global discourse has been reflected in relevant documents of strategic planning, such as the blueprint of Ministry of Education (MoH) for the modernisation of existing educational structures, citing the agenda of the United Nations (UN): “*we must align our education system with the strategic arrangements for building socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and refer to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development...*” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2019b, D3). Although it has international alignment, it is also grounded in the government-driven narrative of modernisation, demonstrating how global norms can be adopted and adapted to help complement and support local developmental needs without simply adopting the entire framework.

Ambiguity has been strengthened via directives yet non-specific language of mobilisation, as indicated by the notice of the MoH, namely, “*Education departments (commissions) of all provinces... all universities directly under the Ministry of Education...*” (General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2021a, D4), without having adequate clarification related to actual expectations or the criteria of assessment, hence strengthening the relationships of the hierarchical frameworks of governance while shifting interpretive responsibilities to the lower tiers of governance. At the same time, several national policy

documents have expanded institutional responsibilities through future-oriented rhetoric languages, including “...schools should be supported in serving enterprise technological innovation, process improvement...” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2023c, D5). Although the above view has framed VET institutions as one of the key contributors to industrial innovations, there has been scarce guidance on relevant support mechanisms, which has posed uneven expectations on VET institutions that have shown a mixed level of capabilities. As such, ambiguity in relevant policies serves as a strategic tool, which allows the central government to achieve coherence in VET reformations in line with international frameworks while having certain flexibility for interpretations at both the provincial and municipal levels.

Theme 2: Compliance-driven Reformation and Performance Governance

RQ2: How are reformation expectations communicated and modified across governance tier?

With pertinent narratives on VET reformations transitioning from national visions to policy adaptations at both the provincial and municipal levels, there has been continual progress of translation into compliance-focused needs according to the framework of performance governance. Although national policies have often prioritised coordination and collective responsibility, provincial and municipal policies have increasingly operationalised reformations using more measurable timelines, tasks, and mechanisms of evaluation. Specifically, at the national level, aspirational language has often been accompanied by the requirements of accelerating the process of reformation, as described in the *Action Plan for Improving the Quality and Excellence of Vocational Education*, namely, “...accelerate the construction of a vertically integrated and horizontally integrated modern vocational education system...” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China and Nine Other Departments, 2020, D9). Despite the above parallel to the OECD-form discourse on system coherence, performance pressure has been introduced without specifying the mechanisms of structural integration.

In existing adoption-focused policy documents, performance governance has increasingly become more important, as shown in one of the regulations governing teacher enterprise practice, namely, “...teacher participation... [is] an important component of the certification of dual-qualified teachers...” (General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2023a, D13), highlighting that any expectations related to reformations are grounded in existing systems of certification and assessment, which have shifted reformation engagement into a compliance need that is associated with professional recognition. Moreover, provincial policy documents have reinforced the above, in which one of the provincial directives has stated that “...align with national strategic priorities and benchmark against the forefront of industrial development...” (General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2023b, D14). At the same time, benchmarking language has strengthened vertical accountability while prioritising measurable outcomes, which has frequently increased gaps between regions with variations in adoption capability. Meanwhile, at the municipal level, compliance-led reformations have often been positioned via the aspects of urgency and task completion, including “...an urgent need to accelerate the reform and development of vocational education...” (General Office of the Guangzhou Municipal People’s Government, 2013, D16), showing that although urgency symbolises commitment to reformations, the lack of corresponding measurements of capacity-building has emphasised the

need for having a framework of governance that concentrates more on pressure instead of support.

Theme 3: Fragmented Capacity and Uneven Implementation

RQ3: How do policy discourses construct institutional responsibilities within the VET system?

Although performance-based governance can help translate the key areas of VET reformations into more manageable tasks in the existing structures of administration, it has been discerned that there have been uneven levels of adoption across various governmental institutions owing to variations in the number of resources allocated to them. In particular, the existing discourses on educational policymaking have gradually allocated more accountability to the outcomes of VET reformations at both the provincial and municipal governmental levels. Nonetheless, there are assumptions that there will be similar levels of abilities in adopting the above frameworks of reformations without realising that there have often been profound differences in expertise, resource allocation, and institutional preparedness in each of the public agencies. Furthermore, the above gaps have frequently aggravated by the implementation of the model of compliance-based performance governance, which comprises the same expectations on the outcomes of VET reformations without offering necessary institutional support, as indicated in one of the regulations, namely, “...strengthen the construction of a ‘dual-qualified’ teacher team in vocational schools...” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China and Seven Other Departments, 2016, D12). Despite being consistent with global standards of VET, the current framework of VET reformations has frequently been operationalised by imposing regulations instead of creating and offering more sustained pathways of professional development, thereby increasing challenges in the process of adoption among different VET institutions that have lower accessibility to forming partnerships with the industry. This is also reflected in policy provisions establishing structured support mechanisms, such as “...a professional development committee composed of industry experts, teaching and research personnel...” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2019c, D8), which indicate attempts to formalise capacity-building through expert collaboration, although access to such structures may remain uneven across institutions.

As demonstrated by the existing body of knowledge, the current fragmented landscape of the capacity of VET institutions has implied that international standards of VET reformations actually act more as a legitimising discourse instead of serving as an operational model, despite the current reformatory efforts are in line with the international standard, as shown by one of the statements, namely, “...international cooperation on education evaluation...” (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and State Council, 2020, D11). Similarly, at both provincial and municipal levels, there have often been uneven abilities due to limited resources allocated, compelling policymakers at the municipal level to frequently implement certain strategies selectively, such as pilot programmes, or focusing on certain VET institutions or regions first (D14, D16).

Theme 4: Future Readiness via Integration and Digitalisation

RQ4: In what ways do reformations align with, diverge from, or reinterpret internationally circulating VET imaginaries?

When scrutinising each of the levels of governance, the existing discourses on VET reformations have been gradually highlighting future readiness by intensifying the efforts of integration and digitalisation, which correspond to the international trends, despite there also being selective reinterpretations in a government-driven model of development, especially in China. According to the current national policy documents in China, digitalisation has been positioned as one of the key strategies of reformations, as reflected in the following statement, namely, *“We will promote the development of textbook supporting resources and digital textbooks... and create more digital textbooks that are audible, visual, practical, and interactive...”* (General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2021b, D6), which is in line with the international trend of digital transformation, with accountability structures for the adoption of digital technologies assigned to local institutions without providing holistic guidelines. This emphasis is also reflected in national policy directives to *“...promote professional upgrading and digital transformation...”* (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2021, D7), which further positions digital transformation as a forward-looking priority of VET reformations while offering limited operational guidance for implementation across institutional contexts. As such, institutions at both the provincial and municipal levels can reinterpret the key focus areas of digitalisation initiatives, as indicated in this statement, namely, *“provincial governments... establish city-level industry-education consortia...”* (General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council, 2022, D10), which has contributed to more fragmentation in the existing structures of governance, although multi-actor partnerships can be fostered. One of the examples is the *“three-chain integration”* reformation in Zhejiang, showing how national reformations can be adapted by local governments using localised design (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2023b, D15) based on local development needs. Meanwhile, there have also been disparities across regions, owing to the challenges of scalability.

Discussion

In the present investigation, the objective was to determine how reformations related to VET in China were positioned, translated, and operationalised across different levels of governance by referring to the theory of policy borrowing and translation. These findings extend comparative and international education scholarship by demonstrating that hierarchical governance structures actively mediate policy translation rather than merely facilitating policy adoption. Specifically, it was demonstrated that despite there being consistency between VET reformations in China and international frameworks that prioritised several important areas, including modernisation, integration, and future readiness, international frameworks were adopted with pertinent adaptation at local contexts, namely, being selectively recontextualised using hierarchical structures of governance and mechanisms of performance-based accountability, shaped by uneven levels of abilities across different institutions (Phillips and Ochs, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Collectively, a total of four main themes were discovered, revealing that there was a constant tension between having coherence in the existing discourse at the national level and respective interpretation and adoption at both the provincial and municipal levels, which strengthened the viewpoints of comparative

education and challenged linear assumptions regarding policy transfer, thereby reflecting the political, contextual, and governance-mediated characteristics of educational reformations (Steiner-Khamisi, 2004; Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). Thus, the outcomes of VET reformations should not be perceived as a binary measure of success or failure, but rather, the focus should be on how the unique meanings of policies would be generated and transformed across different levels of governance.

From the viewpoint of comparative policies, having closer attention towards policy translation is vital to have a deeper understanding of existing trajectories of VET reformations, particularly in a larger-scale, centralised framework of governance. Although the current convergence-based models have frequently presumed that there will be a close alignment between local policies and international standards, the present study revealed that the above presumption could obscure the observation of multiple variations in different implementation processes, governance arrangements, and institutional outcomes at both the provincial and municipal levels, especially in the current VET framework in China. Hence, using the theory of policy translation could assist in putting more focus on the process of shaping the unique meanings of VET reformations in specific administrative and political settings, rather than just concentrating on whether relevant reformations would be either successfully implemented or fail to be implemented. As a result, the theory could assist in redefining policies as a continuous process instead of a fixed outcome, as there would often be influences from hierarchical structures of governance, accountability, and local institutional abilities, particularly for VET, in which there would frequently be an intricate interaction between reformations, industrial demands, regional strategies of development, and institutional diversity.

Determining The Key Areas of VET Reformations: Selective Borrowing and Strategic Ambiguity (RQ1)

The current section interprets the process of determining the key focus areas of national reformations, which mainly uses the approaches of selective borrowing and strategic ambiguity, by referring to Theme 1. To answer RQ1, the current results demonstrated that the key focus areas of national VET reformations in China were determined using an intentionally aspirational, broad, and future-oriented framework, in which the key concepts, namely quality improvement, integration, modernisation, and equity, were often mentioned without providing a clear operational definition. The purpose was to prevent direct replication of international models, wherein global principles of VET reformations were employed to show the key directions, while allowing flexibility in interpreting the above principles based on local priorities in terms of economic, political, and institutional (Phillips & Ochs, 2003). Therefore, the above approach, namely strategic ambiguity, served as one of the strategies of central governance instead of just acting as a temporary means for the early phases of VET reformations, which was important in a larger country with a territorially and institutionally diverse educational system, as the outcomes would be counterproductive when seeking to have universal operationalisation.

Referring to existing comparative studies, it was implied that strategic ambiguity would be generally employed in a centralised framework of governance, aiming to have a more optimal balance between coherence in national directions and the adaptability of local governments. Accordingly, policymakers would shift from inflexible models by incorporating broader concepts of reformations, especially quality, integration, and modernisation, which could aid in developing a broader framework that could be reconceptualised based on local needs and

settings, hence allowing higher degrees of policy diffusion among local actors to adapt principles or concepts that would be more locally meaningful and administratively feasible, while remaining in line with the common objectives. Therefore, strategic ambiguity also served as an important source of legitimacy, in which the alignment between national policies and global standards could enhance political credibility without fully adopting the same framework as implemented on a global scale. In sum, policy borrowing functions as a symbol that allows different nations and governments to choose the most suitable international frameworks while having sufficient control over the intended goals of relevant reformations. In a similar vein, Steiner-Khamsi (2004) contended that international standards would serve more as discursive rather than prescriptive roles. In China, existing national policy documents have strategically incorporated international case studies with local objectives, including national modernisation, industrial upgrading, and societal stability (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2019; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019a), thereby indicating the importance of having policy ambiguity to act as a deliberate strategy of robust governance, which allows the key principles of reformations to be more efficiently adopted and adapted in a heterogeneous system (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Translating Expectations on VET Reformations Across Different Levels of Governance: Performance-Mediated Recontextualisation (RQ2)

According to Theme 2, expectations on VET reformations were discovered to have a progressive journey of translating national visions into adoption at the provincial and municipal levels using the key mechanisms of performance-based governance. Specifically, the national framework prioritised shared responsibility, coordination, and systemic development in the long run, with the process of policymaking at both the provincial and municipal levels increasingly translating relevant expectations at the national level into compliance-driven tasks in the framework of performance-based governance (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Accordingly, performance-based governance could assist any reformatory effort to be more effectively operationalised at each level of governance by reconceptualising national priorities, including benchmarking, acceleration, and system integration, at provincial and municipal levels using quantified timelines, targets, standards of evaluation, and reporting responsibilities (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and Nine Other Departments, 2020; General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023a). Similarly, Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) also indicated through an analysis of performativity how audit and evaluation frameworks could influence existing institutional behaviours by emphasising visible outputs over substantive change. As such, with the key principles of reformations incorporated in local settings, the success of reformations would be evaluated based on the degrees of compliance with standards, task completion, and fulfilment of the key performance indicators (KPIs) instead of having deeper transformations.

According to the current results, it was suggested that compliance-based reformations would narrow the scope of institutional agency by redirecting the focus towards administrative responsibilities rather than experimentation and innovation, especially in a government-led framework or the use of a model of performance-based governance (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). In particular, performance-based accountability would act as a substantial mechanism for translating expectations on reformations into local contexts through administrative processes, which would place a higher emphasis on the comparability, measurability, and evaluative clarity of relevant outcomes, namely, benchmarks, KPIs, and time-bound tasks that could be subject to constant monitoring and assessment. As compliance-based reformations

would concentrate more on KPIs instead of having a deeper engagement with the underlying rationales, relevant reformations would become more proceduralised, wherein the success or the outcomes would be based on the levels of task completion and reporting instead of the processes of educational transformation or organisational learning, thus narrowing the scope of reformations.

Institutional Accountability Amidst Limited Abilities (RQ3)

As indicated by Theme 3, although existing discourses on VET reformations have regarded VET institutions and both the provincial and municipal authorities as the main agents of reformations, there has been minimal attention paid towards the variations in the abilities of different VET institutions, as it has often been presumed that there will be similar levels of preparedness across regions. As such, it has reflected a structural tension continuously present between theory and practice (Phillips & Ochs, 2003), especially when national and subnational policies have placed accountability on relevant VET institutions for their roles in initiating reformations in existing curricula, promoting higher levels of engagement with the industry, fostering teachers' professional development, and implementing digital transformations without resolving gaps in resource allocation or professional abilities (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and Seven Other Departments, 2016; General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023). Similarly, it was demonstrated that certain concepts, particularly dual-qualified teachers and the integration between education and industry, were often operationalised based on imposed regulations and evaluation criteria instead of implementing sustained approaches of capacity-building, which contributed additional burdens to VET institutions with more difficulties in securing funding, forming industrial partnerships, and cultivating professional expertise.

According to the theory of policy enactment, existing processes of policy translation have often been shaped by specific institutional settings instead of having uniform adoption (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). Specifically, VET institutions with more resources and local governmental support could respond more efficiently to the latest requirements of VET reformations compared to resource-constrained counterparts, which would focus more on administrative compliance to fulfil the evaluation criteria, owing to governance arrangements that emphasise accountability over support. Hence, the concentration on policy coherence and integration would further increase the level of fragmentation and regional inequality in institutional capacity, which reflects the inevitable outcome of the current framework of governance, instead of a gap in the process implementation, when existing governance processes constantly assign and assess the accountability structures of reformations across different levels of governance. Moreover, owing to the influences of industrial engagement, staff capacity, funding availability, and local governance priorities, the process of policy translation will be uneven despite there being the same regulatory conditions. Thus, when resource-constrained VET institutions concentrate more on administrative compliance rather than educational transformation and organisational learning in the long term, there will be a trend of institutionalised variations observed in the future framework of VET across regions.

Consistency With and Reinterpretations of International VET Reformatory Frameworks: Adaptation Instead of Convergence (RQ4)

As described in Theme 4 above, existing VET reformations in China have been deliberately designed to selectively correspond to international discourses, as produced by global

organisations and explained in comparative benchmarks, on future readiness, which includes the two critical aspects of integration and digitalisation (OECD, 2025; Klassen, 2025). Particularly, there was a continuous process of reinterpretation of international standards at each of the levels of governance, instead of having convergence or full adoption. At the national level, both integration and digitalisation have been perceived as key to more effective industrial upgrading, economic transformations, and system modernisation (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019a; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023b), whereas at subnational levels, both of the above concepts have been operationalised via project-based initiatives, which include the development of infrastructure, relevant platforms, and consortia (General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council, 2022; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023b). Despite having higher visibility and compliance with relevant policies through the above initiatives, deeper pedagogical innovation has been obscured when the focus is placed on measurability, scalability, and administrative efficiency. In a similar vein, existing comparative studies have demonstrated that international principles of reformations have often reconceptualised based on the local needs of development of a country (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Steiner-Khamisi, 2004). In China, both digitalisation and integration act as more flexible aspects of VET reformations, allowing consistency with international standards without full adoption of the standards by local governments.

The flexibility offered by integration and digitalisation could help support the development of future readiness, in which, at both provincial and municipal levels, both the above aspects have frequently operationalised via project-based and technology-embedded initiatives that are consistent with the demands of performance-based governance. In China, both integration and digitalisation also support consistency with the international discourse on VET transformations while strengthening government-driven initiatives and existing hierarchical structures without having convergence with global frameworks. Summarily, VET reformations in China cannot be fully understood when using only convergence- or adoption-centric models, as the notions of VET reformations have often been selectively recontextualised at different levels of governance, despite alignment of national policy documents with international standards. Accordingly, policy ambiguity at the national level, performance-based policy translation at subnational levels, and uneven institutional capabilities have collectively determined the key focus areas of VET reformations in China.

Implications

There were several implications provided by this study, including policymaking, institutions, and comparative studies, which could help inform future decision-making and research.

Policymaking

According to the current results, strategic policy ambiguity could allow the diffusion of VET reformations across centralised systems, with multiple variations generated in the process of interpretation and adoption at the provincial and municipal levels of governance, which suggested that there would not be similar adoption despite using similar policy language. Despite a higher level of flexibility in the process of policy translation across different regions, disparities in the outcomes of reformations would be widened when there were inadequate operational guidelines offered to local authorities. At the same time, the use of the framework of performance-based governance highlighted the importance of having a balance between

institutional accountability and support, as a higher emphasis on measurable outcomes could limit future innovation and capacity building in the long run, although constant monitoring and coordination were enabled for the outcomes. Therefore, future policymakers should refine existing performance-based models to promote long-term transformations in the current teaching practices and institutional development.

Institution

The implications of the present study indicated that there was a trend of increasing complexity in terms of the responsibilities of VET reformations, in which relevant VET institutions were gradually viewed as key agents in implementing reformations, although the process was frequently accompanied by uneven distribution of resources and different degrees of local support. The above landscape implied the presence of a variety of institutional responses to VET reformations, wherein certain VET institutions would focus more on compliance with administrative accountability structures, whereas other institutions would embark on a journey with more substantial transformations in existing systems of VET. Furthermore, as there was a higher emphasis placed on having a more integrated landscape of education and industry, apart from the process of digitalisation, different forms of requirements also emerged for the existing leadership and staff of VET institutions. As such, it is important to have constant programmes of capacity-building, which can assist existing VET institutions to transition from project-based compliance activities to a deeper integration between the key principles of reformations, the current teaching practices, and future design of curricula.

Comparative Research

There were several implications from this study for future comparative research on VET, especially the strategies of policy translation relevant to VET reformations in centralised, government-driven frameworks of education. Instead of viewing alignment with global standards of reformations as a form of convergence, future scholars should examine how the meanings of reformations are shaped by the unique frameworks of local governance, different structures of accountability, and a wider range of institutional abilities. For instance, in China, it was demonstrated that international standards of VET reformations could be mobilised across different levels of governance to help support national objectives of development while having distinctive adoption methods in local settings, highlighting that comparative studies in the future can focus on the process of reconceptualisation of reformatory principles based on local development needs beyond the binary evaluation of adoption versus resistance. As a result, there would be higher sensitivity to nuanced differences in various systems, which could contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between international and local policies.

Limitations Of the Study

Similar to other studies, there are a few limitations in the current investigation, as the scope of the investigation was intentionally designed to solely concentrate on national policy documents, corresponding to the main objective of assessing the existing discourses on VET reformations and the processes of policy translation at each level of governance, focusing on policy discourse rather than implementation outcomes. Although the above method was suitable for scrutinising the process of policy translation across different levels of governance, how reformatory initiatives were implemented at the levels of schools, classrooms, or workplaces was not included in the scope of the investigation. Additionally, the dataset in the

current study was developed through purposive selection of policy documents at the national, provincial, and municipal levels, which might not include the full picture of regional differences, especially in a highly differentiated system of VET in China, despite the vertical sampling approach allowing analytical comparison across different levels of governance. As the current analysis was based on China only, the results might not be able to be generalised to other countries, although the results could be transferable to similar settings, namely larger-scale, centralised systems of education.

Future Research

In the future, research at the levels of schools and classrooms could offer more in-depth perspectives on how policy translation would operate in daily VET, which could assist in complementing document analyses. In addition, comparative studies performed in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or East Asian region could determine whether similar trends of selective policy borrowing and governance-centric policy translation would be discovered in other educational systems with different political and administrative structures. Future academicians can also include the viewpoints of teachers, students, and employers, as it can help provide a more in-depth understanding of how the expectations on VET reforms and institutional obligations would be experienced by the key groups of stakeholders. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal studies can help explore the evolution of existing discourses on VET reforms, especially when both the aspects of digitalisation and integration between education and industry continue to redefine the current systems of VET across the world.

Conclusion

In the present investigation, it was revealed that having consistency with international standards of VET reforms would not necessarily suggest that there would be convergence in relevant frameworks of governance or practice, but rather, there would be context-specific processes of policy translation. Concurrently, the current study results produced wider implications for how VET reforms would be analysed in future comparative research at the global level. In China, the above concepts were found to have been constantly stabilised using hierarchical levels of governance and the structures of performance-based accountability, which were shaped by varying levels of institutional abilities that contributed to different pathways of VET reforms, thereby reflecting an internally coherent yet externally non-convergent trend. Conceptually, the present investigation could enrich existing comparative research on VET by highlighting the analytical value of having pertinent models of policy translation to have a deeper understanding of the processes of reforms in centralised, government-driven systems of education. Thus, policy mobility should be perceived as a process of policy translation instead of policy transfer, especially in centralised frameworks of governance, which comprise hierarchical structures and administrative complexity.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Overview of Analysed Policy Documents

Doc ID	Policy Level	Document Type	Document Title	Issuing Authority	Year	Analytical Relevance
D1	National	Strategic Plan	National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan	State Council	2019	Establishes overarching reform priorities
D2	National	Policy Opinion	Several Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Industry and Education	State Council (GO)	2017	Introduces industry–education integration as reform logic
D3	National	Strategic Blueprint	Blueprint for Accelerating Education Modernisation	Ministry of Education	2019	Aligns reform with global education agendas
D4	National	Implementation Notice	National Planning Textbooks for VET (14th FYP)	MOE (GO)	2021	Mobilises institutions via performance governance
D5	National	Policy Tasks	Key Tasks for Modern VET Reform	Ministry of Education	2023	Expands institutional responsibilities
D6	National	Implementation Plan	Textbook Construction Plan (14th FYP)	MOE (GO)	2021	Promotes digitalisation in curriculum resources
D7	National	Regulatory Notice	VET Professional Catalogue	Ministry of Education	2021	Structures programme upgrading

D8	National	Policy Guidance	Talent Training Programme Guidelines	Ministry of Education	2019	Introduces industry-led governance mechanisms
D9	National	Law / Action Plan	Action Plan for Quality and Excellence of VET (2020–2023)	MOE + Ministries	2020	Accelerates reform through performance targets
D10	National	Implementation Opinion	Modern VET System Reform Opinions	CPC Central Committee & State Council	2022	Mandates multi-actor governance structures
D11	National	Regulation	Education Evaluation Reform Plan	CPC Central Committee & State Council	2020	Reframes evaluation and accountability
D12	National	Regulation	Enterprise Practice for VET Teachers	MOE + Ministries	2016	Defines ‘dual-qualified’ teacher requirements
D13	National	Administrative Measure	Teacher Enterprise Practice Bases (Trial)	MOE (GO)	2023	Institutionalises performance certification
D14	Provincial	Reform Strategy	Accelerating Key Tasks of Modern VET Reform	MOE (GO)	2023	Translates national priorities provincially

D15	Provincial	Reform Initiative	Zhejiang ‘Three-Chain Integration’ Reform	Zhejiang DoE	2024	Volume 11 Issue 63 (June 2026) PP. 1200-1234 Illustrates localised policy adaptation
D16	Municipal	Implementation Opinion	Guangzhou School–Enterprise Cooperation	Guangzhou Municipal Gov.	2013	Shows early local enactment dynamics

Appendix B: Codebook Aligned to Research Questions

Theme	Code	Code Description	Linked RQ
Theme 1: Policy Ambiguity and Strategic Interpretation	T1C1	Quality assurance and curriculum equivalence	RQ1
	T1C2	Teacher development and industry linkage	RQ1, RQ3
	T1C3	Standards and programme structure	RQ1
Theme 2: Compliance-Driven Reform and Performance Governance	T2C1	Credentialing and system reform	RQ2
	T2C2	Performance-based governance mechanisms	RQ2
	T2C3	Evaluation and assessment reform	RQ2

Theme 3: Fragmented Capacity and Uneven Implementation	T2C4	Reform acceleration targets	RQ2
	T3C1	Curriculum governance and quality assurance	RQ3
	T3C2	Teaching–assessment alignment challenges	RQ3
	T3C3	Institutional and regional capacity gaps	RQ3
Theme 4: Future Readiness via Integration and Digitalisation	T4C1	Industry–education integration	RQ4
	T4C2	Multi-actor partnerships	RQ4
	T4C3	Regional innovation and local practice	RQ4
	T4C4	Local governance and industry partnership	RQ4

Appendix C: Sample Extracts with Coding Annotations

Doc No.	Document Type	Document Title	Author/Year	Year	Extract (Google Translation from Chinese to English)	Assigned Code(s)	Theme	Commentary / Interpretation
D1	Strategic Plans	National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan	State Council of the PRC	2019	“Vocational education and general education are two different types of education, but both are equally important.” p.1	T1C1:QA and Curriculum Design	Theme 1: Policy Ambiguity and Strategic Interpretation	This extract frames vocational and general education as formally equivalent while leaving operational meaning unspecified. The emphasis on ‘equal importance’ functions as a legitimising discourse that signals reform commitment without clarifying implementation priorities. This ambiguity enables flexible interpretation across governance tiers, reflecting a characteristic feature of policy translation whereby global egalitarian ideals are adopted rhetorically but remain open-ended in practice (RQ1, RQ2).
D2	T2 Compliance-Driven Reform and Performance Governance	Several Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Industry and Education	General Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China	2017	“Industry-education integration should be regarded as an important measure to promote coordinated economic and social development...” (Section I (ii))	T2C2:Performance-based Governance	Theme 1: Policy Ambiguity and Strategic Interpretation	Industry–education integration is framed as an economic coordination tool rather than a pedagogical strategy. While aligning with internationally circulating VET imaginaries that emphasise labour-market responsiveness, the extract prioritises performance outcomes over institutional capacity-building. This framing encourages compliance-oriented implementation and reinforces top-down governance logics (RQ1, RQ4).

D3	Strategic Plans	Draw a Grand Blueprint for Accelerating the Modernization of Education and Building an Educational Power in the New Era	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China	2019b	"We must align our education system with the strategic arrangements for building socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and refer to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, considering China's educational positioning within the overall framework of national modernization and building a community with a shared future for mankind."	T1C3:Standards and Programme Structure	Theme 1: Policy Ambiguity and Strategic Interpretation	The reference to the UN 2030 Agenda signals selective borrowing of global education discourses to legitimise national reform trajectories. However, global language is reframed within a state-led modernisation narrative, illustrating how international norms are translated to reinforce domestic developmental priorities rather than adopted wholesale (RQ4).
D4	Opinions / Notices (Guidance & Mobilisation)	Notice on Organizing the Selection of the First Batch of National Planning Textbooks for Vocational Education in the 14th FYP	General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China	2021a	"Education departments (commissions) of all provinces... all universities directly under the Ministry of Education..."	T2C2:Performance-based Governance	Theme 1: Policy Ambiguity and Strategic Interpretation	The extract illustrates how central policy texts mobilise provincial and institutional actors through directive language, reinforcing hierarchical governance relationships. Performance expectations are implied rather than specified, contributing to ambiguity that shifts interpretive responsibility downward while maintaining central control (RQ2, RQ3).

D5	Opinions / Notices (Guidance & Mobilisation)	The Ministry of Education has Identified 11 Key Tasks to Accelerate the Construction and Reform of the Modern Vocational Education System	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China	2023c	"...schools should be supported in serving enterprise technological innovation, process improvement..."	T1C2:Teacher Development; Industry Linkage	Theme 1: Policy Ambig uity and Strategi c Interpre tation Theme 4: Future Readin ess via Integrat ion and Digitali sation	This document expands institutional responsibilities by linking vocational schools to enterprise innovation agendas. While signalling future-oriented reform and industry alignment, the lack of concrete support mechanisms places uneven burdens on institutions, revealing a gap between reform ambition and implementation capacity (RQ3, RQ4).
D6	Opinions / Notices (Guidance & Mobilisation)	Implementation Plan for the Construction of Textbooks for Vocational Education in the 14th FYP	General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China	2021b	"We will promote the development of textbook supporting resources and digital textbooks, explore the digital transformation of paper textbooks, and create more digital textbooks that are audible, visual, practical, and interactive."	T4C1:Industry- Education Integration	Theme 4: Future Readin ess via Integrat ion and Digitali sation	Digitalisation is framed as a technical and pedagogical solution for future readiness. The emphasis on resource development reflects alignment with global digital transformation narratives, yet implementation responsibilities are devolved to institutions without explicit guidance, reinforcing decentralised accountability (RQ2, RQ4).

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D9	Law	Action Plan for Improving the Quality and Excellence of Vocational Education (2020–2023)	Ministry of Education and Nine Other Departments of the People's Republic of China	2020	“...accelerate the construction of a vertically integrated and horizontally integrated modern vocational education system...” Section 1 (i)	T1C3:Standards and Programme Structure T2C4:Reform Acceleration	T1 Policy Ambiguity and Strategic Interpretation T2 Compliance-Driven Reform and Performance Governance T4 Future Readiness via Integration and Digitalisation	The call for vertically and horizontally integrated systems exemplifies aspirational policy language that mirrors OECD-style system coherence discourses. Yet acceleration targets are coupled with performance governance tools, reinforcing compliance-driven reform pressures rather than structural integration (RQ1, RQ2).
D10	Technical / Implementation Documents	Opinions on Deepening the Construction and Reform of the Modern Vocational Education System	General Office of the CPC Central Committee and General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China	2022	“Provincial governments... establish city-level industry-education consortia...”	T4C1:Industry–Education Integration T4C2:Multi-actor Partnerships T4C3:Regional Innovation; Local Practice T4C4:Local Governance; Industry Partnership		This extract demonstrates how national policy mandates the creation of subnational consortia, translating broad reform principles into organisational expectations. While promoting multi-actor partnerships, responsibility for coordination is delegated to local governments, intensifying governance fragmentation (RQ2, RQ3).

D11	Regulations / Measures	The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Evaluation in the New Era	CPC Central Committee and State Council of the People's Republic of China	2020	"...international cooperation on education evaluation..." Section III (ii)	T3C3:Capacity Building	T3 Fragme nted Capacit y and Uneven Implem entatio n	International cooperation in evaluation is selectively incorporated as symbolic alignment with global standards. However, the absence of institutional safeguards or capacity-building measures suggests that global benchmarking functions more as legitimising discourse than as an operational framework (RQ4).
						T4C1:Industry– Education Integration T4C2:Multi- actor Partnerships T4C3:Regional Innovation; Local Practice T1C2:Teacher Development; Industry Linkage	T4 Future Readin ess via Integrat ion and Digitali sation	
D12	Regulations / Measures	Regulations on Enterprise Practice of Vocational School Teachers	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and Seven Other Departments.	2016	"...strengthen the construction of a 'dual-qualified' teacher team in vocational schools..."	T3C3:Capacity Building	T1 Policy Ambig uity and Strategi c Interpre tation T3 Fragme nted Capacit y and Uneven Implem entatio n	The concept of 'dual-qualified' teachers reflects international VET norms but is operationalised through regulatory mandates rather than professional development pathways. This creates implementation challenges for institutions with limited access to enterprise partnerships (RQ3, RQ4).

D13	Technical / Implementation Documents	Notice on Printing and Distributing the “Administrative Measures for National Vocational Education Teacher Enterprise Practice Bases (Trial)”	General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China	2023a	“...teacher participation... as an important component of the certification of dual-qualified teachers...” (Article 6)	T1C2:Teacher Development; Industry Linkage T1C3:Standards and Programme Structure T2C2:Performan ce-based Governance T2C3:Evaluation Reform T3C2:Teaching– Assessment Alignment T3C3:Capacity Building T4C1:Industry– Education Integration	T1 Policy Ambig uity and Strategi c Interpre tation T2 Compli ance- Driven Reform and Perfor mance Govern ance T3 Fragme nted Capacit y and Uneven Implem entatio n T4 Future Readin ess via Integrat ion and Digitali sation	This extract illustrates intensified performance governance through certification and evaluation mechanisms. While promoting integration and partnerships, the multiplicity of reform expectations contributes to institutional overload and uneven enactment across regions (RQ2, RQ3).
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						T4C2:Multi-actor Partnerships	T4 Future Readiness via Integration and Digitalisation	
						T4C3:Regional Innovation; Local Practice		
D14	Provincial-Level Strategy / Reform	Notice on Accelerating the Key Tasks for Accelerating the Construction and Reform of the Modern Vocational Education System (Faculty and Staff Cheng Hall Letter	General Office of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China	2023b	“...align with national strategic priorities and benchmark against the forefront of industrial development...” Section 1 (iii)	T1C2:Teacher Development; Industry Linkage	T1 Policy Ambiguity and Strategic Interpretation	Provincial authorities reinterpret national priorities through benchmarking and acceleration discourse. This reveals how policy translation occurs through selective emphasis on measurable outcomes, reinforcing compliance while amplifying disparities in local implementation capacity (RQ2).
						T1C3:Standards and Programme Structure	T2 Compliance-Driven Reform and Performance Governance	
						T2C2:Performance-based Governance		
						T2C3:Evaluation Reform		
						T2C4:Reform Acceleration		
						T3C1:Curriculum Governance; Quality Assurance	T3 Fragmented Capacity and Uneven Implementation	
						T3C2:Teaching–Assessment Alignment		
						T3C2:Teaching–Assessment Alignment		

						T4C1:Industry– Education Integration T4C2:Multi- actor Partnerships T4C3:Regional Innovation; Local Practice	T4 Future Readin ess via Integrat ion and Digitali sation	
D15	Municipal-Level Opinion / Implementation	Zhejiang Province’s “Three-Chain Integration” Deepens the Reform of Vocational Education Long- Term Talent Training.	Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China. 2023.	2023	“The provincial Department of Education issued the ‘Notice’ ... adhering to integrated design...” (Section 2)	T1C2:Teacher Development; Industry Linkage T1C3:Standards and Programme Structure T2C1:Credential ing and Standards; System Reform T2C2:Performan ce-based Governance T3C2:Teaching– Assessment Alignment T3C3:Capacity Building	T1 Policy Ambig uity and Strategi c Interpre tation T2 Compli ance- Driven Reform and Perfor mance Govern ance T3 Fragme nted Capacit y and Uneven Implem entatio n	This provincial example demonstrates adaptive policy translation, where national reform logics are localised through integrated design. While illustrating innovative enactment, the case underscores regional asymmetry and challenges the scalability of localised reform models (RQ2, RQ4).

D16	Municipal-Level Opinion / Implementation	Opinions on Promoting School–Enterprise Cooperation in Vocational Education in Guangzhou (Guangzhou Municipal Government Office Document No. 2 of 2013)	General Office of the Guangzhou Municipal People’s Government	2013	“...an urgent need to accelerate the reform and development of vocational education...” Section 1 (paragraph 1)	T1C2:Teacher Development; Industry Linkage T1C3:Standards and Programme Structure T2C1:Credenti al ing and Standards; System Reform T2C2:Performan ce-based Governance T3C2:Teaching–Assessment Alignment T3C3:Capacity Building	T1 Policy Ambig uity and Strategi c Interpre tation T2 Compli ance-Driven Reform and Perfor mance Govern ance T3 Fragme nted Capacit y and Uneven Implem entatio n	Volume 11 Issue 63 (June 2026) PP. 1200-1234 Early municipal reform discourse frames urgency and reform necessity without structural support mechanisms. This highlights long-standing tensions between reform rhetoric and institutional capacity, reinforcing fragmented implementation at the local level (RQ3).
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