Journal of Governance and Local Politics (JGLP)
Vol. 8, No. 2, November 2026, pp. 420-429
Received Aug 14, 2026 □ Revised Oct 24, 2026 □ Accepted Oct 1026 2026

Beyond Partnership Counts: Governing Enterprise Engagement in Industry-Integrated Vocational Learning at a Chinese Public College

Cui Dong Qin[1,b*], Badu Ahmad[1]
[1]Universitas Hsanuddin, Jl. Perintis Kemerdekaan Km. 10, Makassar
[b]Guangxi Modern Vocational and Technical College, Guangxi, China
Corresponding Author: 942010512@qq.com

Keyword:
School-enterprise cooperation;
Vocational governance;
Industry-integrated learning;
China

Abstract: This article addresses how enterprises and other external stakeholders are engaged and coordinated in planning, delivering, and evaluating industry-integrated vocational learning at Guangxi Modern Vocational Technology College. A qualitative documentary case study analysed the college profile, its 2025 annual quality report, Chinese vocational-education policy documents, the UNESCO-UNEVOC institutional innovation framework, and relevant peer-reviewed research. The evidence shows a broad partnership portfolio: cooperation with 399 enterprises, six industry colleges, enterprise equipment contributions exceeding RMB 30 million, 16,896 hours of annual practical teaching by enterprise personnel, and twelve order-based classes. However, partnership scale does not ensure educational depth. Reported constraints include shortages of high-level professional leaders and industry mentors, cooperation that remains agreement-based, limited entity-based operation of some platforms, and insufficient visibility of collaborative learning outcomes. The article proposes a partnership-to-learning governance cycle based on strategic partner selection, clear role allocation, curriculum and task co-design, dual mentoring, shared assessment, student protection, and evidence-based renewal. The findings describe documented institutional capacity and governance risks rather than verified participant experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Technical and vocational education and training is expected to connect public education with changing occupational practices, regional production systems, and the long-term development of skilled human resources. This connection cannot be achieved by schools acting alone. Enterprises possess current technologies, work processes, occupational standards, mentors, production problems, and recruitment information that can make vocational learning more authentic. Public colleges, however, retain responsibility for curriculum integrity, equitable access, student safety, assessment, and the broader educational development of learners. Enterprise engagement is therefore a governance relationship rather than a simple transaction in which an institution receives equipment or sends students to a workplace.

China has progressively placed school-enterprise cooperation and industry-education integration at the centre of vocational-education reform. A review of policy reforms from 1978 to 2022 identifies movement from spontaneous cooperation toward systematic design and institutional construction, while also noting persistent problems of enterprise motivation, coordination, regional inequality, and uneven quality (Zhou & Xu, 2023). Recent policy development continues to promote industry-education consortia, sectoral communities, shared training bases, modern apprenticeship, and joint talent-cultivation arrangements. The direction is clear: enterprises should participate more substantially in education. The unresolved question concerns how participation is organised so that it produces educational value rather than a large portfolio of nominal agreements.

The distinction between engagement and linkage is important. Employer participation may include donations, guest lectures, internships, curriculum advice, mentoring, assessment, research, or recruitment, but these activities vary greatly in their influence on the relationship

between education and employment. Bolli et al. (2018) argue that the quality of education-employment linkage depends on the extent to which employment-system actors share power, information, and responsibility across curriculum design, delivery, and assessment. A partnership count therefore says little about whether enterprises influence learning in coherent, accountable, and developmentally appropriate ways.

Guangxi Modern Vocational Technology College provides an information-rich case. The college is a public higher vocational institution in Hechi, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Its official profile describes a large multi-programme institution with substantial practical-training infrastructure and a mandate aligned with regional industrial development (College, 2026b). The 2025 annual quality report describes cooperation with 399 enterprises, six jointly established industry colleges, enterprise equipment contributions valued above RMB 30 million, and 16,896 hours of practical teaching annually by enterprise technical personnel. It also reports twelve order-based classes in metallurgy, new-energy vehicles, and intelligent manufacturing, with more than 600 customised technical-skilled students trained each year (College, 2026a)

These figures indicate more than occasional external contact. Enterprises appear as resource contributors, practical instructors, curriculum partners, training clients, recruiters, and collaborators in technical services. The college also reports shared training centres, engineering technology research centres, enterprise-generated tasks, modern apprenticeship, and joint training arrangements. From a governance perspective, this breadth creates opportunity because the institution can mobilise knowledge and resources beyond its administrative boundaries. It also creates complexity because different programmes, enterprises, teachers, mentors, students, schedules, standards, and incentives must be coordinated.

The same annual report identifies a critical institutional paradox. Although extensive cooperation and infrastructure are reported, the college acknowledges shortages of high-level professional leaders and industry mentors, difficulty attracting talent in emerging fields, limited entity-based operation of some industry-education platforms, and insufficient visibility of collaborative educational outcomes. It further states that cooperation with some local pillar industries remains at the level of agreements rather than substantive operation (College, 2026a). The problem is therefore not the absence of partnership but the conversion of partnership breadth into reliable educational depth.

This problem is consistent with wider research. A survey of Chinese higher vocational education found disparities in partner interests, low cooperation quality, and insufficient depth (Pan et al., 2016). Research on school-workplace collaboration shows that vocational relevance improves when agreements are binding, teachers and workplace instructors develop a shared understanding of vocational tasks and curriculum, placements are jointly planned and followed up, and assessment is connected to authentic work (Hiim, 2023). University-industry collaboration can also strengthen students' perceived employability when it is embedded in an institutional quality culture rather than treated as an isolated activity (Li et al., 2024).

Educational change theory helps explain why formal adoption is insufficient. Fullan (2016) distinguishes initiation, implementation, and institutionalisation. An innovation can be approved and resourced yet remain weak if actors do not share its purpose, lack the capability to enact it, or fail to embed it in routine structures, budgets, professional learning, and evaluation. This perspective is relevant to school-enterprise collaboration because agreements initiate a relationship, but educational value emerges only through repeated interaction, curriculum work, mentoring, problem solving, and evidence-based continuation.

The UNESCO-UNEVOC institutional innovation framework adds an organisational lens. Its ecosystem relationship management dimension requires TVET institutions to identify stakeholders, assess their commitment to skills development, coordinate external engagement, and use evidence to improve institutional innovation (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2020). Ecosystem management is connected to strategy and management, teaching and learning, and products and services. Enterprise engagement is therefore effective only when external relationships are

translated into learning arrangements, student outputs, teacher development, and institutional improvement.

This article develops one research question from the wider thesis proposal: How are enterprises and other external stakeholders engaged and coordinated in planning, delivering, and evaluating vocational learning innovation? The purpose is to analyse the documented forms, strengths, and limitations of enterprise engagement at Guangxi Modern Vocational Technology College and to formulate a governance cycle that connects partnership arrangements with educational value. The article contributes to public administration and educational management by treating school-enterprise cooperation as cross-boundary governance involving public responsibility, negotiated roles, resource exchange, implementation capacity, and accountability for outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODS

The article uses a qualitative documentary case-study design. Documentary analysis is appropriate when institutional policy, formal arrangements, reported practices, and organisational claims constitute important evidence about a bounded case (Bowen, 2009). The case is enterprise engagement in industry-integrated vocational learning at Guangxi Modern Vocational Technology College. The unit of analysis is the governance process through which external actors are connected to learning, rather than an individual enterprise, programme, teacher, or student.

The primary institutional documents were the college's official profile and its Higher Vocational Education Annual Quality Report 2025. The quality report was selected because it contains institutional data, descriptions of school-enterprise mechanisms, examples of customised training and industry colleges, quality-assurance arrangements, and an explicit section on challenges. National policy materials and the UNESCO-UNEVOC institutional innovation framework were used to interpret the wider governance context. Peer-reviewed research published mainly during the last ten years was used to compare the case with evidence on vocational reform, education-employment linkage, school-workplace collaboration, teacher innovation, industry mentorship, quality culture, and curriculum relevance.

The analysis followed a purposive rather than systematic-review logic. Documents were included when they addressed at least one of five analytical categories: partnership purpose and partner selection; actor roles and resource exchange; curriculum and task integration; mentoring, delivery, and student support; or assessment, outcomes, and continuation. Descriptive figures were extracted only when they appeared in the institutional documents. Statements from public reports were treated as reported institutional evidence, not as independently audited proof of educational effectiveness.

Coding combined deductive and inductive procedures. Deductive codes were derived from Fullan's initiation, implementation, and institutionalisation stages and from the ecosystem relationship dimension of the UNESCO-UNEVOC framework. Inductive coding identified patterns specific to the case, including partnership breadth, order-based cultivation, shared facilities, enterprise teaching hours, mentor shortages, agreement-based cooperation, entity-based operation, and outcome visibility. Codes were grouped into themes that explained how the college's external relationship portfolio may support or constrain educational value.

Trustworthiness was supported through source comparison and evidentiary qualification. Institutional claims were compared with policy and peer-reviewed research, while enabling conditions were analysed together with the challenges acknowledged by the college itself. The article distinguishes reported inputs and activities from verified student outcomes. It does not claim that the partnerships caused competency improvement, employability, or institutional performance. Those questions require interviews, observations, internal documents, student work, and assessment evidence in the planned field study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Broad Partnership Portfolio Creates Institutional Capacity

The documentary evidence indicates a broad and diversified enterprise-engagement portfolio. Cooperation with 399 enterprises gives the college access to a large external network. Cooperation with 399 enterprises gives the college access to an exceptionally large external network. This scale is notably broad when compared to the typically smaller or more fragmented partnership networks found across many Chinese higher vocational institutions (Pan et al., 2016; Zhou & Xu, 2023). Furthermore, six industry colleges and shared training or engineering centres provide organisational platforms through which this extensive cooperation can become more stable. Furthermore, six industry colleges and shared training or engineering centres provide organisational platforms through which this extensive cooperation can become more stable. Enterprise equipment contributions above RMB 30 million expand the material basis for practice-oriented learning. Annual participation of enterprise technical personnel in 16,896 hours of practical teaching suggests that external expertise is present in delivery rather than confined to ceremonial events. Twelve order-based classes and more than 600 customised trainees annually show that some cooperation is linked directly to workforce demand (College, 2026a).

These arrangements can support industry-integrated learning in several ways. Enterprises can communicate changes in technology and occupational standards, contribute authentic tasks, provide mentors, open access to production environments, and help teachers update professional knowledge. The college can contribute pedagogy, curriculum continuity, assessment expertise, public educational infrastructure, and a longer-term talent-development perspective. When reciprocal exchange is achieved, the partnership can improve both learning relevance and the enterprise's access to skilled labour, training, and technical services.

The portfolio also illustrates why enterprise engagement should not be reduced to internships. Reported activities include equipment sharing, practical teaching, curriculum and training-plan development, order-based cultivation, modern apprenticeship, employee training, technical services, and the joint use of research and training centres. This multidimensionality is consistent with the policy evolution identified Zhou & Xu (2023), in which cooperation increasingly extends across professional construction, talent-cultivation plans, apprenticeship, training bases, standards, teaching, and evaluation.

Nevertheless, breadth creates a management burden. A network of hundreds of enterprises cannot be governed through identical arrangements. Some partners may provide a specialised mentor for one course; others may co-manage an industry college, accept students, donate equipment, recruit graduates, or commission technical services. Effective governance therefore requires a differentiated partnership portfolio. The college needs to identify which partners are strategic, instructional, facility-based, research-oriented, recruitment-oriented, or short-term, and it needs to match governance intensity to the educational risk and value of each relationship.

Table 1. Reported Enterprise Engagement and Governance Implications

Dimension	Reported Evidence	Governance Implication
Partnership breadth	Cooperation with 399 enterprises.	Requires segmentation of partners by educational role, strategic importance, and level of risk.
Organisational platforms	Six industry colleges and shared training or engineering centres.	Platforms need clear authority, staff, budgets, work plans, and entity-based operation rather than nominal status.

Dimension	Reported Evidence	Governance Implication
Resource exchange	Enterprise equipment contributions exceeding RMB 30 million.	Equipment must be integrated into curriculum, teacher preparation, maintenance, access, and assessment.
Teaching participation	Enterprise technical personnel provide 16,896 hours of practical teaching annually.	Mentors require role clarity, pedagogical support, scheduling, and coordination with college teachers.
Customised cultivation	Twelve order-based classes and more than 600 customised trainees annually.	Employer requirements must be translated into educationally sound outcomes without narrowing learning to one firm's immediate needs.
Acknowledged constraints	Mentor and professional-leader shortages; some cooperation remains agreement-based; limited entity operation and outcome visibility.	Governance should prioritise implementation depth, evidence, renewal decisions, and the discontinuation of low-value partnerships.

Source: Author analysis based on Guangxi Modern Vocational Technology College (2026).

From Agreement to Shared Educational Purpose

The first governance challenge is purpose. Enterprises may cooperate for recruitment, corporate visibility, social responsibility, access to facilities, employee training, technical problem solving, or influence over future skills. The college may seek equipment, updated knowledge, placements, mentors, employment opportunities, research links, and regional-development legitimacy. These interests are not necessarily incompatible, but they are not automatically aligned. A partnership becomes educational when the parties specify how their exchange will improve student learning and when that purpose guides the allocation of roles and resources.

The college's acknowledgment that some cooperation remains at the level of agreements shows the difference between initiation and implementation. Fullan (2016) explains that formal adoption can create a visible reform without changing practice. In school-enterprise collaboration, a memorandum may list broad intentions while leaving unanswered who will redesign the curriculum, prepare mentors, schedule access to equipment, protect students, collect evidence, and resolve conflict. The agreement establishes permission to cooperate; it does not by itself establish an operating system.

A stronger arrangement begins with partner selection based on educational fit. The college should examine whether an enterprise possesses relevant occupational expertise, safe and accessible learning environments, mentors with sufficient time, and a willingness to participate in curriculum and evaluation. The enterprise should understand the programme's learning outcomes, student level, academic calendar, and public obligations. This two-sided assessment reduces the risk of selecting partners primarily because they can sign an agreement or contribute visible resources.

Purpose should also determine the appropriate duration and level of formalisation. A single expert lecture may require a simple activity agreement. A recurring work-based learning arrangement requires clear responsibilities for task design, supervision, attendance, safety, feedback, and assessment. An industry college or shared centre requires a governance board or equivalent mechanism, named operational leaders, resource commitments, staffing, annual plans, data, and review procedures. The deeper the enterprise's influence on curriculum and student assessment, the stronger the public-accountability safeguards should be.

Curriculum Co-design Must Translate Industry Demand into Learning

Enterprise engagement adds value when occupational demand is translated into curriculum rather than inserted as disconnected activity. Order-based classes and enterprise-generated tasks can increase relevance, but the educational question concerns how job requirements become sequenced learning outcomes, teachable concepts, practical tasks, and fair assessment. A narrow response to one company's immediate vacancy may produce task-specific compliance without developing transferable judgement, adaptability, or understanding of why procedures are used.

Research on education-employment linkage shows that stronger systems involve employers not only at the end of training but across curriculum development, delivery, and assessment (Bolli et al., 2018). Hiim (2023) similarly finds that collaboration becomes educationally coherent when teachers, workplace instructors, and students develop a shared understanding of core vocational tasks and connect practical experience with curriculum and theory. The key unit of collaboration is therefore not the agreement or the workplace itself, but the learning task and the competence it is intended to develop.

For Guangxi Modern Vocational Technology College, curriculum co-design should begin with a structured analysis of occupational tasks, technologies, standards, risks, and problem situations. College teachers should then determine the conceptual knowledge, practice sequence, reflection, and assessment needed for students at a particular stage. Enterprise personnel can verify authenticity and currency, while the college protects progression, breadth, and educational coherence. This division avoids two extremes: a school-designed curriculum that is detached from work and an enterprise-designed programme that is too narrow or production-driven.

Reported equipment contributions create a similar requirement. New machines, simulations, and production technologies become educational resources only when teachers are prepared to use them, students receive equitable access, tasks are aligned with outcomes, maintenance is planned, and assessment captures meaningful competence. Equipment that is available but weakly integrated can become a display of cooperation rather than a learning environment. The governance of donated or shared resources should therefore include curriculum mapping, staff development, utilisation indicators, safety responsibility, and renewal or replacement plans.

Joint Delivery Requires Dual Capacity and Boundary-Spanning Roles

The reported 16,896 hours of practical teaching by enterprise technical personnel indicates substantial participation in delivery. This is an institutional asset because current practitioners can demonstrate technologies, standards, problem-solving routines, and workplace expectations that are difficult to reproduce in conventional classrooms. Industry mentorship and real-world projects can improve engagement and professional readiness when expectations are clear and mentors are connected to academic staff (Popli & Singh, 2024).

Occupational expertise, however, is not the same as pedagogical capability. Enterprise mentors may know how to perform a task but not how to diagnose student understanding, sequence difficulty, explain tacit judgement, provide developmental feedback, or assess fairly. Conversely, college teachers may understand pedagogy but lack recent experience with emerging technologies or production conditions. Effective joint delivery therefore depends on dual capacity: teachers need continuing industry exposure, and enterprise mentors need concise preparation for educational roles.

The college's reported shortage of industry mentors and high-level leaders shows that human capacity is a central constraint. This shortage cannot be solved only by inviting more

external personnel. Governance must address mentor selection, workload, incentives, continuity, preparation, and communication. A mentor who appears once cannot easily understand student progression, while a teacher who is excluded from workplace interaction cannot connect experience back to the curriculum. Joint delivery requires stable boundary-spanning roles that connect academic and enterprise systems.

Practical mechanisms can include paired teacher-mentor teams, pre-activity planning, shared task briefs, contact protocols, observation and feedback forms, post-activity debriefs, and periodic mentor development. The college should also identify a responsible academic coordinator for each substantial partnership. Leaving coordination to individual goodwill creates vulnerability when staff change, workloads increase, or enterprise priorities shift. Organisational support and distributed leadership are important conditions for collective teacher innovation (Cao et al., 2025) and the same principle applies to cross-boundary teaching teams.

Student participation must remain an explicit governance concern. Enterprise settings can expose students to authentic pressure and responsibility, but production priorities may conflict with learning time, safety, equitable task allocation, and the right to ask questions or make supervised mistakes. The college retains responsibility for ensuring that students are learners rather than inexpensive labour. Agreements and operating procedures should define supervision, prohibited tasks, working time, grievance channels, insurance, accessibility, confidentiality, and the treatment of student outputs.

Shared Assessment Converts Participation into Evidence

A partnership can be active without producing visible evidence of learning. Numbers of enterprises, teaching hours, donated equipment, students placed, or classes established are useful indicators of scale, but they do not show what students learned or whether learning was consistent across participants. The college's acknowledgment that the visibility of collaborative educational outcomes is insufficient therefore identifies a quality-assurance problem rather than merely a communication problem.

Shared assessment should connect occupational authenticity with educational standards. Enterprise mentors can judge whether performance resembles workplace expectations, while teachers can ensure alignment with curriculum, level, reliability, and fairness. Assessment evidence may include practical demonstrations, project products, technical reports, portfolios, problem-solving logs, presentations, safety performance, reflective explanations, and structured observations. Evidence should show both what a student can do and the reasoning used to perform or adapt the task.

The need for evidence also applies at partnership level. An industry college or recurring enterprise arrangement should be reviewed using a balanced set of indicators: student access, mentor continuity, task quality, curriculum integration, teacher learning, assessment completion, student feedback, employment or progression relevance, enterprise contribution, safety, cost, and improvement actions. The aim is not to create excessive reporting but to distinguish active, educationally productive partnerships from agreements that have little operational substance.

Li et al., (2024) show that university-industry collaboration is associated with perceived employability when embedded in a broader quality culture. This suggests that collaboration should not be evaluated separately from institutional values and processes. Evidence needs to be discussed by academic units, enterprise partners, quality-assurance staff, and students, and it should lead to decisions. A partnership that underperforms may need redesign, additional support, a narrower scope, or termination. Continuation should be earned through educational value rather than assumed because a relationship already exists.

A Partnership-to-Learning Governance Cycle

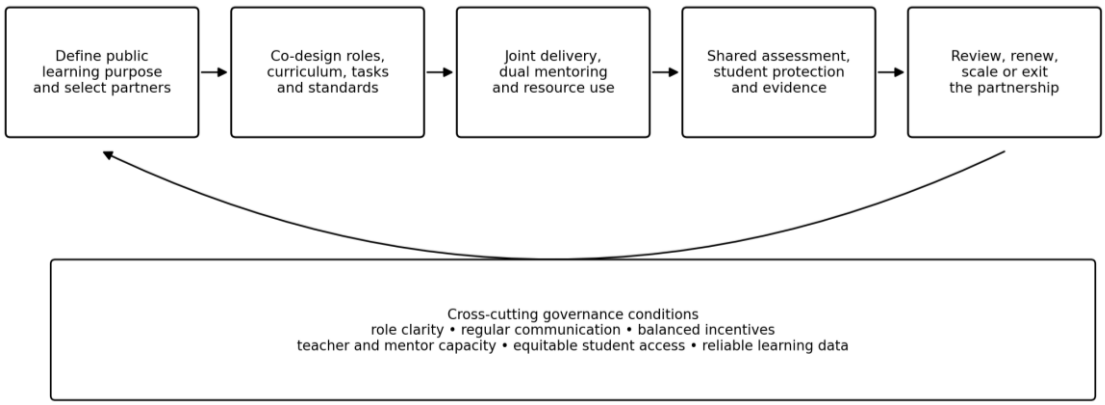
The documentary analysis supports a five-stage partnership-to-learning governance cycle. The first stage defines the public learning purpose and selects partners whose expertise, facilities, and commitment fit that purpose. The second stage translates purpose into co-designed roles, curriculum, tasks, standards, schedules, and safeguards. The third stage organises joint delivery

through paired teachers and mentors, appropriate use of resources, communication, and student support. The fourth stage produces shared assessment and evidence about learning, access, safety, capacity, and partner contribution. The fifth stage uses evidence to renew, scale, redesign, or exit the partnership.

The cycle addresses the central weakness of partnership-count governance. It does not assume that every enterprise must participate in every stage or that all relationships require the same structure. Instead, it requires proportional governance. A partner providing one specialist workshop may pass through a light version of the cycle, while an industry college, apprenticeship programme, or order-based class requires sustained co-design, staffing, monitoring, and review. The principle is that governance intensity should correspond to the partnership's influence on students and curriculum.

Several conditions cut across all stages. Role clarity reduces duplication and gaps. Regular communication allows different organisational languages and calendars to be reconciled. Balanced incentives make participation worthwhile for both sides without allowing recruitment or production interests to dominate education. Teacher and mentor capacity supports implementation. Equitable access prevents the best opportunities from being restricted to a small group. Reliable data allow institutional learning and public accountability.

This model connects Fullan's change stages with ecosystem relationship management. Partner selection and shared purpose strengthen initiation. Co-design, joint delivery, and boundary-spanning capacity support implementation. Evidence, renewal, and integration into routine quality assurance support institutionalisation. The model also connects external relationships with the other UNESCO-UNEVOC dimensions: strategy and management determine priorities and resources; teaching and learning translate engagement into curriculum; and products and services capture student outputs, institutional learning, and value for the regional ecosystem.



Picture 1. Partnership-to-Learning Governance Cycle
Source: Author analysis based on the documentary case study

Implications for Educational Management and Public Governance

For educational management, the main implication is that enterprise relations should be managed as a portfolio of learning arrangements rather than a collection of external contacts. The college needs a central view of its partnerships, but operational decisions should remain close to academic programmes and occupational fields. A common institutional framework can define minimum requirements for partner selection, agreements, student protection, evidence, and review, while academic units adapt tasks, standards, and mentoring to specific vocational contexts.

For public governance, the model clarifies accountability across organisational boundaries. Enterprises can influence public education, but influence should be transparent, educationally

justified, and subject to review. The college remains accountable for who receives opportunities, what students are asked to do, how they are assessed, and whether public resources and private contributions produce educational value. Mutual benefit is legitimate, but the public purpose of student development must remain the governing criterion.

The model also reframes regional development. Cooperation with local industries can support employment, technological upgrading, and technical services, but these outcomes depend on institutional capability. The annual quality report's concern that some relationships remain agreement-based suggests that regional partnership policy should not be evaluated only by the creation of consortia, industry colleges, or signed projects. Local and regional authorities can support deeper operation through intermediary platforms, shared standards, incentives for mentor participation, data infrastructure, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises that lack the capacity to engage alone.

Finally, the proposed cycle provides a basis for the planned field study. Interviews can examine whether administrators, teachers, enterprise mentors, and students share the same understanding of partnership purpose and roles. Observation can test whether authentic tasks, dual mentoring, feedback, and student protection are present. Document review can examine agreements, curriculum plans, mentor preparation, assessment instruments, meeting records, and improvement actions. Field evidence may confirm, modify, or reject elements of the model.

CONCLUSSION

This article examined enterprise and stakeholder engagement in industry-integrated vocational learning at Guangxi Modern Vocational Technology College. The documentary evidence shows a substantial institutional base: a network of 399 enterprises, six industry colleges, major equipment contributions, extensive practical teaching by enterprise personnel, shared platforms, and customised talent-cultivation arrangements. These resources indicate that enterprise participation is an established part of the college's development rather than a peripheral activity.

The evidence also shows that partnership scale is not equivalent to educational depth. Shortages of professional leaders and industry mentors, agreement-based cooperation, limited entity operation of some platforms, and insufficient visibility of collaborative outcomes create risks of symbolic or uneven implementation. The decisive governance question is whether external relationships are translated into coherent curriculum, authentic tasks, capable teaching and mentoring teams, fair assessment, student protection, and continuous improvement.

The proposed partnership-to-learning governance cycle responds to this problem through five connected stages: define purpose and select partners; co-design roles, curriculum, tasks, and standards; organise joint delivery and dual mentoring; generate shared assessment and evidence; and review whether the relationship should be renewed, scaled, redesigned, or ended. Role clarity, communication, balanced incentives, capacity, equitable access, and reliable data operate across the cycle.

The study is limited by its reliance on public documents and published research. Institutional reports provide important evidence about formal arrangements, resources, activities, and acknowledged challenges, but they cannot verify how consistently the arrangements are implemented or experienced. The model should therefore be tested through interviews, observations, internal documents, and student learning evidence. Future research should compare different partnership types and examine how enterprise size, sector, programme, mentor continuity, and student characteristics affect educational value.

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