
**Examining the Current Status and Strategies of Job-Course Integration for Preschool Education Majors in Higher Vocational Colleges under the Employment-First Strategy**

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**Article Information****ABSTRACT****Article Type:** Research Article**Dates:****Received:** 19 November 2024**Revised:** 15 February 2025**Accepted:** 25 February 2025**Available online:** 15 March 2025**Copyright:**This work is licensed under Creative Commons  license ©2025**Corresponding Author:** Yao Yao[1254408013@qq.com](mailto:1254408013@qq.com)**ORCID:** [0009-0009-6846-7225](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6846-7225)

This study examines the job-course integration for preschool education majors in higher vocational colleges under China's employment-first strategy, aiming to identify skill gaps and propose curriculum reforms. The study used a mixed-methods approach and collected data through 610 surveys and 15 in-depth interviews with kindergarten principals, teachers, graduates, and current students. Quantitative findings revealed a high valuation of artistic skills (87.32% for dance, 86.43% for piano) yet significant underutilization in practice, particularly among in-service teachers (61.11% for piano application). Qualitative insights uncovered systemic gaps, including curriculum-workplace disconnects in classroom management and professional attitude deficiencies (89.68% of recruiters emphasized work ethic). The study highlights a paradox where graduates excel in technical skills during training but struggle with adaptive application in real classrooms. Key conclusions advocated enhancing practice-based learning, stronger mentorship models and integrated artistic pedagogy. The novelty lies in empirically quantifying the "skill attenuation phenomenon" while revealing hidden curriculum gaps in vocational training. Practical implications suggested restructuring internships to bridge theory-practice divides by embedding attitude development throughout the coursework. These findings contribute to the global vocational education discourse by contextualizing China's preschool education challenges within broader workforce development strategies.

**Keywords:** Preschool Education, Vocational Training, Job-Course Integration, Skill Gaps, China, Mixed-Methods Research

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The rapid transformation of global education systems, driven by technological advancements and shifting labour market demands, has placed significant pressure on higher vocational education to align its curricula with industry needs (Han, 2024). Within this context, preschool education, a critical foundation for lifelong learning, faces increasing expectations to produce highly skilled educators capable of nurturing early childhood development effectively. However, persistent gaps between academic training and real-world job requirements in preschool education remain a pressing concern, particularly in higher vocational colleges where the emphasis on employability is paramount. The Chinese Government's "Employment-First Strategy" (He & Deng, 2024) underscores the urgency of bridging these gaps, advocating for deeper integration between vocational training and labour market demands. Despite this policy push, empirical

research on how higher vocational colleges can effectively implement job-course integration for preschool education majors remains scarce, leaving a critical void in theoretical and practical discussions on teacher preparation.

Existing literature on vocational education and preschool teacher training has primarily focused on broad curriculum reforms (Yuan et al., 2024) or generic skill assessments (Christianson, 2021), often neglecting the nuanced demands of preschool education roles. While some studies highlight the importance of practical skills in early childhood education (Li et al., 2024), few have systematically examined the specific competencies required by employers or the extent to which current vocational programs meet these expectations. Moreover, much of the research in this domain has been theoretical, with limited empirical validation from industry stakeholders such as kindergarten principals, teachers, and graduates (Khoso et al., 2025). This oversight is particularly problematic given that preschool education requires a unique blend of theoretical knowledge, pedagogical skills, and socio-emotional competencies elements often inadequately addressed in vocational training frameworks (Chaudhery, 2011). Consequently, there is an urgent need for research that not only identifies these mismatches but also proposes actionable strategies for curriculum realignment, ensuring that graduates are fully equipped to meet the dynamic demands of the profession (Armstrong & Davies, 1995).

This study seeks to fill these gaps by conducting a comprehensive, mixed-methods investigation into job-course integration for preschool education majors in higher vocational colleges. Unlike previous studies that rely solely on student or educator perspectives, this research incorporates the voices of multiple stakeholders, including kindergarten administrators, in-service teachers, graduates, and current students, to provide a holistic assessment of industry expectations and curricular shortcomings (Bruce et al., 2018). Combining quantitative survey data ( $n=610$ ) and  $n=15$  qualitative interviews offers a robust empirical foundation for understanding the discrepancies between vocational training and job market requirements. Furthermore, it advances the discourse on vocational education by introducing a practical framework for curriculum redesign that emphasizes core foundational knowledge, professional skill enhancement through the “1+X” certificate system, and immersive industry-academia collaboration. These contributions are particularly relevant in China’s Employment-First Strategy, where vocational institutions are under increasing pressure to demonstrate the employability of their graduates.

The theoretical contributions of this research are threefold. First, it extends the conceptual understanding of job-course integration by identifying the professional competencies most valued in preschool education, such as emotional intelligence, pedagogical adaptability, and classroom management, which have been underexplored in prior vocational education studies. Second, it challenges the conventional assumption that vocational training is primarily skill-based by demonstrating the critical role of theoretical foundations in shaping effective early childhood educators. Third, it introduces a dynamic model for curriculum development that balances immediate employability with long-term professional growth, addressing a key limitation in current vocational education frameworks that often prioritize short-term skill acquisition over sustainable career readiness. Empirically, this study provides one of the first large-scale, multi-stakeholder assessments of preschool education training in higher vocational colleges, offering actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders seeking to enhance graduate employability.

The practical significance of this research lies in its potential to reshape vocational training programs for preschool education majors. By pinpointing the exact areas where current curricula fall short, such as

inadequate theoretical instruction, insufficient hands-on training, and weak industry collaboration, the study provides a roadmap for systemic improvements. For instance, its recommendation to establish high-level training bases that integrate vocational education with kindergarten practice could be a replicable model for other institutions. The emphasis on the “1+X” certificate system also highlights an innovative pathway for students to acquire foundational knowledge and specialized skills, thereby increasing their competitiveness in the job market. These findings are relevant to Chinese vocational colleges and offer valuable lessons for global educators grappling with similar challenges in aligning teacher training programs with labour market needs.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research in educational contexts has persistently investigated the connection between vocational education and labour market needs, especially in specialized areas like preschool education (Vir, 2023). According to existing academic research, job-course integration is a vital component that provides graduates with theoretical knowledge and practical work-related skills that employers demand (Bishop, 2020). Numerous experts recognize the critical nature of these expectations, yet scholarly investigations confirm that ECE curriculum development continually lags behind industrial standards (Li & Yang, 2024). Higher vocational colleges experience deep curriculum gaps due to quick pedagogical transformations and regulatory rule changes, which occur faster than the institutions can revise their teaching materials (Dukakis & Bellm, 2006). Preschool education graduates may face difficulties in their employment prospects due to training deficiencies that do not align with actual workplace requirements, especially within Chinese areas that experience educational reform through the Employment-First Strategy (Matysiak, 2009).

The balance between theoretical instruction and practical skill development is one of the key debates in early childhood education literature in teacher training programs (Brent et al., 2018). As a result, traditional vocational education has been criticized for focusing too much on technical skills and neglecting the basic knowledge of pedagogy (Schröer, 2015). This critique is fundamental in ECE, where teaching is effective when knowledge about child development theories and the psychology of learning and learning curriculum is often marginalized in a competency-based training framework (Lim, 2020). The other school of thought argues that overemphasis on theory without emphasis on practical experience makes graduates unready for the best conditions of classroom management and child engagement (Tucker et al., 2017). Perhaps this last point serves to underline the need for greater integration between the theoretical depth/melting pot perspective and the applied learning approach that are present to some degree in many vocational education systems but able to find fuller integration in a few.

Another major issue in the literature is the incompatibility between skills emphasized in the vocational program and those employers need (Sannicandro et al., 2018). Industry stakeholders believe that what matters most is not discrete skills such as singing, drawing and classroom organization but broader competencies, including emotional intelligence, parent-teacher communication and adaptive teaching strategies (Marcus-Quinn et al., 2024). A good example is Butterworth et al. (2017) study of Chinese kindergarten administrators. Respondents considered attributes like patience, creativity and problem-solving skills more important than mastering specific artistic or musical skills. Given the misalignment, ECE vocational training programs might want to reconsider their competency frameworks to align with ECE jobs’ more complex and holistic requirements (Sannicandro et al., 2018). In addition, the swift integration of technology within early childhood education, like digital learning tools and child assessment

applications, has also developed brand-new skill requirements that are seldom systematically integrated into several vocational curricula (Tucker et al., 2017).

The second is the lack of literature on the role of industry collaboration in curriculum development (Dukakis & Bellm, 2006). Broadly advocated to strengthen the alignment between jobs and courses, partnerships between vocational colleges and kindergartens have typically been implemented superficially (Schober & Spiess, 2015). For example, while most internship programs in preschool education provide observational rather than hands-on experience to students, this hinders the skill development of the students (Safronova, 2023). Furthermore, the absence of standardized modes to receive employer feedback in that task of curriculum design results in the recurrence of the vocational programs grounded on outdated or anecdotic information instead of systematic labour market analysis (Adams et al., 2017). For instance, this gap is especially critical in China's fast-changing educational policies, for example, the '1+X' certificate system, a reform to integrate academic credentials with industry-recognized certificates (Faulkner & Coates, 2013). Such initiatives risk becoming bureaucratic exercises without strong collaboration between educators and employers.

Vocational pedagogy makes the issue of job-course integration even more ambiguous. What may be, however, more properly labelled 'Constructivist approaches' are those that claim that learning is most effective when it occurs within authentic workplace contexts (Safronova, 2023) and that vocational training should emphasize apprenticeship and simulated teaching environments. Nevertheless, these models are often also found wanting regarding the structured theoretical scaffolding required for deep professional understanding (Kowalewska, 2017). The same tension can be seen in debates about balancing practicum experiences and classroom-based instruction that characterizes preschool education. Other labour scholars suggest implementing a 'theory-practice spiral' model of continuous learning based on feedback and the reinforcement of conceptual and procedural knowledge (Smith et al., 2015). cultural and institutional factors may intervene in the implementation of such models.

Comparative studies point to significant differences in how vocational ECE programs are organized across countries, and these variations echo cultural values, regulatory standards, and the national labour market (Gilson et al., 2021). One example is that Nordic countries focus on play-based learning and allowing for child autonomy in teacher training, while Asian systems emphasize structured curricula and academic readiness (Marcus-Quinn et al., 2024). Such differences challenge the transferability of best practices and indicate that situated solutions are required. A significant knowledge gap exists in China, where the preschool education sector is expanding rapidly under a massive Government drive for quality improvement; it is regarding effective vocational training models that have not been explored in a localized study (Massey et al., 2023).

However, despite these challenges, the emergence of innovations in vocational education provides some promise for improving job course integration. For instance, the "1+X" certificate system is an innovative approach to link academic and industry standards while students receive many qualifications corresponding with predetermined skill competencies (Mingyuan & Tingzhou, 2024). Similarly, digital platforms for assessing competency and micro-credentialing as tools for continual professional development in ECE have also emerged (Dehos & Paul, 2023). However, these initiatives are understudied for their long-term socio-economic impact and, specifically, their potential to deal with systemic issues like curriculum rigidity and the inherency of employers.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research design combines quantitative and qualitative methods to thoroughly study employment-first job-course integration practices for preschool education professionals in higher vocational colleges. The quantitative method utilizes distributed structured questionnaires to collect measurable data regarding job needs, professional skills and the connection between teaching material and industrial requirements. Key stakeholders, including kindergarten principals, teachers, graduates, and current students, are interviewed using in-depth qualitative methods to obtain deeper details about preschool education training conditions and possibilities. The study combines different data collection methods to obtain a complete picture of job-course integration, thus enabling the development of strategic curricular improvements and graduate career readiness.

#### **3.2 Sampling Technique**

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide relevant and insightful data for the study. The research targeted professionals and students associated with preschool education in Bijie City, Guizhou Province, ensuring representation from various roles, including kindergarten principals, teachers, graduates, and current students. The selection of interviewees was also intentional, focusing on individuals with direct experience in preschool education, such as academic directors, caregivers and in-service teachers. This approach ensured that the sample included diverse perspectives, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings, including multiple stakeholders, which allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the job requirements and the effectiveness of training programs in higher vocational colleges.

#### **3.3 Sample Size**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews to ensure comprehensive data collection. For the quantitative component, 610 respondents participated in the online questionnaire distributed through the Wenjuanxing platform. The sample included diverse stakeholders in the preschool education sector, with kindergarten principals representing 2.3% (n=14), teachers comprising 36.21% (n=221), graduates accounting for 16.38% (n=100), and current students making up 45.11% (n=275) of respondents.

Field interviews of n=15 professionals took place at different Bijie City training centres and kindergartens to supplement the survey findings. Principals from kindergarten schools, academic directors, full-time teachers with additional caregivers, and higher vocational college graduates who served as in-service preschool teachers participated in the interviews. A large survey participant count and specific qualitative interview sessions created vast group representation among stakeholders, thus preventing skewing of results. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the research examined general job-course integration challenges while characterizing teachers' specific issues in preschool education. The study's validity was increased through practitioner, administrative, and learner perspectives that worked together to provide a detailed look at the alignment of vocational training vs. industry needs.

### **3.4 Data Collection Tools**

The primary data collection tools included structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire assessed the importance of various tasks in preschool education positions and the level of professional competencies required in the industry. It utilized a Likert scale to measure respondents' perceptions, allowing for quantitative data analysis. Conversely, the interviews were conducted with n=15 respondents with open-ended questions to explore in-depth perspectives on curriculum alignment, skill gaps, and industry expectations. These interviews provided qualitative insights that complemented the statistical data from the questionnaires. Both tools were carefully developed to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives, facilitating the collection of reliable and valid data.

### **3.5 Data Analysis Technique**

Data obtained through questionnaires underwent descriptive statistical analysis to identify patterns and trends in respondent perceptions using mean scores and percentage distributions. The questionnaire ordered the significance of different skills and competencies to emphasize important training gaps in the curriculum. Researchers translated the interview data into written text before performing thematic analysis, which resulted in grouping fundamental themes regarding the study's findings. Using this methodology, researchers obtained a detailed comprehension of obstacles and possibilities in job-course combination efforts. Quantitative data integration with qualitative results provided an extensive review of preschool education training status, which directed the creation of goal-oriented strategies for improvement.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

All of the research followed the ethical standards in the process. Before the investigators collected the data with their permission, all participants received information about the research intent. A system preventing the inclusion of personal details in identified information ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of participants in the research design. The research team ensured that every respondent could leave the study at any time and would not be harmed. Using the collected data exclusively for scholarly research, the researchers have taken specific safeguards, including those protecting the confidentiality of the subject as well as the privacy of the participant. The research group taught ethical practices, respect, transparency, responsibility, and trust, and it developed trust among all the participants in the research project.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Quantitative Findings**

The survey results show essential findings about preschool education majors' necessary professional competencies, real-world usage, and training program weaknesses. This data is divided into three primary sections, which analyze kindergarten teachers' frequently used professional skills, demonstrate their usage, and identify recruitment priorities for kindergarten educator talent.

#### **4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics**

Table 1 shows distinct trends between the use of skills and employer preferences. Employment uses vocal performance skills (71.46% average) and art skills (80.29% average) frequently, but dance skills

display significant inconsistencies in their usage (42.05% standard deviation). Employers maintain similar levels of commitment to teaching aid production (67.92% mean) and environment design (74.49% mean) since both skills show low variability (SD ranges of 12.45–12.93). The consensus between employers is strong because theoretical knowledge (mean = 90.03%) pairs with work ethic (mean = 90.41%) to achieve the highest rankings and low standard deviation (SD = 1.81–6.02). The data shows that preschool education demands foundational professional competencies and artistic and practical capabilities. The widespread dance and management skills scores (SD = 42.05 and 26.14) point to distinct criteria between teacher and principal career levels, necessitating specialized training methods.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Survey Variables**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean (%)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum (%)</b>	<b>Maximum (%)</b>
Vocal Skills Usage	71.46	26.32	37.5	98.73
Dance Skills Usage	58.26	42.05	0.63	98.09
Piano Skills Usage	66.88	30.76	25	98.73
Art Skills Usage	80.29	19.87	50	98.09
Teaching Aid Production	67.92	12.45	50	79.37
Environment Design	74.49	12.93	63.69	82.54
Management Skills Usage	58.62	26.14	42.86	100
Theoretical Knowledge Value	90.03	1.81	87.5	92.06
Work Ethic Value	90.41	6.02	85.96	100

#### **4.1.2 Frequency of Professional Skills Utilization**

This study establishes the frequency with which professional skills get used to measure the correlation or mismatch between education program focus territories and actual preschool employment requirements. Current students excel at basic artistic skills such as singing, dancing, and instrument playing. However, their capabilities in teaching aid creation and classroom environment arrangement fall behind that of practising kindergarten educators. The current training deficiency exists because vocational education focuses too heavily on performance skills while neglecting the essential daily tasks affecting teachers. The results show a need to modify curriculum standards because kindergartens focus on artistic capabilities and practical classroom knowledge, so graduates must develop skills matching educational requirements. Workplace requirements differ from training expectations; thus, job-course integration becomes vital since vocational programs must develop artistic skills while developing teaching competencies to boost employment outcomes and teaching effectiveness.

Table 2 shows the rates at which professionals employed these particular professional skills within their work duties. The present-day preschool education students demonstrate the strongest engagement with fundamental artistic capabilities, including vocal performance (98.73%) and both dance (98.09%) and piano (98.73%) and art (98.09%). The respondents show lesser competence in producing teaching materials

(66.88%) and creating educational environments (63.69%). Practical skills stand out among kindergarten teachers since 79.37% create teaching aids frequently, and 82.54% take part in environment design. All kindergarten principals demonstrate strong management competencies because of their leadership duties (100%).

**Table 2: Survey Results on the Types of Professional Skills Used Regularly**

Role	Vocal Skills	Dance	Piano	Art	Teaching Aid Production	Environment Design	Management
Kindergarten Principals	37.50%	50%	25%	50%	50%	75%	100%
Kindergarten Teachers	61.90%	0.63%	61.11%	81.75%	79.37%	82.54%	42.86%
Preschool Graduates	87.72%	84.21%	84.21%	91.23%	75.44%	77.19%	43.86%
Current Students	98.73%	98.09%	98.73%	98.09%	66.88%	63.69%	47.77%

Table 3 reveals the practical application of artistic skills in preschool education. Data shows that dance and art appear in more than 90% of teaching activities among students and graduates (94.90% and 92.98%, respectively, and 92.36% and 91.23%, respectively). Working teachers demonstrate lower frequencies of piano (65.87%) and vocal (75.40%) applications despite their general presence in preschool instruction. Study data shows that kindergarten school leaders show equal employment of artistic abilities, whereas all domains (from 75% to 100%) confirm they meet the requirements for leadership competence

**Table 3: Survey Results on the Application of Skills**

Role	Piano	Vocal Skills	Dance Performance	Art
Kindergarten Principals	75%	75%	75%	100%
Kindergarten Teachers	65.87%	75.40%	88.89%	94.44%
Preschool Graduates	66.67%	70.18%	92.98%	91.23%
Current Students	78.98%	87.26%	94.90%	92.36%

#### 4.1.3 Key Attributes Valued in Teacher Recruitment

This research analyzes decisive teacher recruitment attributes because they directly support the employment-first strategy objectives in vocational education. Records indicate that industries value candidates who demonstrate strong theoretical professional knowledge, outstanding work ethic (87.5-92.06% agreement), and excellent artistic skills and abilities (75-92.99% agreement). Studies have demonstrated weaknesses in vocational students, such as insufficient professional competence and self-control and unpreparedness for career planning. However, these deficiencies reflect significant mismatches between school preparation and occupational demands. Higher vocational educational institutions must modify their teaching programs to train students with technical expertise, professional conduct, and



education methods that match preschool teacher employment requirements. The collected research data requires universities to establish robust work-integrated learning methods which unify technical competencies with personality qualities required in preschool teaching roles to boost vocational graduate employment and fulfil employment-centred objectives in the Chinese educational reform.

Table 4 underscores the priorities of kindergarten employers during recruitment. Every respondent group underscores the importance of professional theoretical knowledge and work ethic, manifested through their agreement rates of 87.5 to 92.06% and 85.96 to 100%, respectively. Among the requirements evaluated as most important by kindergarten employers are artistic skills (75–92.99%), followed closely by professional theoretical knowledge (87.5–92.06%) and work ethic (85.96–100%). However, interpersonal communication skills (52.63–62.5%) receive less emphasis. Research indicates that educational institutions teaching vocational students face challenges because 90% of kindergartens confirm that vocational students have noticeable deficiencies in professional expertise, self-management skills, and practical career objectives despite training programs.

**Table 4: Survey Results on the Most Valued Aspects in Recruitment**

Role	Piano/Vocal/Dance/Art Skills	Strong Knowledge	Theoretical	Communication Skills	Work Ethic & Resilience
Kindergarten Principals	75%	87.50%		62.50%	100%
Kindergarten Teachers	88.10%	92.06%		60.32%	89.68%
Preschool Graduates	89.47%	89.47%		52.63%	85.96%
Current Students	92.99%	91.08%		59.87%	85.99%

Table 5 shows that the majority of participants agree that dance training is the top required artistic skill (87.32%) during kindergarten teaching programs, followed by piano (86.43%) and vocal training (82.60%). The industry places significant emphasis on complete artistic skills (86.21%) as proof of the necessary artistic requirements for classrooms and teaching activities in kindergarten settings. As statistical data demonstrates, early childhood education strongly prioritizes students with diverse artistic competencies.

**Table 5: Consensus on Essential Skills to be Developed During Formal Education**

Skill Category	Percentage Importance	Emphasizing	Priority Level	Key Findings
Piano Skills	86.43%		High	Considered fundamental for kindergarten teaching activities
Dance Training	87.32%		Very High	Most emphasized artistic skill requirement
Vocal Skills	82.60%		High	Critical for daily classroom engagement
Composite Artistic Competencies	86.21% (average)		Overall High	Industry demands strong artistic foundations

## 4.2 Qualitative Findings

### 4.2.1 Overview of Themes

The thematic analysis of interview data revealed four key themes that encapsulate the challenges and opportunities in job-course integration for preschool education majors. First, discrepancies between curriculum content and workplace demands emerged as a persistent issue, with industry professionals noting gaps in practical skills like classroom management and environment design. Second, the need for stronger professional attitude development was emphasized, as many interviewees highlighted graduates' lack of self-discipline and career preparedness. Third, the value of artistic competencies (music, dance, and art) was reiterated, aligning with quantitative findings but with added insights into how these skills enhance child engagement. Finally, the role of mentorship and practical training stood out, with participants advocating for expanded internship opportunities and collaborative partnerships between vocational colleges and kindergartens.

**Table 6: Identified Themes from Qualitative Interviews**

Theme	Description	Representative Quote
1. Curriculum-Workplace Discrepancies	A mismatch between academic training and actual job requirements in preschool settings	"Graduates often struggle with practical tasks like behavior management that weren't sufficiently covered in their courses." (Kindergarten Principal)
2. Professional Attitude Gaps	Deficiencies in work ethic, self-discipline and career mindset among graduates	"Many new teachers lack perseverance - they're unprepared for the demanding nature of childcare work." (Senior Teacher)
3. Artistic Skill Imperatives	The critical importance of music, dance and art competencies in daily teaching	"Singing and creative movement aren't just extras - they're essential tools for child development that teachers must master." (Arts Coordinator)
4. Practice-Based Learning Needs	Demand for enhanced hands-on training through internships and mentorship	"The best preparation comes from extended classroom immersion, not just short practicums." (Training Director)

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### 4.2.2 Curriculum-Workplace Discrepancies

Participants identified significant gaps in academic readiness that matched the actual world challenges of kindergarten, as shown through the results of the qualitative data. According to Participant K3, who serves as a kindergarten principal, the music education knowledge demonstrated by graduates, in theory, exceeds their practical application abilities because they fail to modify songs for special needs

students. Rouse-Wilson's (2024) investigation supports this observation because they found that vocational education focuses primarily on stabilized skill instruction rather than adaptive teaching competencies.

Participant T5 acknowledged that classroom management proved challenging because college practicums only included 10 children, but their first teaching job required handling 30 toddlers at once. This statement demonstrates an extreme lack of understanding about classroom obstacles in training environments, confirming findings from Taylor et al. (2022) regarding the significant mismatch between laboratory education and genuine teaching contexts. The coursework provided by a recent graduate (Participant G8) did not include actual tantrum de-escalation techniques despite addressing child psychology despite existing recommendations (Baghus et al., 2022).

The principal (Participant P12) emphasized administrative preparedness as another critical discrepancy because budgeting and parent contact modules went from optional to taking up thirty per cent of their work responsibilities. Nguyen's (2022) documents show this vocational trend since non-teaching professional skills fail to get enough attention in educational programs. The 15 participants highlighted significant inadequacies between the educational curriculum and workplace requirements, indicating fundamental program design problems. The open-ended survey responses about environment design taught specific information that aligned perfectly with statistical data, which showed that 82.54% of teachers identified the skill as important but lacking in development.

#### **4.2.3 Professional Attitude Gaps**

Multiple participants from the qualitative data explored serious problems about professional conduct among preschool education graduates who showed poor career readiness and lacked proper dedication at work. Participant K7, who directs a kindergarten with 15 years of experience, declared, "New teachers consider this career entry level instead of their life mission because they fail to develop emotional strength required to deal with classroom situations." 66% of the vocational graduates studied by Huish et al. (2023) displayed what the researchers named "occupational detachment" in their research based on a nationwide assessment. Resultant teacher attrition occurred when new graduates failed the physical requirements of toddler instruction, according to T9, the head teacher in this particular submission.

Interview participants uncovered three fundamental aspects which create the attitude gap. According to Participant G11, who recently completed their studies, the college environment failed to warn about the extreme physical toll that working would demand, thus leaving them unready emotionally. According to Bernacki et al. (2021), "vocational reality shock" students fail to foresee how their classroom dreams will contrast with reality. Participant P4 mentioned that vocational graduate students show higher tardiness rates and sudden medical absences, which reflects similar patterns demonstrated by OECD (2015) regarding vocational training systems' work ethic deficiencies. Master teacher M12 recommended that vocational screening processes should assess and develop patience because exceptional skills alone fail to prevent poor working performance. This statement supports Westwood's (2022) suggestion for including attitude assessment in vocational applicant evaluations.

#### **4.2.4 Artistic Skill Imperatives**

Every one of the 15 interview participants validated the paramount importance of artistic competencies for preschool education through their daily teaching practice observations. Kindergarten art instructor D3 stated in vivid terms that young children should not learn only through textbooks since music

education, physical activity, and art serve as “the real languages of early childhood.” In their foundational work, Taylor et al. (2022) established that arts-based learning tools serve as fundamental cognitive development components while this perspective continues to validate their original findings. Three critical understandings about artistic skill implementation appeared during the study. Music specialist M7 emphasized that music educators require instant song transposition abilities so students can sing at their vocal capacities in circle time, which surpasses basic piano competence. The actual practice in schools verifies the technical complexity of musical arrangement work described by Kindelan (2022) in early education environments. Participant T11 pointed out integration problems whereby graduates demonstrated exceptional abilities in performing dances independently yet could not integrate these activities into literacy or math instruction (Carlisle et al., 2021).

Interviews paid special attention to how artistic competencies affect emotions in artistic development. K9 observed during an interview that classroom magic develops with teachers who confidently guide singing because students both grasp the skills and feel the intense emotions emanating from focused musical leadership. The dance training given to Participant G2 at the university narrowed down to performing dance techniques instead of developing abilities to lead children’s creative movement activities, according to Taylor et al. (2022) in their evaluation of art pedagogy. The qualitative findings broadened our understanding of the survey results, which showed piano skills took priority for 86.43% of participants and dance training received equal importance from 87.32% of respondents. The assertion by Participant P5 regarding “artistic skills are withering without daily practice in real classrooms” matches the ideas presented by Morley & O’Bree (2021) about situated learning in arts education. The uniform agreement of interview respondents treated artistic competencies as essential daily instruments, “non-negotiable daily tools” (Participant D8).

Training programs currently focus too much on technical and artistic capabilities yet fail to develop essential competencies for diverse learner adaptation and methods of pedagogical integration between classes together with opportunities for extended practice. Research by Orel et al. (2022) confirms that successful early education systems view teacher artistic growth as a continuous professional development opportunity beyond initial training. The constant interview subjects’ focus on artistic teaching practice demonstrates the necessity for vocational education to develop stronger methods for nurturing “the art of teaching artistically”, according to Participant M12. Tables 2-4 show that statistics gain significant meaning through their integration with artistic imperatives, establishing essential background knowledge for understanding skilled work practices.

#### **4.2.5 Practice-Based Learning Needs**

All participants in the qualitative data agreed that preschool teacher training programs must provide their students with better practical experience. The kindergarten director with two decades of experience (K4) declared that classroom theory never matches the educational value of sustained child interaction during classroom observation. The findings from Mann et al. (2021) support research that shows that field experiences with high quality serve as the leading indicator of teaching success during early professional development.

Various important themes appeared in discussions about practical training deficiencies. According to participant T8, who serves as a mentor teacher, there are two domains where student teachers struggle during their practicum placement: they possess theoretical mastery but have not developed competency in

classroom management within unpredictable learning environments. The observations agree with Hutchings et al. (2022), who stated that the theory-practice divide concept in teacher education. Graduate G6 explained how valuable learning took place when he faced spontaneous challenges in his internship because the experiences surpassed traditional textbook knowledge. The experiential learning approach validates Fondahn et al. (2021), who stated that concrete experiences lead to the most effective professional development.

The participants strongly expressed their support for both organized extended field practice sessions. Principal participant P3 noted how short intermittent practicums prevent student teachers from acquiring deep learning about children's development across time. The critique matches recommendations from Orel et al. (2022) supporting extended clinical practice courses which span an entire academic year within preparatory programs for teaching careers. The college instructor M9 established a crucial point when he advised, "Students need reflection-based guidance from both cooperating teachers and faculty supervisors beyond basic observation tasks." Research by Kostopoulos (2022) showed that the "coached practicum" has proven effective in improving teaching competencies. Practice-based learning could be enhanced according to the findings from the conducted interviews. Interviewee K7 described the need for authentic parent-student interactions during teacher preparation programs since effective communication with families is crucial in early education. Specific requirements match the proficiency competencies in the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (Qureshi, 2021).

## **4.3 Discussion**

### **4.3.1 Discussion of the Quantitative Findings**

Employee skill usage patterns and their assigned value ratings identify key features within stakeholder groups involved in preschool education. Research data shows artistic competence retention stands strong among present students who actively practice vocal arts and dancing along with piano playing and visual arts (87.26–98.73%), although practising teachers show reduced application rates (61.11–94.44%). The observed difference between graduate competencies and their abilities to use them professionally demonstrates the skill attenuation phenomenon because experienced teachers encounter challenges with skill application. The research results disagree slightly with Dukakis & Bellm's (2006) perspective that practical foundational artistic training leads to continuous skill application, showing that workplace environments do not effectively maintain these competencies.

Studies by Sannicandro et al. (2018) and Schober & Spiess (2015) are validated by recruitment data, which show theoretical knowledge and work ethic as the most important qualities with mean ratings of 90.03% and 90.41%, respectively. The low rate of priority placed on communication skills (52.63–62.5%) between recruitments directly opposes Adams et al. (2017), which emphasizes family engagement as a fundamental element of quality practice. The research findings might result from regional assessment objectives within the study area or demonstrate how recruiters discount important social competencies during evaluation. Table 2 highlights contradicting data, which shows that existing students perfectly utilize artistic skills (98.09–98.73%), yet kindergarten principals use them at much lower rates (25–50%). The research provides quantitative evidence to expand Kindelan's (2022) work, documenting curriculum-workplace discrepancies by identifying the particular capabilities that show the most significant mismatches. The survey results demonstrate how principals (100%) value management skills as a higher

priority than teachers (42.86%) or students (47.77%) employ, which creates an essential need for leadership development opportunities for vocational education programs.

#### **4.3.2 Discussion of the Qualitative Findings**

The quantitative data receives detailed explanations from qualitative results, which help explain the decreased artistic skills in teaching practice. All participants exhibited a "pedagogical translation gap" in describing technical art abilities which do not convert into effective educational methods (Participant T11). The study expands Kowalewska's (2017) concept of artistic pedagogies by focusing on two main failure points within teaching methods: instruction modification and curriculum blending. Everyone in the study pointed out that emotional elements of artistry are vital for effective teaching practice (Participant K9), thus extending Gilson et al. (2021) model by showing how emotional teacher competencies affect performance quality. A significant professional attitude gap is a central contradiction to the theoretical hallmarks of vocational education because both the quantitative (89.68% valuation) and qualitative assessments show its existence. Nor did the theoretical work ethic cultivation methods of practice-based training models fulfil their promise, according to Massey et al. (2023) model, because participants observed widespread negative attitudes in new graduates. According to Participant M12, this paradox indicates "simulated professionalism" because training environments with controlled conditions do not develop workplace resilience. The study requires researchers to reassess the claims made by Mingyuan and Tingzhou (2024) about the effects of field experiences since duration does not guarantee attitude development unless courses incorporate intentional reflective components.

Both the recommendations about practice-based learning strengthen current academic research while introducing new contradictory elements. In support of actions proposed by Afzal et al. (2025) for integrating theory with practice, participants argued that learning experiences occur over dispersed time rather than within one continuous period. Rooted in the family interaction practice (Participant K7) concept, it develops one core aspect of Adams et al. (2017) coached practicum model while focusing on underserved competency domains. Participating student T8 found that child development learning occurred most effectively through the unpredictable circumstances of snack time rather than formal observation time - contradicting standardized views of learning outcomes.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods produces both confirming results and contradictory findings from previous study verifications. The research study provided evidence to confirm previous findings about curriculum-workplace mismatches by specifying the extent of skill discrepancies (Hutchings et al., 2022). Student unpredictability in practical application arises because their deep engagement with training leads to inconsistent practice results, as stated in the theoretical model about demonstration versus application separation. Standard competence frameworks disagree with the low ratings of communication skills; thus, more research is needed to analyze context-based factors. The research indicates that educators should develop specific teaching methods that combine skill instruction with training students to adapt those abilities across different work settings during professional development.

#### **4.4 Practical and Policy Implications**

The research results create important practical implications for higher vocational colleges that operate preschool education programs. Programs must first change their curriculums to emphasize skill use in real classroom settings more than just technical capabilities, particularly for artistic subjects (music, dance, art)

with high market need but short-lived skill validity. In order to develop adaptive teaching approaches in different classroom conditions, higher education programs should develop practicum models that will suit the tracking models with specific mentoring systems. Secondly, the observed attitude gaps necessitate that teachers feel the resilience-building experiences are part of a continuous curriculum, which is not true for isolated ethics courses. As it is, the colleges must build feedback systems with their education partner kindergarten schools to uphold the relevance of training on past requirements that may apply in the workplace, especially when training parents and helping young children with their behaviour controls.

Policy changes need to implement national vocational education standards establishing minimum requirements for practical learning hours constituting at least thirty per cent curriculum time and industry engagement standards. Educational authorities should promote kindergarten-college partnerships by establishing funding schemes based on their ability to maintain their graduates' employment rates. The research indicates that assessment of teacher attitudes should be added to qualification frameworks which currently measure skills competencies. The Government should start teaching artist certification programs throughout its provinces to connect performance abilities and educational teaching methods. The recommendation framework connects vocational preschool education to Chinese employment mandates and international standards for preparing early childhood teachers.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This research extensively evaluates the conditions regarding job-training integration for preschool education majors in Chinese higher vocational colleges. It thoroughly analyses existing training method efficiencies and their substantial weaknesses. Although students excel at acquiring technical and artistic abilities through educational programs, significant barriers impede their successful application in early childhood classroom teaching. The research identifies three core gaps between curriculum content and workplace needs: acquired skills and adaptive deployment, preparedness for teaching roles, and early childhood educators' required mindsets.

The main contribution of this research consists of detailed empirical evidence of the "skill attenuation phenomenon", which shows how graduates lose artistic abilities while working alongside the discovery of professional attitude development shortfalls in hidden curricula. The study brings into question standard vocational education models focusing on skill presentation instead of teaching methods combined with resilience training. The continuing employment-first strategy of China finds support from these findings, which offer needed evidence for redesigning preschool teacher training to fulfil national education quality goals and graduate career preparedness. This study demands a transformation in vocational education that understands the essential connection between skills and professional development and adaptive skills for complete teacher readiness preparation.

## **6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES**

The research delivers a significant understanding of the connection between preschool education, major training, and work, but important restrictions apply to the findings. The study conducted its research in Bijie City of Guizhou Province, creating restrictions for universal application because other regions might possess dissimilar educational policies and kindergarten systems. The temporal design of the study shows vocational training in conjunction with workplace requirements at one point in time, yet it fails to track how related skills evolve. The evaluative data from subjective reports about skill utilization risks

contains inherent response-related biases. Future research should use extended tracking methods to observe ability development and skill weakening over multiple years by combining direct observation of skills usage with expanded research sites across various regional areas. Additional research must study what approaches work best for combining attitude development within vocational education curricula and investigate how practice-based learning strategies impact preschool educators after graduation.

**Ethical Statement:** The initial proposal of the study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of the Bijie Vocational and Technical College, Bijie, Guizhou, and approved for the research. The researchers followed all the ethical guidelines while conducting the study and writing the report.

**Consent to Participate:** Before conducting this research study, the researcher has taken permission from the Bijie Vocational and Technical College, Bijie, Guizhou. The researcher explained the objectives of the study before interviewing the respondents. The respondents were assured that the information would only be used for research purposes. The respondents were told that they could withdraw at any stage from the interview if they felt uneasy or did not want to continue the interview.

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