

Article

Research on the International Talent Cultivation Model of Vocational Senior High Schools in Yunnan Border Counties under the "Belt and Road" Initiative

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Abstract: Under the continuous advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, economic exchanges and cultural interactions between China and South and Southeast Asian countries have become increasingly frequent, resulting in a growing demand for technically skilled talents with professional competencies and international perspectives. Located in China's southwestern border region, Yunnan serves as an important gateway to South and Southeast Asia, and vocational education in border counties plays a critical role in supporting regional economic development and cultivating skilled professionals. This study focuses on vocational senior high schools in Yunnan's border counties, analyzing the current foundation for international talent cultivation in border vocational education while considering regional economic development and the internationalization needs of vocational education. The study finds that although these schools benefit from advantages in geographical location, industrial development, and cross-border exchanges, challenges remain in international talent cultivation, including unclear training objectives, insufficient internationalization of the curriculum, and limited international competency of the teaching staff. To address these issues, the paper proposes constructing an international talent cultivation model aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative by clarifying internationalized training objectives, optimizing curriculum systems, and expanding school-enterprise cooperation and cross-border educational exchange platforms. The findings provide a reference for promoting the internationalization of vocational education in border areas and cultivating technically skilled talents with a global outlook.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative; Yunnan border region; vocational senior high schools; international talent cultivation; training model

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1. Introduction

With the deepening implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and personnel interactions between China and Belt and Road partner countries have been continuously strengthened, leading to an increasing demand for skilled technical professionals with international perspectives and cross-cultural communication abilities [1]. The Belt and Road Initiative not only serves as a significant development strategy for promoting regional economic cooperation and connectivity but also provides new opportunities and challenges for the development of vocational education in China. As a major pathway for cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents, vocational education plays a vital role in serving national strategies, promoting regional economic development, and facilitating industrial upgrading. Along with China's increasing degree of opening-up, the objectives of vocational education have gradually shifted from training purely skill-oriented talents to cultivating versatile professionals who possess both professional competencies and international perspectives,

as well as cross-cultural communication skills. Consequently, the internationalization of vocational education has become an essential direction for educational reform and development. In this context, exploring models for cultivating internationally competent talents in vocational education not only aligns with national strategic needs but also represents a necessary approach to advancing the high-quality development of vocational education. Yunnan Province, located in China's southwestern border region, serves as an important gateway and frontier for opening up to South and Southeast Asia. Bordering countries such as Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam, Yunnan has distinct geographical advantages and rich border resources. With the continuous deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative and regional cooperation, Yunnan's strategic position in China's external openness framework is increasingly prominent. Industries such as cross-border trade, cross-border e-commerce, cultural tourism, and modern logistics have been rapidly developing in the border region, creating a growing demand for talents who possess not only professional skills but also foreign language proficiency and international communication capabilities. At the same time, vocational senior high schools in Yunnan's border counties, as an important component of the local vocational education system, bear the responsibility of cultivating applied and skilled talents to serve regional socio-economic development. The quality of talent cultivation directly affects industrial development and regional economic vitality. However, current developments show that some border vocational senior high schools still focus primarily on traditional skill-based training in terms of educational philosophy, curriculum design, and teaching methods, paying insufficient attention to the cultivation of internationally competent talents. Students' foreign language proficiency, cross-cultural communication skills, and awareness of international professional standards remain limited, making it difficult for them to fully meet the practical demand for composite technical talents in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. Therefore, under the national Belt and Road Initiative and the continuous deepening of regional economic openness, systematically studying the international talent cultivation model of vocational senior high schools in Yunnan's border counties and exploring talent training pathways that align vocational education with regional industrial development hold significant theoretical and practical value for enhancing the capacity of vocational education to serve regional economic development, promoting high-quality development of border vocational education, and cultivating technically skilled talents with an international outlook [2].

2. The Current Foundation for International Talent Cultivation in Vocational Senior High Schools in Yunnan Border Counties

2.1. Geographical Advantages and Industrial Development Needs

Yunnan, located in China's southwestern border region, serves as an important gateway for opening up to South and Southeast Asia and holds a significant strategic position within the national framework of the Belt and Road Initiative and regional cooperation [3]. The province borders multiple countries, including Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam, with a long land border and several national-level ports, providing distinct geographical advantages. With the continuous advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative and the deepening of China-ASEAN cooperation mechanisms, border areas in Yunnan have seen increasingly active development in cross-border trade, cross-border e-commerce, international logistics, and cultural tourism, and the degree of regional economic openness continues to rise. Meanwhile, the industrial structure in these border areas has been gradually optimized and upgraded, forming a development pattern dominated by border trade, modern services, and specialized local industries. Against this backdrop, regional economic development has created new demands for talent. It requires not only technically skilled personnel with solid professional competencies but also composite talents who possess foreign language proficiency, cross-cultural understanding, and a certain degree of international perspective. Leveraging these unique geographical

advantages, cultivating internationally competent technical talents to serve the needs of regional openness has become a critical task for vocational education in Yunnan's border areas and provides a solid practical foundation for vocational senior high schools in these counties to develop internationalized talent cultivation programs [4].

2.2. Alignment of Vocational Education Programs with Regional Industrial Needs

Vocational senior high schools in Yunnan's border counties generally design their programs to closely align with regional economic development needs, offering majors that correspond to the local industrial structure. For example, some schools have established programs in e-commerce, tourism service and management, hotel management, and logistics management to meet the growing demands of border trade, cross-border e-commerce, and tourism-related industries. These programs have contributed significantly to supplying local enterprises and service sectors with a large number of personnel with foundational skills, thereby supporting regional economic development. Meanwhile, with the continuous growth of border trade and cross-border economic cooperation, some vocational schools have begun to integrate basic foreign language courses, international trade knowledge, and cross-border e-commerce content into their curricula to enhance students' adaptability to regional industrial demands. However, although the current vocational program offerings generally align with regional industry needs, there remains considerable room for improvement regarding curriculum internationalization, the provision of an internationalized practical teaching environment, and the cultivation of cross-cultural competencies. Strengthening the internationalization orientation of talent cultivation on the basis of existing programs is therefore an important direction for promoting vocational education that effectively serves regional development [5].

2.3. Preliminary Exploration of Cross-Border Exchange and Vocational Education Cooperation

With the ongoing advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, Yunnan has gradually strengthened educational exchanges and cooperation with neighboring countries [6]. Some border vocational schools have begun to explore various forms of cross-border educational exchange, such as establishing cooperative relationships with vocational institutions in neighboring countries, conducting teacher exchanges, organizing short-term student study programs, and providing vocational skills training. These initiatives have gradually expanded channels for international cooperation in vocational education. Additionally, some schools have leveraged border ports and cross-border enterprise resources to develop school-enterprise partnerships with businesses engaged in cross-border trade and international service industries, providing students with practical internship opportunities where they can gain firsthand experience of cross-border economic activities and international business processes. These explorations have, to some extent, broadened students' international perspectives and accumulated preliminary experience for the internationalization of vocational education. Nevertheless, overall cross-border education cooperation is still at an exploratory stage, with limited depth and scope, and a systematic, long-term talent cultivation mechanism has yet to be fully established [7].

3. Major Challenges in International Talent Cultivation in Vocational Senior High Schools in Yunnan Border Counties

3.1. Lack of Systematic Planning in International Talent Cultivation Goals

Some vocational senior high schools in Yunnan's border counties still focus primarily on traditional skill-based talent cultivation when formulating training objectives, with unclear positioning for international talent development. Although the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has increased the demand for talents with international perspectives and cross-cultural communication skills in border areas, some schools have not yet integrated international competence cultivation into their core training objectives,

placing greater emphasis on students' basic vocational skills and employability. Due to the lack of a systematic internationalization concept in talent cultivation, students have limited exposure to cross-cultural knowledge, international professional standards, and cross-border industry developments, making it difficult for them to fully meet the growing demands of international exchanges and cooperation in the region. Therefore, the insufficient international orientation in talent cultivation objectives has become a significant factor restricting the internationalization of vocational education in border areas [8].

3.2. Insufficient Alignment of Curriculum Content with International Development Needs

In terms of curriculum design, although some vocational senior high schools in Yunnan border counties have established majors such as e-commerce, tourism services, and logistics management in response to local economic development needs, the content of these programs still primarily follows domestic industry standards and focuses on basic vocational skill training, resulting in limited alignment with international development requirements [8]. In particular, aspects such as cross-border trade regulations, international service standards, and cross-cultural competency development are underrepresented in the curriculum, leaving students with few opportunities to systematically understand international industry norms and cross-border economic activities. Additionally, practical training is often conducted primarily in local enterprises, with limited exposure to cross-border companies or international business environments, which constrains the development of students' international vocational competencies. Consequently, there remains a noticeable gap between the curriculum content and the internationalization needs of industries under the Belt and Road Initiative [9,10].

3.3. Limited International Competency of Teaching Staff

Effective international talent cultivation relies not only on a well-structured curriculum but also on a teaching workforce with international perspectives. However, in practice, most teachers in vocational senior high schools in Yunnan border counties have long been engaged in local vocational education and have limited opportunities to participate in international exchanges, enterprise international business practices, or cross-border educational cooperation. While some teachers possess solid professional knowledge and teaching experience, their foreign language proficiency, cross-cultural awareness, and understanding of international professional standards still require improvement, which in turn affects the effectiveness of implementing internationalized courses. Furthermore, due to limited teacher training resources and international cooperation channels in some schools, opportunities for teachers to engage with international vocational education concepts and advanced teaching experiences remain relatively scarce. The insufficient internationalization of the teaching staff thus objectively constrains the further development of international talent cultivation in border vocational education [11-14].

4. Constructing an International Talent Cultivation Model for Vocational Senior High Schools in Yunnan Border Counties under the Belt and Road Initiative

4.1. Clarifying International Talent Cultivation Goals to Serve Regional Economic Development

With the continuous advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative and the increasing level of regional openness, vocational senior high schools in Yunnan border counties should place greater emphasis on aligning talent cultivation with regional economic development needs and integrating internationalization concepts into their training objectives. When formulating talent cultivation programs, schools should not only strengthen students' vocational skills but also highlight the development of international perspectives, cross-cultural communication abilities, and awareness of international professional standards. This approach ensures that students possess solid professional

competencies while being able to adapt to cross-border economic cooperation environments. By embedding international development requirements into talent cultivation goals, schools can establish a systematic approach to curriculum design, practical training, and school-enterprise cooperation, thereby cultivating technically skilled talents with international competencies to meet the demands of regional industrial development [15-17].

4.2. Developing a Curriculum System Incorporating International Elements

The curriculum system is a key vehicle for achieving talent cultivation objectives. In the process of international talent development, it is necessary to integrate international elements into the existing professional curriculum framework. On one hand, relevant courses can include foundational knowledge of cross-border trade, international service standards, and regional cultural exchanges, enabling students to acquire professional skills while gaining a basic understanding of the economic, cultural, and industrial contexts of Belt and Road partner countries [18,19]. On the other hand, schools can offer applied foreign language courses or vocational situational language training programs to enhance students' ability to communicate effectively in practical work settings. Additionally, practical training should be strengthened through cooperation with cross-border enterprises or companies engaged in international business, allowing students to gain firsthand experience of cross-border business processes and international professional standards, further enhancing their capacity to adapt to international employment environments [20-22].

4.3. Expanding School-Enterprise Cooperation and Cross-Border Educational Exchange Platforms

Promoting the internationalization of vocational education also requires creating diverse platforms for student practice and exchange. Vocational senior high schools in Yunnan border counties can leverage border ports and cross-border industrial resources to strengthen cooperation with cross-border trade companies, tourism service enterprises, and international logistics firms, establishing stable school-enterprise partnerships and providing students with practical environments closely aligned with industry development. Meanwhile, schools can actively explore cooperative opportunities with vocational institutions in neighboring countries through teacher exchanges, short-term student study programs, and vocational skills training, gradually broadening channels for international vocational education collaboration. By building multi-level school-enterprise cooperation and cross-border exchange platforms, students' practical skills and international perspectives can be enhanced, while the sustainable development of an international talent cultivation model in border vocational education can be effectively promoted [23-25].

5. Conclusion and Outlook

With the continuous advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative and the increasing level of regional openness, the strategic position of Yunnan's border areas in China's foreign exchange and cooperation has become increasingly prominent, resulting in a growing demand for technically skilled talents with international perspectives and cross-cultural communication abilities. Vocational senior high schools in Yunnan border counties, as an important component of the regional vocational education system, play a critical role in serving local economic development and cultivating applied and skilled talents. Analysis of the current foundation for international talent cultivation in these schools shows that the border areas possess advantages in geographical location, industrial development, and cross-border exchanges, providing favorable conditions for the internationalization of vocational education. However, overall, challenges remain in the international talent cultivation process, including unclear positioning of training

objectives, insufficient internationalization of the curriculum, and relatively limited international competencies among teaching staff.

In response, this study suggests that schools explore constructing an international talent cultivation model aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative by clarifying international training objectives, optimizing curriculum systems, and expanding school-enterprise cooperation and cross-border educational exchange platforms, thereby enhancing vocational education's capacity to serve regional economic development. Looking ahead, with the continued deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative and the expansion of regional cooperation, there is broad potential for the internationalization of vocational education in Yunnan border areas. Future research could further incorporate specific school cases to empirically examine the implementation pathways and practical outcomes of international talent cultivation, providing richer theoretical support and practical experience for the high-quality development of vocational education in border regions.

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