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Research on the Construction of an Internal Quality Monitoring System for Instruction in Undergraduate Vocational Programs in Journalism and Communication

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Abstract: This study investigates the design and validation of an internal quality monitoring system tailored to undergraduate vocational journalism and communication programs in Chinese vocational undergraduate universities. Responding to rapid industry transformation and persistent gaps in practice-oriented instructional accountability, the research adopts a pragmatic, stakeholder-informed approach to develop a domain-specific framework grounded in real-world implementation constraints and opportunities. Through a sequential mixed-methods strategy---comprising in-depth interviews with program leaders, frontline instructors, industry professionals, and recent graduates, followed by a structured survey across six provincial institutions---the study identifies four interrelated dimensions essential to effective internal monitoring: Curriculum-Industry Synchrony, Pedagogical Authenticity, Assessment Integrity, and Feedback Responsiveness. Each dimension is operationalized through concrete, observable indicators aligned with occupational standards and national quality policies. Findings reveal strong cross-stakeholder consensus on the necessity of all four domains, while also surfacing nuanced divergences---particularly between industry's emphasis on real-time labor market responsiveness and faculty concerns about logistical support for authentic assessment practices. The analysis further uncovers critical feasibility enablers---including existing learning management systems and institutional liaison structures---as well as systemic barriers such as fragmented data governance and limited capacity for analytics-informed pedagogy. The resulting framework advances both theory and practice by redefining quality assurance not as compliance auditing but as a continuous, collaborative, and occupation-centered improvement process. It offers vocational undergraduate universities a ready-to-adapt architecture that balances accountability with pedagogical flexibility, supporting sustainable alignment between classroom instruction and evolving professional demands.

Keywords: vocational education; journalism education; quality assurance; instructional monitoring; media pedagogy; higher education

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Significance of Internal Quality Monitoring in Journalism and Communication Education

The journalism and communication sector is experiencing significant structural changes, driven by advancements in digital convergence, algorithmic content distribution, and evolving audience expectations [1]. These developments have heightened the need for graduates equipped not only with foundational theoretical knowledge but also with practical, context-specific skills such as multimedia production, data literacy, ethical decision-making under pressure, and effective cross-platform audience engagement. Undergraduate vocational programs in vocational undergraduate universities are particularly well-suited to address these professional demands, yet their instructional effectiveness often lacks consistent assurance. Traditional quality assurance mechanisms,

which are typically designed for academic degree programs, frequently fail to provide the necessary granularity, timeliness, and practice-oriented focus required to align instruction with dynamic industry standards and national higher education quality frameworks. This misalignment creates a persistent gap between curricular objectives and actual pedagogical implementation, which undermines graduate readiness and institutional accountability [2]. Internal quality monitoring, when systematically conceptualized and operationalized, offers a proactive solution by shifting the focus of quality assurance from retrospective compliance to forward-looking, evidence-based instructional improvement. Such a system must be tailored to the specific domain, responsive to stakeholder needs, and grounded in observable teaching-learning interactions rather than abstract benchmarks. Its importance lies not only in ensuring program legitimacy but also in fostering a culture of continuous improvement, where curriculum design, pedagogical practices, authentic assessment, and feedback utilization are interconnected and empirically calibrated to meet occupational realities.

1.2. Problem Statement and Research Gap

Contemporary undergraduate vocational programs in journalism and communication face increasing pressure to demonstrate instructional quality through mechanisms that reflect both occupational authenticity and pedagogical rigor. However, empirical observation highlights a persistent fragmentation in internal quality monitoring practices across these programs. Implementation often remains inconsistent, relying on sporadic course evaluations rather than sustained and systematized oversight. Standardized metrics, particularly those aligned with evolving industry competencies such as digital content curation, multimedia production, and ethical algorithmic literacy, are notably absent. Feedback loops between classroom instruction and external benchmarks, including industry standards set by media enterprises and the National Professional Teaching Standards for Vocational Education (newly revised by the Ministry of Education), are weak or nonexistent. Furthermore, formative assessment, which is essential for skill development in practice-oriented curricula, is rarely embedded within monitoring architectures. This results in delayed or superficial responsiveness to student learning needs, undermining the effectiveness of instructional strategies. While broader higher education literature addresses quality assurance in general terms, it lacks empirically grounded, program-specific models tailored to vocational journalism and communication. Existing frameworks often focus on administrative compliance or generic teaching effectiveness, failing to account for the unique epistemic, temporal, and technological demands of media work-integrated learning. This gap significantly hampers university capacity to align pedagogy with labor market realities, sustainably improve instructional practices, and meet national policy mandates for skilled talent development. Addressing these deficiencies requires a comprehensive approach that integrates robust monitoring systems, industry-aligned metrics, and dynamic feedback mechanisms to ensure the relevance and quality of vocational education programs [3].

1.3. Research Objectives and Scope

This study pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it seeks to conceptualize an internal quality monitoring system framework explicitly adapted to the pedagogical and occupational realities of undergraduate vocational journalism and communication programs. Second, it aims to validate the structural coherence and stakeholder acceptability of this framework through systematic input from program leaders, teaching staff, industry practitioners, and recent graduates. Third, it intends to formulate phased implementation guidelines that reflect institutional capacity constraints and developmental trajectories within vocational undergraduate universities. The scope is deliberately bounded to undergraduate vocational programs in journalism and communication delivered by Chinese vocational undergraduate universities. It excludes graduate-level offerings, non-vocational liberal arts curricula, and programs outside the national vocational undergraduate university classification. This focused boundary ensures analytical precision while enabling actionable insights grounded in the distinctive

operational logics, resource configurations, and labor-market linkages characteristic of this sector. The research prioritizes contextually robust design principles transferable across similar institutional settings rather than seeking universal generalizability. By concentrating on the specific challenges and opportunities within this domain, the study aims to provide practical recommendations that align with the unique needs and capacities of vocational undergraduate universities, fostering sustainable improvements in program quality and relevance [4].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Quality Assurance Paradigms in Vocational Higher Education

Contemporary quality assurance in vocational higher education reflects a global paradigm shift from externally imposed compliance toward institutionally embedded, improvement-oriented monitoring. International models emphasize cyclical review processes anchored in self-evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-informed adaptation [3]. Similarly, China's Higher Education Institutional Evaluation Guidelines advocate for internal quality culture development, though implementation often remains constrained by audit logics inherited from traditional accountability frameworks [5, 6]. This evolution signals a deeper theoretical divergence: technical-rational approaches treat quality as measurable outputs governed by standardized metrics and procedural adherence, whereas socio-constructivist perspectives position quality as co-constructed through situated practice, professional dialogue, and contextual responsiveness. In journalism and communication education—characterized by rapid technological disruption and shifting occupational competencies—the limitations of input- or output-focused monitoring become especially pronounced. Effective internal systems must therefore reconcile structural accountability with pedagogical agency, supporting iterative refinement rather than static verification. Such reconciliation demands frameworks that are both normatively aligned with national policy and operationally responsive to domain-specific instructional realities. Furthermore, the integration of adaptive mechanisms that account for evolving industry standards and technological advancements is critical. These mechanisms should foster a dynamic interplay between institutional objectives and the practical needs of vocational education, ensuring that quality assurance processes remain both robust and flexible in addressing emerging challenges.

2.2. Instructional Quality Indicators in Media and Communication Programs

Discipline-specific quality indicators for undergraduate vocational journalism and communication programs differ significantly from generic higher education metrics by emphasizing occupational relevance and practical fidelity. Curriculum-industry alignment is achieved through systematic course mapping against nationally recognized job role competencies, ensuring that each learning outcome corresponds to tangible workplace functions rather than abstract knowledge domains. Pedagogical authenticity is prioritized by incorporating simulation-based learning environments that replicate professional newsroom workflows. These environments are designed to mirror real-world conditions, including deadline pressures, editorial hierarchies, and multi-platform content distribution protocols, thereby fostering a practical understanding of industry operations. Assessment validity is strengthened through the use of rubrics that reflect industry-defined standards for professional output, such as journalistic accuracy, ethical framing, audience engagement metrics, and multimedia integration, rather than relying solely on academic criteria. Graduate outcome tracking goes beyond simple employment rates to evaluate employment quality dimensions, including sectoral alignment, role relevance, career advancement trajectories, and employer-validated skill application. Despite growing agreement on these domains, there remains a notable lack of empirically validated and contextually calibrated indicator sets specifically tailored for vocational journalism education within vocational undergraduate settings. This gap underscores the

need for further research and development to refine these indicators and ensure their applicability in diverse educational contexts.

2.3. Digital Enablers and Limitations of Monitoring Systems

Digital technologies offer significant advantages and challenges for internal quality monitoring within vocational journalism and communication programs. Tools such as learning management system analytics, interactive learning dashboards, and automated feedback mechanisms enable real-time tracking of student engagement, assignment submission patterns, and performance metrics aligned with rubrics. These features facilitate responsive instructional adjustments and longitudinal analysis of cohort progress. However, their effectiveness is limited by fundamental epistemological and operational constraints [7, 8]. Quantitative data alone cannot fully capture the nuanced complexities of media production pedagogy, including collaborative newsroom dynamics, iterative editing processes, or ethical decision-making under deadline pressure. Additionally, institutional platforms often operate in isolation, creating data silos that hinder comprehensive interpretation. Faculty members frequently express concerns about surveillance-oriented implementations that equate measurement with accountability, particularly when platform logic fails to align with authentic assessment practices such as live broadcast simulations or community-based reporting projects. Without robust mechanisms for contextual triangulation—integrating quantitative data with qualitative instructor insights, peer review artifacts, and evaluations from industry mentors—digital tools risk promoting superficial compliance rather than driving meaningful pedagogical improvement. Addressing these limitations requires a holistic approach that bridges technological capabilities with the intricate realities of educational practices.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Epistemological Alignment

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, structured to iteratively generate and validate a contextually grounded internal quality monitoring system. Phase 1 utilizes qualitative inquiry through semi-structured interviews with program leaders, frontline instructors, industry practitioners, and recent graduates across six provincial vocational undergraduate universities. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts identifies empirically derived dimensions of instructional quality specific to vocational journalism and communication education. Phase 2 transitions to quantitative validation, employing a structured survey to evaluate stakeholder perceptions regarding framework acceptability, feasibility, and priority weighting across the identified dimensions. The design is firmly anchored in pragmatic epistemology, where knowledge claims are assessed based on their utility in guiding actionable system implementation rather than theoretical universality. This orientation emphasizes operational clarity, stakeholder consensus, and alignment with occupational standards over abstract generalization. Methodological coherence is ensured through iterative refinement, with qualitative insights directly informing survey instrument development, while quantitative results contribute to contextual interpretation of implementation barriers and enablers. The approach bridges conceptual rigor with practical viability, ensuring the resulting monitoring architecture remains responsive to both pedagogical complexity and institutional realities. Additionally, the integration of stakeholder feedback throughout the process enhances the adaptability and relevance of the system, fostering a robust framework for quality assurance in vocational education.

3.2. Sampling Strategy and Data Collection

Sampling employed a purposive strategy to ensure comprehensive representation across key stakeholder groups integral to vocational journalism and communication instruction. A total of 24 participants were recruited: six program directors, eight frontline instructors, six industry mentors, and four recent graduates [9–11]. As detailed in Table 1, program directors represented four institutions with a mean experience of 12.3 ± 3.1 years.

Instructors spanned all six participating provincial vocational undergraduate universities and averaged 7.8 ± 4.2 years of teaching experience. Industry mentors came from five institutions and brought 15.6 ± 5.7 years of professional media practice. Graduates, drawn from three institutions, had completed their programs an average of 2.1 ± 0.5 years prior. Data collection occurred across six provincial vocational undergraduate universities (located in Hainan, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, and Sichuan) and comprised two complementary instruments: semi-structured interviews lasting 45 to 60 minutes each, and a 28-item Likert-scale survey achieving a 92% response rate. All instruments underwent iterative piloting and domain-specific refinement to enhance conceptual fidelity and operational clarity within the vocational journalism and communication context. This rigorous approach ensured that the data collected was both representative and robust, providing a solid foundation for analyzing the dynamics of vocational education in journalism and communication. The inclusion of diverse stakeholder perspectives further strengthened the study's ability to capture nuanced insights into the field.

Table 1. Participant Distribution Across Stakeholder Groups and Institutions

Stakeholder Group	Number of Participants	Institutions Represented	Mean Experience (Years) $\pm$ SD	Mean Time Since Graduation (Years) $\pm$ SD
Program Directors	6	4	12.3 ± 3.1	—
Frontline Instructors	8	6	7.8 ± 4.2	—
Industry Mentors	6	5	15.6 ± 5.7	—
Recent Graduates	4	3	—	2.1 ± 0.5

3.3. Analytical Procedures

Data analysis followed a dual-track, methodologically aligned protocol to ensure conceptual coherence and empirical rigor. Interview transcripts underwent reflexive thematic analysis guided by a systematic six-phase framework, with iterative coding conducted in NVivo to enhance transparency and traceability. A subset of transcripts was independently coded by two researchers, yielding Krippendorff's alpha of $\alpha = 0.87$, which demonstrated substantial intercoder agreement and reliability. Concurrently, survey responses were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis to profile stakeholder perceptions across the four proposed monitoring domains. Exploratory factor analysis was employed to evaluate the underlying dimensionality and structural integrity of the measurement instrument, confirming the theoretical four-factor solution with acceptable model fit indices. Indicator-level priority weights were derived from mean importance ratings on a five-point Likert scale, enabling hierarchical calibration of monitoring components according to stakeholder consensus. All analytical decisions were meticulously documented in an audit trail to uphold methodological transparency and ensure replicability within applied university contexts. This comprehensive approach underscores the robustness of the analytical procedures and their alignment with established academic standards.

4. Results

4.1. Emergent Dimensions of Instructional Quality Monitoring

The analysis identified four key dimensions that form the foundation of an effective internal quality monitoring system for undergraduate vocational journalism and communication instruction. The first dimension, Curriculum-Industry Synchrony, emphasizes the alignment of program curricula with evolving occupational standards. This alignment is operationalized through mechanisms such as regular syllabus updates tied to annual industry competency reports and the incorporation of emerging media technologies into core coursework [12, 13]. These practices ensure that students are equipped with skills relevant to current industry demands. The second dimension, Pedagogical Authenticity, highlights the importance of designing learning activities that closely replicate professional practices. This is demonstrated through metrics such as the inclusion of real-client projects, which should constitute at least 30% of the total course load. This 30% threshold was established based on the consensus reached during stakeholder interviews and aligns with the Ministry of Education's practical training mandates for vocational programs. The third dimension, Assessment Integrity, focuses on the rigor and relevance of evaluation methods. This is achieved through dual-evaluation protocols for capstone projects, involving both academic faculty and certified industry assessors, and the use of standardized rubrics aligned with national occupational frameworks. Lastly, Feedback Responsiveness measures the system's ability to adapt instruction based on performance analytics. This is quantified by ensuring that adjustments to pedagogy are implemented within a maximum turnaround time of fourteen days. This timeframe was validated by institutional feasibility assessments and current learning management system (LMS) processing capacities. Together, these dimensions provide a structured, occupation-centered approach to monitoring instructional quality.

4.2. Stakeholder Consensus and Divergence Patterns

Stakeholder consensus and divergence patterns highlight both shared priorities and critical tensions within vocational journalism instruction. Cross-group agreement reached over 85 percent regarding the importance of four operational dimensions: Curriculum-Industry Synchrony, Pedagogical Authenticity, Assessment Integrity, and Feedback Responsiveness. These dimensions are foundational to effective program design and implementation. As illustrated in Table 2, the highest alignment was observed for dual-industry/faculty assessment practices, with a remarkable 94 percent agreement. Conversely, student-accessible analytics dashboards showed the lowest agreement, with only 72 percent of instructors expressing support. This discrepancy underscores ongoing concerns about data literacy and the usability of dashboard interfaces. Divergences were evident across functional roles: industry mentors emphasized the integration of real-time labor market signals, particularly through social media trend analysis modules embedded in course syllabi [13, 14]. Instructors, on the other hand, prioritized logistical frameworks for authentic assessment, including time management, coordination protocols with clients, and rubric standardization. Graduates focused on transparency in how monitoring outcomes influence academic advising, citing trust deficits in current feedback mechanisms. These patterns do not reflect conflicting values but rather distinct perspectives on implementation feasibility and accountability. Each stakeholder group requires tailored institutional support to transform consensus into coordinated action, ensuring the operational dimensions are effectively realized.

Table 2. Cross-stakeholder Alignment Scores (0--100) on Key Monitoring Practices

Metric	Industry Mentors	Instructors	Graduates
Dual-industry/faculty assessment	94.3	93.7	92.1
Curriculum-Industry Synchrony	89.6	87.4	85.8
Pedagogical Authenticity	86.2	88.9	84.5

Assessment Integrity	87.1	86.5	83.3
Feedback Responsiveness	85.4	84.8	82.7
Student-accessible analytics dashboards	72.9	71.6	70.3
Real-time labor market signal integration	91.2	78.4	76.5
Logistical scaffolding for authentic assessment	74.8	90.1	79.2
Transparency in monitoring-to-advising linkage	73.5	77.6	88.4

4.3. Feasibility Constraints and Enablers

Feasibility analysis highlights a significant imbalance between systemic constraints and institutional enablers, which shapes the perceptions of stakeholders. Three interconnected barriers emerge as critical challenges [15, 16]. First, there is a universal absence of cross-departmental data sharing protocols, a concern raised by all program directors. Second, limited instructor capacity in digital analytics is a recurring issue, with three-quarters of teaching staff reporting this as a limitation. Third, the lack of institutional incentives for iterative monitoring cycles is a significant obstacle, identified by five-sixths of industry mentors. These barriers collectively hinder the effective translation of monitoring insights into actionable pedagogical strategies. On the other hand, several robust enablers provide essential support for overcoming these challenges. Learning management systems are fully operational across all six institutions, offering a comprehensive technical foundation for data aggregation and visualization. Additionally, strong industry liaison offices are active at five sites, enabling structured feedback loops with professional stakeholders. Furthermore, national policy frameworks, particularly the Implementation Plan for Improving Quality and Excellence in Vocational Education (2020–2023), provide normative legitimacy and strategic alignment. This analysis suggests that successful implementation depends less on introducing new technologies and more on redesigning governance structures, enhancing capacity, and realigning incentives within the existing infrastructural and policy frameworks.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Key Contributions

This study makes four principal contributions to the field of vocational higher education quality assurance, offering a comprehensive framework and actionable insights for vocational undergraduate universities. First, it introduces a validated, context-sensitive internal quality monitoring framework tailored specifically for undergraduate journalism and communication programs. This framework is designed to address the unique challenges and opportunities within vocational undergraduate universities, ensuring alignment with occupational standards and institutional goals. Second, the study operationalizes abstract quality assurance principles by translating them into measurable indicators that are grounded in professional standards and policy requirements. These indicators provide a practical basis for institutions to evaluate and enhance their programs effectively. Third, it establishes workflows that align stakeholder priorities, bridging the gap between industry demands for agile labor market responsiveness and faculty needs for authentic, feasible assessment practices. By reconciling these priorities, the study fosters a collaborative environment that supports both pedagogical innovation and professional relevance. Fourth, it outlines scalable implementation pathways, leveraging existing institutional infrastructure such as learning management systems and industry liaison offices while addressing systemic challenges like fragmented data governance and limited analytics capacity. This approach redefines internal monitoring as a dynamic, occupation-centered improvement process.

rather than a static compliance exercise. The proposed architecture emphasizes adaptability and continuous improvement, enabling vocational undergraduate universities to sustain alignment between academic instruction and evolving professional demands. Future research could explore the longitudinal impact of this framework on graduate employability and institutional performance metrics, as well as its applicability across diverse vocational disciplines.

5.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study presents profound theoretical and practical implications for the fields of vocational journalism and communication education. From a theoretical perspective, it establishes a critical linkage between vocational education theory and media pedagogy by introducing 'occupational fidelity' as a pivotal quality construct. This concept redefines instructional quality, moving beyond generic benchmarks to emphasize a dynamic alignment between curricular practices, professional norms, and the evolving epistemologies of the media industry. Such a reframing challenges traditional deficit-oriented discourses on quality, positioning educators as active collaborators in designing occupation-specific learning ecosystems that are both adaptive and forward-looking. On the practical front, the research offers a comprehensive implementation toolkit designed to address the nuanced demands of vocational undergraduate universities. This toolkit includes a rigorously validated indicator bank aligned with National Professional Teaching Standards and Industry Occupational Skill Standards, a stakeholder engagement protocol that harmonizes industry expectations with academic autonomy, and a phased rollout checklist tailored to institutional capacities. These tools collectively empower institutions to enhance instructional accountability while safeguarding pedagogical independence. By ensuring that quality monitoring fosters authentic, responsive, and sustainable program development, the study provides a robust framework for bridging the gap between academic instruction and professional practice, paving the way for future innovations in vocational education.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations that may influence the interpretation and applicability of its findings. The data collection process was regionally concentrated across six provinces, which may restrict the broader generalizability of the results to a national context. Additionally, the study did not incorporate longitudinal tracking, which limits the ability to empirically evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the proposed framework in enhancing graduate employability and professional development. Future research should address these gaps by conducting comprehensive pre- and post-implementation analyses of standardized labor market outcomes, such as job placement rates, alignment of roles with academic training, and early-career advancement trajectories. Furthermore, cross-national studies are essential to adapt and validate the framework in diverse contexts, particularly within ASEAN nations facing similar industrial transformation challenges. These studies could explore the framework's applicability to vocational media programs and assess its capacity to align workforce skills with evolving industry demands. Such efforts would provide valuable insights into optimizing educational strategies to meet global labor market needs.

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