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Railway International Talent Cultivation in Chinese Higher Vocational Education Going Global: A Documentary Analysis of Models, Problems and Pathways

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Abstract: Chinese higher vocational colleges increasingly train railway personnel for overseas projects under the "Vocational Education Going Global" agenda and the Belt and Road Initiative. Research on this work remains largely descriptive and confined to single institutions. This study examines how rail-related vocational colleges organise international talent cultivation, what problems recur in their practice, and which pathways could address them. A qualitative documentary analysis was conducted on publicly available policy texts, institutional reports, news releases and scholarly articles concerning four purposively selected colleges, analysed thematically and interpreted through the policy-borrowing literature. Four practice models were identified: standard export-led, school–enterprise collaborative, compound "Chinese language plus vocational skills", and order-based training. These models overlap in practice and are anchored in the overseas operations of Chinese railway enterprises. Five recurring problems emerged: limited cross-border recognition and localisation of standards, insufficient international competence among teaching staff, narrow and unstable funding, the absence of a quality-assurance framework for overseas provision, and weak cultural adaptation. The analysis suggests that these problems arise largely from treating standard export as transfer rather than as negotiated adaptation. Pathways are proposed for co-constructing standards with host countries, developing teachers' international competence, diversifying funding, building shared quality assurance, and strengthening cultural integration. Because the evidence consists mainly of institutional self-reports, the findings describe how practice is represented rather than its verified outcomes, and host-country perspectives remain a priority for future research.

Keywords: Vocational education going global, railway talent cultivation, TVET internationalisation, policy transfer, Belt and Road Initiative

1. Introduction

The internationalisation of Chinese vocational education is no longer a matter of scattered exchange projects. It is now a coordinated agenda, described in Chinese scholarship as "Vocational Education Going Global". National policy documents do not use the term; they speak of the internationalisation of vocational education or of overseas vocational education. The term also lacks an agreed definition (Liang et al., 2026). Its practical importance, however, is clear. Vocational colleges are now expected to support Chinese enterprises operating abroad, to export Chinese teaching standards and resources, and to contribute to people-to-people exchange under the Belt and Road Initiative (S. Li et al., 2025; Y. Wang, 2024).

Railway training is a distinctive part of this agenda. Railways are long-lived infrastructure whose safe operation after hand-over depends on a local workforce able to operate, inspect and maintain equipment built to Chinese specifications. When a Chinese contractor completes a line abroad, the warranty period ends long before the asset does. Who will run and maintain the railway then becomes a question of skills formation in the host country (Wu, 2024). Railway international talent cultivation therefore links the commercial interests of Chinese enterprises, the development needs of host countries, and the reputation of Chinese vocational education.

The policy context reinforces this link. National guidance has repeatedly asked vocational colleges to "follow enterprises overseas", and colleges with rail-transport specialisms have responded with overseas colleges, workshops, training bases and standard-development projects (H. Liu, 2024; Zhao, 2024). The OECD (2023) has likewise argued that

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vocational systems must respond to changing skill needs and support transitions into a changing labour market. Its analysis, however, concerns domestic systems rather than cross-border provision.

Three broad definitions of the concept can be distinguished in Chinese scholarship. A content-oriented definition stresses the development of internationally influential professional and curriculum standards and the export of Chinese experience (S. Li et al., 2025). A strategy-oriented definition treats Going Global as a national strategy that links central design, regional industrial layout and institutional projects (S. Liu et al., 2025). Its practical forms include foreign-aid training, inter-institutional cooperation, standard export and "Chinese language plus vocational skills" programmes. A measure-oriented definition presents it as a set of overseas academic, training, standard-export and industry–education activities that serve diplomacy and global education governance (Liang et al., 2026). This article combines the first and third definitions. Vocational Education Going Global here refers to the activities through which Chinese vocational institutions deliver education, training and standards abroad, usually in partnership with Chinese enterprises.

Seen from outside China, this agenda is an instance of a familiar scholarly problem: the international transfer of vocational education and training (VET). Comparative research has long cautioned that educational policies and practices cannot simply be lifted from one system and installed in another (Phillips & Ochs, 2003). Reviews of VET transfer conclude that successful transfer depends on cultural sensitivity, adaptation and long-term planning in the receiving context (Li & Pilz, 2023). They also find that empirical research on transfer remains fragmented and methodologically uneven (Toepper et al., 2022).

Evidence on enterprise-led transfer points the same way. Pilz (2016) studied more than forty German subsidiaries in China, India, Japan and the United States. Host-country conditions were so influential that complete transfer of the German dual system was not possible; companies instead reached accommodations with local VET structures and labour markets. The Chinese strategy of "education following industry overseas" rests on a similar enterprise-led logic, and Pilz's finding suggests that its success will likewise depend on accommodation rather than replication.

A second dimension concerns the structural barriers that national VET systems create. Because vocational qualifications are tied to national occupational standards, regulatory regimes and labour markets, internationalisation in VET faces obstacles that are more stubborn than in higher education (Shaw et al., 2016). Research on policy transfer within the European Union, where harmonisation instruments are far more developed than between China and its partners, still finds partial and uneven uptake (Ciantar, 2025).

A third dimension, central to railway training, is the human and cultural side of cross-border teaching. Intercultural competence is now widely understood as a combination of attitudes, knowledge and skills that enables effective and appropriate behaviour across cultures, and it develops through deliberate learning rather than exposure alone (Deardorff, 2006). This matters both for overseas trainees, who must work within Chinese-designed technical systems, and for the Chinese teachers who are sent to teach them.

The evidence on China's own education and training cooperation abroad is mixed. King (2013) documented the rapid growth of Chinese training provision in Africa and showed how it serves both development cooperation and soft-power objectives, while noting that its effects on local capacity are rarely evaluated. More recent accounts of the Luban Workshops describe their expansion and standardisation as a model of Chinese vocational education internationalisation (F. Wang, 2026), but such accounts are largely produced by the implementing institutions themselves. Acknowledging this limitation is important for any study that relies on similar sources, including the present one.

Domestic Chinese scholarship has grown quickly. It has examined the motivations for going global, including people-to-people exchange (Y. Wang, 2024) and the shift from product export to standard export (B. Li, 2024); organisational models such as the Zhan Tianyou Colleges (Zhao, 2024) and the enterprise-led 3C model (H. Liu, 2024); compound talent models combining language and vocational skills (Xu Man, 2024); teacher development (Lin, 2024); and the localisation and mutual recognition of standards (Ge, 2024; Han, 2024).

Within the railway sector specifically, studies have argued that localised technical talent is a precondition for the success of high-speed rail exports (Wu, 2024). Most existing work, however, examines a single college or a single programme, and relies on the authors' own institutional experience without stating how evidence was gathered or analysed.

Two gaps therefore remain. First, there is little cross-institutional analysis of how rail-related vocational colleges organise international talent cultivation and of the problems that recur across them. Second, Chinese and international literatures on VET transfer have developed largely in isolation. Chinese practice is seldom interpreted through the international policy-transfer literature, and international scholarship has paid little attention to Chinese rail-sector cases.

This study addresses these gaps through a documentary analysis of four vocational colleges engaged in railway-related international training. It asks three questions: (1) What models of railway international talent cultivation have these colleges developed? (2) What problems recur in their practice? (3) What pathways could address these problems? The study does not evaluate learning outcomes or the experience of overseas trainees, which the available evidence does not allow; its findings describe how practice is organised and represented, not how well it works. The article proceeds with a review of the literature, an account of the method, the findings on models and problems, a discussion of pathways and limitations, and a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 International Research on VET Transfer and Internationalisation

International research on VET internationalisation has been organised around three themes. The first concerns motivations. Economic globalisation, labour mobility and competition between education systems all push VET towards international activity, but the strongest driver in the transfer literature is the overseas expansion of firms. German multinationals, for example, have sought to reproduce dual training in their subsidiaries, and the outcome has been partial, locally adapted versions of the model rather than replicas (Pilz, 2016; Li & Pilz, 2023).

The second theme concerns standards and their transferability. Here the literature is cautious. Because VET qualifications are anchored in national occupational standards and regulatory systems, standards that work at home do not automatically gain recognition abroad (Shaw et al., 2016). Policy-borrowing research describes transfer as a staged process of attraction, decision, implementation and internalisation, in which the receiving context reshapes what is borrowed at each stage (Phillips & Ochs, 2003). Systematic reviews add that most studies of VET transfer describe projects rather than evaluate them, and that host-country perspectives are under-represented (Toepper et al., 2022; Ciantar, 2025).

The third theme concerns the competences that international work requires. Internationalisation has been defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of education (Knight, 2004). At the level of the individual, this translates into intercultural competence, which research-based models describe as developmental and assessable rather than as a fixed trait (Deardorff, 2006). Both points imply that language training alone is not sufficient for international technical work.

2.2 Chinese Research on Vocational Education Going Global

Chinese research on vocational education internationalisation began later but has expanded rapidly. Five strands can be identified. Studies of motivation emphasise people-to-people exchange (Y. Wang, 2024) and the strategic move from exporting products to exporting standards (B. Li, 2024). Studies of cooperation models describe how overseas institutions are governed. Examples include the council and working-group structure of the Zhan Tianyou Colleges (Zhao, 2024) and the enterprise-led 3C model developed by Hunan Railway Professional Technology College with CRRC (H. Liu, 2024).

Studies of talent cultivation argue that high-speed rail exports depend on localised technical staff (Wu, 2024) and that "Chinese language plus vocational skills" programmes improve trainees' ability to work in Chinese-funded enterprises (Xu Man, 2024). Studies of teaching staff report that few vocational teachers have international teaching experience (Lin, 2024). Studies of standards argue that export requires localisation (Ge, 2024) and that mutual recognition remains the "last mile" of going global because of differences in education systems, industrial standards and law (Han, 2024).

2.3 Research Gap and Analytical Frame

The two literatures complement each other. Chinese research offers detailed institutional accounts but rarely states its methods or engages with comparative theory; international research offers theory and caution but has paid little attention to Chinese cases. This study uses the policy-borrowing framework of Phillips and Ochs (2003), and the enterprise-led transfer findings of Pilz (2016), as a sensitising frame. The frame directs attention to how Chinese standards and models are adapted, or not adapted, as they move into host-country contexts, and to whose interests and capacities shape that movement.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative multiple-case design based on documentary analysis (Bowen, 2009). Documentary analysis suits this topic because overseas vocational projects generate a substantial public record of policy texts, institutional reports and news releases, while access to overseas sites and trainees is limited. The design is descriptive and interpretive: it seeks to identify how practice is organised and represented, not to measure its effects.

3.2 Case Selection

Cases were selected purposively. Three criteria applied: (a) the college offers rail-transport or rail-related programmes; (b) it operates at least one overseas training or school-running project linked to a Chinese enterprise; and (c) the project is documented in publicly available sources. Four colleges met these criteria: Shandong Polytechnic, Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College, Hunan Railway Professional Technology College and Jiangsu Vocational Institute of Architectural Technology. The last of these is a construction-sector college; it was retained as a contrasting case because its compound language-and-skills programme supports overseas infrastructure projects, including railway construction.

3.3 Data Sources

The documentary corpus comprised four types of source, summarised in Table 1. Documents published between 2023 and 2026 were collected from official college and government websites, national news portals and the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. Searches used Chinese terms for vocational education going global, railway, overseas colleges and international talent cultivation. International literature on VET transfer and internationalisation was used to interpret, rather than to describe, the cases.

Table 1 - Composition of the Documentary Corpus

Source type	Examples	Number	What it can establish
Scholarly articles and book chapters	Chinese journal articles on going global, standards, teachers and models	12	Concepts, arguments and reported practices
Government documents	Henan Department of Education report and web release; Ministry of Education release	3	Official framing; existence and scale of projects
Institutional and news releases	College websites, Xinhuanet, Hunan New Media, The Paper	7	Existence, partners and scale of projects

Note. Counts refer to the documents cited in this article.

3.4 Data Analysis

Documents were analysed thematically following the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. Initial codes captured the organisational form of each project, the partners involved, the content exported (standards, curricula, equipment, training), and any difficulties reported. Codes were then grouped into two sets of themes, one describing practice models and one describing recurring problems. The policy-borrowing stages of Phillips and Ochs (2003) were used as a sensitising lens when interpreting the problems. Coding was carried out manually by the author, and themes were checked against the full set of documents before being finalised.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Positionality

Credibility was supported by triangulating across source types, so that no model or problem rests on a single document. Two limitations of the corpus are acknowledged from the outset. First, institutional and news sources are promotional: they establish that projects exist and at what scale, but they do not report failure and cannot establish quality or outcomes. Claims drawn from them are therefore reported as institutional claims. Second, the author works in international cooperation at another rail-related college engaged in similar work. This position brings practical knowledge of how overseas projects operate, but it also creates a risk of favourable interpretation. To limit that risk, the author's own institution was excluded from the cases, and the professional interest is declared at the end of the article.

4. Findings

4.1 Practice Models of Railway International Talent Cultivation

Four models were identified. They are summarised in Table 2 and described below. The models are analytical types rather than mutually exclusive categories: the same project frequently combines several of them, and the Hunan–CRRC High-speed Rail Workshop in Malaysia illustrates three.

Table 2 - Practice Models of Railway International Talent Cultivation

Model	Defining feature	Illustrative case	Main evidence
Standard export-led	Development and registration of occupational and teaching standards in host countries	Zhengzhou Railway VTC (Ethiopia, Tanzania, Laos, Hungary); Shandong Polytechnic	Government and news releases
School–enterprise collaborative	Joint overseas platform governed with a lead enterprise	Hunan Railway PTC with CRRC (3C model, Malaysia); Zhan Tianyou Colleges	Scholarly article; news releases
Compound language and skills	Integration of Chinese language and intercultural modules with technical courses	Jiangsu Vocational Institute of Architectural Technology	Institutional release; scholarly article
Order-based training	Programmes tailored to a named employer's overseas job requirements	Shandong Polytechnic Ban-Mo College (Laos); Hunan Railway PTC (Malaysia)	News releases

4.1.1 Standard Export-Led Model

In the standard export-led model, colleges develop occupational and teaching standards with enterprises and seek their adoption by host-country authorities. Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College reports that, since 2021, it has led the development of ten occupational qualification standards with enterprises in Tanzania, Ethiopia, Laos, Hungary and other countries. The standards cover roles such as locomotive operation and maintenance engineer and railway infrastructure maintenance engineer. According to the college, they have been registered under host-country procedures together with teaching standards and resources (Department of Education of Henan Province, 2025a). Shandong Polytechnic reports the development of standard packages for railway maintenance occupations with adaptive revision for different national contexts (Yue, 2025; Ge, 2024). These are institutional claims; the sources do not name the registering authorities or describe how the standards are used after registration.

4.1.2 School–Enterprise Collaborative Model

The school–enterprise collaborative model builds an overseas platform jointly governed by a college and a lead enterprise. The clearest example is the 3C model (CRRC, cooperation, college) developed by Hunan Railway Professional Technology College with CRRC. In this model, the High-speed Rail Workshop at CRRC's Malaysian manufacturing base carries curricula for vehicle manufacturing, operation and maintenance (H. Liu, 2024; Zhang, 2024). Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College follows a related logic. It has built three overseas Zhan Tianyou Colleges with higher education institutions in Ethiopia, Uganda and the Philippines (Department of Education of Henan Province, 2025b). Each is governed by a council with five working groups for standards, curricula, teacher training, student activities and research (The Paper, n.d.). Zhao (2024) analyses the organisational logic of these colleges in more detail.

4.1.3 Compound Language and Skills Model

The compound model integrates Chinese language and intercultural communication modules with technical courses such as power supply technology and mechanical maintenance, so that graduates can operate Chinese-made equipment and work in Chinese-funded enterprises (J. Wang, 2025; Xu Man, 2024). Hunan Railway Professional Technology College describes a related approach in which work tasks are linked to teaching content and courses to workshop scenarios (Su, 2025). The evidence for the model's effectiveness consists of institutional statements; no source reports assessment data on language or technical attainment.

4.1.4 Order-Based Training Model

In the order-based model, colleges design programmes around the job requirements of a specific employer's overseas project, which some sources describe as an international version of modern apprenticeship. Shandong Polytechnic's Ban-Mo College in Laos delivers "Chinese language plus railway skills" training for the overseas staff of China Railway No. 2 Engineering Group. The college has also delivered aid-funded training for the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway (The Paper, 2024). Hunan Railway Professional Technology College's High-speed Rail Workshop provides recurrent order-based training for CRRC's Malaysian operations (Xu Min & Chen, 2023). The model offers clear objectives and strong employer involvement, but it ties training closely to one employer's needs, which may limit trainees' wider labour-market mobility.

4.2 Recurring Problems

Five recurring problems were identified. Chinese institutional sources rarely report difficulties. The evidence for these problems therefore comes mainly from the scholarly literature and the author's professional experience, and it is more tentative than the evidence for the models.

4.2.1 Limited Recognition and Localisation of Standards

Chinese vocational standards are developed for domestic industrial systems. Differences in education systems, technical codes and law limit their recognition abroad, and cross-border mutual-recognition mechanisms remain incomplete (Han, 2024). Recognition reported in the corpus is concentrated in Belt and Road partner countries; no case of recognition in a European or North American system was found. Localisation is also uneven: where domestic curricula and standards are transplanted without revision, training content may not match local technical codes or job requirements (Ge, 2024). This pattern is consistent with the international finding that transferred models are reshaped or resisted by host-country structures (Pilz, 2016; Shaw et al., 2016).

4.2.2 Insufficient International Competence of Teaching Staff

Teacher development in most vocational colleges is oriented to domestic teaching. Few teachers combine bilingual teaching ability, internationally recognised industrial qualifications, overseas project experience and familiarity with host-country education systems (Lin, 2024). Without these competences, teachers find it difficult to adapt curricula and teaching methods to local learners, which limits the scale and quality of overseas provision.

4.2.3 Narrow and Unstable Funding

Overseas projects require substantial up-front investment in bases, bilingual materials, teacher deployment and trainee support, followed by long periods of operation. The corpus indicates that funding depends heavily on special government subsidies and colleges' own resources, with limited and irregular contributions from enterprises and other sources (S. Li et al., 2025). Where follow-on funding is interrupted, activity may be reduced or suspended.

4.2.4 Absence of a Quality-Assurance Framework for Overseas Provision

No national framework of quality standards, assessment rules or supervision arrangements for overseas vocational provision was identified in the corpus. Procedures, teaching norms and assessment practices vary between colleges, and systematic monitoring of recruitment, teaching, assessment, employment and employer feedback is rarely reported. Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College is a partial exception. It reports a closed-loop system of construction, operation and assessment that covers recruitment, teaching, graduation and employment, together with periodic evaluations conducted jointly with host-country vocational education authorities (The Paper, n.d.). Such arrangements remain institution-specific, however, and evaluation of outcomes across projects is therefore difficult. Uneven quality in some projects could affect the reputation of Chinese vocational education more broadly.

4.2.5 Weak Cultural Adaptation

Host countries differ from China in educational philosophy, management practice, values and learning habits. Where projects adopt domestic teaching plans and classroom routines without adaptation, and where seconded teachers lack intercultural preparation, misunderstanding between teachers and learners can reduce teaching effectiveness (Xu Man, 2024). Intercultural competence research suggests that such competence must be deliberately developed and assessed rather than assumed (Deardorff, 2006).

5. Discussion

Read through the policy-borrowing lens, the five problems share a common root. Much Chinese practice treats standard export as transfer: standards, curricula and teaching routines are developed at home and carried abroad with the enterprises that need them. The international literature suggests that what actually happens is closer to negotiated adaptation, in which the receiving context reshapes what is borrowed at every stage (Phillips & Ochs, 2003; Li & Pilz, 2023). The problems identified here (limited recognition, weak localisation, teachers unprepared for local adaptation, and cultural mismatch) are consistent with the gap between these two understandings. The pathways below are framed accordingly. Each responds to one problem, and each is offered as a proposal grounded in the documentary evidence rather than as a tested intervention.

5.1 Co-Constructing Standards with Host Countries

The first pathway is to replace one-way export with co-construction. Working groups combining government, industry, enterprises and colleges could develop differentiated standards for different groups of host countries and align them with international certification systems where these exist. At project level, curricula and assessment would be revised to comply with host-country law and technical codes before delivery rather than after problems emerge. Work connected with the China–Laos Railway illustrates the direction. Lao education officials awarded Hunan Railway Professional Technology College certificates for its part in developing the Lao national occupational standard and teaching standard for railway locomotive operation and maintenance technicians (Hunan New Media, 2024). Standards developed in this way belong to the host country's own system rather than being imported into it. Two-way recognition of credits and skill certificates would help align training with local employment. This pathway is consistent with Pilz's (2016) finding that accommodation to local structures, rather than replication, is the realistic outcome of enterprise-led transfer.

5.2 Developing Teachers' International Competence

The second pathway is a structured approach to teacher development combining on-campus training, overseas practice, joint development with enterprises and the appointment of local staff. Training would target four competences: bilingual instruction, international industrial qualifications, intercultural communication and overseas practical teaching. Secondment to overseas technical service and training projects offers one route to building this experience. Linking overseas service to promotion and performance rewards would strengthen incentives, and recruiting host-country technical experts and teachers as part-time staff would bring local knowledge into teaching teams. Intercultural preparation should be designed and assessed as a developmental outcome (Deardorff, 2006).

5.3 Diversifying Funding

The third pathway is a multi-source funding arrangement in which government provides guidance and seed funding, enterprises contribute through joint training bases and co-developed programmes, and colleges generate revenue through technical services and training. Dedicated and contingency funds for overseas projects could cover base construction,

curriculum localisation and teacher deployment, while tax and subsidy incentives could encourage both Chinese and host-country enterprises to invest. Self-generated revenue can also contribute, for example through fee-earning training commissioned by the companies that operate Chinese-built railways abroad. Such revenue is unlikely to replace public and enterprise funding, but it can reduce dependence on a single source.

5.4 Building Shared Quality Assurance

The fourth pathway is a quality-assurance framework for overseas provision, developed jointly with host-country partners rather than imposed from China. At system level, this would involve differentiated standards for overseas school-running, teaching norms and assessment rules. At project level, it would involve monitoring across recruitment, teaching, practical assessment, employment and employer feedback, supported where feasible by digital platforms. Evaluation teams combining Chinese supervisors, host-country administrators and local employers could focus on the match between training and jobs, teaching effectiveness and wider social benefit. The joint evaluations that Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College reports conducting with host-country authorities (The Paper, n.d.) suggest that such arrangements are feasible. Shared evaluation would also generate the outcome evidence that the current literature, including this study, lacks.

5.5 Strengthening Cultural Integration

The fifth pathway is to build cultural adaptation into project design. Before launch, projects would research host-country educational traditions, learner characteristics and workplace norms, and adapt teaching plans accordingly. Seconded teachers would receive structured intercultural preparation, and host-country teachers and learners would participate in curriculum design and programme management. Simulation-based preparation, in which teachers and trainees rehearse overseas classroom and workplace situations before departure, is one further option. Involving host-country partners as co-designers would also respond to the critique that Chinese education cooperation is better at documenting its expansion than at building local ownership (King, 2013).

5.6 Limitations and Further Research

Four limitations qualify these findings. First, the evidence is documentary and drawn largely from institutional and news sources that describe projects favourably and seldom report failure; the findings therefore describe how practice is organised and represented, not its outcomes. Second, host-country voices, including those of trainees, employers and ministries, are absent from the corpus. Third, the four cases were selected purposively and cannot represent all rail-related colleges. Fourth, the author's professional position in the same field may have shaped interpretation despite the steps taken to limit this.

Each limitation suggests a line of further research. Outcome studies that track trainees' skills and employment would address the first. Interviews and surveys with host-country trainees, employers and officials would address the second. A larger comparative sample, including colleges without enterprise partners, would address the third. Independent or jointly conducted evaluations would address the fourth.

6. Conclusion

This study examined railway international talent cultivation in Chinese higher vocational colleges through a documentary analysis of rail-related cases. It identified four practice models, standard export-led, school–enterprise collaborative, compound language and skills, and order-based training, which overlap in practice and are anchored in the overseas operations of Chinese railway enterprises. It also identified five recurring problems: limited recognition and localisation of standards, insufficient international competence among teachers, narrow and unstable funding, the absence of shared quality assurance, and weak cultural adaptation.

Interpreted through the policy-borrowing literature, these problems appear to stem largely from treating standard export as transfer rather than as negotiated adaptation with host countries. The study therefore proposes pathways that emphasise co-construction of standards, teacher development, diversified funding, shared quality assurance and cultural integration. The contribution of the article lies in bringing Chinese rail-sector practice into dialogue with international research on VET transfer. Its conclusions are provisional, because the evidence describes how practice is represented rather than what it achieves; research that includes host-country perspectives and outcome data is the necessary next step.

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Conflict of Interest

The author holds a leadership role in international cooperation at Guangzhou Railway Polytechnic, a rail-related vocational college engaged in overseas training similar to that discussed in this article. The author declares no other conflicts of interest.

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