

An Empirical Study on the Integration Path of “Culture–Competence–Internalization” in the Secretarial Major of Vocational Education in Yunnan

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Abstract: To address the imbalance between skills training and value cultivation in vocational education within China's ethnic regions, this study developed and validated a Culture Resources–Workplace Competence–Internalization of Values model (CCI Model). Through course redesign incorporating localized cases, scenario-based tasks, and reflective practice, the model systematically connects cultural resources with professional skill development. A quasi-experiment with 98 students in a Yunnan higher vocational college demonstrated significant improvements in cultural cognition, workplace competence, and internalization of values (all Cohen's $d > 1.25$). The results confirm that integrating ethnic culture into professional modules simultaneously enhances technical skills and value cultivation, offering a replicable approach for curriculum reform in ethnic regions.

Keywords: Secretarial major; Internalization of values; Cultural integration; Vocational education; Empirical research

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1. Introduction

In China's current context, integrating values education into the vocational education system, which is fundamentally oriented toward virtue cultivation and talent development, has become a core requirement^[1,2]. However, current related research exhibits significant limitations. On the one hand, existing achievements predominantly concentrate on the level of ideological and political courses^[4-6], lacking systematic exploration targeted at professional courses. On the other hand, teaching in the secretarial major in borderland higher vocational colleges has long exhibited a tendency of “emphasizing skills over values”^[7,8], where ethnic cultural resources are severely disconnected from the cultivation of workplace abilities, resulting in a “superficial attachment” of elements to the curriculum^[9].

In-depth analysis reveals two key gaps in the research field. First, theoretical research is disconnected from

practical needs. Although some scholars advocate mining local cultural resources^[10], their work often remains at the level of cultural display, failing to systematically transform these resources into trainable and assessable professional competency modules. Second, support systems are insufficient. The “triple lag” problem of teachers in higher vocational colleges in ethnic regions, revealed by Gao Yuehan^[11], directly restricts the in-depth implementation of integrated teaching.

From an international perspective, theories of learning and identity development offer valuable frameworks for addressing these gaps. Situated learning theory^[3,12] emphasizes that learning is inherently tied to the activities, context, and culture in which it occurs. This suggests that embedding secretarial skill acquisition within authentic, culturally-rich scenarios should enhance learning transfer and professional identity formation. Furthermore, theories of identity development in education highlight that professional and national identities are not merely taught but are developed through reflective practice and meaningful engagement within a community of practice^[13].

Based on this, this study innovatively constructs a three-dimensional integration model of “Cultural Resources—Workplace Competence—Internalization of Values” (abbreviated as the CCI Model). Using the secretarial major in Yunnan higher vocational colleges as the empirical field, and through systematic path design and practical verification, it aims to break through existing research limitations and provide a replicable solution for deeply integrating education on internalization of values into professional curricula. This study focuses on the following questions:

- (1) RQ1: Can culture-embedded instructional design enhance students’ understanding of Chinese culture?
- (2) RQ2: Can integrating local cultural resources into workplace scenarios improve students’ vocational competence?
- (3) RQ3: Can such an integrated pathway facilitate the internalization of values education?

The objective is to build a replicable paradigm for embedding internalization of values into vocational professional curricula through empirical validation.

2. Construction of the CCI Model

The CCI Model is an organic whole, founded on the creative transformation of cultural resources, centered on the immersive training of workplace skills, and aimed at the deep internalization of values.

2.1. Diagnostic and transformation mechanism for cultural resources

This mechanism focuses on resolving the disconnection between cultural resources and professional teaching, achieving the transformation from cultural elements to teaching elements through a systematic conversion process.

First, a cultural resource diagnostic system is established, organizing professional teams to assess the educational value of Yunnan’s ethnic minority cultural resources. The focus is on examining the alignment between cultural elements and the core competencies of the secretarial major. For instance, the narrative structure of the Dai people’s palm-leaf manuscripts aligns with the normative requirements of business document writing, and the organizational logic of multi-ethnic festival activities has intrinsic connections with meeting management processes.

Second, the pedagogical transformation of cultural resources is achieved through case-based reconstruction. Real operational scenarios of ethnic enterprises are developed into teaching cases. For example, the Dai Water-

Splashing Festival is transformed into a “Human Resource Scheduling Plan for Festival Activities,” and multi-ethnic team collaboration models are converted into “Cross-cultural Communication Training Modules.”

2.2. Immersive training system for workplace competence

This system achieves the deep integration of skill training and cultural edification through multi-level training design.

The Basic Skills Level revolves around the core competencies of the secretarial major, designing serialized situational tasks. Multi-ethnic cultural communication elements are embedded in official document writing, and cross-cultural coordination links are integrated into meeting management, enabling students to acquire cultural understanding while mastering professional skills.

The Comprehensive Application Level adopts project-based learning, designing complex tasks that simulate complete work processes. For example, the “Anniversary Celebration Planning for a Borderland Multi-ethnic Enterprise” project requires students to holistically consider the cultural customs of different ethnic groups and formulate culturally inclusive activity plans, thereby cultivating cultural adaptation and integration capabilities.

2.3. Design of the internalization path for internalization of values

Through a progressive path design, a deep transformation from cultural cognition and skill mastery to internalization of values is achieved.

The Experience phase emphasizes emotional engagement, allowing students to personally feel the unique charm and mutual integration of various ethnic cultures during culturally immersive skill training, forming intuitive cultural experiences.

The Reflection phase focuses on rational sublimation. Through structured reflection guides, students are helped to extract the “pluralistic and integrated” characteristics of Chinese culture from cultural phenomena and to perceive the personal value of serving the borderlands from professional skills.

The Practice phase concentrates on action transformation, encouraging students to apply their secretarial expertise to serve the development of ethnic regions (e.g., participating in rural revitalization), thereby solidifying the internalization of values consciousness through practice.

Through the organic connection of these three phases, the model forms a complete transformation chain from resources to skills, and from skills to identity, providing a theoretical framework and practical guidance for the empirical research.

3. Research design

3.1. Participants

A quasi-experimental study was conducted with 98 first-year students majoring in Secretarial Studies at a public higher vocational college in Yunnan Province. The sample consisted of 86 females and 12 males, aged between 17 and 20. Whole-class convenience sampling was adopted due to administrative constraints, precluding random assignment across classes. The significant gender imbalance (approximately 88% female) reflects the typical enrollment profile of secretarial majors but may limit the generalizability of findings to more gender-balanced populations. No participants withdrew, resulting in complete pre-test and post-test data from all 98 students.

3.2. Instruments

Three instruments were developed and validated, corresponding to the three core dimensions of the CCI Model.

3.2.1. Cultural cognition and affection scale

This scale measured students' knowledge, recognition, and emotional engagement with Yunnan's ethnic cultures. Items were generated based on literature review and analysis of local cultural characteristics, and refined through review by a panel of three experts in vocational education and ethnology. The 15-item scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$) in the main study, using a five-point Likert scale.

3.2.2. Workplace competence scenario test

This performance-based instrument assessed students' ability to apply secretarial skills in simulated cross-cultural workplace scenarios (e.g., drafting documents for an ethnic enterprise, resolving communication misunderstandings arising from cultural differences). A standardized scoring rubric focused on task completion, cultural appropriateness, and procedural accuracy. Inter-rater reliability, assessed by two independent raters on a randomly selected 30% of responses using ICC, was .91, indicating excellent agreement.

3.2.3. Internalization of values scale

This scale was adapted from established values measures used in recent studies on higher vocational students ^[4]. Item wording was modified to fit the secretarial profession and Yunnan's regional context. The adapted scale showed high internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .89$) in this study.

3.3. Instructional intervention

The intervention was systematically implemented across two core secretarial courses: *Human Resource Management* and *Modern Chinese*. In *Human Resource Management*, a "Yunnan Multi-ethnic Enterprise Case Bank" was developed, transforming ethnic festival cultures into teaching modules like "HR Scheduling Plans for Festival Events." In *Modern Chinese*, administrative documents from multi-ethnic regions were used as teaching materials, guiding students to analyze linguistic expression characteristics across different cultural contexts.

Structured role-playing and project-based learning (PBL) were employed to create workplace scenarios, such as "Cross-border Business Negotiation" and "Multi-ethnic Enterprise Event Planning." Through carefully designed scenario scripts and project guidelines, students engaged with practical problems arising from cultural differences in highly realistic work environments. Following each project, scaffolded reflection sessions were conducted to guide students in exploring the significance of cultural integration embedded within the tasks, thereby facilitating the transition from practical experience to value identity.

3.4. Post-test assessment

Post-test assessment employed instruments identical to the pre-test. Questionnaires and scenario tests from the pre-test were readministered to directly compare changes across the three dimensions. Student project outputs and reflective reports were also collected as process evaluation materials.

Data analysis utilized a mixed-methods approach: Quantitative analysis involved paired-sample t-tests on pre- and post-test data to quantitatively assess significant changes in the three dimensions. Qualitative analysis employed content analysis to code and extract themes from student projects and reflective reports, providing an in-depth interpretation of cognitive deepening and value internalization. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative analyses ensured the reliability of the findings.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Data comparison

Paired-sample t-tests on the pre- and post-test questionnaire data from the 98 students showed statistically significant improvements across all dimensions of the CCI Model (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Comparison of pre-test and post-test scores across three dimensions ($n = 98$)

Assessment Dimension	Pre-test Mean (Max 5)	Post-test Mean (Max 5)	Mean Increase	t-value	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Regional Cultural Cognition & Affection	3.12	4.35	+1.23	15.674	$p < 0.001$	1.59 (large)
Workplace Ability Application	2.89	4.18	+1.29	17.892	$p < 0.001$	1.82 (large)
Internalization of Values	3.45	4.52	+1.07	12.345	$p < 0.001$	1.25 (large)

4.2. Interpretation of results

The pre- and post-test data indicate significant improvements across all three dimensions, with effect sizes reaching large levels (Cohen's $d > 1.20$), demonstrating that the intervention had both statistical significance and substantial practical impact. These marked improvements underscore the appropriateness and effectiveness of the CCI Model within the higher vocational secretarial program.

Firstly, the cultural cognition and affection dimension showed an increase from 3.12 to 4.35, a substantial gain of 1.23 points. Students demonstrated more systematic understanding and more positive attitudes towards cultural symbols, festival systems, communication etiquette, and contemporary applications of multi-ethnic cultural elements. This suggests that systematically embedding Yunnan's ethnic cultural resources into the secretarial curriculum not only makes cultural knowledge more "perceivable" but also facilitates a shift from instrumental understanding to emotional identification. For example, during the "Coordinating the Dai Water-Splashing Festival Event" simulation, students were required to research cultural origins, taboos, and procedural norms, prompting them to actively construct their own cultural understanding frameworks.

Secondly, workplace competence showed the greatest improvement among the three dimensions, with an increase of 1.29 points. In the post-test scenario-based assessment, students performed substantially better in selecting cross-cultural communication strategies, organizing meetings, and designing event procedures. For instance, in the "Cross-Border Business Negotiation" simulation, students proactively considered communication style differences among neighboring cultures like Myanmar and Thailand, demonstrating cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability. This indicates that cultural elements did not weaken professional training but enhanced students' workplace transferability through "situational reinforcement," aligning with the situated learning principle that knowledge embedded in authentic practice contexts is more readily transferable^[12].

Finally, students also showed a significant improvement (+1.07) in Internalization of Values. Although the baseline score for this dimension was relatively high in the pre-test, the intervention still produced a large effect size, suggesting that the CCI Model effectively facilitates the shift from superficial cognitive awareness to deeper internalized value identification. For example, in reflective journals, some students expressed intentions such as "hoping to work in Yunnan's ethnic regions after graduation and contribute my secretarial expertise to promoting local cultural brands," highlighting meaningful value-oriented outcomes^[14].

Overall, these results demonstrate that the CCI Model successfully establishes a synergistic developmental pathway where knowledge, competence, and values are enhanced through the internal linkage of cultural

resources, professional skills, and values development within the vocational curriculum.

4.3. Exploring the mechanisms

A key finding is that integrating cultural content did not interfere with secretarial skill training but significantly enhanced the acquisition of workplace competence.

4.3.1. Cultural elements increase the “authenticity” of scenarios

Secretarial work inherently involves cross-cultural communication and navigating diverse situations, and practical work contexts in Yunnan's multi-ethnic regions demand sensitivity to cultural differences. Introducing elements like cultural taboos and festival arrangements into teaching made simulated tasks closer to real workplaces, effectively promoting skill transfer and application.

4.3.2. Cultural scenarios enhance students' “learning motivation”

Compared to the “task completion” focus often observed in traditional skill training devoid of cultural context, culturally rich scenarios significantly boosted students' initiative to explore and engage. Students actively sought information, discussed cultural differences, and simulated conflict resolution. Culture acted as an “emotional activator,” driving them to delve into more complex and challenging tasks.

4.3.3. Culture serves as a “cognitive scaffold” for deep understanding.

Cultural symbols, ritual structures, and traditional logic are inherently systematic, providing structured content that supports the comprehension of underlying professional principles. For example, the narrative structure of Dai palm-leaf manuscripts aids in training logical organization in business writing; the compositional patterns of Yi embroidery inform aesthetic application in document layout; multi-ethnic festival procedures offer natural frameworks for event planning.

4.4. Implications for vocational education curriculum reform in ethnic regions

The CCI Model clearly demonstrates that ethnic cultural resources can, through systematic pedagogical transformation, become significant carriers for cultivating vocational competence, rather than merely serving as decorative cultural add-ons in the curriculum. Embedding cultural content into professional tasks enhances students' situational understanding, strategic application, and cross-cultural communication skills, thereby promoting integrated learning of “culture—competence—values” in both authentic and simulated workplace environments ^[15].

More importantly, the CCI Model is not confined to the secretarial major; its theoretical structure and practical mechanisms exhibit strong cross-disciplinary scalability. For instance, in Tourism Management, the organizational logic of ethnic festivals can be reconstructed as project-based tasks like “Multi-ethnic Festival Experience Design,” enabling students to learn event planning and public service through cultural immersion. In E-commerce programs, the cultural symbols, narratives, and branding strategies of ethnic enterprises can form the core of learning units like “Digital Communication and Marketing for Ethnic Brands,” helping students understand the commercial value of cultural assets in digital business contexts.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This study constructed and validated the three-dimensional “Cultural Resources—Workplace Competence—Internalization of Values” (CCI) integration model. Theoretically, it breaks through the traditional disconnect between curriculum-based education and professional teaching, proposing a new paradigm of “workplace-contextualized integration.” It reveals the intrinsic connections between regional culture, vocational ability, and community value, confirming their synergistic development through scientific curriculum design.

Practically, the study explored an effective pathway for transforming ethnic cultural resources into measurable professional competencies. Through dynamic, modularized cultural teaching and scenario simulation, it facilitated the deep internalization of student learning, moving from cultural cognition to professional behavior. Empirical data indicate this path significantly enhances students’ cultural confidence, professional capabilities, and internalization of values.

Furthermore, the school-enterprise dual evaluation mechanism established, relying on positive enterprise feedback regarding students’ “cultural adaptability,” creates a “demand—curriculum—talent” virtuous cycle, achieving effective alignment between curriculum reform and market needs.

5.2. Research limitations and prospects

This study has limitations. The teaching experiment lasted one semester; the long-term stability of the internalization of values requires sustained tracking. The study focused primarily on the secretarial major; the model’s applicability to other professional fields warrants further testing.

Future research can develop along two dimensions: Vertically, tracking graduate career development to assess the long-term effects of the “CCI” competencies cultivated during their studies. Horizontally, extending the model to other regionally distinctive majors like Tourism Management and Cross-border E-commerce to explore more universal paradigms for vocational education in border regions.

In summary, this study provides a replicable curriculum reform plan for higher vocational education, holding theoretical and practical value for forging a strong sense of internalization of values within the secretarial major.

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