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## EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF INTEGRATED CHINESE– VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA: INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT, IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES, AND EMPLOYABILITY OUTCOMES

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examines the manner in which the "Chinese + Vocational" bilingual programme is implemented in Ethiopia with regard to the support systems, problems of implementation, and perception of job prospects by the students. Based on a background of increased collaboration between China and Ethiopia and the demand for bilingual vocational education, the current investigation is based on a qualitative approach. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews of ten students who have been enrolled in the programme at the Federal Institute of Development College. Even though the findings may be explained using Social Cognitive Career Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Second Language Acquisition principles, the study uses the perspective of educational management in order to discuss the results. In particular, the findings show that the success of the programme is conditioned by such aspects of educational management as curriculum integration, teaching-learning process organisation, institutional support system strength, access to necessary resources, and cross-cultural implementation of the programme. Also, several difficulties were reported by the students, including language barrier issues, time restrictions, curriculum pressure, inadequate teaching methods, and lack of practical conditions. On the other hand, the participants named such supportive factors that allowed them to stay active during the training programme as advice from the teacher, teamwork with classmates, motivation provided by family members, learning resources, scholarship, mentorship, and cultural interaction. Some practices that could be used in the implementation of the programme included repetition of exercises, multimedia use, role play, applied learning, and bilingual tasks associated with the acquisition of vocational skills. Such practices allowed enhancing the programme's consistency and its relevance for students' future jobs.

**Keywords:** Educational management, integrated bilingual vocational education, programme implementation, institutional support, employability pathways.



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## INTRODUCTION

With globalization and large-scale initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, demand for labor, cross-border investment, and international business operations is continually increasing. As a result, the dynamics of labor markets in developing countries become more complicated, and educational institutions face the necessity to adjust their curricula and prepare future graduates to meet the new demands. In Ethiopia, for example, the increasing partnership with China requires graduates who will be able to operate in a bilingual environment using their technical knowledge, skills, and language proficiency in Chinese (Gebre & Liu, 2025). At the moment, there are thousands of Chinese-sponsored enterprises and organizations operating in different sectors, such as manufacturing, construction, service provision, etc. (Mulat, 2025). Therefore, the education sector has to produce students able to work in "Chinese + Vocational" positions that require special competences and abilities.

However, the change in labor market demands is not only a change in curriculum but also a change in educational management. With new labor market requirements, the integration of higher and vocational education institutions is expected to be realized in an attempt to ensure proper policy implementation, meet employers' expectations, and support student growth. This trend is reflected in national policy documents and bilateral agreements. According to one policy statement: "The Chinese government will continue to support the development of vocational education in African countries, particularly in Ethiopia, by promoting the 'China-Africa Vocational Education Cooperation Program,' facilitating technical training and language capacity building, and providing more skill training opportunities for African youth to help them adapt to modern industrial transformation" (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021). Thus, integrated bilingual vocational education appears to be an important task for educational institutions involving complex educational management practices.

As can be seen, there are various cooperation frameworks between China and Ethiopia that include different types of collaboration aimed at industrial and infrastructural development and support for sustainable development. Among those are initiatives in vocational education and Chinese language training, which are supposed to build up combined technical and language competences among students (Koussihouédé, 2020). Some of the initiatives and programs implemented to this aim are the China-Ethiopia "Chinese + Vocational Skills" program, various collaborative works with Confucius Institutes, and Luban Workshops' initiatives. All of them provide an integrated approach involving technical training, language education, and cross-cultural learning into a unified system of teaching (Goble, 2024; YRCTI, 2023). Early results of these programs showed positive effects, namely, students' employment opportunities were significantly increased with job options in Chinese companies, translation-related occupations, and other income-generating activities which involve bilingual and technical skills (Gebre & Liu, 2025; Goble, 2024). Nonetheless, most of the research in the area is mainly descriptive without a proper understanding of managerial issues associated with this type of program.

Here is the problem in educational management. Despite the number of works done previously, the researchers mostly paid attention to language learning, intercultural competence development, and employability. The institutional factors influencing students' experiences and performance were little investigated. In reality, however, the success of the entire project lies not only in the final product – competent students who can find a decent job. Educational managers have to properly organize curriculum integration, provide appropriate resources and support for effective learning and cross-cultural communication, maintain partnerships with employers, and overcome potential implementation barriers to make the program productive. This particular problem is especially acute in the context of Ethiopia, where such programs become widespread in a fast-changing situation involving international partnerships and workforce transformation.

There are two significant problems concerning the current state of research on integrated bilingual vocational education in Ethiopia. First, the field still lacks empirical data on the topic in question. What is more, there is no adequate theoretical framework that would help understand the impact of institutional arrangements on student



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experiences and program performance (Wang & Dai, 2021; Zynuddin et al., 2024). Secondly, there are some tendencies to focus on psychological and career-oriented factors in relation to the process of becoming employable. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) can be regarded as one of the best approaches to understand what contributes to career success (Lent & Brown, 2019).

Furthermore, human capital theory, second language acquisition, and intercultural competence frameworks give additional insight into the issue since they consider the economic value of combined skills (Becker, 1993; Mohamad Marzaini & Mat Yusoff, 2026; O'Brien et al., 2017). Thus, it becomes clear that there are numerous perspectives that have to be discussed when considering educational management in the Sino–Ethiopian vocational education context. Nevertheless, this specific combination of theories was not fully explored before. Specifically, the research asks:

1. How are institutional supports within an integrated “Chinese + Vocational” program experienced by Ethiopian undergraduates in relation to their learning and career preparation?
2. What implementation challenges emerge in the management of bilingual vocational education, particularly in relation to language learning, time demands, pedagogy, and cultural adaptation?
3. How do these institutional arrangements and implementation conditions shape students’ perceived employability pathways in domestic and international labor markets?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Educational Management of Integrated Vocational Programs*

Rapid evolution of labor markets under the conditions of globalization has increased the importance of educational management in vocational education. In the environment shaped by changes in industry, international collaboration, and a multilingual labor force, it is essential not only what is being taught, but also how programs are developed, managed, supported, and evaluated. Therefore, special educational management is required to align the objectives of institutions, methods of teaching, student support, and labor market needs within integrated vocational programs.

The first factor is curriculum integration. Technical education should be closely tied to skills such as communicative skills, intercultural competence, and adaptability in the workplace. It requires deliberate efforts to build a curriculum in which language learning contributes to vocational development, rather than being just one of the academic subjects. Poor integration results in a perceived mismatch between language courses and vocational or workplace requirements. Effective integration, in contrast, helps to promote students' interest in study, their perseverance, and success. Curriculum integration also matters in building vocational systems and boosting the economy (King, 2019).

Another vital factor is program coordination. It is vital in the case of integrated vocational programs because several components should be coordinated effectively by all participants, such as language and vocational teachers, institution heads, etc. If not, students will encounter overlapping requirements, conflicting approaches in instruction, and a lack of proper support while coping with language and vocational studies. Coordination is particularly important in the cross-cultural environment, where it should cover both organizational and teaching aspects. Its effectiveness depends on students' perception of programs (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Institutional capacity is an important element as well. Implementation of successful programs assumes the presence of properly trained and experienced staff members, necessary learning materials and services, technological tools, and an opportunity to practice in realistic or simulated workplace conditions. As a result, institutions implementing bilingual vocational programs require well-developed curricula as well as sufficient institutional capacity to implement them properly. It ensures students' success, motivation, and readiness for employment. On the other



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hand, a lack of capacity makes good programs less effective or impossible to realize (Lent & Brown, 2019; Yusoff et al., 2025).

Partner management is another crucial factor, especially for international cooperation. Collaboration with China has contributed significantly to the development of the "Chinese + Vocational" education system in Ethiopia. Numerous initiatives and partnerships with China have been launched in this country (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021; Yuliantoro, 2020). For instance, there is a China–Ethiopia "Chinese + Vocational Skills" pilot project, Confucius Institutes, and Luban Workshops aimed at promoting curriculum design, providing language learning opportunities, facilities for vocational training, and others (Goble, 2024; YRCTI, 2023). Such a partnership should be adequately managed.

Therefore, quality assurance becomes important in this case too. It means assessment of learner achievements, but also evaluation of program implementation. Among its parameters are curriculum integration, teaching quality, institutional capacity, availability of materials and resources, student support systems, and others. While empirical data prove the effectiveness of "Chinese + Vocational" education projects, current literature provides only qualitative analysis and little information about the quality of program implementation (Gebre & Liu, 2025; Goble, 2024). Thus, new research should concentrate on factors influencing program efficiency. From this viewpoint, educational management implies creating favorable conditions for students to cope with programs and find a job afterwards (Becker, 1993; Wang & Dai, 2021). Critically, however, existing studies diverge on key questions. While some scholars argue that language integration enhances vocational identity and career confidence (Gebre & Liu, 2025; Goble, 2024), others caution that poorly managed bilingual programs can exacerbate cognitive overload and reduce academic persistence, particularly in low-resource contexts (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021; Zhang, 2024). Similarly, there is an unresolved debate about whether transnational educational partnerships primarily benefit host-country students or primarily serve the labor market interests of the investing nation (Koussihouédé, 2020; King, 2019). The present study positions itself at the intersection of these debates, arguing that institutional management quality is the critical moderating variable that determines whether bilingual vocational programs fulfill their promise or reproduce structural disadvantage.

### ***Managing Bilingual and Cross-cultural Vocational Education***

In managing bilingual and cross-cultural vocational education, it is more than just joining vocational and language teaching together. Rather, it includes managing such institutional aspects as staffing, teaching organization, student support, language-learning infrastructure, and delivery processes, ensuring that the process results in both educational and occupational achievements. Within "Chinese + Vocational" education programs, learning a language becomes a part of vocational preparation, and thus requires managerial attention in this context.

For example, appropriate staffing is essential. The staff working with these programs should demonstrate not only skills in vocational training and language teaching but should also pay attention to students' intercultural adjustment issues. Staff from various countries participating in collaboration with educational institutions could have diverse educational backgrounds and experience, complicating communication, teaching consistency, and collaboration within these programs. In the context of Ethiopian-China relations, international cooperation allowed the attraction of native-speaking specialists and technical experts and offered more comprehensive learning to students (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021; Yuliantoro, 2020). Nonetheless, hiring international employees is not sufficient; they should coordinate properly and participate in program implementation.

Another aspect requiring managerial attention is teaching organization. Learning a language should facilitate and support, rather than impede, vocational training. It calls for careful lesson planning, balancing vocational and language classes, and using consistent teaching approaches that would incorporate communication skills development with technical task performance. Inconsistency might make a student overwhelmed and unable to cope with assignments, as well as fail to engage in learning in a realistic context. Instead, practice-oriented and



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applied learning as well as immersion into the language and vocational environment contribute to students' better involvement and learning outcomes (Gao, 2019; Zheng et al., 2025), provided there is sufficient organizational planning in this regard.

Learning support is vital as well, considering the complexity of assignments students might undertake. At the same time, they face additional challenges posed by learning a language, experiencing cultural gaps, and being pressed for time. Without assistance, learners may struggle to overcome barriers and continue their studies successfully. Thus, providing appropriate learning support from educators, colleagues, mentors, and peers becomes necessary for maintaining learners' focus and increasing their chances of success (Lent & Brown, 2019; McWhirter et al., 2019).

Creating language-learning infrastructure is another necessary condition. Not only should students be provided with classes but also offered an opportunity to study using relevant materials, conduct laboratory activities, work with multimedia content and digital solutions, and engage in real-life communication. The amount and quality of infrastructure determine how many possibilities students get for interacting with language. Research has proved that interactive learning enriched with communication helps in achieving competence and confidence in language acquisition (O'Brien et al., 2017). In cases when infrastructure is inadequate, it imposes an additional challenge on students; with its presence, learners gain benefits.

Finally, management of intercultural education is essential. Since programs incorporate features of various educational systems, workplaces, and communication patterns, opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration should be created actively by educational institutions rather than be expected from students. Intercultural activities, including collaborative and workplace-related ones, are conducive to the development of adaptability and intercultural communicative competence that are necessary in contemporary labor markets (Byram, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2017).

### ***Institutional Support, Resource Provision, and Student Development***

While this paper concentrates on educational management issues, one should remember that student development can be viewed as a significant indicator that reveals how successful institutional arrangements are. Students' confidence, commitment, and career intentions greatly depend on the presence of certain support systems, resources, and opportunities. That is why the following analysis uses SCCT and HCT as additional theoretical viewpoints to identify why institutional management arrangements can influence student development.

The SCCT approach implies that factors such as self-efficacy, career expectations, and career intentions can be significantly affected by the presence of certain barriers and support in a learning setting (Lent & Brown, 2019). In "Chinese + Vocational" programs, such an approach implies that the quality of the managerial arrangement will affect how successful students can be in terms of receiving adequate training, having enough time for practicing, receiving necessary support, etc. Therefore, in the case of having enough structured learning, having teachers who support them, being able to collaborate with peers, and dealing with acceptable workloads, learners can be persistent and capable of overcoming any difficulties. Otherwise, language problems and other adjustment challenges will be viewed by students as their own weaknesses. As a result, according to SCCT, confidence should not be treated as something that only depends on people's individuality.

Such an approach is especially significant in the context of cross-cultural vocational settings. Other than education itself, students need other forms of guidance, social support, various career examples, and other forms of assistance. At this point, teacher assistance and student cooperation acquire a vital significance because students receive not only assistance but also motivation. Besides, the supportive environment contributes to enhancing self-confidence regarding possible future career decisions, helping students to stay motivated despite all the hardships of the educational process (Lent & Brown, 2019; McWhirter et al., 2019). Speaking about educational administration, one may state that support services form a crucial part of the program quality.



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Another significant supportive framework that can be considered in this regard is Human Capital Theory (HCT), highlighting the importance of available resources. Education and training are seen as an investment in productivity, employability, and returns (Becker, 1993). In terms of bilingual vocational education programs, high economic returns depend on institutions themselves. Scholarships, internships, language acquisition tools, relationships within the industry, practical work, and other resources may provide students with some advantages in the job market (Wang & Dai, 2021).

Research proves that knowledge of a second language positively affects employment and earnings in many cases, especially if the person is qualified in a particular area. Such opportunities depend on how successfully institutions manage to create favorable conditions for students to use their abilities. Therefore, institutional support and resource provision serve as a bridge between institutional arrangements and their effects on students. Adequate support, which includes teacher guidance, social support, financial assistance, and learning resources, encourages students to continue studying and consider future career options. These options include work at multinational companies, work as translators, enrollment in higher education programs, entrepreneurship, and other career paths (Gebre & Liu, 2025; Goble, 2024; Jusoh et al., 2026). Apart from increasing the potential economic returns, this approach positively influences motivation and confidence.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Following up from the previous section, this study presents an Institutional Management Framework (IMF) for Integrated Bilingual Vocational Education. Rather than considering the individuals as the main target, it takes the approach that looks at the program as a whole. Unlike prior frameworks that treat language acquisition and vocational competence as parallel but separate dimensions (Becker, 1993; Lent & Brown, 2019), the IMF advances existing scholarship by positioning institutional management as the mediating mechanism through which these dimensions are integrated, thereby generating a new conceptual understanding of how program-level decisions shape student outcomes in transnational vocational settings. Hence, the way in which organizations affect students' performance and outcomes will be explained based on the analysis of the following six dimensions: curriculum integration, teaching and learning arrangements, institutional support systems, external partnerships, resource accessibility, and cultural mediation mechanisms.

Firstly, curriculum integration refers to deliberate connections between language education and vocational training. Teaching and learning arrangements refer to the way in which the program operates and include class sequencing, learning methods, applied learning opportunities, and balancing language and technical instruction. The elements of institutional support systems could include, for example, teachers' guidance, peer collaboration, and mentoring services (Goble, 2024; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021; YRCTI, 2023; Yuliantoro, 2020). In terms of external partnerships, one may consider cooperation with other institutions, governmental bodies, and private enterprises that influence program resources and its general direction. Finally, resource accessibility means availability of scholarships, learning material, learning facilities, and hands-on learning opportunities. Cultural mediation mechanisms imply the process of managing intercultural interaction and adjusting the program design to facilitate cross-cultural experience (Byram, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2017).

It is believed that the described program elements will influence four key outcomes of interest, namely, student confidence, learning continuity, perception of employability, and program value. Student confidence refers to learners' feelings about being able to participate in the program successfully. Learning continuity implies the ability of students to persist despite all the difficulties connected with the language, studying, and intercultural issues. Perceived employability is concerned with student opinions about the practicality and usefulness of the program for employment. Finally, program value stands for its educational significance. In the described conceptual framework, those outcomes should be viewed as influenced not only by students' individual characteristics but by program design and management.



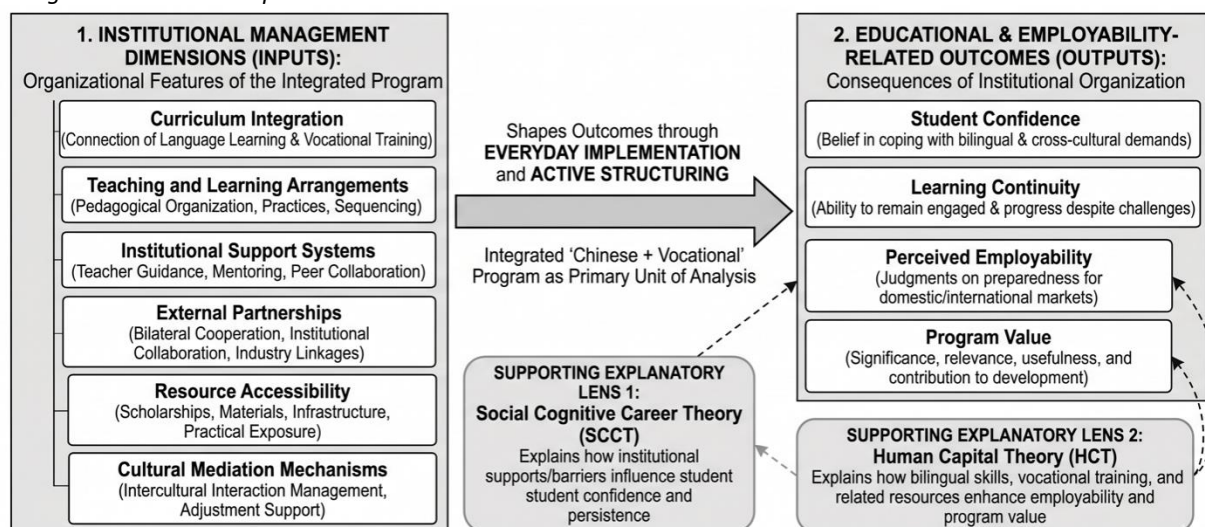
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In the proposed model, Social Cognitive Career Theory and Human Capital Theory do not lose their importance but act as theoretical backgrounds for the research. Social Cognitive Career Theory can be used to explain the connection between institutional supports and barriers and student confidence and persistence (Lent & Brown, 2019). As for Human Capital Theory, it can be useful for understanding how access to a combination of linguistic and technical competences enhances employability and labor market value (Becker, 1993; Wang & Dai, 2021). However, within the discussed framework, emphasis is put on educational management with the focus on the program as the unit of analysis rather than on the individual learner.

The presented theoretical model is also grounded in the particular context in which this study was conducted. As indicated earlier, due to policy commitments and partnerships between organizations, there are many expectations regarding the potential benefits of "Chinese + Vocational" programs in terms of both education and economic development in Ethiopia through preparing workers with a combination of linguistic and professional skills (Gebre & Liu, 2025; Koussihouédé, 2020). In this regard, one may consider students' concerns and wishes as reflecting the actual success of these programs' implementation. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the current study.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework for an Institutional Management Model of Integrated Bilingual Vocational Education: A Program-Centered Perspective*



## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design and Participant*

The present study applies a qualitative interpretive research design in order to examine the institutional management of the program in question and explore how the Ethiopian undergraduate students perceive the institutional support, implementation barriers, and employment prospects related to the "Chinese + Vocational" program. The qualitative methodology proves particularly useful when researching complex processes taking place in a certain organization, the organizational structure itself and its constituent elements, and the meanings attached to them by particular individuals or groups of people (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The current paper is built upon the theoretical frameworks of Human Capital Theory (HCT), Second Language Acquisition (SLA), and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT); however, these theories are not applied in isolation as descriptive lenses. Rather, they are employed analytically to interrogate how specific institutional arrangements — such as resource provision, curriculum design, and support structures — generate or constrain the conditions under



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which human capital accumulation, language acquisition, and career self-efficacy can occur. It seems appropriate and relevant to conduct research via a qualitative interpretive method since it would be possible to analyze how the participants experience, interpret, and perceive those processes taking place within an educational environment (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Additionally, a qualitative methodology can help identify details regarding how specific structures of the program, the support received by students, and its outcomes interact.

The semi-structured interview was selected as the primary data collection instrument because it enables in-depth exploration of participants' subjective experiences while maintaining sufficient structure to address the study's research questions. Specifically, the interview fulfills the needs of the current research project. To be more precise, the interview helped obtain in-depth information about how students perceived their experience within the scope of the "Chinese + Vocational" program, as well as expectations in connection with its advantages. Specifically, the greatest attention was paid to analyzing students' experience regarding the process of instruction, provision of support, resources, cultural adjustment, and job opportunities.

Such a method is considered to be the most effective one while investigating complicated educational experiences along with interpreting the social and psychological meanings underlying them. It is especially pertinent in the discussed case where students were seen not only as learners but also as respondents whose experiences and thoughts helped uncover positive features and weaknesses of the program and the effectiveness of its functioning. In simple words, while collecting data, it was the students who served as the principal source of information about education management rather than educational specialists themselves. It is acknowledged that relying exclusively on student interviews constitutes a methodological limitation: student perceptions of institutional management are necessarily partial and filtered through individual experience. Future research should triangulate student accounts with data from program coordinators, administrators, language instructors, and industry partners to construct a more comprehensive picture of educational management practices. This limitation is addressed in the study's conclusion and scope of future work.

### ***Research Population and Sampling***

The study participants are deliberately chosen from those Ethiopian students pursuing education in the "Chinese + Vocational" program at the FED College. Ten participants were selected through purposive sampling, a strategy well-suited to qualitative studies that seek depth over breadth (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The decision to limit the sample to ten was guided by the principle of informational saturation: data collection continued until no new themes or codes emerged across successive interviews, consistent with recent evidence that near-saturation is typically achieved between nine and fifteen participants in homogeneous, focused qualitative studies (Squire et al., 2024). All ten participants had been enrolled in the program for a minimum of one academic year, possessed at least beginner-level Chinese language proficiency upon entry, and had prior involvement in a Luban Workshop or equivalent vocational activity. Demographically, participants ranged in age from 19 to 24 years ( $M = 21.3$ ), with six male and four female students. The sampling strategy targets a group of students with varied vocations (eng, manufac, serv), since it is believed that such a selection will provide a broad range of experience related to language learning and cross-cultural interactions.

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

Clear inclusion criteria were established at participant recruitment to maintain the relevance and ethics of this research. All participants needed to be at least 18 years old and able to consent (SpA, 2017). Participants also had to be currently enrolled in or pursuing the "Chinese + Vocational" program at FED College and have been involved in other related programs such as the Luban Workshop (or similar activities) to support direct access to the program (King, 2019). All required permissions or authorizations were granted from the Ethiopian Federal Institute of Development (FED) College before any data collection for access to students' information and research on the campus. After receiving an extensive explanation of the purpose of and approach to the study, voluntary participation was required of all participants, who signed informed consent as evidence was obtained with respect for human research ethics (Bazen et al., 2021). The need for ethics and research integrity in research was recognized



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when ethical approvals were obtained by the University Medical Research Ethical Committee (UMREC) as necessary to adhere to the most robust ethical and moral standards during the study (Resnik, 2018). Table 1 shows the participants involved in this study.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Sample Description*

| Vocational Area | Number of Participants | Notes                                                   |
|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Engineering     | 3                      | Involving mechanical, electronic, and technical fields  |
| Manufacturing   | 5                      | Engaged in industrial production and manufacturing      |
| Other Services  | 2                      | Including IT, hospitality, and customer service sectors |

### **Data Source**

A major source of data used for research purposes includes semi-structured interviews with Ethiopian undergraduate students participating in the integrated "Chinese + Vocational" program at the Federal Institute of Development (FED) College. These participants have been selected for their involvement and experience in the program. Their views are important in the current research as the data can help identify actual institutional support, pedagogy, availability of resources, adaptation of students to a different culture, and their potential employability in future life.

During data collection, both face-to-face and online interviews have been used to reach the target participants. Face-to-face interviews were held in Addis Ababa as part of the fieldwork conducted there. At the same time, online interviews allowed the researcher to contact other participants who were not available at the particular moment due to other engagements.

For the purpose of conducting face-to-face interviews, the researcher first received all required institutional permissions to work with participants from the Federal Institute of Development College. Moreover, the researcher also gained approval for the interview procedure from the corresponding ethics committee. Before starting any interviews, the participants were briefed about the purposes of conducting the research and the nature of their participation, which would not cause any risks or adverse consequences. Per ethical requirements for research, informed consent was also obtained from the participants.

In regard to interview data collected in the course of research, this type of information was very useful for meeting research objectives as it allowed identifying students' perspectives and their experiences in regard to various aspects associated with the "Chinese + Vocational" program. As part of the interview procedure, the researcher was able to obtain comprehensive insight into language learning processes, cross-cultural issues, and many others, which could be related to other aspects such as implementation of the program, institutional support, curriculum delivery, and students' perspectives on their future employment.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using software called NVivo 14. The analysis strategy relied on constructivist qualitative analysis procedures suggested by Sarstedt et al. (2021), which implies careful consideration of data obtained from interviews and making sense of students' experiences and reflections in regard to the program.

The data analysis process included several steps. First of all, all interview transcripts conducted with 10 participants were analyzed. Line-by-line examination of the data allowed identifying 86 descriptive codes related to several issues, which include language challenges faced by students, lack of sufficient time to learn the Chinese language,



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pedagogical strategies used, support system used by the institution, cultural adaptation problems, learning techniques, and career expectations, among others.

In the next stage of data analysis, all previously generated codes were compared to each other, which allowed for the identification of more complex themes emerging in students' accounts. Overall, this process resulted in a set of themes, which relate to program implementation, support system, and students' perceptions in regard to curriculum delivery and teaching procedures used.

### ***Open Coding: Developing a Code Set***

To gain insight into the key problems that emerged from participants' experiences, open coding was applied to generate the initial set of 86 codes distributed across 6 different domains. The resulting code set captured various insights about participants' views of their experiences as students of Chinese. However, they were analyzed not only as personal opinions but also as elements of the organizational design and functioning of the entire "Chinese + Vocational" program.

According to the results of open coding, both problems and facilitators can be identified for the students enrolled in the program. In the first case, language problems, time issues, and cultural barriers appeared to be significant obstacles to successful performance in classes. At the same time, the second group of codes included such issues as strategies for coping with difficulties, motivations, career plans, and support from family members or friends.

**Table 2**

*Open Coding Classification and Description*

| Code Category       |            | Total Codes | Sample Codes & Descriptions               |
|---------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Language Challenges | Learning   | 16          | A001_Language Differences                 |
|                     |            |             | A002_Pronunciation Difficulties           |
|                     |            |             | A003_Accent Adaptation                    |
|                     |            |             | A004_Vocabulary Comprehension             |
|                     |            |             | A005_Chinese Character Learning           |
|                     |            |             | A006_Pinyin System                        |
|                     |            |             | A007_Tone Mastery                         |
|                     |            |             | A008_Listening Comprehension              |
|                     |            |             | A009_Speaking Expression                  |
|                     |            |             | A010_Grammar Structure                    |
|                     |            |             | A011_Lack of Language Environment         |
|                     |            |             | A012_Mother Tongue Interference           |
|                     |            |             | A013_Language Anxiety                     |
|                     |            |             | A014_Comprehension Speed                  |
|                     |            |             | A015_Language Output Difficulty           |
|                     |            |             | A016_Limited Communicative Competence     |
| Time Challenges     | Management | 8           | B001_Insufficient Class Time              |
|                     |            |             | B002_Learning Time Conflicts              |
|                     |            |             | B003_Multi-task Pressure                  |
|                     |            |             | B004_Time Allocation Difficulty           |
|                     |            |             | B005_Limited Self-study Time              |
|                     |            |             | B006_Dense Course Schedule                |
|                     |            |             | B007_Insufficient Review Time             |
|                     |            |             | B008_Low Time Efficiency                  |
| Cultural Adaptation |            | 12          | C001_Teaching Method Differences          |
|                     |            |             | C002_Teacher-Student Relationship Pattern |
|                     |            |             | C003_Classroom Interaction Style          |



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| Code Category        | Total Codes | Sample Codes & Descriptions                      |
|----------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Learning Strategies  | 15          | C004_ Learning Habit Differences                 |
|                      |             | C005_ Communication Style Differences            |
|                      |             | C006_ Cultural Value Conflicts                   |
|                      |             | C007_ Social Perception Differences              |
|                      |             | C008_ Educational Philosophy Differences         |
|                      |             | C009_ Politeness Norm Differences                |
|                      |             | C010_ Food Culture Differences                   |
|                      |             | C011_ Clothing Culture Differences               |
|                      |             | C012_ Festival Culture Differences               |
|                      |             | D001_ Self-directed Learning Strategy            |
|                      |             | D002_ Multimedia Learning                        |
|                      |             | D003_ Imitation Learning Method                  |
|                      |             | D004_ Repetitive Practice                        |
|                      |             | D005_ Peer Collaborative Learning                |
|                      |             | D006_ Digital Learning Tools                     |
| Motivational Factors | 18          | D007_ Audio-visual Media Learning                |
|                      |             | D008_ Learning App Usage                         |
|                      |             | D009_ Online Resource Utilization                |
|                      |             | D010_ Audio Material Practice                    |
|                      |             | D011_ Role Play Practice                         |
|                      |             | D012_ Group Discussion                           |
|                      |             | D013_ Cultural Experience Learning               |
|                      |             | D014_ Practical Application Learning             |
|                      |             | D015_ Gamified Learning                          |
|                      |             | E001_ Employment Motivation                      |
|                      |             | E002_ Salary Improvement Motivation              |
|                      |             | E003_ Career Development Motivation              |
|                      |             | E004_ International Mobility Motivation          |
|                      |             | E005_ Scholarship Motivation                     |
|                      |             | E006_ Cultural Interest Motivation               |
| Career Planning      | 10          | E007_ Personal Growth Motivation                 |
|                      |             | E008_ Identity Construction Motivation           |
|                      |             | E009_ Social Recognition Motivation              |
|                      |             | E010_ Curiosity-driven Motivation                |
|                      |             | E011_ Challenge Motivation                       |
|                      |             | E012_ Utilitarian Motivation                     |
|                      |             | E013_ Integrative Motivation                     |
|                      |             | E014_ Competitive Advantage Motivation           |
|                      |             | E015_ Globalization Adaptation Motivation        |
|                      |             | E016_ Chinese Culture Attraction                 |
|                      |             | E017_ Economic Opportunity Motivation            |
|                      |             | E018_ Skill Enhancement Motivation               |
|                      |             | F001_ Short-term Career Goals                    |
|                      |             | F002_ Long-term Career Vision                    |
|                      |             | F003_ Industry Preference                        |
|                      |             | F004_ Multinational Company Employment Intention |
|                      |             | F005_ Entrepreneurial Intention                  |
|                      |             | F006_ Further Education Plans                    |
|                      |             | F007_ Skill Certification Needs                  |



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| Code Category   | Total Codes | Sample Codes & Descriptions             |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Support Systems | 8           | F008_Career Competency Self-assessment  |
|                 |             | F009_Professional Identity Construction |
|                 |             | F010_Professional Network Building      |
|                 |             | G001_Family Support                     |
|                 |             | G002_Peer Support                       |
|                 |             | G003_Teacher Guidance                   |
|                 |             | G005_Social Support                     |
|                 |             | G006_Emotional Support                  |
|                 |             | G007_Academic Support                   |
|                 |             | G008_Career Guidance Support            |

Further examination showed that some problems emerged at the very beginning of the learning process and continued throughout the entire study. First of all, language problems (A001–A016), time-related concerns (B001–B008), and cultural barriers (C001–C012) had become major sources of stress for learners. Moreover, the lack of confidence associated with these issues often led to reduced participation in discussions and difficulties with advancing further into new material. For instance, difficulties with pronunciation (A002) and speaking anxiety (A013) contributed to hesitation during classroom interaction. The evidence suggests that time pressure was compounded by the structural requirement to balance language acquisition with vocational training simultaneously, a burden that is inherently managerial in origin.

However, the analysis of codes has also shown that several facilitators existed. Specifically, repetitive practice (D004), cooperation with peers (D005, G002), advice from instructors (G003), and help provided by parents or friends (G001–G008) contributed to improved student performance and self-confidence. These codes illustrate the importance of support networks in the program under consideration. Furthermore, participants expressed a keen interest in the culture (E016), strong motivation to learn a foreign language to ensure their competitiveness on the labor market (E003, E014), and plans associated with the future profession (F001–F010).

The data demonstrate that facilitators such as institutional support, deliberate practice, and cultural engagement played a crucial role in reducing the negative impact of challenges faced by students. In particular, participants who received a great deal of support were more likely to overcome initial language and time-related obstacles. In turn, individuals who were aware of the program's practical benefits were more persistent in their studies.

### ***Axial Coding Stage***

Once the open coding stage was completed, axial coding was applied to group the 86 initial codes into broader categories that offer a clearer picture of how the integrated "Chinese + Vocational" program works and how students experience it. At this point, the goal was not simply to link related ideas, but to move toward a deeper understanding of how the program is implemented, how support systems function, and how employability outcomes are shaped. In this sense, axial coding made it possible to connect individual student experiences with broader issues in educational management.

The 86 codes were ultimately grouped into three main categories: linguistic-educational barriers, psychosocial adaptation factors, and human capital development. While these categories are grounded in students' experiences, they also reflect how the program operates in practice. In other words, students' accounts were used not just to describe their personal journeys, but also to shed light on the structure and management of the program itself.



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**Table 3**  
*Axial Coding*

| Main Category                   | Subcategories                                       | Representative Codes / Examples                         | References codes | Theoretical Links                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Linguistic-Educational Barriers | 1. Language Learning Challenges (A001-A016)         | "The biggest challenge is language barriers"            | 126              | Aligns with SLA: Language difficulties such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and teaching gaps impede initial mastery, which is crucial for building self-efficacy. |
|                                 | 2. Time Constraints (B001-B008)                     | "Time deficiency and the accent"                        |                  |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                 | 3. Teaching Methodology Gaps (C001-C005; D010-D014) | "Need more interactive activities"                      |                  |                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Psychosocial Adaptation Factors | 1. Cultural Integration Process (C006-C012)         | "Cultural differences can be solved by collaboration"   | 309              | Aligns with SLA: Intercultural competence development through cultural engagement enhances motivation and identity.                                              |
|                                 | 2. Self-Regulation Strategies (D001-D009; E010)     | "I improve by practicing regularly"                     |                  |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                 | 3. Identity Development (E008-E013; F009)           | "Learning Chinese helps me connect with other cultures" |                  |                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Human Capital Development       | 1. Career Aspiration Formation (E001-E018)          | "I see opportunities to work with Chinese businesses"   | 811              | Aligns with HCT: Language mastery and intercultural skills serve as human capital resources that increase employability and market competitiveness.              |
|                                 | 2. Skills Investment Rationale (F001-F008; F010)    | "Language skills provide competitive advantages"        |                  |                                                                                                                                                                  |



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| Main Category | Subcategories                                    | Representative Codes / Examples                | References codes | Theoretical Links                                                   |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
|               | 3. Resource Accessibility (G001-G003; G005-G008) | "Family support and scholarship opportunities" |                  | SCCT: Self-efficacy and motivation mediate pathway to career goals. |

Firstly, linguistic-educational barriers involve the identification of primary challenges that students face during their studies within the program. Such difficulties include learning difficulties in mastering the Chinese language, a lack of sufficient time, and improper instructional techniques. Thus, the problems faced by students should not be considered merely as linguistic challenges. Indeed, a lack of time, poor coordination of subject content, and insufficient opportunities to interact may serve as indicators of the current curriculum management practices used to design the "Chinese + Vocational" education model. Consequently, from a management perspective, these factors have a dual nature and can be viewed both as limitations of students' abilities and characteristics of the educational program structure.

Secondly, psychological and social adaptation to studying in a bilingual environment should also be discussed in relation to the interplay of several components, including cultural integration, self-regulation, and identity. As indicated by the empirical data obtained, the process of adapting to such conditions is a complex phenomenon that depends on a wide range of environmental variables. In terms of management, these factors emphasize the need to ensure that there are effective support mechanisms in place as well as provide students with structured opportunities to adapt culturally.

Thirdly, the category related to human capital development reveals how participants perceive their learning experience and relate it to future activities. Career aspirations, motivation for personal skill acquisition, and available resources play a significant role in this regard. In general, students consider the course of study as an opportunity for obtaining better employment in the future. However, such motivation depends on how clear and realistic future prospects are provided by the educational institution.

Consequently, all three identified categories reveal the complex dynamics of factors shaping students' experiences in the current context. Barriers impose certain challenges, whereas support helps students cope with them, and career aspirations encourage individuals to make greater efforts. Therefore, the success of the "Chinese + Vocational" program should not be assessed based on students' language acquisition or career achievements alone. The program itself can be defined as an integrated managed system that requires consideration of multiple parameters.

In this regard, axial coding allowed the development of categories that would be further included into the main themes of the study. The analysis of these parameters revealed challenges in implementing the "Chinese + Vocational" program and ways to overcome them. In particular, institutional support systems, curriculum organization, and teaching methods were discussed in relation to students' experiences in this context.

### ***Trustworthiness of the Study***

To enhance the credibility of the study, data triangulation was employed using multiple sources: semi-structured interviews, selected program-related documents, and the researcher's field notes. Given the study's primary focus on students' lived experiences and perceptions of the Sino-Ethiopian vocational program, the document analysis was intentionally delimited to materials directly accessible and relevant to the student perspective, namely, institutional guidelines, curriculum schedules, and publicly available partnership agreements between FED College and Chinese partner institutions. These documents were used to corroborate and contextualize participant



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accounts, particularly regarding curriculum structure, institutional support arrangements, and program coordination mechanisms (Bowen, 2009). No additional administrative or policy documents were examined, as the study does not aim to evaluate institutional or governmental policy implementation from a managerial standpoint but rather to understand how students navigate and make sense of the existing structures.

Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa Coefficient ( $\kappa = .81$ ), indicating strong agreement exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of .70 for qualitative coding studies (Brady & O'Regan, 2009; Cheung & Tai, 2023). Disagreements were resolved through iterative discussion among the research team until consensus was reached. Memo writing served as an essential technique during the analysis stage, describing the process of theme development and making analytical decisions transparent. Specifically, memos documented how initial codes were grouped into subcategories and how subcategories were elevated to themes, providing an audit trail of analytical reasoning.

To address confirmability, reflexivity was employed to mitigate the potential impact of personal biases. The lead researcher, as an outsider to the Ethiopian educational system, maintained a reflexivity journal throughout the study, recording assumptions about Chinese-African educational partnerships and how those assumptions were challenged or revised during data collection and analysis. This process of systematic self-scrutiny is consistent with best practices for confirmability in cross-cultural qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### ***RQ1: How are Institutional Supports Within an Integrated "Chinese + Vocational" Program Experienced by Ethiopian Undergraduates in Relation to Their Learning and Career Preparation?***

As evidenced by the data collected during this study, institutional support is necessary for the effective maintenance of the integration process and for connecting the current process of learning with future career goals. Teacher assistance, collaboration with peers, encouragement from family members, availability of learning materials, scholarships, mentoring, and cultural activities have been identified by the respondents as the most significant types of institutional support in the program. These kinds of support have been considered not as additional factors, but as integral elements that create an environment for meaningful, relevant, and sustainable learning.

Teacher support deserves special attention in terms of the importance that it provides for successful learning outcomes. Ethiopian students noted that their teachers were sources of explanations, encouragement, and additional assistance with difficult tasks. Under challenging conditions of studying in a bilingual and vocational environment, such support not only facilitated the process of learning but also contributed to increased motivation. This result corresponds with evidence indicating that a strong system of educational support helps to increase learners' confidence and maintain their commitment (Edokpolor & Omiunu, 2017) and that teacher-student relationships can promote learner persistence in career-oriented education (Myran & Sylvester, 2021). From the managerial perspective, teacher support needs to be considered not as informal but as an integral part of any educational program.

Furthermore, collaboration with peers was also viewed by the participants positively. They emphasized the importance of having a network of students who can share their skills, encourage them, and solve problems together. In the context of learning in a bilingual and vocational program, which includes different challenges associated with a new language, new topics, and even cultural aspects, peer support creates a more favorable learning environment and promotes increased practice. It should be mentioned that peer support can contribute to the improvement of confidence and optimism in vocational education (Goodwin, 2019). Finally, encouragement from the side of families also assisted students in remaining motivated to overcome the difficulties and challenges.

Additionally, more organized forms of institutional support, such as the availability of learning materials, scholarships, mentoring, and cultural activities, were perceived as means of connecting learning and career



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opportunities. Respondents noted that the presence of resources indicated potential career advantages from learning in the program. The idea that education acquires greater significance when institutions provide learners not only with instruction but also with access to employment opportunities is supported by previous studies (Arghode et al., 2021). Moreover, this finding corresponds with evidence demonstrating that highly resourced and international programs can enhance the feeling of employability of students by connecting their current training with future career pathways (Dai & Pham, 2024). Critically, however, these findings also reveal a structural tension: the institutional supports that students valued most; teacher guidance, peer networks, and scholarship access. These supports were unevenly distributed and largely informal in character. This suggests that the program's effectiveness is currently contingent on individual goodwill rather than systematically managed support architecture, raising important questions about equity of access and the scalability of current arrangements (Jusoh et al., 2026).

### ***RQ2: What Implementation Challenges Emerge in The Management of Bilingual Vocational Education, particularly in Relation to Language Learning, Time Demands, Pedagogy, And Cultural Adaptation?***

Based on the findings, the implementation challenges faced by the learners were largely determined by program management rather than students' individual characteristics. The majority of the participants highlighted language barriers, lack of time, high volume of courses, inappropriate teaching methods, and absence of sufficient practice opportunities. Therefore, successful program management appears to be an essential precondition for the effective learning experience.

Speaking about the specific problems faced by the learners, language learning turned out to be a major issue. They experienced numerous difficulties with pronunciation, comprehension of spoken language, vocabulary development, and language expression. The resulting lack of confidence led to low engagement and unwillingness to participate in classroom activities and vocational communication exercises. Despite the fact that the findings are consistent with previous studies on language difficulties' impact on motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021), the problem can also be explained by how the program is implemented, namely the availability of practice opportunities and the integration of language learning into vocational education.

Another problem identified by participants related to time pressure and curriculum load. Students expressed concerns regarding insufficient time needed to process and review newly acquired knowledge. In fact, the issue is less associated with poor time management skills among the students than with the nature of the program and its structure. As per recent studies, high workloads can adversely influence students' academic performance and reduce their self-confidence (Zhang, 2024).

Pedagogical challenges can be described in relation to ineffective teaching strategies. Namely, some students reported that lessons did not offer sufficient room for interactions and were detached from real-life experiences and vocation. Other participants noted that they rarely got an opportunity to communicate in Chinese outside of the classroom. The mentioned aspects are highly relevant to the process of learning due to its dependence on repeated practice and immersion (Gao, 2019; Tseng & Yi-Wei, 2023). In addition, the effectiveness of educational processes increases as soon as language training becomes relevant and contextual (Weijzen et al., 2024). Therefore, the identified challenges indicate deficiencies in pedagogical and curricular cooperation, workload balance, and program management. Instead of considering students' individual limitations, it is important to focus on improving the management of bilingual vocational education. From a critical educational management perspective, the co-occurrence of language barriers and heavy workloads is not merely a pedagogical inconvenience but a structural contradiction inherent in the design of bilingual vocational programs: they simultaneously demand high cognitive load (language acquisition) and high skill load (vocational mastery) within the same temporal constraints, without proportional institutional adjustments to scheduling, assessment, or support (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021; Mat Yusoff et al., 2023; Zhang, 2024). Addressing this contradiction requires not only curriculum revision but a fundamental rethinking of how time and resources are allocated at the program management level.



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### ***RQ3: How Do Institutional Arrangements and Implementation Conditions Shape Students' Perceived Employability Pathways in Domestic and International Labor Markets?***

It is evident that the organization of instruction and its implementation greatly affect students' perceptions of their future employment prospects. As noted above, students' confidence, perseverance, readiness to interact in an intercultural environment, and overall career trajectory are determined by the learning environment and the level of institutional support. Therefore, it can be concluded that, contrary to the perception of employability as a purely cognitive concept, there are various other factors influencing students' views of their career development.

Firstly, curriculum design and instructional methods are crucial in forming students' perception of the value of their learning experience. As found in previous studies, the regular repetition of certain practices allows overcoming difficulties and gaining confidence in the successful completion of assignments (Gao, 2019). Moreover, as emphasized by Bryan (2025), the effective development of any skill is impossible without proper curricular design and adequate implementation of learning tasks. In this regard, the current study confirmed the effectiveness of using multimedia resources and role-playing in increasing students' interest in learning activities. Meanwhile, applied and bilingual tasks contributed to improving students' motivation to apply their skills in practice. These results correspond with previous findings on the importance of practical applications in learning (Weijzen et al., 2024) and emphasize the need to actively implement integration principles in the educational process rather than only describe them in program documents (Zhang, 2024; Zheng et al., 2025). Otherwise, students' interest may fade.

Secondly, the implementation conditions at the institutional level positively affected students' personal and professional growth. With access to necessary support and opportunities to practice their skills, learners' confidence was strengthened, and their motivation and perseverance were stimulated. Moreover, exposure to the Chinese language and culture and participation in cross-cultural activities contributed to students' preparation to find employment in multicultural settings. This corresponds with previous findings on the critical role of intercultural competence in promoting effective communication and professional interactions (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009) and increasing employability and mobility (Deardorff, 2006; O'Brien, 2017). Taken together, these findings illuminate a broader implication for transnational vocational education policy: the perceived employability benefits of bilingual programs are not automatically realized but are actively constructed through institutional management decisions. Where management is strong — providing coherent curriculum, adequate support, and cross-cultural exposure — students develop a confident, market-oriented professional identity. Where management is weak or inconsistent, the same program can produce disengagement and eroded self-efficacy. This has direct implications for how Sino-Ethiopian educational cooperation agreements are operationalized and monitored at the institutional level.

Finally, students' perceptions of their future career trajectory were formed through interaction with peers and instructors and discussions of possible career opportunities. They began to think about applying the acquired knowledge and skills for work in Chinese companies, multinational corporations, as translators, during further education, or when founding their own enterprises. These results are similar to findings concerning the impact of international education on career prospects (Jones, 2013). Furthermore, it is worth noting the beneficial role of language skills in promoting career advancement and earnings opportunities (Guo & Chase, 2011; Hang & Zhang, 2023; Hao et al., 2026).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study illustrates that the "Chinese + Vocational" program in Ethiopia must be regarded from the perspective of educational management. Although such courses are typically characterized by a skill-based focus, the results obtained in this research indicate that the effectiveness of bilingual programs cannot be assessed independently of their organizational and managerial aspects. Curriculum integration, teaching approaches, institutional factors, availability of resources, cross-cultural delivery, among other features of "Chinese + Vocational" programs are critical aspects that determine students' views and perceptions of their usefulness as far as their future careers are



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concerned. From this perspective, such bilingual programs can be described as an intricate system in which the outcome depends on the quality of organization of different components.

However, typical problems associated with "Chinese + Vocational" programs, including language barriers, time constraints, a large amount of material to cover, few opportunities to engage in practice, and poor alignment between teaching methodologies used and students' needs, can hardly be considered purely personal concerns. In this context, various factors, such as comprehensive support provided by instructors, peer collaboration, encouragement from families, adequate financial assistance, access to learning resources, mentoring, culture-oriented events, and others, may help students cope with these challenges and remain engaged in educational activities and the learning process. Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrate that effective learning experience requires teaching that is practical, interactional, and contextualized. These insights impose a considerable responsibility on educational leaders who need to provide proper coordination of program implementation and ensure appropriate support. It should be noted that these conclusions were made in accordance with students' rather than administrators' or instructors' perspectives.

From the theoretical standpoint, SCCT, HCT, and SLA are integrated into the broader field of educational management. Unlike other studies, in which motivation plays a critical role, this paper demonstrates that institutional factors play a major role in the formation of certain students' traits such as confidence, perseverance, ability to adapt culturally, career direction, and employability. Furthermore, an Institutional Management Framework for Integrated Bilingual Vocational Education can offer some additional insights on the ways programs affect student development within an international vocational setting. In fact, the relevance of such an approach is dictated by the rapidly growing popularity of "Chinese + Vocational" programs in Ethiopia that contribute to workforce development and international collaboration in the country. Overall, the current study indicates that the effective management of such initiatives involves curriculum alignment, workload balance, appropriate teaching methodology, advanced language learning infrastructures, cultural adjustments, and coordination of students' services that can improve students' learning experience and their prospects for gaining employment.

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