



Constructing an Immersion Internship Model in Early Childhood Profession: A Case Study of School B in Chinese Vocational Colleges

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Abstract. To enhance the quality of training for Early Childhood Education (ECE) applied talents, this study constructs an Immersion Internship Model (IIM) tailored to the developmental needs of Chinese ECE. The essence of the model is to blend theory with practice, fostering students' full-scale multi-dimensional immersion in kindergarten environments, and actively participating in and integrating into all aspects of the daily routine at kindergarten. This paper begins by defining the concept of the IIM. It then analyzes the principles underlying this model. Finally, it illustrates these principles using China's higher vocational college B school as a case study, elaborating on the objectives, content arrangement, implementation process, and evaluation strategy of the internship model. The aim is to provide practical suggestions and references to enhance the quality and effectiveness of internship programs for ECE majors at vocational colleges and universities.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Immersion Internship Model; Vocational Colleges

1 Introduction

The fundamental educational philosophy of China's colleges of higher vocational technology is to cultivate students' mastery of practical skills and vocational literacy. The aim is to ensure that the curriculum and teaching content closely align with the cutting-edge needs of the industry, enabling students to enhance their practical skills and problem-solving abilities through hands-on work experiences both on and off campus [1]. Internships play a crucial role in pre-service teacher training, directly related to the development of students' professionalism and educational practice abilities.

Research shows that internships are highly effective in securing stable employment [2]. Although the forms of professional practice in ECE in China are currently very diverse, including Educational Observation, Top-up Training, and increasingly rich content [3], persistent issues remain. For example, the objectives of internships lack clarity, the contents of internships do not effectively focus on the expected learning outcomes,

there is a lack of standardized guidance and management in the implementation process, the evaluation method tends to be formalized^[4], there is still a "gap" between students' practical abilities and the actual needs of employers^[5], and the role of instructors is weakened^[6]. Therefore, contemporary scholars have proposed a new internship model, namely IIM, to address these issues.

Contrasted with the conventional educational internship model, the IIM introduces a distinctive mode of intern involvement, termed 'marginal participation'^[7]. Within this framework, interns are legally and permanently integrated into the practical affairs of the school as assistants to the school's lead teacher. This methodology enables interns to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical application, promoting a thorough understanding of the daily operations and educational activities in kindergarten, thereby enhancing their professionalism.

Therefore, this study suggests that IIM can address the limitations of other internship approaches by encouraging students to immerse themselves in kindergarten operations, actively participate in daily activities, and fully integrate into the kindergarten environment. This immersive experience enables students to understand the complexity of classroom management. Moreover, the IIM demonstrates unique advantages over traditional experiences^[8], significantly enhancing students' professional confidence and practical skills^[9], while promoting more in-depth and systematic reflective practice^[10]. However, while some scholars have proposed this model and examined its definition, no scholars have analyzed the framework of incorporating internships. Therefore, this study will analyze the model from four aspects: goal setting, content construction, implementation, and evaluation.

2 The Principles of Constructing the Immersion Internship Model

2.1 Comprehensive Integration Principle

Firstly, the IIM emphasizes the integration of academic knowledge, skills, and emotional objectives in a cohesive manner. It focuses not only on the cultivation of professional knowledge and operational skills but also on developing students' emotional intelligence and values.

Secondly, the model emphasizes the complementary and mutually immersive integration of theoretical learning and practical operation. This approach means that students do not simply apply acquired knowledge in practice but deepen their understanding of theoretical concepts through engaging in practical activities and implementing this knowledge in real-world scenarios.

Furthermore, the model emphasizes the integration of online instruction and offline learning. By integrating online teaching resources with practical field environments, students can transcend the limitations of time and space to acquire knowledge and experience in various dimensions and scenarios, thereby achieving comprehensive learning outcomes.

2.2 Sustainability Principle

In constructing the IIM, the principle of sustainability, as one of the core elements, permeates the entire internship process. This principle aims to ensure the consistency, challenge, and progression of the internship activities, thereby enhancing students' educational practice and professionalism.

Firstly, the objectives and requirements of the internship should be continually refined to keep pace with the professional growth needs of the students. As the internship progresses, its content should be optimized accordingly. This ongoing challenge and development not only stimulate students' learning motivation but also foster the overall enhancement of their professionalism.

Secondly, the arrangement of internship activities should allow for regular participation, ideally on a weekly basis. Through consistent internships, students can engage continually in kindergarten care, education, and management, ensuring the continuity of their learning. This regular schedule helps students to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical experience, forming a robust foundation for educational practice.

Additionally, students should engage in ongoing reflection and improvement of their performance throughout the internship. By continuously analyzing their practical experiences, students can identify areas for improvement in their educational practices and explore strategies to enhance these practices.

Finally, teachers should provide continuous guidance and support throughout the internship process. With teachers fully involved and offering consistent guidance, students are ensured systematic and comprehensive practical experiences in education during their internship, laying a solid groundwork for their future professional development in the field of education.

2.3 Cooperative Principle

The principle of cooperation plays a crucial role in developing an educational IIM. This principle emphasizes close collaboration among multiple parties to ensure the smooth operation of internship activities and the overall development of students' professionalism.

First of all, the principle of cooperation is reflected in the in-depth collaboration between schools and practice bases. The solid cooperative relationship established between schools and practice bases provides an important environment for students to enhance their practical abilities. Through close cooperation with practice bases, students can obtain practice opportunities and guidance that meet professional requirements, laying a strong foundation for their future career development.

Secondly, the principle of cooperation is also reflected in the synergy between on-campus tutors and off-campus tutors. By sharing information and through information sharing and close collaboration, they ensure that students receive comprehensive and detailed guidance and evaluation in the process of internships.

In addition, the principle of cooperation is also reflected in the positive interaction between students and teachers. As the supervisor of the internship activities, it is crucial

for the teacher to establish a positive teacher-student relationship with the student. During the process of collaboration, students can experience the care and support of the teacher, which will stimulate the internship motivation and participate in the internship activities more actively. At the same time, the teacher can better understand the needs and characteristics of the student, providing more targeted guidance, which enhances the significance of the internship. Finally, the principle of cooperation also emphasizes teamwork among students. Student cooperation not only creates a positive learning atmosphere but also enhances their teamwork and communication skills. During the internship, students can not only improve the impact of the internship but also enhance the friendship and trust between each other by completing tasks together, sharing experiences, and supporting each other.

In summary, the principle of cooperation plays crucial role in the development of the educational IIM. Through close cooperation between multiple parties, we can ensure the smooth implementation of internship activities and the comprehensive development of students' professionalism.

3 Construction of Immersion Internship Model

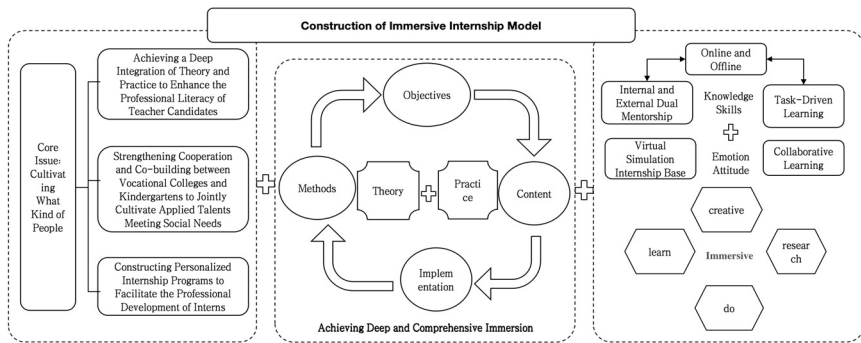


Fig. 1. A Constructive Framework for an Immersion Internship Model

3.1 The Objective Construct of the Immersion Internship

Determining "what kind of people to train" emerges as a central issue when exploring internship models for ECE majors. The IIM as a novel educational approach, requires meticulous planning and scientific deliberation. This includes adhering to professional standards for kindergarten educators, meeting genuine kindergarten requirements, and considering site-specific characteristics. Additionally, it involves fulfilling professional certification requirements, aligning with the educational goals of the school, accommodating the developmental stages of individual students, and considering other relevant factors. This comprehensive approach ensures that the training provided through the IIM is thorough, targeted, and effective in preparing students to meet the diverse needs of the early childhood education sector.

The establishment of the IIM aims to achieve the following three core objectives (View Fig. 1):

(1) To realize the in-depth integration of theory and practice and to improve the professional quality of teacher trainees. During the IIM process, theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom is integrated with practical work in kindergartens by interns, deepening their understanding and mastery of theoretical knowledge through hands-on experience. This process reinforces the guiding principle of "from theory to practice" and enhances the effectiveness of education and teaching.

(2) Cooperation between higher vocational colleges and kindergartens is strengthened to jointly cultivate applied talents in line with societal needs. The IIM provides a platform for higher vocational colleges and kindergartens to cooperate in cultivating talents. Through close cooperation between the two sides, the optimal allocation and efficient use of educational resources will be achieved, and more outstanding ECE teachers.

(3) Constructing a personalized internship program to promote the professional development of interns. The IIM focuses on the personal growth and development needs of interns. Through an in-depth understanding of interns' interests, abilities, and development needs, personalized internship goals and plans are designed collaboratively with supervising teachers. At the same time, it provides interns with the necessary support and assistance, encourages them to actively participate in practical activities, take the initiative to assume responsibility, and have the courage to challenge themselves. This approach aims to achieve the enhancement of their personal and professional abilities and strengthen their sense of self-identity.

Using School B as a model, the establishment of objectives for its IIM incorporates the Trinity (higher vocational institution, practice base, and interns), covering a range of aspects such as teacher ethical standards, educational attitudes, childcare and teaching knowledge, pedagogical abilities, classroom management, comprehensive parenting, reflective skills, and communication and collaboration skills. The establishment of these objectives reflects the comprehensive demands for interns' professionalism and contributes to cultivating ECE educators with profound professional expertise and exemplary professionalism.

3.2 The Content Construction of the Immersion Internship

The formulation of the IIM aims to address three fundamental issues: the "learning focus" of students, the "guidance direction" of supervising teachers, and the "resource supply" of the school. Considering the prevalent challenges, School B's immersion practice model presents a viable solution to these issues. During the immersion internship, students participate in kindergarten activities for at least one full day per week. This fosters peer communication and interaction with young children, thereby achieving comprehensive familiarity with kindergarten routines. Such experiences aid in gradually alleviating apprehensions regarding trial teaching, facilitating the seamless transition from teacher trainee to teacher.

In terms of the design of the internship content, the immersion internship adopts a task-oriented approach, which includes the formulation of the internship manual,

presentation of internship outcomes, and performance debriefing. The presentation of internship outcomes includes various elements, such as photographs depicting teacher-child interactions, organization of teaching activities, design of thematic displays, handicrafts, work scene recordings, micro-videos showcasing kindergarten life, and educational activity design. The debriefing session highlights interns' learning achievements and practical competencies through demonstrations of teaching activities, sharing in-ternship experiences, and interactive performances with children.

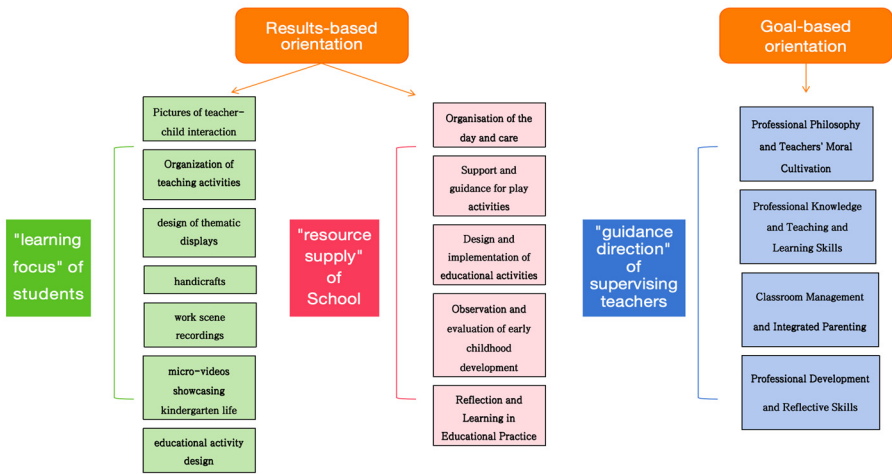


Fig. 2. Content Design Thinking for Immersion Internships

To ensure the efficacy and pertinence of the internship content, School B has established four primary project modules derived from the analysis of the demand for pre-school education professionals by the Ministry of Education of China and the elucidation of the Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (View Fig. 2). Subsequently, a variety of specific task lists were developed using a task-oriented approach. These tasks are further delineated into precise task cards on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, providing interns with clear operational guidance for practical tasks. Through the completion of these specific task cards, interns systematically acquire practical knowledge and skills, strengthen core competencies, and improve adaptability to future professional demands.

3.3 The Implementation Construct of the Immersion Internship

Before commencing the immersion internship, higher vocational institutions must meticulously plan and devise a structured internship program. This plan should outline the internship project modules, specific tasks, educational objectives, duration of practice, dual tutor system, and evaluation criteria. Initially, interns engage in observation and perception, followed by iterative observation. During the internship period, interns are required to draft a minimum of five lesson plans and participate in more in-depth dis-

cussions with the supervising teacher. During the concluding phase, interns are expected to deliver at least one lecture, which will be evaluated by the entire group, facilitating the acquisition of direct practical experience. As a protracted and intensive practice model, the successful execution of the immersion internship is contingent upon the meticulous selection of the cooperative base.

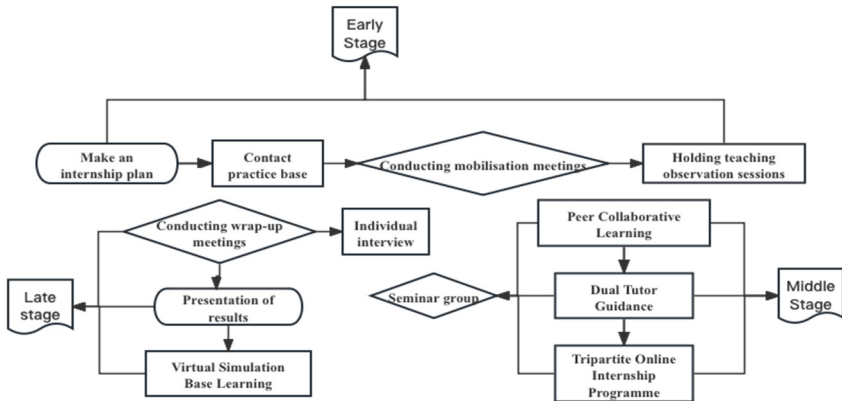


Fig. 3. Flowchart of the process of implementing an immersion internship

Taking School B as an example (see Fig. 3), the school collaborates with practice bases and affiliated kindergartens with long-term partnerships. To address challenges such as interns' uncertainty about their tasks, School B complements the initial mobilization meeting with a special lecture and observation session, enhancing interns' understanding of the internship content. During the internship process, School B employs a peer education internship model, where each kindergarten instructor supervises two interns. Additionally, a dual mentor system is established both internally and externally at the school to motivate interns through collaborative learning, peer support, and teamwork. Recognizing the supervisors' busy schedules, School B implements a tripartite online internship platform to provide interns with necessary resources and support. In this model, interns serve as both beneficiaries and contributors of resources, enriching the repository of educational internship materials. Upon completion of the internship cycle, higher vocational colleges and universities organize an educational internship summary meeting to assess interns' immersion internship experience and analyze challenges and accomplishments. Based on authentic feedback, institutions continuously refine the internship model to ensure its effectiveness. School B organizes internship results exhibition events and report presentations to comprehensively showcase interns' learning outcomes. To further develop and expand on the results of the internship, School B creates a virtual simulation internship specifically on the school platform. This innovative educational internship model overcomes time and space constraints, allowing teacher trainees to complete virtual kindergarten internships on the platform at their convenience. In the virtual environment, teacher trainees simulate day-to-day

situations in kindergartens and solve various practical problems, continuously enhancing their educational practice abilities and achieving ongoing deepening and expansion of the outcomes of their educational internship.

3.4 The Evaluation Constructs for Immersion Internships

The establishment of a scientific, comprehensive, and objective evaluation system for internship education is crucial for enhancing the quality of internship programs and fostering students' professional development. This evaluation system plays a pivotal role in assessing students' performance throughout the internship process and provides valuable reference information for higher vocational institutions, kindergartens, students, and their peers (see Fig. 4).

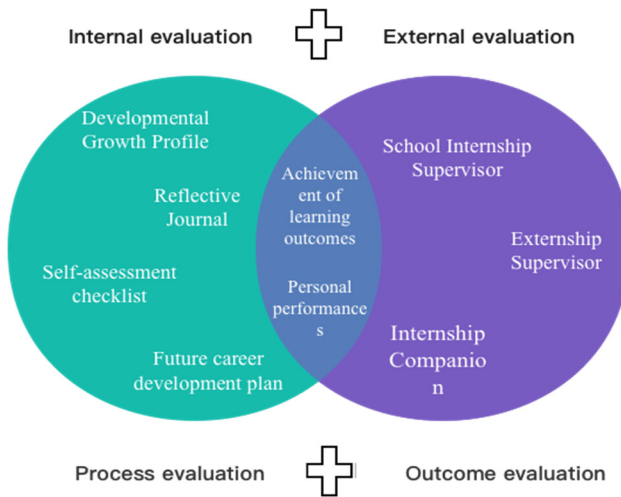


Fig. 4. Immersion Internship Evaluation Wayne's Chart

Various methods can be employed to effectively implement the evaluation system:

Diversified Evaluation Methods. A variety of evaluation methods can be utilized, including internship progress reports on online platforms, group evaluations during internship seminars, evaluations of teaching demonstrations, presentations of internship outcomes, report showcases, and professional interviews. This multi-dimensional approach provides comprehensive insights into students' performance.

Balancing Summative and Process Evaluation. A balance between summative evaluation, which objectively reflects students' internship results, and process evaluation, which tracks students' progress in real-time and provides timely feedback and suggestions, is important.

Therefore, the establishment and utilization of an evaluation system for internship education not only help to understand the performance and achievements of interns

objectively and comprehensively in educational practice but also provide valuable feedback and guidance to interns and related parties and promote the continuous development and improvement of Immersion internships.

4 Conclusion

Considering the considerable emphasis placed by Chinese higher vocational colleges and universities on nurturing students' practical skills and professionalism and considering the current challenges regarding the quality of internships for ECE education majors, this paper proposes the implementation of IIM. This model grounded in the principles of integrality, continuity, and collaboration, aims to meet professional requirements, and bridge the gap between theory and practice. Through a systematic exploration of goal setting, content organization, implementation procedures, and evaluation, the following conclusions have been drawn:

First and foremost, the IIM aims to achieve a deep integration of theory and practice, with a focus on enhancing the professionalism of teacher trainees. It promotes collaboration and mutual construction between higher vocational colleges and kindergartens to cultivate skilled professionals who meet societal needs. The model underscores individualized internship programs tailored to each student's characteristics and interests to foster their professional development during the internship process. The implementation of this model requires meticulous planning and the development of a structured internship program by higher vocational colleges, including a dual-mentor system comprising school and kindergarten mentors who collaboratively oversee the internship and establish clear disciplinary requirements and evaluation standards.

During the implementation process, careful consideration must be given to selecting cooperative bases and fostering deep cooperation. A peer-to-peer education internship model is established to facilitate mutual learning and support among students during the internship. Lastly, promptly summarizing and evaluating the IIM is crucial. By gathering feedback from the internship process and analyzing intern performance, the IIM can be continuously refined to better align with practical realities and enhance its effectiveness. This evaluation process not only improves the quality of internships but also provides valuable insights and references for future internship endeavors.

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