

Construction and Implementation Pathways of an Integrated Curriculum System for Tourism Management in Secondary-Higher Vocational Education amidst Digital-Cultural Tourism Convergence

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of digital-intelligent cultural-tourism convergence, the tourism industry exhibits heightened demand for professionals with enhanced capabilities in digital technology application, interdisciplinary knowledge integration, innovative practice, and continuous learning. This trend poses new challenges to current talent cultivation in tourism vocational education. To address this, the construction of an integrated secondary-higher vocational curriculum system for tourism management programs requires comprehensive reforms across four dimensions: positioning curriculum objectives, optimizing course content, innovating pedagogical approaches and refining assessment mechanisms. Concurrently, three synergistic pathways must be implemented: developing diverse-qualification faculty teams through multidimensional capacity, integrating educational resources through multi-approach coordination and strengthening policy safeguards via multilayered institutional support. This integrated framework aims to align vocational education with emerging trends in digital-intelligent cultural-tourism convergence.

Keywords

Curriculum System, Tourism Management Major, Digital, Cultural Tourism Convergence

1. Introduction

The integration of secondary and higher vocational education constitutes a vital

element in advancing vocational education toward a lifelong learning framework (Khaled et al., 2014). Since 1985, China's efforts to cultivate integrated talent through this model have evolved through three distinct phases: initial exploration, adjustment and standardization, and quality enhancement with high-quality development (Huang, Zhang, & Peng, 2025). In 2022, two pivotal developments solidified this approach: the government issued the Opinions on Deepening the Construction of the Modern Vocational Education System, emphasizing support for high-quality secondary vocational institutions to partner with higher vocational colleges in implementing five-year integrated programs. That same year, the revised Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China took effect, explicitly establishing the integrated talent cultivation system between secondary and higher vocational education and providing its legal foundation.

Integrated talent development has now become a cornerstone of high-skilled personnel training within China's vocational education system. As the core mechanism for achieving secondary-higher vocational integration, curriculum alignment directly addresses the practical requirements of this educational model (Xu & Song, 2012). Furthermore, the tourism management curriculum system functions as a critical bridge between education and industry practice, which not only shapes students' professional competencies but also directly leverages the quality enhancement and structural optimization of human resources in the tourism sector.

Globally, research on tourism management education and secondary-higher vocational integration concentrates on four key domains: curriculum framework design, innovative talent cultivation models, vocational education system articulation, and modern educational technology applications. Established vocational education systems, particularly in Germany and the United States, have pioneered comprehensive transition mechanisms between educational tiers. Germany's dual education system, for instance, ensures continuity through enterprise-school partnerships, practice-oriented skill development, and standardized modular curricula (Hong, 2009). Similarly, the U.S. community college system facilitates seamless progression via flexible credit transfer mechanisms, empowering personalized learning paths aligned with student aspirations to foster educational diversification and individualization (Baker, 2016).

Three theoretical frameworks underpin talent development in tourism management: constructivist learning theory, competency-based education, and lifelong learning principles. Constructivism asserts that learners achieve deep understanding through active knowledge construction in authentic contexts (Sharan, 1980), providing a theoretical foundation for tourism management curriculum design. Competency-based education defines specific ability indicators and assessment mechanisms to guide curriculum planning and instruction (Krause, Portolese, & Schedle, 2015), crucially supporting articulation between secondary and higher vocational levels. Lifelong learning emphasizes educational continuity and personal growth (Biesta, 2011), offering clear direction for establishing vertically

integrated curriculum systems spanning secondary to higher vocational education.

While China's research on tourism management education and secondary-higher vocational integration started later than international counterparts, scholarly output has expanded significantly amid growing national emphasis on vocational education. Chinese scholarship primarily addresses curricular coherence, advocating for systematic, hierarchical content progression. Studies identify persistent challenges, including content duplication, ill-defined structures, and disjointed transitions in current tourism curricula—issues that undermine both educational efficiency and talent development outcomes (Yang & Ren, 2016). To address these gaps, experts propose establishing unified competency-based curricular frameworks that enhance practical relevance, thereby strengthening students' comprehensive vocational capabilities and employment competitiveness (Liu, 2025).

Regarding curriculum integration models, Chinese scholarship primarily concentrates on practical and theoretical analyses of secondary-higher vocational articulation program—specifically “3 + 3”, “3 + 2”, and five-year continuous programs (Yang & Ren, 2016; Chen, 2023). While these models address discontinuities between educational tiers, they confront persistent challenges including: inconsistent teaching standards, uneven resource distribution, and underdeveloped inter-institutional collaboration mechanisms (Zhu et al., 2024). Consequently, experts advocate establishing unified teaching standards frameworks while promoting collaborative innovation in curriculum design, instructional planning, and assessment systems across vocational education levels (Wang et al., 2022).

Amidst the rapid advancement of digital and intelligent technologies, the cultural and tourism industry is undergoing unprecedented deep integration. This trend not only reshapes the operational mechanisms and value chains of the sector but also poses new challenges and heightened demands for tourism management education. However, few studies have explored the development of integrated curriculum systems for secondary-to-higher vocational education in tourism management within this emerging context.

Drawing upon constructivist learning theory, competency-based education theory, and lifelong learning principles, this study addresses existing gaps in China's integrated secondary-higher vocational talent development. It analyzes tourism workforce demands under digital-intelligent integration, constructs a cohesive curriculum framework, and proposes strategic implementation pathways.

2. Tourism Talent Demand Dynamics amidst Digital-Cultural Tourism Convergence

The deepening digital transformation of tourism is fundamentally restructuring industry competencies, as advanced technologies, including big data analytics, artificial intelligence, IoT, immersive systems (VR/AR), and blockchain, increasingly drive product innovation, service management, and experiential enhancement. This technological integration necessitates redefined professional capabilities for

tourism practitioners

First, constituting foundational literacy, 89% of tourism enterprises prioritize data analytics proficiency, while 85% demand comprehensively skilled digital professionals (Qiu & Du, 2022). Mastery of tourism-specific applications, including big data interpretation, intelligent marketing platforms, and VR deployment, is essential for optimizing product development, marketing, and service operations within digital-cultural tourism ecosystems.

Second, professionals require sophisticated domain comprehension to navigate the operational paradigms and market mechanisms of integrated cultural-tourism industries, translating theoretical knowledge into practical solutions for complex operational challenges.

Thirdly, digital-cultural tourism advancement demands demonstrable innovation competencies for encompassing problem-solving agility, collaborative teamwork, and creative ideation within authentic operational contexts.

Finally, practitioners must uphold rigorous ethical standards, service-oriented dispositions, and cross-cultural communication efficacy. Concurrently, self-directed learning adaptability is imperative to address evolving career demands, complemented by digital ethics frameworks ensuring responsible technological deployment.

Within the context of digital-intelligence-driven cultural tourism, the demand for tourism professionals is shifting from singular service skills, standardized operations, static knowledge acquisition, and manual service capabilities toward specialized interdisciplinary competencies, innovative management literacy, dynamic adaptability, and human-AI collaborative capacities. This transformation necessitates a paradigm shift in talent cultivation within contemporary tourism vocational education.

3. Construction of an Integrated Curriculum System for Tourism Management in Secondary-Higher Vocational Education amidst Digital-Cultural Tourism Convergence

This study examines the construction of an integrated secondary-to-higher vocational curriculum system in Tourism Management at Guangdong Industry & Trade Polytechnic. It highlights how integrated education models ensure vertical articulation of career training across educational levels and horizontal integration of interdisciplinary competencies. Through systematic curriculum objective alignment, content optimization, pedagogical innovation, and assessment mechanism refinement, the framework facilitates students' progressive development from foundational skill acquisition to advanced professional capabilities.

3.1. Positioning of Course Objectives

Against the backdrop of increasing convergence between cultural and tourism sectors driven by digitalization and intelligent technologies, the design of an integrated curriculum system for tourism management in secondary and higher vo-

cational education must be guided by clearly defined objectives and a robust competency framework.

Course outcomes should align with the pressing need for advanced technical talent amid ongoing industry transformation, while simultaneously fostering students' personalized development and lifelong learning capacities. At the secondary vocational level, the primary focus is on cultivating entry-level service personnel for travel agencies, hospitality establishments, and tourist attractions. In higher vocational education, emphasis shifts toward developing mid-to-senior-level operators for cultural and tourism enterprises, equipping them with expertise in project planning, resource development, digital operations, and team management. This staged pedagogical approach facilitates student progression from foundational operational competencies to integrated managerial capabilities.

3.2. Optimization of Course Content

The selection and organization of curricular content represent a core element of systemic development, critically influencing the attainment of pedagogical objectives while fundamentally shaping the coherence of learners' knowledge frameworks and the progressive development of professional competencies. Grounded in the talent competency framework for cultural and tourism enterprises within digitally integrated environments centered on four core dimensions which are technical application proficiency, industry cognition, innovative management capacity, and professional practice competence, this study conducts comprehensive analysis across four domains which are curricular stage stratification, content selection criteria, organizational logic architecture, and inter-stage articulation mechanisms. Aligned with the operational requirements of vertical articulation between secondary and higher vocational education and established student cognitive development patterns, the curriculum may be organized into three pedagogically progressive stages, which are foundational cognition, competency advancement, and integrated application (**Table 1**).

Firstly, the foundational cognition stage targets lower-grade secondary vocational students. This initial stage employs general education and core professional courses to cultivate fundamental comprehension of tourism management. Students acquire operational principles of the cultural-tourism sector while establishing preliminary familiarity with digital-intelligent technological paradigms. Pedagogical content prioritizes accessibility and engagement through case-based instruction and simulated scenarios, fostering intrinsic motivation while establishing bedrock knowledge for subsequent learning.

Secondly, the competency advancement stage, which is designed for upper-secondary through lower-higher vocational cohorts, this phase intensifies professional skill development in digital-intelligent tool application, cultural-tourism product design, and operational process optimization. Modular course architecture targets discrete competency domains through project-based learning and task-driven methodologies that facilitate knowledge transfer in authentic environ-

ments. Additionally, interdisciplinary knowledge integration must be prioritized to enhance students' comprehension of and adaptability to the complexities inherent in the cultural-tourism industry, such as incorporating heritage management and digital marketing into curriculum frameworks.

Finally, the integrated application stage, which addresses upper-level higher vocational students, this culminating stage synthesizes theoretical knowledge with practical implementation via industry-academia collaborations, internships, and experiential training. Students resolve authentic problems through applied initiatives, including cultural-tourism project planning, smart tourism platform development, and digital content creation. Outcome-oriented pedagogy emphasizes demonstrable skill application, completing the transition from theoretical mastery to professional competence. Curricular content continuously integrates emergent industry standards, enterprise case studies, and technological innovations to maintain contemporary relevance.

Table 1. Construction of an integrated curriculum system for tourism management in secondary and higher vocational education.

Learning Stage	Professional Curriculum System	Professional Practical Training System	Competency Objectives
Foundational Cognition Stage	Introduction to Tour Guide Knowledge, Introduction to Tourism, Tour Guide Business, Tourism Laws and Regulations, Tourism Service Etiquette, Hotel Service and Management, Travel Agency Service and Management, Scenic Area Service and Management, etc.	Practical Training in Tour Guide Business, Hotel Skills Training, Scenic Area Service Training, etc.	Professional Integrity Competency, Sustainable Learning Competency
Competency Advancement Stage	Practical Management, Tourism Consumer Psychology and Behavior, New Media Marketing in Tourism, Tourism Product Design, Tourism E-commerce, Tourism English, etc.	Production of Tourism Short Videos, Live Sales of Tourism Products, Operation of Tourism Product Design, etc.	Knowledge Integration Competency, Applied Innovation Capability
Integrated Application Stage	Analysis of Tourism Big Data, Tourism Financial Management, Tourism Human Resource Management, Tourism Enterprise Operations, etc.	Comprehensive Tourism Operation Project Training, etc.	Knowledge Integration Competency, Data Analytics Capability

In synthesizing principles for integrated tourism management curriculum design across secondary and higher vocational education, systematic implementation of a “simple-to-complex, progressively expansive” framework ensures coherent pedagogical progression and competency development across educational stages. The foundational cognition stage establishes bedrock knowledge while fostering intrinsic motivation, the competency advancement stage cultivates applied skills through theoretical integration, and the culminating integrated application stage prioritizes experiential learning with demonstrable outcome manifestation. These vertically articulated and horizontally aligned stages constitute an interlocking system that mitigates knowledge fragmentation and skill discontinuities.

Furthermore, dynamic curriculum adjustment mechanisms must be instituted to periodically update content and pedagogical organization based on triangulated

data from learner feedback, industry evolution, and instructional efficacy assessments. This iterative refinement cycle sustains curricular relevance and pedagogical effectiveness. Conclusively, implementation requires deliberate attention to differentiated pedagogy and personalized learning trajectory design. By provisioning tiered pedagogical resources and support services tailored to heterogeneous learner profiles, the curriculum actualizes precision education objectives.

3.3. Innovative Course Methods

Within smart cultural tourism ecosystems, developing integrated tourism management curricula for secondary and higher vocational education necessitates systematic content-structure planning alongside pedagogical innovation and robust assessment frameworks to achieve talent development objectives. As primary conduits for educational outcomes, instructional methodologies critically mediate students' knowledge acquisition, skill progression, and professional competency cultivation. Consequently, tourism management pedagogy requires multimodal approaches that align with digital-informational convergence, industry integration trends, learner cognition patterns, and occupational skill demands.

Pedagogical implementation should prioritize project-based learning, where authentic cultural tourism projects facilitate comprehensive knowledge application and collaborative innovation. Concurrently, curricular integration of representative transnational smart tourism cases enhances industry trend analysis, technological application comprehension, and management model evaluation to strengthen analytical acuity and strategic decision-making capacities. Furthermore, leveraging technological advancements enables the incorporation of immersive digital pedagogies, which include virtual reality simulations, cloud-based collaborative learning, and hybrid instruction models to increase instructional flexibility and praxis relevance while accommodating cognitive diversity.

3.4. Assessment of Evaluation System

A scientifically rigorous evaluation system constitutes an essential precondition for effective pedagogical implementation. Beyond its fundamental role in instructional activities, evaluation functions as a critical developmental mechanism that scaffolds student progression, provides actionable feedback on learning outcomes, and informs pedagogical recalibration. Conventional assessment paradigms relying predominantly on terminal examinations inadequately capture the complexity of learning trajectories and competency development.

Consequently, integrated tourism management curricula across secondary and higher vocational education necessitate developmental assessment frameworks integrating formative and summative approaches. Such frameworks must prioritize authentic measurement of core competencies, which include learning engagement, collaborative aptitude, problem-solving efficacy, and innovative capacity. Implementation requires combining formative diagnostics with performance-based assessments utilizing multimodal instruments structured classroom observa-

tions, reflexive learning portfolios, collaborative project defenses, and simulated operational scenarios to enable continuous performance monitoring and feedback.

Furthermore, multi-source appraisal integrating instructor evaluations, meta-cognitive self-assessments, peer reviews, and industry expert judgments enhance evaluative authenticity and dimensionality. This triangulation concurrently fosters professional identity formation and reflective praxis. To ensure equitable and scientifically rigorous assessment standards, a hybrid approach combining formative and performance-based evaluations is recommended. Implementation should encompass classroom observation protocols, reflective learning journals,

collaborative project presentations and simulated operational training scenarios. This integrated methodology enables continuous monitoring and feedback on students' learning behaviors and competency progression.

Technological advancements provide robust infrastructure for assessment modernization within digital-cultural tourism ecosystems, intelligent evaluation systems leveraging learning analytics and algorithmic processing enable longitudinal tracking and dynamic competency mapping. Educational data platforms furnish granular performance indicators, which include learning pathway visualizations, concept mastery diagnostics, and artifact quality metrics and facilitate personalized scaffolding and pedagogical iteration. Such data-informed methodologies not only elevate assessment validity and reliability but also generate empirical foundations for continuous pedagogical enhancement, establishing recursive feedback loops that optimize the teaching-evaluation-improvement cycle.

4. Implementation Pathways of an Integrated Curriculum System for Tourism Management in Secondary-Higher Vocational Education amidst Digital-Cultural Tourism Convergence

4.1. Multidimensional Construction of Dual-Qualified Teaching Teams

Teaching teams constitute a fundamental pillar in constructing integrated secondary-higher vocational tourism management curricula. Their pedagogical expertise and industry proficiency directly determine curricular quality and talent development efficacy. While current vocational tourism educators demonstrate substantial domain knowledge and instructional experience in conventional areas, significant competency gaps persist in emerging digital-cultural tourism domains. Two critical limitations emerge, which are insufficient technological literacy impedes effective integration of advanced tools into instructional practice, and systemic challenges in cross-disciplinary curriculum design hinder knowledge integration across tourism management's inherently interdisciplinary nature.

To address these deficiencies, a multilayered professional development strategy is essential.

First, establish comprehensive faculty development systems featuring structured in-service training. Collaborate with industry associations and enterprises

to deliver specialized workshops on digital-cultural tourism trends, smart tourism ecosystems, and digital pedagogical tools. These initiatives should expand professional horizons and update knowledge frameworks.

Second, institutionalize digital pedagogy credentialing through certification programs in micro-course design, MOOC development, and blended learning methodologies. This enhances technological-pedagogical content knowledge essential for contemporary vocational education.

Third, implement practice-oriented mentorship via flexible adjunct faculty models. Recruit industry experts as visiting professors who simultaneously mentor junior faculty while exposing students to cutting-edge industry practices, thereby bridging the theory-practice divide.

4.2. Multifaceted Integration of Teaching Resources

Within digitally integrated cultural tourism ecosystems, the systematic curation and integration of educational resources critically determine tourism management curriculum efficacy. A comprehensive analysis of resource components and integration mechanisms is therefore imperative for pedagogical optimization.

First, industry-academia integration requires intensification to establish polycentric educational support systems. Industry collaboration projects constitute invaluable praxis-oriented resources that provide authentic work environments and task-based learning opportunities, thereby enhancing professional literacy and occupational preparedness. Through strategic partnerships with smart tourism enterprises, institutions can integrate industry mentors, authentic case repositories, and project-driven instructional tasks to ensure curricular alignment with industry benchmarks while actualizing the “teaching-learning-application” continuum.

Second, digital learning ecosystems must be developed through online platform construction. As critical enablers of modern pedagogy, these platforms facilitate resource convergence while promoting personalized and self-regulated learning. Particularly for practice-oriented curricula, their resource richness and temporal-spatial flexibility provide multidimensional cognitive scaffolding. Consequently, secondary-higher vocational programs should develop AI-enhanced platforms incorporating big data analytics, VR simulations, and adaptive learning architectures. These should integrate industry resource repositories, virtual practicum modules, and case-based instructional media, collectively forming integrated online-to-offline pedagogical models.

Third, dynamic resource evaluation systems necessitate implementation to ensure continuous optimization. Educational resources should be conceptualized not as statically accumulated assets, but rather as a dynamic circulatory process requiring continuous optimization. Institutions should therefore establish resource management frameworks featuring regular relevance-effectiveness audits, phased obsolescence management, and integration of emergent resources. Concurrently, resource-sharing mechanisms, including regional consortia, inter-institutional collaborations, and industry-academic co-creation initiatives, should

be expanded to enhance accessibility, utilization efficiency, and redundancy reduction.

4.3. Multilevel Policy Reinforcement

Within digitally integrated cultural tourism ecosystems, constructing and implementing integrated secondary-higher vocational tourism management curricula represents both a core educational mandate and a critical mechanism for advancing vocational education quality.

At the national level, recent national prioritization of vocational education is evidenced through policy frameworks promoting industry-education alignment. These mandate curricular responsiveness to sectoral needs, competency standards reflecting occupational requirements, and pedagogical integration of workplace practices. Particularly significant are provisions encouraging digital transformation through technological adoption and tourism resource integration. Educational authorities should therefore operationalize these directives: specialized curriculum reform guidelines for smart tourism ecosystems, incentive structures such as funding allocations, teacher development programs, and infrastructure investments.

At the local level, regional governments must develop context-sensitive policies aligned with local tourism development indices. In resource-endowed regions, governments should establish dedicated funding mechanisms to facilitate collaborative curriculum development, praxis-oriented platform construction, and teaching team cultivation between vocational institutions and local enterprises. Foster quadruple helix partnerships with higher education institutions and industry associations to strengthen articulation between tourism management pedagogy and regional industry evolution. Additionally, local education departments must implement comprehensive planning and monitoring systems for vertical curriculum integration across secondary-higher vocational education and dynamic adaptation mechanisms, ensuring curricular responsiveness to technological advancements and market demands. To underpin these initiatives, regional governments should extend policy incentives, including tax relief and talent recruitment schemes to vocational institutions, thereby enhancing institutional engagement in tourism talent cultivation.

At the institutional level, effective implementation of integrated secondary-higher vocational curricula necessitates establishing comprehensive regulatory frameworks and governance mechanisms. The primary imperative involves formulating holistic curriculum development blueprints that explicitly define programmatic objectives, structural architecture, content domains, pedagogical methodologies, and assessment regimes to ensure scientific rigor and systemic coherence throughout the curricular ecosystem. Institutionally, dedicated organizational structures must be constituted to oversee curriculum orchestration. This requires establishing task forces chaired by senior administrators with multi-stakeholder representation from academic affairs divisions, discipline-specific teaching-research units, and industry partners. Such cross-functional teams institutionalize collaborative project ad-

vancement mechanisms.

Furthermore, faculty engagement incentives should be strategically designed through formal recognition systems for curriculum development achievements, integration of curricular innovation outcomes into faculty promotion criteria and incorporation of teaching effectiveness metrics into performance appraisal frameworks.

5. Conclusion

This study addresses emerging competency demands in digital-intelligent tourism integration, specifically heightened needs for digital technology application, industry knowledge integration, innovative practice, and sustainable learning capabilities. It proposes reform strategies and implementation pathways for an integrated secondary-to-higher vocational curriculum system in tourism management, providing actionable references for talent development.

However, three implementation barriers warrant attention. First, accelerated skill obsolescence cycles necessitate faculty mastery of emerging technical content—including digital marketing, big data analytics, and smart attraction management—while simultaneously designing vertically articulated curricula bridging secondary vocational foundational skills and higher vocational technological applications. These dual demands may precipitate a significant escalation in instructional workloads. Second, the development of smart tourism simulation labs necessitates substantial capital investment under digital-intelligent tourism paradigms, while recurring expenditures escalate for faculty digital upskilling programs and annual maintenance of curriculum resource platforms. Third, the implementation of integrated secondary-to-higher vocational talent development programs necessitates multistakeholder coordination across secondary and higher vocational institutions, industry-academic partnerships, and regional education authorities, significantly intensifying institutional alignment challenges. These systemic barriers represent potential implementation challenges for vertically integrated secondary-to-higher vocational curriculum systems, warranting further empirical investigation in subsequent research.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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