
Improving the Effectiveness of Second-Classroom Education in Higher Vocational Colleges under the Three-Wide Education Framework

Chun Zhou, YanTing Tang, JiaWen Wang

Sichuan Preschool Educators College, Mianyang 621000, Sichuan, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

Copyright: © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: Under the policy framework of “Three-Wide Education” (whole-staff, whole-process and all-round education), second-classroom education has moved from the margin of campus life to an important component of talent cultivation in Chinese higher vocational colleges. However, the educational value of the second classroom remains uneven. In many institutions, activity systems have expanded faster than their pedagogical coherence, producing recurrent problems such as weak alignment with student needs, fragmented implementation, limited participation depth and evaluation systems that reward attendance more than development. This paper offers a concise conceptual analysis of these problems and proposes a reform framework for improving educational effectiveness. It argues that the key constraint is insufficient educational synergy across actors, resources and evaluation. On this basis, the paper advances a five-part improvement agenda: student-centred concept renewal, cross-sector governance innovation, content redesign around vocational competencies, digital empowerment, and a value-added evaluation system informed by the CIPP model. The paper contributes an integrated framework for understanding why second-classroom initiatives often underperform and how higher vocational colleges can reposition them as coherent educational fields rather than activity platforms alone. The analysis may inform institutional reform aimed at cultivating technically skilled graduates with stronger professional competence, social responsibility and lifelong development capacity.

Keywords: Three-Wide Education; higher vocational colleges; second-classroom education; educational effectiveness; collaborative education; CIPP

Online publication: February 26, 2026

1. Introduction

In Chinese higher vocational education, the second classroom has increasingly been expected to complement formal coursework by extending learning into co-curricular and extra-curricular spaces. Within the framework of “Three-Wide Education”, this role has become more explicit: education should involve all staff, run through the full developmental process, and promote students’ all-round growth. In this policy and institutional context, the second classroom is no longer treated simply as a set of optional activities. Rather, it is expected to function as an important arena for moral education, professional socialisation, innovation training and the cultivation of transferable skills.

This policy repositioning has practical logic. Compared with the first classroom, second-classroom settings are often

more flexible, participatory and practice-oriented. They may therefore create opportunities that are difficult to realise through formal instruction alone, particularly in relation to hands-on learning, teamwork, civic engagement and identity formation. For higher vocational colleges, these functions are especially important because talent cultivation is expected to connect academic development, technical competence and occupational readiness.

Yet the expansion of second-classroom activities has not automatically translated into stronger educational outcomes. Existing practice is often characterised by a familiar contradiction: activity systems appear increasingly complete, but the educational value they generate is less clear. Many institutions have established transcript systems, activity platforms and credit-recognition arrangements, but these mechanisms do not necessarily ensure meaningful participation, developmental continuity or high-quality evaluation^[1, 2]. As a result, the second classroom may become administratively visible while remaining pedagogically weak.

This paper argues that the main challenge is not the absence of activities, but the absence of coherence. Problems in current practice are best understood as a synergy deficit across three dimensions: educational actors, educational resources and educational evaluation. Building on this diagnosis, the paper develops a concise reform framework for improving the effectiveness of second-classroom education in higher vocational colleges.

2. Current Development and Persistent Weaknesses

Over the past decade, many higher vocational colleges have made progress in formalising second-classroom education. One notable development is the incorporation of second-classroom participation into institutional training schemes and student evaluation systems. The “second-classroom transcript” has been particularly influential because it gives extra-curricular participation a visible place within the formal governance of student development[1, 3]. This shift has helped move second-classroom management away from informal administration towards more standardised procedures.

At the same time, the functional scope of the second classroom has expanded. In many institutions, activities now cover ideological and political education, skills competitions, professional associations, innovation and entrepreneurship projects, volunteer service, labour education and cultural participation. This diversification reflects a broader understanding of student development and suggests that the second classroom can provide a platform where professional training and broader educational goals intersect^[4, 5].

However, institutional expansion has not resolved several persistent weaknesses. First, there is often a mismatch between activity supply and student demand. Activities may be designed according to administrative convenience or existing institutional routines rather than students’ developmental needs. When this happens, participation is frequently instrumental: students attend to accumulate credits, satisfy requirements or improve their eligibility for awards, rather than because activities support meaningful learning and growth^[2].

Second, participation is often uneven in depth and quality. A relatively small number of highly active students—such as student leaders or competition-focused participants—tend to dominate access to high-value opportunities, while many others remain peripheral. This pattern weakens the inclusive ambition of whole-staff and all-round education because educational benefits become concentrated rather than broadly distributed.

Third, the educational process is often fragmented. Activities are commonly organised as isolated events rather than as parts of a developmental sequence. Students therefore move from one activity to another without a clear pathway linking participation to capability building, reflection or progression. In such cases, second-classroom participation generates records, but not necessarily trajectories of growth.

Finally, evaluation remains the weakest part of the system. Current practice often privileges measurable process indicators—attendance, duration, frequency or prizes—over changes in knowledge, competence, values or professional identity. This means that institutions can document participation without adequately assessing educational impact. Although recent studies have begun to explore CIPP-based evaluation frameworks and more structured indicator systems, implementation remains limited and uneven^[3, 6].

3. The Core Constraint: Insufficient Educational Synergy

The above weaknesses are interconnected. Their shared root lies in insufficient educational synergy. In the context of second-classroom education, synergy refers to the degree to which educational actors, internal and external resources, and evaluation mechanisms work towards a common developmental purpose. When such coordination is weak, activity systems may expand in scale while remaining shallow in effect.

3.1. Fragmented understandings among educational actors

A first source of weak synergy is the fragmented understanding of the second classroom among managers, teachers and students. Administrative departments may treat it primarily as a management tool for maintaining order, displaying institutional vitality or fulfilling policy expectations. Teachers, especially those under heavy teaching and appraisal pressure, may regard it as peripheral to their formal responsibilities. Students, in turn, may interpret it mainly as a credit task, a networking platform or a recreational space. When these three groups operate with different assumptions, it becomes difficult to build a genuine educational community around shared developmental goals. The second classroom then risks becoming organisationally busy but educationally diluted.

3.2. Limited integration of educational resources

A second constraint concerns resource integration. In principle, the second classroom should benefit from collaboration across departments, enterprises, communities and public institutions. In practice, however, many colleges remain locked into a largely internal circulation model. Within institutions, departmental boundaries often restrict the sharing of venues, projects, staff expertise and information. Beyond campus, cooperation with enterprises may remain symbolic rather than embedded in the design, delivery and evaluation of student activities^[7,5]. Likewise, potentially valuable partnerships with museums, communities, science centres, industry associations or local government agencies are often underdeveloped. As a result, students' learning opportunities are narrower than the discourse of all-round education suggests.

3.3. Misaligned evaluation logic

A third source of weak synergy is the evaluation system itself. Evaluation shapes behaviour. When second-classroom systems reward participation counts more than developmental outcomes, they encourage both institutions and students to prioritise visible completion over substantive learning. The problem is not simply technical; it is pedagogical. A weak evaluation system fails to connect activities with vocational standards, developmental feedback and longitudinal improvement. It also weakens the relationship between the first and second classroom, because the latter is measured through administrative indicators rather than through its contribution to broader talent cultivation goals^[8,6].

4. A Reform Framework for Improving Educational Effectiveness

If insufficient synergy is the central problem, then effective reform requires more than adding new activities. It requires a coherent reconstruction of goals, governance, content, technology and evaluation. A five-part framework is proposed below.

4.1. Reframing the educational orientation

The starting point is conceptual. Second-classroom reform should move from activity-centred management to student-centred development. This means treating students not only as participants, but also as co-designers of projects, organisers of learning opportunities and reflective agents in their own development. It also requires shifting the focus of planning from activity completion to capability formation. In higher vocational colleges, such capabilities should include professional skills, communication, teamwork, problem solving, innovation, civic responsibility and occupational identity. Without this conceptual shift, later reforms are likely to remain procedural.

4.2. Building a collaborative governance structure

A second priority is governance innovation. Colleges need stronger coordination mechanisms that reduce fragmentation across departments and promote whole-staff participation. One practical option is to establish a dedicated coordinating body for second-classroom education that integrates student affairs, academic departments, Youth League work, employment services and external cooperation. At the staff level, institutions should build a tutor pool that includes professional teachers, counsellors and external mentors, and should recognise second-classroom guidance within workload and appraisal systems. Such measures are necessary if whole-staff education is to function as an institutional reality rather than a rhetorical aspiration^[7].

4.3. Redesigning content around developmental pathways

A third reform area concerns educational content. Instead of relying on a loosely connected collection of events, colleges should design a modular and developmental activity system. For example, activities may be grouped around several core domains: professional skills and craftsmanship, innovation and entrepreneurship, ideological and civic education, social practice, and physical and mental wellbeing. Within each domain, projects can be organised from introductory to advanced levels so that students move through clearer pathways rather than isolated experiences. This design would make the second classroom more transparent, more personalised and more educationally cumulative.

4.4. Using digital tools for precision support

Digital technology can strengthen second-classroom education if used to support, rather than replace, educational judgement. Integrated digital platforms can improve activity management, streamline credit recognition and support data accumulation. More importantly, these systems can help institutions identify patterns in participation, interests and developmental needs, making it easier to provide targeted recommendations and timely support^[9]. Used cautiously, digital tools may therefore shift second-classroom management from broad administrative coverage to more precise developmental guidance. However, the pedagogical value of data depends on whether institutions use it to support students' growth rather than merely intensify monitoring.

4.5. Establishing a value-added evaluation system

Evaluation reform is the most critical step because it determines what counts as success. A more appropriate approach is a value-added evaluation framework informed by the CIPP model, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.

In this framework, context evaluation assesses whether activity goals respond to institutional missions, industry needs and student development; input evaluation examines the adequacy of staff, funding, facilities and partnerships; process evaluation focuses on implementation quality, student engagement and the integrity of records; and product evaluation examines developmental gains in knowledge, skill, attitude and broader competence^[3, 6].

CIPP Evaluation Model Framework and Value-Added Multidimensional Index System

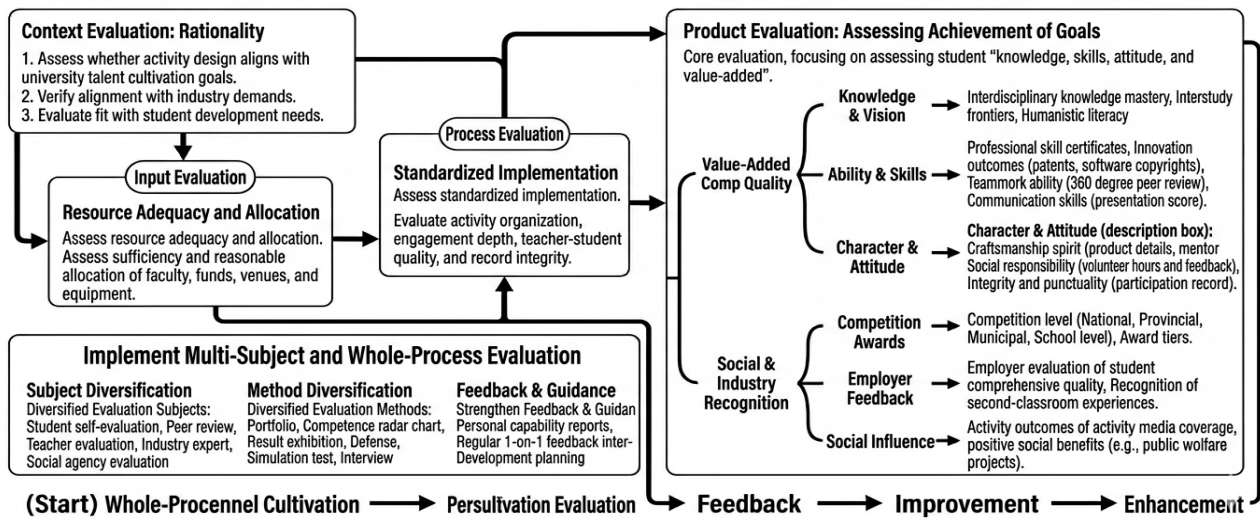


Figure 1. A CIPP-based value-added evaluation framework for second-classroom education.

The advantage of this approach is that it moves beyond attendance-based accounting. It allows colleges to assess whether students have actually developed through participation and whether activities are educationally worth sustaining. To make such a system workable, institutions should combine quantitative indicators with qualitative evidence such as reflective reports, project outputs, mentor assessments and portfolio records. Evaluation should also be formative as well as summative: feedback needs to guide subsequent participation, not merely certify past attendance.

5. Conclusion

The second classroom has become an important site of educational reform in Chinese higher vocational colleges, particularly under the policy framework of Three-Wide Education. Yet its effectiveness depends less on the number of activities offered than on the coherence of the system in which those activities are embedded. Current weaknesses—instrumental participation, fragmented processes, limited resource integration and weak evaluation—are best understood as symptoms of insufficient educational synergy.

To address this problem, colleges should reposition the second classroom as a developmental field built on shared educational purpose, stronger coordination, structured learning pathways, digital support and value-added evaluation. The five-part framework proposed in this paper is intended as a practical and analytical guide for that task. Its central implication is straightforward: second-classroom education will only become genuinely effective when institutions stop treating it as an auxiliary activity platform and begin organising it as an integrated component of vocational talent cultivation.

Funding

This paper is part of a 2025 institutional research project (General Application Category) funded by Sichuan Preschool Educators College. The project is titled "Construction and Practical Research on a Second Classroom Education System in Higher Vocational Colleges Based on the 'Three-Wide Education' (Sanquan Yuren) Concept"(Project No.: SYB202508).

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Xu XB, 2019, A study on the systematic design of the second classroom in higher vocational colleges under the background of “Three-Wide Education”: A case study of Nanning Vocational and Technical College. *Guangxi Education*, (31): 98-100.
- [2] Song YL, 2024, On the educational effect of the “Second Classroom Transcript” system in local higher vocational colleges. *Employment and Security*, (7): 145-147.
- [3] Tang XF, Zhang YJ, Luo YY, 2025, Construction and research on the recording and evaluation system of the “Second Classroom Transcript” based on CIPP. *Industrial & Science Tribune*, 24(6): 259-261.
- [4] Zhou GQ, 2020, Innovative exploration of second-classroom education in colleges and universities from the perspective of “Three-Wide Education”. *School Party Building and Ideological Education*, (5): 52-54.
- [5] Zhang L, Li F, 2024, Research on the practical path of innovation and entrepreneurship education in the “second classroom”: A case study of finance and economics higher vocational colleges. *Educational Development and Innovation*, 3(4): 14-16.
- [6] Zhao LY, Cai X, Li T, 2024, Construction of the evaluation system for the “second classroom” of the physical education major from the perspective of the simultaneous development of the five educations: A case study of Hanjiang Normal University. In *Proceedings of the 2nd Hubei Sports Science Congress & the 5th Academic Forum on the Development of Modern Sports and Military Training*. Hubei Sports Science Society, 453-454.
- [7] Xu S, 2024, A study on cross-department collaboration mechanisms in teacher training for higher vocational colleges under the lifelong education system. *Education Journal*, 7(1): 65-73.
- [8] Xuan JC, Chen CM, 2025, Construction of the second classroom education system for the Chinese language and literature major aligned with teacher certification standards. *Journal of Chinese Language Education and Evaluation*, 1(2): 268-279.
- [9] Wang WY, 2024, Promoting the construction of the “Second Classroom Transcript” system and creating a new pattern of internet-based ideological and political education with “Three-Wide Education”: A case study of Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications. *China Science and Technology Paper Online*.

Publisher's note

Whoice Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.