

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Problem

In contemporary educational landscapes, early childhood education (ECE) has gained vital recognition as the cornerstone of lifelong learning and holistic child development. Countries worldwide, including China, have increasingly emphasized strengthening teacher training, curriculum innovation, and institutional missions that align with values of care, child-centered learning, and professional competence (Yang & Li, 2018; see background on ECE programs in China).

In China, the proliferation of vocational higher education institutions offering early childhood education programs reflects national priorities to produce qualified educators capable of nurturing young learners (Ministry of Education data, 2024). The emphasis on quality vocational pathways is part of broader reforms to expand practical, employment-oriented education that aligns with socio-economic development needs. China's vocational education transformation in the era of globalization underscores modernization, digital transformation, and talent development as key strategies for national competitiveness.

Located in Changchun City, Changchun Early Education Vocational Institute (CEEVI) is one such institution tasked with preparing early educators through academic coursework, practicum experiences, and mission-driven programs in early childhood care and education. The institute's motto, "Love forever", encapsulates a philosophical commitment to nurturing educators who not only possess technical skills but also uphold compassion, ethical care, and lifelong dedication to children's development.

Despite broad policy efforts and mission articulation, the effectiveness of higher education programs in fully realizing the "Loving Forever" mission remains underexplored in academic research. Studies on vocational teacher training in China highlight challenges related to curriculum integration, professional development, and applied pedagogical strategies that are crucial for

cultivating educators who can operationalize core values in their professional practice.

Simultaneously, global research indicates that early childhood teacher roles have expanded amidst curriculum reforms in China. Teachers are no longer passive implementers of pre-designed curricula; they increasingly shape educational goals, select content, and adapt instructional methods, positioning teacher agency as pivotal to educational quality.

Given these dynamics—national vocational reforms, the mission focus of CEEVI, and the evolving role of early educators—it becomes essential to critically examine how higher education programs at CEEVI support its mission and prepare educators to embody these values. This study, therefore, investigates the implementation of these programs, their alignment with institutional mission, and the implications for teacher competencies in practice.

The quality and effectiveness of early childhood education (ECE) are deeply influenced by the preparation, competence, and professional development of early childhood educators. In China, the rapid expansion of vocational higher education programs that train early childhood educators reflects national policy priorities, including improved access to childcare and kindergarten services, and strategic investment in the workforce needed for inclusive social development (Han, 2024).

The vocational education system in China has been undergoing significant transformation, driven by globalization, labor market demands, and modernization efforts. This reform movement has placed vocational programs at the forefront of efforts to cultivate a skilled workforce, emphasizing the integration of knowledge, practical skills, and alignment with industrial needs. However, challenges remain in ensuring that vocational teacher training frameworks effectively produce professionals equipped for contemporary ECE environments, particularly in relation to values such as compassion, care, and ethical practice, which are central to institutional missions like “Loving Forever.”

Despite these systemic investments, research reveals persistent issues in early childhood education training in vocational contexts. For example, the preparation of pre-service preschool teachers, including physical education and

movement education, shows gaps between national educational goals and practical outcomes, underscoring the need for comprehensive professional development strategies (Zhang & Mohd Rasyid, 2022; Zhang et al., 2025).

Curriculum systems for early childhood education majors also face structural challenges, such as insufficient alignment between theoretical foundations and applied skills, unclear talent development standards, and weaknesses in industry-education integration. These limitations suggest that vocational institutions may struggle to equip future educators with both conceptual depth and practical competencies needed in early education environments (Ye et al., 2023).

Moreover, the effectiveness of teacher training programs is shaped by broader institutional factors such as resource allocation, quality evaluation systems, and external influences like regional development disparities. Quality evaluation models emphasize that institutional resources and evaluation mechanisms directly affect the output of vocational education programs, including ECE training outcomes. In this context, talent cultivation objectives must be tightly linked with educational orientation, talent training processes, and systematic feedback mechanisms to improve program quality (Lu & Wang, 2023; China Higher Education Research, 2024).

China's vocational education reforms and the distinctive features of its system further complicate the landscape. Emerging research on the formation of China's vocational education structure and its "five-element integration" approach highlights the complexity of aligning multiple policy goals, including mission adherence, professional preparation, and responsiveness to socio-economic dynamics. This indicates a fundamental tension between institutional mission values and the operational realities of vocational programs (Zhu et al., 2025).

Additionally, teachers' roles amid ongoing curriculum reforms in early childhood education have been debated in recent literature. Early childhood educators are increasingly expected to exercise pedagogical agency, contribute to curriculum design, and navigate policy shifts that affect classroom practices. These expanded expectations intensify the need for robust preparatory programs

that integrate ethics, pedagogy, and reflective practice within vocational educational frameworks (Chen et al., 2024).

Although China has enacted policies and expanded vocational programs aimed at improving ECE teacher preparation, existing research underscores persistent gaps between program implementation and desired educational outcomes. These gaps particularly manifest in how vocational programs internalize and operationalize mission-oriented values such as those encapsulated by “Loving Forever,” which emphasizes enduring care, professional integrity, and holistic development in early education. This contextual background highlights the necessity of examining the implementation of higher education programs at institutions like Changchun Early Education Vocational Institute to determine whether and how these programs support their articulated mission in meaningful and measurable ways.

The rapid expansion of early childhood education (ECE) in China over the past decade has placed unprecedented demands on the preparation, competence, and professional development of early childhood educators. While the Chinese government has advanced ambitious policies to universalize access to quality ECE and expand teacher training, significant gaps remain between policy goals and classroom realities—especially within higher vocational education programs that train the majority of early childhood teachers (Chen, Chen, & Chi, 2024).

China’s vocational higher education system plays a pivotal role in generating a skilled workforce aligned with national development objectives and social needs. However, this system concurrently faces structural and qualitative challenges related to curriculum alignment, teacher preparation, and mission execution within institutional programs. The ongoing transformation of Chinese vocational education reflects broader economic and technological shifts, yet research highlights persistent obstacles in ensuring that teacher preparation programs produce highly competent educators capable of translating mission-driven values into practice.

In the context of early childhood education, teacher quality is universally recognized as a critical determinant of educational outcomes. International research highlights that teacher efficacy and pre-service experiences strongly

influence the quality of teacher–child interactions, which are foundational for child development (e.g., professional efficacy mediates instructional quality). However, there is a notable scarcity of research examining how vocational teacher preparation specifically enhances these competencies within China’s rapidly evolving ECE landscape.

Within China, existing studies on early childhood teacher preparation reveal that teacher training systems often struggle with theory–practice disjunctions, insufficient practical guidance, and lack of robust support mechanisms during practicums. For example, interviews with vocational college educators uncover internal and external barriers to effective practice guidance, including weak practice awareness, structural knowledge gaps, and inadequate evaluation mechanisms. These barriers directly impede the capacity of vocational programs to cultivate educators who can implement child-centered pedagogies and mission-aligned practices.

Further compounding these challenges, reform efforts such as China’s “1+X policy” aim to integrate job-oriented curriculum design, competition-based learning, certification pathways, and technology enhancement into vocational programs. However, this integrative approach remains emergent, and evidence regarding its effectiveness—especially in mission integration and professional competence development—is still limited.

Crucially, vocational ECE programs also operate within broader systemic tensions. Quality evaluation models for vocational education point to persistent shortfalls in institutional resources, evaluation systems, and alignment between educational orientation and industry needs. These systemic deficiencies undermine the ability of vocational institutions to implement coherent, mission-oriented programs that produce graduates capable of meeting both professional standards and societal expectations for early childhood education.

Despite the substantial policy attention and expansion of ECE services (driven by national objectives such as “Healthy China 2030” and demographic shifts), teacher preparation remains a critical bottleneck in achieving sustained quality improvements in early childhood education. Studies indicate that gaps in both pre-service and in-service teacher training undermine the quality,

consistency, and equity of ECE delivery across regions—particularly in under-resourced rural and vocational settings.

In the context of higher and vocational education, the effective implementation of institutional missions increasingly depends on the application of sound strategic management principles. Strategic management is broadly defined as a systematic process involving environmental analysis, strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation aimed at achieving organizational goals and sustaining long-term performance (David & David, 2017). Educational institutions, particularly vocational colleges, are no longer viewed merely as teaching organizations but as complex social systems that require clear strategic direction, value alignment, and adaptive leadership to respond to societal demands, policy reforms, and stakeholder expectations (Bryson, 2018).

The “Loving Forever” Mission at Changchun Early Education Vocational Institute reflects a value-driven educational philosophy emphasizing care, moral development, professional ethics, and lifelong commitment to early childhood education. From a strategic management perspective, such a mission represents the institution’s core purpose and normative foundation, guiding decision-making, resource allocation, curriculum design, and organizational culture (Pearce & Robinson, 2015). Strategic management theory emphasizes that mission statements must not only articulate values but also be translated into coherent strategies, operational programs, and measurable outcomes to ensure institutional effectiveness (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2020).

Moreover, strategic management frameworks such as stakeholder theory and the resource-based view highlight the importance of aligning institutional missions with internal capabilities and external expectations. In vocational education, key stakeholders include students, parents, government authorities, early education employers, and the broader community. Effective strategic management enables institutions to balance these interests while embedding mission-oriented values—such as compassion, professionalism, and social responsibility—into teaching practices and organizational routines (Freeman, 2010; Barney, 1991). Without a clear strategic approach, mission-driven initiatives risk remaining symbolic rather than operational.

Within the Chinese higher vocational education system, policy reforms emphasize moral education, quality development, and the integration of values education with professional training. Strategic management theory provides a relevant analytical lens for examining how institutional missions like “Loving Forever” are interpreted, implemented, and sustained in practice. By linking strategic intent with leadership commitment, organizational structures, and performance evaluation mechanisms, institutions can ensure that mission statements function as strategic tools rather than rhetorical declarations (Kaplan & Norton, 2001). Therefore, analyzing the implementation of the “Loving Forever” Mission through a strategic management perspective is essential for understanding its effectiveness, challenges, and contribution to institutional development at Changchun Early Education Vocational Institute.

Strategic management theory provides a critical foundation for understanding how educational institutions translate abstract values into sustainable organizational practices. Contemporary scholars emphasize that strategic management is not limited to private-sector competitiveness but is equally essential in public and educational organizations to ensure mission coherence, accountability, and long-term effectiveness (Poister, Edwards, & Pasha, 2013). Empirical studies show that institutions with clearly articulated missions supported by formal strategic planning mechanisms demonstrate higher organizational alignment, improved staff commitment, and stronger institutional performance compared to those where missions function merely as symbolic statements (Boyne & Walker, 2010). This evidence underscores the importance of examining how value-based missions are strategically operationalized in vocational education contexts.

In higher and vocational education, strategic management plays a central role in integrating moral values, professional competencies, and institutional goals. Research indicates that mission-driven strategies positively influence curriculum relevance, pedagogical consistency, and student development when embedded into strategic plans, leadership practices, and evaluation systems (Shattock, 2014). Particularly in teacher and early childhood education institutions, value-oriented missions must be supported by strategic frameworks that align human resource

development, instructional supervision, and organizational culture with long-term educational objectives (Bush & Glover, 2016). Without strategic alignment, institutional missions risk fragmentation across departments and weak implementation at the instructional level.

Within the Chinese vocational education system, strategic management has gained increasing importance due to national reforms emphasizing quality assurance, moral education (*deyu*), and integration between education and industry. Studies on Chinese higher vocational colleges reveal that strategic leadership and mission-oriented management significantly affect institutional adaptability, teaching quality, and graduate employability (Liu & Li, 2020). Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that vocational institutions that embed ethical values and social responsibility into their strategic management processes are more effective in cultivating professional identity and moral commitment among students (Zhao, 2018). These findings highlight the relevance of strategic management theory in analyzing value-based institutional missions such as “Loving Forever.”

Strategic management models such as the balanced scorecard and strategy-as-practice further provide empirical tools for translating mission statements into measurable actions. Kaplan and Norton’s framework has been widely applied in educational settings to link vision and mission with performance indicators related to learning outcomes, internal processes, and stakeholder satisfaction (Hoque, 2014). Meanwhile, the strategy-as-practice perspective emphasizes the daily actions of leaders, teachers, and administrators in enacting institutional missions through routines, decision-making, and professional interactions (Whittington, 2019). This perspective is particularly relevant for early education vocational institutes, where values like care, empathy, and lifelong dedication must be practiced consistently rather than merely declared.

Therefore, analyzing the implementation of the “Loving Forever” Mission at Changchun Early Education Vocational Institute through the lens of strategic management theory is supported by both theoretical and empirical evidence. Strategic management enables the alignment of institutional values with policy demands, stakeholder expectations, and internal capabilities, ensuring that

mission-driven education contributes meaningfully to organizational development and student quality formation. This study addresses an important gap by examining how a value-based mission is strategically planned, enacted, and evaluated within a Chinese higher vocational education context

This landscape underscores the urgent need for empirical research that critically examines how higher vocational education programs support—or fail to support—the realization of mission-oriented goals in early childhood education. In particular, at institutions such as Changchun Early Education Vocational Institute, where the mission statement “Loving Forever” foregrounds holistic, value-driven educator preparation, there is a pressing need to investigate the degree to which program structures, instructional strategies, and institutional supports align with the mission’s aims and contribute to measurable improvements in teacher competence and professional identity.

1.2 Research Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study is geographically and institutionally limited to Changchun Early Education Vocational Institute (CEEVI) in Changchun, China. Although the institute operates within the broader context of China’s higher vocational education system and is influenced by national policies concerning early childhood education, vocational education, moral education, and institutional quality development, the findings primarily reflect the specific organizational context, policies, practices, and experiences of CEEVI. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized directly to all early education vocational institutions in China or to higher education institutions in other countries without considering differences in institutional missions, organizational cultures, resources, policies, and educational contexts.

Second, the study focuses specifically on the strategic management of the implementation of the “Loving Forever” mission. The mission emphasizes care, moral development, professional ethics, and lifelong commitment to early childhood education. Accordingly, the study examines how this mission is translated into strategic planning, leadership practices, organizational structures,

curriculum and educational activities, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and evaluation mechanisms. It does not attempt to evaluate every aspect of institutional management or provide a comprehensive assessment of all academic, administrative, financial, and student-service activities of the institute.

Third, the study is primarily concerned with the institutional process of mission implementation rather than directly measuring the long-term outcomes of early childhood education graduates in the workplace. Although teacher competence, professional identity, and the ability of graduates to embody mission-related values are relevant to understanding mission effectiveness, the study does not constitute a longitudinal evaluation of graduates' professional performance. Consequently, conclusions regarding the long-term impact of the "Loving Forever" mission on graduates and children should be interpreted cautiously.

Fourth, the implementation of a value-based institutional mission is influenced by the perceptions and experiences of different stakeholders. The study therefore recognizes that administrators, academic leaders, teachers, students, and other relevant stakeholders may interpret the meaning and implementation of "Loving Forever" differently. These differences in perception may affect the data collected through interviews, observations, questionnaires, or other research instruments. Participants may also provide responses influenced by their institutional positions, professional experiences, expectations, or perceptions of socially desirable answers. Such factors may create potential subjectivity in the interpretation of mission implementation.

Fifth, the study is limited by the availability and accessibility of institutional information. Strategic plans, internal policies, evaluation documents, curriculum materials, performance records, and other institutional documents may contain confidential or restricted information. Consequently, the analysis is dependent on the documents and evidence that can be legitimately accessed and provided by the institution and research participants. The absence of certain internal documents may limit the extent to which some strategic management processes can be examined in detail.

Sixth, the implementation of the “Loving Forever” mission is situated within a changing Chinese higher vocational education environment. National educational policies, labor-market requirements, demographic changes, technological developments, and reforms in early childhood education may influence institutional strategies during the research period. Therefore, the findings represent the situation and implementation practices observed during the period of the study and may change as CEEVI responds to subsequent policy, organizational, or environmental developments.

Finally, because the study adopts a strategic management perspective, particular attention is given to the relationship between institutional mission, strategic planning, leadership, organizational implementation, stakeholder engagement, and evaluation. Other theoretical perspectives, such as organizational culture, institutional theory, teacher professional identity, or educational psychology, may provide additional explanations of how the “Loving Forever” mission is understood and practiced. These perspectives are not ignored but remain outside the primary analytical scope of the present study.

Despite these limitations, the study is expected to provide a contextualized understanding of how a value-based institutional mission can be strategically planned, implemented, and evaluated within a Chinese early education vocational institution. The limitations therefore define the boundaries of the research rather than diminish its contribution to understanding mission-oriented strategic management at Changchun Early Education Vocational Institute

1.3 Research Focus and Sub Focus

This study examines the strategic management in the implementation of the mission of “loving forever” at Changchun Early Education Vocational Institute China with the following sub focuses:

1. Planning, which includes the formulation of the university’s vision and mission, SWOT analysis, long-term goal setting, and the development of alternative strategies.

2. Implementation, which emphasizes resources management, organizational structure development, and the execution of institutional programs.
3. Evaluation, which involves performance assessment and the application of corrective actions to ensure the effective and continuous implementation of the strategies.

1.4 Research Question

Despite the clear articulation of its mission of “Loving Forever,” Chang Chung Vocational University faces ongoing challenges in translating this mission into effective strategic actions. The extent to which strategic management practices, particularly in planning, implementation, and evaluation, are systematically aligned with the mission remains unclear. Specifically, questions arise regarding how the university formulates its vision, mission, and long-term strategies; how these strategies are implemented through resource management, organizational structures, and programs; and how performance is evaluated to ensure continuous improvement. Without a comprehensive examination of these strategic management processes, it is difficult to determine whether the mission of “Loving Forever” is being effectively realized and sustained within the institution.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following research problems:

1. How is strategic planning conducted at Chang Chung Vocational University in relation to its mission of “Loving Forever”?
2. How are strategic plans implemented through resource management, organizational structure, and program execution?
3. How are strategic initiatives evaluated, and what corrective actions are taken to ensure alignment with the university’s mission?

1.5 Problem Formulation

Based on the background and limitations of the study, the main problem addressed in this research concerns the implementation of the “Loving Forever” mission at Chang Chung Vocational University from the perspective of strategic management. Although the institution has clearly articulated the mission of “Loving Forever” as an important foundation for its educational direction and

institutional development, the extent to which this mission has been translated into systematic and sustainable strategic actions remains unclear. In particular, there is a need to understand how the institution connects its mission with strategic planning, institutional decision-making, resource allocation, organizational structures, and educational programs.

The problem is also related to the implementation of strategic plans within the institution. Strategic planning will have limited impact if the strategies developed by the university are not effectively translated into concrete institutional programs and activities. Therefore, this study examines how strategic plans related to the “Loving Forever” mission are implemented through the management and allocation of institutional resources, organizational structures, leadership practices, and educational programs. Attention is given to how institutional actors translate strategic objectives into practical activities and how these activities contribute to the realization of the mission.

Furthermore, the study addresses the problem of strategic evaluation and continuous improvement. Effective strategic management requires institutions to monitor the implementation of strategies, evaluate their outcomes, identify weaknesses, and undertake corrective actions when necessary. Therefore, this research examines how Chang Chung Vocational University evaluates its strategic initiatives related to the “Loving Forever” mission and how the results of evaluation are used to improve institutional strategies, programs, and practices. This is important for determining whether the mission is continuously reflected in institutional operations rather than functioning only as a formal institutional statement.

Accordingly, the fundamental problem of this study is the insufficient understanding of how the “Loving Forever” mission is strategically planned, implemented, evaluated, and sustained within Chang Chung Vocational University. The study therefore seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of the strategic management processes through which the institution translates its mission into strategic direction, institutional actions, resource management, organizational practices, educational programs, and evaluation mechanisms. Through this analysis, the research aims to determine how strategic management

supports the realization and sustainability of the “Loving Forever” mission within the institutional context.

1.6 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to analyze the strategic management involved in the implementation of the “Loving Forever” mission at Chang Chung Vocational University. The study aims to understand how the institution translates its mission into strategic directions, institutional policies, programs, and practices and how strategic management contributes to ensuring that the mission becomes an integral part of institutional development and educational practice.

Specifically, the study aims to examine how strategic planning is conducted in relation to the “Loving Forever” mission, including how the university formulates its vision, mission, strategic priorities, and long-term development strategies. The study seeks to understand how institutional leaders and relevant stakeholders interpret the mission and incorporate its values into strategic decision-making and institutional planning.

The study also aims to analyze how strategic plans associated with the “Loving Forever” mission are implemented through resource management, organizational structures, leadership practices, and institutional programs. Particular attention is given to how strategic objectives are translated into concrete activities and how human resources, financial resources, organizational arrangements, and educational programs are mobilized to support the realization of the institutional mission.

Furthermore, the study aims to examine how strategic initiatives related to the “Loving Forever” mission are evaluated within the university. This includes examining the mechanisms used to monitor implementation, assess performance and outcomes, identify challenges or gaps, and provide feedback for institutional improvement. The study also seeks to understand how corrective actions and continuous improvement processes are used to maintain alignment between strategic activities and the institutional mission.

Ultimately, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between strategic management and the implementation of the “Loving Forever” mission at Chang Chung Vocational University. Through examining strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation as interconnected processes, the study seeks to determine how the mission is transformed from an institutional statement into practical and sustainable organizational actions that guide institutional development and educational activities.

1.7 Research purposes

The general purpose of this study is to examine the strategic management practices employed by Chang Chung Vocational University in implementing its mission of “Loving Forever.” Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Analyze the strategic planning processes of Chang Chung Vocational University, including the formulation of its vision and mission, SWOT analysis, long-term goals, and alternative strategies.
2. Examine the implementation of strategic plans in terms of resource management, organizational structure development, and program execution.
3. Evaluate the mechanisms used to assess performance and identify corrective actions to ensure the effective and sustainable implementation of strategies aligned with the university’s mission.

1.8 State of The Art

The state of the art in this study is situated at the intersection of strategic management, vocational higher education, early childhood education, and value-based institutional mission implementation. Contemporary higher education institutions are increasingly required to move beyond the traditional function of providing teaching and training and to develop clear strategic directions that respond to policy reforms, social expectations, labor-market demands, technological developments, and changing educational needs. Strategic management has consequently become an important framework for understanding how educational institutions formulate institutional directions, allocate resources, implement programs, monitor performance, and undertake continuous improvement. In this context, an institutional mission is not merely a formal

statement but can function as a strategic foundation that guides organizational decision-making and institutional development.

Existing strategic management literature emphasizes that effective institutions need to establish a clear relationship between mission, strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation. Strategic planning provides direction by identifying institutional priorities and long-term objectives, while strategic implementation translates these objectives into organizational structures, programs, resource allocation, and operational activities. Strategic evaluation subsequently provides information about the effectiveness of implementation and enables institutions to identify gaps and undertake corrective actions. This perspective is particularly relevant to vocational higher education because vocational institutions must simultaneously respond to institutional values, government policies, professional standards, student needs, and labor-market expectations.

In the context of Chinese vocational education, the development of vocational higher education has increasingly emphasized quality improvement, practical competence, moral education, professional preparation, and responsiveness to social and economic development. Research identified in the background of this study indicates that vocational education continues to face challenges in curriculum alignment, teacher preparation, practical training, institutional resources, quality evaluation, and the integration of educational objectives with professional requirements. These challenges demonstrate that the existence of institutional policies and educational programs does not automatically guarantee effective implementation. Rather, successful implementation requires strategic coordination among leadership, organizational structures, human resources, curriculum, educational programs, and evaluation mechanisms.

The state of the art in early childhood education further indicates that the quality of ECE depends substantially on the preparation, competence, professional identity, and ethical orientation of early childhood educators. Existing research has identified gaps between theoretical preparation and practical

competence in vocational teacher education, as well as weaknesses in practical guidance, evaluation mechanisms, and the integration of professional competencies. At the same time, the role of early childhood educators has expanded, requiring teachers to demonstrate pedagogical agency, reflective practice, professional responsibility, and the ability to respond to changing educational expectations. These developments create a need for vocational institutions to ensure that their educational missions are reflected not only in formal curricula but also in institutional strategies, teacher preparation, organizational culture, and professional practice.

Within this broader context, the “Loving Forever” mission of Chang Chung Vocational University represents a distinctive value-oriented institutional direction. The mission emphasizes enduring care, professional ethics, moral development, and commitment to early childhood education. Such values are particularly relevant to the preparation of early childhood educators because professional competence in this field involves not only technical and pedagogical knowledge but also ethical responsibility, compassion, child-centered practice, and commitment to children's holistic development. However, the existing background literature indicates that there is limited empirical understanding of how such a value-based mission is translated into systematic strategic management processes within a Chinese vocational institution.

The existing state of knowledge therefore demonstrates an important distinction between mission articulation and mission implementation. Many educational institutions establish formal visions and missions, but the effectiveness of these statements depends on whether they are incorporated into strategic planning, leadership decisions, resource allocation, organizational structures, educational programs, and performance evaluation. A mission can remain symbolic when there is insufficient strategic alignment between institutional values and daily organizational practices. Conversely, when mission values are incorporated into strategic management, they can provide a framework for institutional coherence, stakeholder engagement, professional development, curriculum development, and continuous improvement.

The research gap addressed by this study consequently concerns the limited empirical examination of how a specific value-based mission is strategically implemented within an early education vocational institution. Existing studies provide substantial discussions of vocational education reform, early childhood teacher preparation, curriculum development, professional competence, quality assurance, and strategic management. However, these areas have generally been examined separately. There remains insufficient understanding of how strategic planning, strategic implementation, and strategic evaluation operate as an integrated process for realizing a distinctive institutional mission such as “Loving Forever.”

This study therefore advances the state of the art by examining the implementation of the “Loving Forever” mission through an integrated strategic management perspective. Rather than examining the mission solely as an educational philosophy or institutional slogan, the study investigates how the mission is translated into strategic planning, implemented through organizational structures, resources, leadership practices, and institutional programs, and evaluated through monitoring and continuous improvement mechanisms. This approach allows the study to examine the practical relationship between institutional values and organizational action.

The novelty of the study lies primarily in its contextual and analytical integration. Contextually, it focuses on Chang Chung Vocational University as a specific Chinese vocational higher education institution concerned with early childhood education. Analytically, it connects the institutional mission with three interconnected strategic management processes: strategic planning, strategic implementation, and strategic evaluation. This provides an opportunity to identify not only whether the “Loving Forever” mission is formally recognized but also how it is operationalized, supported, monitored, and improved within institutional practice.

Accordingly, the state of the art establishes that the central issue is no longer simply whether vocational institutions possess clear institutional missions, but whether those missions are strategically embedded in organizational processes

and educational practices. By examining this issue at Chang Chung Vocational University, the present study seeks to contribute empirical evidence concerning how a value-based mission can be transformed from an institutional declaration into a practical strategic framework for organizational development, educational management, and the preparation of competent and ethically committed early childhood educators.

1.9 Previous Studies and Research Gap

Research on vocational teacher education in early childhood education (ECE) has expanded significantly in recent years, particularly in response to the increasing demand for qualified teachers capable of meeting educational reforms, technological advances, and the holistic developmental needs of young children. Existing studies have examined teacher preparation from different perspectives, including curriculum quality, pedagogical competence, professional development, digital capability, internship experiences, and teacher efficacy. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that preparing competent early childhood educators requires a comprehensive approach that integrates knowledge, skills, values, and continuous professional growth. However, despite these contributions, limited attention has been given to vocational teacher education programs that are explicitly guided by institutional missions and value-based educational philosophies.

Han (2024) examined the effectiveness of short-term vocational teacher training programs for early childhood education teachers in China. The study concluded that the effectiveness of teacher training is strongly influenced by political, economic, and cultural contexts. While the programs improved teachers' professional knowledge, the outcomes varied considerably because of differences in institutional support and training implementation. Han argued that systematic evaluation is essential to determine whether vocational training programs genuinely improve teacher quality rather than merely fulfilling policy requirements. This study contributes to understanding the complexity of teacher training but focuses primarily on external contextual factors instead of examining how institutional missions shape program implementation.

Similarly, Herman, Sultan, and Suardi (2025) investigated Early Childhood Education teachers' perceptions of Pedagogical Competence 4.0. Their

findings demonstrated that higher educational qualifications, professional certification, participation in continuous training, and digital literacy significantly influence teachers' pedagogical competence. The researchers emphasized that professional development should be continuous because technological changes continually reshape educational practice. Although this research provides valuable evidence regarding factors affecting pedagogical competence, it does not examine how institutional values and organizational culture influence the development of these competencies within vocational education programs.

Curriculum implementation has also become an important focus of vocational education research. Zhang Qingmin (2025) analyzed reforms in movement education preparation for pre-service preschool teachers and found substantial gaps between national educational policies and the actual implementation of vocational curricula. The study concluded that vocational colleges often experience difficulties translating government expectations into classroom practice, particularly regarding competency development and curriculum integration. These findings highlight the importance of evaluating curriculum implementation, yet they primarily concentrate on policy alignment rather than institutional mission fulfillment.

From a broader perspective, Zhao (2024) traced the historical development of vocational education research in China and identified several systemic challenges affecting teacher preparation, including inconsistent professional standards, uneven quality assurance mechanisms, and disparities in institutional capacity. Zhao argued that sustainable improvement in vocational education requires stronger policy coordination and standardized quality assurance systems. This historical analysis provides an important foundation for understanding the evolution of vocational education but offers limited discussion on institution-specific educational philosophies.

Addressing future directions for vocational teacher education, Zhang, Chen, Chen, and Köhler (2025) compared vocational teacher preparation systems in China and Germany. Their comparative analysis recommended integrated teacher education systems, updated professional standards, stronger industry collaboration, and increased emphasis on digital literacy. The study concluded

that vocational teacher education should combine professional expertise with practical workplace experience. While these recommendations contribute significantly to quality improvement, the research focuses mainly on structural reform rather than mission-driven educational implementation.

Teacher competence alone is insufficient without confidence in applying professional knowledge effectively. Linker et al. (2025) explored teacher efficacy as a mediating factor influencing teacher-child interaction quality. Their findings demonstrated that teachers with stronger professional efficacy create more positive classroom interactions, suggesting that teacher education programs should intentionally develop both professional competence and personal confidence. Nevertheless, the study primarily investigates classroom outcomes rather than the educational processes that cultivate efficacy during vocational teacher preparation.

Digital transformation has become another major concern in vocational education. Cheng and Cao (2024) investigated the digital teaching capabilities of vocational early childhood education teachers in China. Their research found that many teachers remain at an early stage of digital competency development and require structured professional training, institutional support, and systematic technological integration. These findings reinforce the necessity of incorporating digital competence into teacher preparation but do not examine how digital capability aligns with institutional educational missions and values.

Experiential learning has likewise attracted increasing scholarly attention. Research on Work-Based Learning Models (2025) demonstrated that immersive workplace experiences strengthen students' technical competence, professional readiness, and practical problem-solving abilities. The study concluded that vocational education should integrate classroom learning with authentic field experiences to prepare graduates more effectively for professional practice. However, the emphasis remains on technical skill acquisition rather than holistic teacher formation.

In a related area, research on TPACK-based teacher training (2025) highlighted teachers' continuing need to integrate technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge effectively. The study identified significant training needs in

technology integration and recommended comprehensive professional development programs to improve instructional quality. Although these findings are highly relevant to contemporary teacher education, they primarily emphasize technological competence without considering broader institutional values that shape professional identity.

Finally, comparative vocational education research on segmented internship models (2025) demonstrated that innovative internship structures significantly improve vocational students' practical competence and professional readiness. The researchers concluded that carefully designed field experiences help bridge the gap between theory and practice. While these findings strengthen understanding of internship effectiveness, they do not evaluate how practical experiences contribute to achieving an institution's educational mission.

Taken together, these studies indicate a growing scholarly consensus that high-quality vocational teacher education depends on effective curriculum implementation, continuous professional development, digital competence, practical experience, teacher efficacy, and systematic quality assurance. The conversation among previous researchers has progressively expanded from examining teacher competencies to considering broader institutional and policy contexts. However, an important gap remains. Existing studies predominantly evaluate technical competencies, curriculum implementation, digital transformation, and professional development from functional or policy perspectives. Very few studies investigate vocational early childhood teacher education through the lens of institutional mission and educational philosophy.

This gap is particularly relevant in the context of the China Early Childhood Education Vocational Institute (CEEVI), whose educational philosophy is grounded in the institutional mission of "Loving Forever." Unlike conventional vocational education programs that primarily emphasize technical competence, CEEVI seeks to integrate professional expertise with moral values, character formation, compassion, and lifelong commitment to serving young children. Whether this mission is consistently reflected in curriculum design, teaching practice, field experiences, competency development, and graduate outcomes has not yet been comprehensively investigated.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the implementation of vocational

early childhood teacher education at CEEVI by examining how the institution's mission is translated into educational practice and competency development. By focusing on the relationship between institutional mission, curriculum implementation, teacher preparation, and graduate competence, this research extends previous studies beyond technical training and contributes to a more holistic understanding of mission-driven vocational teacher education. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on vocational education management, mission-based teacher preparation, and quality improvement in early childhood education while providing practical recommendations for strengthening teacher education programs in vocational institutions.

1.10 Research Road Map

The research roadmap begins with the identification of the gap between the articulation of the “Loving Forever” mission and its practical implementation at Chang Chung Vocational University. Although the mission provides an important philosophical foundation emphasizing care, professional ethics, moral development, and commitment to early childhood education, the extent to which these values are incorporated into institutional strategic management requires systematic investigation. The first stage of the research therefore involves examining the institutional background, existing mission, strategic direction, and challenges associated with translating the mission into organizational practice.

The second stage focuses on the development of the theoretical and conceptual foundation of the research. Strategic management theory is used as the primary analytical perspective, particularly the interconnected processes of strategic planning, strategic implementation, and strategic evaluation. Supporting concepts include mission alignment, leadership, organizational structure, resource management, stakeholder engagement, educational programs, and continuous improvement. The theoretical framework provides the basis for examining how institutional values are transformed into strategic objectives and subsequently into concrete institutional practices.

The third stage involves identifying the current strategic planning processes at Chang Chung Vocational University. This stage examines how institutional leaders and relevant stakeholders interpret the “Loving Forever” mission and how the mission is incorporated into institutional vision, strategic priorities, development plans, policies, and long-term objectives. The analysis also considers how internal capabilities and external environmental demands influence strategic planning and institutional decision-making.

The fourth stage examines strategic implementation. At this stage, the research investigates how strategic plans related to the “Loving Forever” mission are translated into institutional programs and operational activities. Particular attention is given to resource allocation, human resource management, organizational structures, leadership practices, curriculum and educational programs, professional development, and stakeholder participation. The purpose is to determine how mission-related strategic objectives are implemented in actual institutional practices and to identify factors that facilitate or constrain implementation.

The fifth stage focuses on strategic evaluation and continuous improvement. This stage examines the mechanisms used by the university to monitor strategic implementation, assess institutional performance, identify discrepancies between strategic objectives and actual outcomes, and formulate corrective actions. Evaluation is considered an essential component of strategic management because it provides feedback that enables the institution to revise strategies, strengthen implementation, and maintain alignment between institutional activities and the “Loving Forever” mission.

The sixth stage involves integrating and interpreting the findings across the three strategic management dimensions of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The findings are compared and connected to determine the degree of strategic alignment between the institutional mission and actual organizational practices. This stage also identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, implementation barriers, and institutional practices that contribute to the sustainability of the mission.

The final stage is the formulation of conclusions and strategic recommendations. Based on the findings, the research develops recommendations for strengthening the strategic management of the “Loving Forever” mission at Chang Chung Vocational University. The recommendations are directed toward improving strategic planning, strengthening implementation mechanisms, optimizing resource and organizational support, enhancing stakeholder involvement, and developing more effective evaluation and continuous improvement processes.

Overall, the research roadmap follows a logical progression **from identification of the research problem → theoretical and conceptual development → strategic planning analysis → strategic implementation analysis → strategic evaluation → integration of findings → strategic recommendations and mission sustainability**. This roadmap enables the study to examine the “Loving Forever” mission not merely as a formal institutional statement, but as a strategic foundation that should be reflected in institutional decision-making, organizational practices, educational programs, resource management, and continuous institutional development.