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SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF PRACTICAL TRAINING WITHIN THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: The article presents a mechanism for managing cooperation between vocational education institutions and employers with a focus on the quality of practical training. Partnership is assessed not by the number of agreements, but by the alignment of learning outcomes, workplace tasks, mentor responsibility, safety conditions, performance evidence and feedback. A workplace task map, a responsibility allocation framework and internal indicators are developed. The paper identifies risks of formal partnership, substitution of learning with productive labour and incorrect interpretation of employment indicators. A limited-pilot algorithm is proposed, including baseline diagnosis, task alignment, evidence collection, reassessment and a scaling decision.

Keywords: social partnership, vocational education, dual learning, practical training, workplace mentor, task map, quality, feedback.

Introduction

The integration of vocational education with industry is an essential prerequisite for developing competencies that cannot be fully mastered within a classroom setting. However, the mere existence of an agreement with a company or the placement of students in a workplace does not guarantee the quality of learning. In a workplace environment, a student might perform only a narrow range of repetitive, auxiliary tasks, receive no constructive feedback, and fail to demonstrate the learning outcomes stipulated by their educational program. Consequently, such social partnerships should be viewed as a managed pedagogical process rather than as a formal administrative metric.

The purpose of this article is to develop a coordination mechanism between educational institutions and employers—one that aligns the program's intended learning outcomes with workplace tasks, mentorship, assessment, and managerial feedback. To achieve this, the following objectives were addressed: defining the substantive characteristics of a high-quality partnership; developing a framework for practical assignments and the distribution of responsibilities; proposing indicators for internal monitoring; and outlining the conditions for limited-scale pilot implementation and the accurate interpretation of results.

Theoretical and Regulatory Foundations

Research on work-based learning emphasizes that simply being in a workplace is not synonymous with learning. Guile and Griffiths highlight the necessity of pedagogical mediation, which helps learners connect their workplace experience with professional concepts, compare different

approaches to action, and reflect on the outcomes [11]. Therefore, practical training should encompass more than just participation in operational tasks; it must also include task definition, observation, discussion of criteria, and reflection.

ILO Recommendation No. 208 concerning quality apprenticeships underscores the importance of a structured program, the rights of participants, safe working conditions, ongoing support, and clear contractual terms [10]. While the ILO approach does not replace national regulations, it provides a common frame of reference for evaluating the extent to which a workplace effectively fulfills its educational function. In Uzbekistan, the general foundations for vocational education, dual training, credit-modular organization, and the modernization of the system are established in regulatory acts [1–7].

The theory of collaborative governance explains the sustainability of partnerships through clear rules, opportunities for meaningful participation, and the accumulation of trust [12]. In the context of educational practice, this means that the parties involved must agree not only on a common goal but also on specific obligations, procedures for data exchange, and methods for resolving discrepancies in assessments. The interests of the participants vary: the vocational institution is responsible for the curriculum, the enterprise for the workplace conditions, and the learner for their own participation and professional development. A high-quality model does not obscure these differences; rather, it makes them a subject for negotiation and agreement.

Research Methodology

This research is based on an analysis of regulatory documents, functional modeling of the practical training process, and a comparison of international approaches with national conditions. The unit of analysis is defined as the link between "program learning outcome — work task — execution conditions — evaluator — evidence." For each such link, the study identifies the responsible party, the source of information, and the conditions under which the link may be revised. The proposed tools are methodological in nature and require empirical validation before they can be used as standardized assessment instruments.

The quality of a partnership is operationalized through four criteria: the alignment of a task with an educational learning outcome; the presence of a trained mentor with clearly defined responsibilities; safe and accessible working conditions; and the generation of verifiable evidence, followed by feedback. The number of partners or agreements is considered an indicator of the scope of the partnership, but not as an independent measure of its quality.

Results and Discussion The starting point for the partnership is not the organization of an internship as an event, but rather a specific educational outcome. This outcome is translated into observable professional actions: what the learner must perform, under what conditions, with what level of autonomy, and according to which criteria. The employer then identifies real-world tasks that can safely provide the necessary experience. If a particular operation is inaccessible—due to technical constraints, risks, or commercial confidentiality—the parties agree on a simulation, an observation, or another appropriate task, while ensuring that such limited participation is not presented as the full achievement of the intended outcome.

Table 1.

Structure of the practical assignment map

Map element	Contents	Guiding Question
Educational outcome	Observed action and quality criterion	What exactly should the learner be able to do?
Work-related task	Actual or simulated work task	Does the task provide an opportunity to demonstrate the outcome?
Conditions and safety	Equipment, materials, time, tolerances, safety measures	Can the task be performed legally and safely?
Mentoring	Instruction, observation, assistance, feedback	Who provides support, and what are the limits of that assistance?
Asses ment	Criteria, evaluator, timing, and method of recording	How do independent performance and supported performance differ?
Evidence	Work sample, checklist, record/log, explanation	What serves as evidence that the outcome has been achieved?
Feedback	Communication of results to the instructor and the learner	How is the conclusion used to inform the next decision?

Source: developed by the author.

An assignment card helps avoid two extremes. The first is treating an internship as merely spending time at a company without any structured program. The second is excessive bureaucracy, where every single step is documented, yet the resulting paperwork is never actually used by the mentor. Therefore, an assignment card must be concise and practical for use during an actual shift. It may cover a group of interrelated operations, provided that the criteria and evidence remain clear. For the trainee, the instructions should outline the expected outcome and the safe sequence of actions.

The distribution of responsibilities is based on the distinction between the person performing a task and the person making decisions. The educator links the internship to the formal program and facilitates a final synthesis of the experience. The workplace mentor establishes an appropriate environment, observes the work being performed, and documents the facts. The internship coordinator ensures the flow of information and addresses organizational issues. A manager approves decisions within the scope of their authority. The trainee is responsible for reporting on the completion of tasks, as well as any difficulties or risks encountered; however, they are not held accountable for organizational conditions beyond their control.

Table 2.

Distribution of responsibilities in practical training

Process	Person responsible for the outcome	Key participants	Product to be verified
Alignment on deliverables and tasks	Person responsible for academic/educational work	Educator, instructor, company representative	Task sheet with criteria
Preparation of the workspace	Coordinator from the enterprise	Mentor, safety specialist	Confirmation of eligibility and conditions
Support during execution	Mentor at the enterprise	Learner, instructor	Observation record and work sample
Comparison of evaluations	Methodologist / person responsible for quality	Educator and mentor	Agreed-upon result profile
Adjustment of the program or terms and conditions	Authorized manager/supervisor	All stakeholders	Decision, resources, and timeline for re-verification

Mentorship is defined not by the formal appointment of an individual, but by the functions they perform. A mentor must understand the program's intended outcomes, distinguish between appropriate guidance and doing the work for the trainee, document observations—while avoiding the disclosure of sensitive personal or proprietary information—and report any risks. Brief training for mentors may cover the review of assessment criteria, a practice evaluation exercise, and the established procedures for communicating with the vocational college. Completion of this training is marked not merely by attendance at an orientation session, but by the successful and accurate submission of a trial assessment form.

Workplace assessment should not simply replicate a classroom-based examination. Because the industrial environment is inherently variable, it is essential to document the context—such as the equipment used, the complexity of the task, the level of assistance provided, and any deviations from standard operating conditions. At the same time, results must remain comparable. To ensure this, the process employs standardized criteria, examples of performance levels, and discussions between the educator and the mentor to resolve any discrepancies. Both the initial independent assessments and the final, reconciled assessment are recorded; this approach helps identify ambiguous criteria rather than artificially inflating the level of agreement between evaluators.

Internal monitoring of the partnership should encompass both the scope and the content of the collaboration. Scope-related metrics include the proportion of students placed in internships and the number of active partners. Content-related metrics track the share of tasks linked to specific learning outcomes, the proportion of tasks accompanied by mentor feedback, the percentage of

competencies verified through practical evidence, and the share of corrective actions that are re-evaluated within the required timeframe. For each indicator, the numerator, denominator, data source, reporting period, and any relevant constraints must be clearly defined.

Table 3.

Indicators of partnership quality and practical training

Indicator	Calculation basis	Source	Limitation of interpretation
Alignment of assignments	Tasks with a result and a criterion / assessed tasks	Task cards	Documentary compliance is not equivalent to actual implementation
Evidence-based practice	Tasks with a confirmed result / scheduled tasks	Mentor's notes, sample work	Non-participation is distinct from an unsatisfactory outcome
Preparedness of mentors	Mentors who have completed a trial assessment / engaged mentors	Preparation sheet	Attendance at a briefing is not sufficient on its own
Completion of corrective actions	Re-assessed solutions / solutions past their deadline	Solution specification	Extensions of time are recorded separately
Coverage of graduate tracking	Graduates with an assigned status / watchlist	Coded registry	An unknown status is not equivalent to unemployment
Employment in the field	Individuals employed in a relevant profession / individuals with an assigned status	Graduate's response and confirmation	Presented alongside coverage; does not prove a causal effect

The employment rate indicator requires particular caution. A graduate who cannot be contacted cannot be automatically classified as either unemployed or employed. It is necessary to distinguish between employment, further education, job seeking, temporary non-participation in the labor market, and an unknown status. Employment in the field for which the individual was trained is calculated only for those whose status is known, and this figure is published alongside the scope of the data collection. Even a high rate does not prove a causal link to a specific partnership project, as employment outcomes are influenced by market conditions, individual mobility, and the characteristics of the cohort.

Key risks in such partnerships include: formal agreements that lack actual educational activity; the use of learners merely as an additional labor force; ambiguous responsibility for safety; pressure exerted on those conducting assessments; the collection of excessive personal data; and attempts to inflate performance indicators by altering their definitions. Preventive measures include clearly defining tasks, establishing channels for reporting issues, triangulating evidence from multiple sources, ensuring data protection, and conducting independent re-evaluations of contested results.

A limited pilot study can be conducted on a single program over the course of an academic cycle. During the preparatory phase, the process is selected and baseline data are recorded; subsequently, task maps and criteria are agreed upon. During the implementation phase, records are collected and any concurrent changes are noted; upon completion, the original criteria are applied once more. A decision to scale up the initiative should not be based merely on the fact that the practice took place, but rather on whether there has been an improvement in the alignment of tasks, the robustness of assessment evidence, and the effective implementation of corrective actions—all while maintaining a manageable workload for the participants.

The scientific novelty of this mechanism lies in shifting from a purely quantitative view of partnerships toward an evaluation of their underlying processes. While the formal agreement serves as the legal foundation, the core unit of quality is defined by the interplay between educational outcomes, tasks, mentorship, evidence, and feedback. This approach makes it possible to identify the specific stage at which a partnership ceases to fulfill its pedagogical function, allowing for corrective measures that are proportionate to the underlying cause.

Conclusion

Social partnership enhances the quality of vocational education, provided that the interests of the enterprise, the educational institution, and the learner are translated into mutually agreed-upon educational commitments. A practical assignment sheet, a clear division of responsibilities, and a set of performance indicators establish a verifiable link between the curriculum and the workplace. While the number of agreements and internship placements remains an important metric for the scope of the partnership, it cannot serve as a substitute for evidence of actual learning.

It is recommended that agreements specify the expected outcomes, the nature of the assignments, the role of the mentor, safety protocols, methods for documenting progress, and procedures for providing feedback. Furthermore, mentors should undergo brief training that includes a trial assessment; a distinction must be made between a lack of data and a negative outcome; and any corrective actions taken should be subject to follow-up verification. Future testing should evaluate not only changes in performance indicators but also the associated workload, the feasibility of the tools used, and the sustainability of the partnership beyond the pilot phase.

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