

The Process and Reflection on Sino-foreign Cooperative Education in Vocational Colleges: Taking Anhui Zhong'ao Institute of Technology as an Example

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Abstract: Since 2001, as the first vocational college in Anhui Province to hold a Sino foreign cooperative education program included in the national unified enrollment plan, Anhui Zhong'ao Institute of Technology has conducted a series of explorations and practices in resource introduction, curriculum system, team building, quality assurance system construction, and other aspects of Sino-foreign cooperative education, and has achieved significant results. In 2019, due to reasons such as student sources, the Sino foreign cooperative education program of the college ceased enrollment. This article reviews the process of Sino foreign cooperative education at Anhui Zhong'ao Vocational and Technical College, analyzes the gains and losses, and identifies the reasons. Based on the environments, and requirements, several suggestions are proposed for improving the quality and efficiency of future Sino-foreign cooperation projects in vocational colleges.

Keywords: Vocational Colleges; Sino-foreign Cooperative Education; Process; Effects; Reflection; Internationalization

1. Introduction

As early as 1995, the Provisional Regulations on Sino-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools clearly stated that Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools is an important form of education exchange and cooperation in China. The Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Sino-foreign Cooperative Education promulgated in 2003 encourage the development of Sino-foreign cooperative education in the field of vocational education. The Outline of the National

Medium - and Long Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) once again emphasizes: drawing on advanced educational concepts and experiences to enhance the international status, influence, and competitiveness of China's education; Adapt to the requirements of opening up to the outside world, cultivate a large number of international talents with an international perspective, understanding of international rules, and the ability to participate in international affairs and competition. In the "Several Opinions on Promoting the Reform and Innovation of Higher Vocational Education and Leading the Scientific Development of Vocational Education" issued by the Ministry of Education, it is required that vocational colleges should serve the national "going out" strategy and also serve the overseas cooperation of large multinational groups and enterprises. As the first vocational college in Anhui Province to hold a Sino-foreign cooperation project, Anhui Zhong'ao Institute of Technology focused on Sino-foreign cooperation in education from 2001 to 2020, and conducted a series of explorations and practices in resource introduction, professional and curriculum system construction, teaching team construction, and quality assurance system construction, achieving significant educational results.

2. Basic Information

The Sino-foreign cooperative education program of Anhui Zhong'ao Institute of Technology (hereinafter referred to as the "College") began in 1998, when Anhui Province and the Western Australian government signed a technology and education cooperation agreement in Perth. The cooperation between the college and TAFE

College in Western Australia is the first intergovernmental cooperation project in Anhui Province, and it is also the earliest cooperation project approved by the education regulatory department for vocational colleges in Anhui Province. The Sino-Australian Cooperative Business English program was founded in 2001 and was initially known as the "Double Diploma" program. After completing courses for both domestic and foreign students and passing assessments, students can obtain two diplomas from both domestic and foreign cooperative universities. It was officially included in the national enrollment plan in 2004. In 2010, the Business English (Sino-Australian Cooperation) major was approved by the Anhui Provincial Department of Education for the construction of a characteristic major in the provincial quality engineering project, making it the first Sino-foreign cooperative education characteristic major in the province. In 2011, in response to changes in social demand, the school applied for two majors, namely China Australia Cooperative Accounting Computerization and Business Management, based on the Sino-Australian Cooperative Business English major. The partner was changed to TAFE College North Brisbane, Australia. In 2012, the "Three in One, Integrating China and Australia" - Research and Practice on the Construction of Business English Professional Characteristics won the third prize of provincial teaching achievements. In 2013, the Business English (Sino-Australian Cooperation) major of the college became the first major in Anhui Province to pass the evaluation of Sino-foreign cooperation in vocational education by the Provincial Department of Education. In the same year, "Internationalization, Skill-based, and Openness - Research and Practice of Sino-foreign Cooperative Education in Vocational Colleges" won the second prize of provincial teaching achievements. In 2016, the partner institution for the Business Management program was adjusted to Oroney College in California, USA. In December 2017, the project passed the evaluation of Sino-foreign cooperation in higher vocational education by the Anhui Provincial Department of Education for the second time. Enrollment ceased in 2019.^[1]

3. Development History

3.1 Initial Stage (2001-2005)

The project originates from cooperation between the governments of China and Australia, with a high starting point, high social attention, and a good source of students. The foreign side has dispatched a senior expert to serve as the vice dean and project manager of the college, while the Chinese management team has fewer personnel and only plays a supportive role. The college only has a few teachers for basic courses such as English, and professional courses are mainly taught by foreign teachers. There are four foreign teachers who work on campus all year round.

3.2 Rapid Development Stage (2006-2010)

The college has increased its efforts in talent introduction and recruitment, and has formed its own management team. The teaching team has rapidly expanded to around 20 people, with one-third of the teachers having overseas backgrounds. Assign a dedicated person to be responsible, making teaching routine management more standardized. The development momentum is good, with both "entry" and "exit" thriving - on the one hand, enrollment is booming, with more than 110 students expanding to three classes (including some unplanned indicators) in 2008; On the other hand, the situation of further education and employment is good, with about a quarter of students choosing to study abroad.

Due to the complexity and particularity of Sino-foreign cooperative education, the college has set up the Foreign Affairs Office in the main undertaking unit - the Department of Foreign Languages (later renamed the Department of International Business), fully responsible for managing cooperative projects, arranging foreign affairs activities, and recruiting foreign teachers. This is conducive to the overall management of foreign-related affairs and Sino-foreign cooperative projects throughout the school. In June 2010, the college established an International Exchange Center, with the dean serving as the director, responsible for coordinating command and resource allocation.

3.3 Transformation and Development Stage (2011-2015)

With the cooling of foreign language fever, the

attractiveness of Business English majors to candidates is gradually weakening. In 2010, the college decided to apply for a new collaborative project. Since 2011, Sino-foreign cooperative education has no longer relied on the enrollment of Business English majors and has been adjusted to accounting and business management. There are significant differences between Australia's accounting standards and China's, which poses significant challenges for students who do not plan to study Australian professional courses abroad. In order to meet market demand and improve teaching quality, the college launched a pilot project for comprehensive professional reform in 2015, which carried out disruptive reforms on the curriculum system, teaching content, and teaching mode of Sino-foreign cooperative majors. The curriculum is guided by job requirements, maximizes international integration, and focuses on cultivating students' international perspectives and foreign-related business skills; Adopting professional teaching standards and practical training manuals, introducing a small number of internal training courses in enterprises, and comprehensively enhancing students' practical abilities.^[2]

3.4 Phase of Gradual Shrinkage (2016-2020)

Implement the educational philosophy of "student-centered" and widely adopt teaching methods such as group discussions, hierarchical teaching, and team cooperation; Implement a "mentor system" to provide academic mentors for each student; Implement small class teaching, assign students to different teaching classes based on their English scores, align English teaching with the IELTS exam, comprehensively enhance listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities, and strengthen guidance on learning methods; Open up more study abroad channels and build more platforms for students who are interested in studying abroad.

However, due to changes in the overall environment, there are more and more channels for students to study abroad, and the social demand for Sino-foreign cooperative education programs is further reduced. The quality of students has been declining year by year, and most of the recruited students are unable to handle the learning of foreign courses. In 2016, the college added a new

cooperation program with Oroney College in the United States, aimed at expanding the scope of cooperation, but the new program still failed to improve the sluggish enrollment situation. Faced with multiple challenges in terms of student resources, funding, management, and teaching staff, the college decided to suspend Sino-foreign cooperation projects in 2019.^[3]

4. Achieve Results

4.1 Promoted Professional Development

Construct a curriculum system based on the principles of "consistency between job positions and courses" (corresponding to skills required for job positions and courses offered) and "integration of courses and certificates" (combining courses with relevant professional qualification certificates). Adhere to an "output oriented" approach, aligning teaching content with the actual needs of students in future job positions; By comprehensively utilizing teaching methods such as Presentation, Survey and Research, Panel Job, Case Study, and Role Play, a classroom teaching model that reflects the characteristics of Sino foreign cooperative education is established. Team building, curriculum construction, and teaching reform are the main focus of professional construction, and a professional characteristic of "trinity and integration of Chinese and foreign" is constructed.

Based on the talent cultivation goals, we have learned and borrowed advanced ideas and concepts from countries such as Australia, and implemented the talent cultivation approach of "ability based (including English communication ability and job operation ability), with knowledge and quality as the wings". We have constructed a BECP talent cultivation model with "Business as the background, English as the foundation, Competence as the main line, and Vocational Skills Practice as the core".^[4]

4.2 Promoted Team Building

After years of exploration, the college has established an international teaching team with high professional level, strong teaching ability, and a combination of full-time and part-time education, relying on Sino-foreign cooperative education projects. In 2012, it was approved as a provincial-level teaching team with 20 full-

time teachers, including 2 professors, 8 associate professors, and 3 foreign teachers (all with work experience in enterprises and possessing "dual teacher quality"); More than 60% of teachers are dual qualified, with all teachers holding a master's degree and over half having overseas study or training experience. To optimize the "dual teacher structure", the college also hires some foreign enterprise experts to guide the professional construction. The teaching and research abilities of team members have significantly improved, undertaking more than 20 provincial-level or above teaching and research (or research) projects, and publishing more than 50 teaching and research (or research) papers; Two teachers won awards in national teaching competitions and five teachers won awards in provincial teaching competitions; One teacher was rated as a provincial-level professional leader, and two teachers were rated as provincial-level teaching masters.

In 2017 and 2018, the college sent two batches of nearly 30 professional leaders and backbone teachers to Australia for teaching and training, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the external environment, internal structure, teaching modes and methods, as well as communication with enterprises in Australian universities. This laid the foundation for building an internationalized teaching staff.

4.3 Promoting the Integration of Industry and Education

The experience of Sino-foreign cooperation in education and the internationalization of educational ideas in the college have had a certain positive impact and radiation on the construction of other majors on campus. In April 2013, the college collaborated with Marriott International Group in the United States to establish the world's first hotel management college - Anhui Zhong'ao Marriott Hotel Management College. The college innovates talent training models for hotel management majors, achieving a transformation and upgrading from "2+1" to "1+1", and comprehensively promoting a talent training model of engineering and academia alternation. The cooperation with Marriott Group has opened another window for the development and growth of students, providing them with more opportunities to

communicate face-to-face with top executives from the hotel industry, enriching their horizons, and promoting the improvement of their professional abilities; At the same time, it also expands the industry knowledge of teachers, improves their professional level, and provides a new platform for the college to explore new models of industry education integration and school enterprise cooperation under the new situation.

With the joint efforts of both schools and enterprises, we will deepen the reform of the integrated talent training model for engineering and academia, and create a high-quality technical and skilled talent training highland with international perspectives and outstanding abilities for related industries.

4.4 Promoted Social Services

Vigorously carry out social services. Relying on the advantages of the college as the only IELTS test center and international business English test center in Anhui Province at that time, we conducted social training and became a well-known English and business training center that radiated throughout the province. We provided business English and employee recruitment and selection training for multiple local enterprises in Hefei; Utilizing the well-equipped teaching facilities and high-quality teacher resources of the college, we have undertaken training for English backbone teachers in Anhui Province's vocational colleges for 11 consecutive years, training more than 400 English backbone teachers from more than 50 vocational colleges in the province; In 2016 and 2017, we hosted cross-border e-commerce training for the entire province twice in a row, which earned the college a good social reputation.

Promote the application and development of Sino-foreign cooperative education projects within and outside the province. As the first vocational college in Anhui Province to hold a Sino-foreign cooperative education project, it has accumulated rich experience in Sino-foreign cooperative education through years of hard work. Brother colleges such as Qingdao Vocational and Technical College, Yantai Automotive Engineering Vocational College, Anhui Finance and Trade Vocational College, and Anhui Business and Trade Vocational and Technical College have successively visited to consult and exchange ideas on topics related to

cooperative education. Anhui Education Network, Xin'an Evening News, Zhong'an Online, Market Star News and other media have successively reported on the Sino-foreign cooperative education situation of the college.

4.5 Promoted the Establishment of an Internal Operational Quality Assurance System

The college has established a specialized organization - the International Exchange Center, with the dean serving as the director, responsible for the overall planning and coordination management of Sino-foreign cooperative education affairs throughout the college. The Foreign Affairs Office is responsible for project negotiations, recruitment of foreign teachers, and management of other foreign-related affairs. The Academic Affairs Office and Supervision Office monitor the quality of education throughout the process. The department is responsible for the specific implementation of projects, and the Teaching and Research Office (Project Office) is the most grassroots project management unit. The effective implementation of sound management institutions and their functions has strengthened the status of Sino-foreign cooperative education in schools, maintained the standardization, seriousness, and stability of projects, and promoted the healthy development of projects.

Strict and orderly process management is the foundation for ensuring the quality of education. The college has taken multiple measures to effectively supervise the teaching quality of Sino-foreign cooperation projects. Based on strict implementation of the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Sino-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools and the teaching management systems of both parties, regular teaching inspections and evaluations are carried out, forming a teaching quality monitoring and guarantee system including "three phase" teaching inspections, peer listening, supervision and inspection, and student evaluation. Foreign partner universities also regularly review the curriculum, textbooks, teachers, and other teaching resources of the project, and evaluate and inspect the teaching process and effectiveness.^[5]

5. Reflection

Holding Sino-foreign cooperative education projects inevitably involves a series of issues, including educational philosophy (whether it is advanced), professional settings (whether it aligns with industrial and local economic development needs), curriculum system (whether it is ability oriented and logical), teaching quality (whether the teacher level meets the standards, whether talent cultivation meets the standards), teaching management (whether the process management is strict and the guarantee system is sound), cultural differences (whether there are communication barriers and differences of opinion between the cooperating parties), and so on. Specifically, the quality of talent cultivation and operational management in Sino-foreign cooperative education are mainly constrained by the following four factors:

5.1 Concept

Foreign affairs are not trivial matters. Sino-foreign cooperative education is a complex and systematic project with strong policy implications, multiple perspectives, and a wide range of involvement, almost involving all functional departments of the school. Whether school leaders, managers of functional departments or teachers of secondary teaching units, if they can not stand on the overall situation of serving the national "the Belt and Road" construction strategy and school development, they are likely to waver when encountering difficulties. Some people believe that organizing Sino-foreign cooperative education projects is not worth the cost, and that "putting in effort is not pleasing", even seeing it as a burden and burden.

5.2 Management

The management of Sino-foreign cooperation projects involves many factors such as foreign affairs, finance, curriculum, teaching, and foreign teachers, and every detail should not be erroneous. On the basis of handling daily affairs well, the undertaking department should deal with various special situations brought about by Sino-foreign cooperative education, and the workload of each member of the team should be significantly increased. The management of Sino-foreign cooperative education involves numerous and significant responsibilities, and the incentive and

evaluation of project management follow traditional models, resulting in a mismatch between responsibilities, rights, and benefits. The concentration of personnel and performance allocation rights at the school level is not conducive to mobilizing the enthusiasm of project organizers.

5.3 Source of Students

The quality of student sources is a key factor in the normal operation of projects, but Sino-foreign cooperative education projects are often passive choices made by candidates due to insufficient scores in their desired majors. Cooperative education programs require the use of foreign languages to learn professional knowledge, which is a huge challenge for most students. Furthermore, the social recognition of Sino-foreign cooperative education in vocational colleges is relatively low, coupled with high tuition fees, resulting in a lower willingness of candidates to apply. The quality of students, especially the difference in English proficiency, inevitably affects the teaching progress, teaching method selection, and teaching content of teachers. Students with different English proficiency levels learn in the same environment, while those with a good foundation will be affected by the step-by-step classroom teaching, which will affect the learning process; Students with lower starting points may feel pressure due to not keeping up with the teaching pace.

5.4 Teaching Staff

A good project requires two teams to support it, one is a professional management team, and the other is a teaching team with an international perspective. An efficient and orderly management team can ensure the achievement of cooperative education goals, which is crucial for the successful organization and sustainable development of cooperative projects. Establishing an international teaching staff that is suitable for Sino foreign cooperative education projects is the basic guarantee of educational quality. The Sino-foreign cooperative education project has put forward higher requirements for professional teachers - not only to have the "dual teacher" quality, but also to have a certain level of bilingual teaching ability to ensure the steady improvement of teaching quality; At the same time, it is necessary to have certain cross-

cultural communication skills and be able to "integrate Chinese and foreign" in the classroom.

6. Suggestions

After the promulgation of the National Medium - and Long Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020), various vocational colleges have fully recognized the importance of internationalization of vocational education. In addition, the requirements for applying for construction projects such as "dual universities" have led to an unprecedented enthusiasm for conducting Sino-foreign cooperation and exchange, and applying for cooperative education projects. The Standard for the Construction of Skilled High Level Universities in Anhui Province (Trial) issued in 2019 includes Chinese foreign cooperation in running schools in the evaluation index system - actively expand international exchanges, introduce high-level educational resources, attract students from countries along the "the Belt and Road" to receive education, and undertake vocational education and training for overseas employees who "go global". By introducing high-quality educational resources from abroad, professional construction and school development have been promoted, and a group of international talents urgently needed by society have been cultivated, making contributions to the implementation of Anhui's strategy of strengthening the province through education. However, due to various subjective and objective reasons, the overall level and quality of Sino-foreign cooperative education in vocational colleges are not yet satisfactory. The original intention of this study is to identify problems and seek countermeasures by reviewing the development process. The Sino foreign cooperative education in vocational colleges in China started relatively late, and there are still many immature areas. Strengthening the connotation construction, establishing brands, and improving quality are the main tasks at this stage. Several suggestions are proposed for improving the quality and efficiency of future Sino-foreign cooperation projects in higher vocational colleges based on the current new policies, new environments, and new requirements.^[6,7]

6.1 Strictly Follow the Application and

Approval Process, and Strengthen Quality Monitoring

We must adapt to and serve the overall situation of national reform and development, while also being in line with the actual situation of the school, and cannot blindly follow the trend; Adapt and serve the development and growth of students. For the declaration of the purpose of Sino-foreign cooperation, the competent department shall strictly control it; Simultaneously implementing macroeconomic regulation to avoid duplicate construction; By organizing evaluations of the level of Sino foreign cooperative education projects, we will strengthen quality monitoring and create a new situation of healthy, orderly, and sustainable development. Encourage social forces to participate in supervision and management, establish third-party institutions, cooperate with local government education administrative departments to implement dynamic quality supervision, and research and develop scientific quality monitoring indicators.^[8]

6.2 Effectively Improve the level of Project Management and Implement a Top-notch Responsibility System

Establish a dedicated institution and equip it with full-time staff. The dean is in charge of the overall management and directly responsible for the operation of cooperative projects; The head of the second level department shall follow the routine procedures; Establish incentive mechanisms and moderately increase the salary and benefits of personnel responsible for project construction, management, and teaching tasks; Strengthen international understanding education and create an atmosphere of international cooperation.^[9]

6.3 Firmly Establish Brand Awareness and Continuously Improve the Quality of Talent Cultivation

For vocational colleges, Sino-foreign cooperative education projects are not tools for pursuing economic or social benefits. Sino-foreign cooperative education requires long-term investment and continuous efforts from a group of people. To establish a college, the whole school should make efforts, increase talent introduction efforts, build a highly

internationalized Sino-foreign teacher team, and build an internationalized teaching and management team. Continuously optimizing talent training programs, deepening teaching reforms, and gradually forming its own characteristics and brand.^[10]

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