

20 Years of Sino-foreign Cooperative Education in Anhui Vocational Colleges: Review and Reflection

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Abstract: The history of Anhui vocational colleges holding Sino-foreign cooperative education projects can be traced back to more than 20 years ago. With the acceleration of economic globalization and the advancement of education internationalization, more and more Anhui vocational colleges are seeking cooperation with foreign high-level educational institutions. The Sino-foreign cooperative education in Anhui vocational colleges has gone through stages of starting, rapid development, transformation, and gradual decline. Taking four vocational colleges, including Anhui Zhong'ao Institute of Technology, as examples, this paper comprehensively reviews the process of the four colleges in organizing Sino-foreign cooperative education projects from the dimensions of resource introduction, curriculum system, team building, daily management, quality assurance system establishment, and educational effectiveness. It clarifies the development context, identifies shortcomings, and puts forward suggestions to help vocational colleges better organize Sino-foreign cooperative education projects in the new era.

Keywords: Anhui Vocational Colleges; Sino-foreign Cooperative Education; Process; Review; Reflection

1. Introduction

With the deepening of the “the Belt and Road” initiative, internationalization has become an inevitable choice for the development of higher vocational education and an important way to promote the high-quality development of higher vocational colleges. The history of Anhui vocational colleges holding Sino-foreign cooperative education projects can be traced back to more than 20 years ago.

With the acceleration of economic globalization and the advancement of education internationalization, more and more Anhui vocational colleges are seeking cooperation with high-level educational institutions abroad, hoping to improve the quality of education and the reputation of the school, broaden students' international perspectives and career development directions.

Between 2001 and 2020, a total of 18 vocational colleges in Anhui Province launched Sino-foreign cooperation projects, involving 8 countries and 28 majors. As shown in Table 1.

Taking Anhui Zhong-Ao Institute of Technology, Anhui Economic Management Cadre College, Anhui Finance and Trade Vocational College, and Anhui Foreign Economic Vocational College as examples, this article briefly summarizes the process of Anhui vocational colleges, represented by the four schools, in organizing Sino-foreign cooperative education projects from the dimensions of project origin, resource introduction, curriculum system, team building, daily management, quality assurance system establishment, and educational effectiveness.

2. Basic Situation Review

2.1 Anhui Zhong-Ao Institute of Technology

The Sino foreign cooperative education of Anhui Zhong-Ao Institute of Technology began in 1998, when Anhui Province signed a technology and education cooperation agreement with the Western Australian government in Perth. The cooperative education project between the college and TAFE College in Western Australia is the first Sino-foreign cooperative education project between the government in Anhui Province, and also the earliest Sino-foreign cooperative

education project among vocational colleges in Anhui Province. The Business English (Sino-Australian Cooperation) program was founded in 2001 and was originally 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 market changes and social demands, the school applied for two majors, 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].

2.2 Anhui Economic Management Cadre College

The Sino-foreign cooperative education program began in 1997, when the college

signed an agreement with Witt Island College to establish a friendly and cooperative relationship. The two colleges cooperated to implement student exchange programs. Every autumn, high school graduates are admitted to the college for a one-year training program. Those who pass the exam will go to the Isle of Wight College to study for two years, obtain the National Diploma of Higher Education (HND) certificate in the UK, and then study at a university that cooperates with the Isle of Wight College for one year. Those who pass the exam will receive an academic degree certificate. This collaborative project recruited the first batch of students in 1998.

In 2000, with the approval of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Security, and the State Administration for Industry and Commerce, the college obtained the qualification of self-funded intermediary services for studying abroad, and based on this, established the International Cooperation Center (also known as the International Education Department) of Anhui Economic Management Cadre College. The cooperative training (2+2) program between the college and Australia began to enroll students until it ceased in 2011.

In 2003, the Sino-foreign cooperative education project between the college and Edith Cowan University was approved by the Provincial Department of Education and filed with the Ministry of Education of China. In the summer of 2004, the program was officially included in the college entrance examination plan, with a major in Marketing and Tourism Management (which was discontinued in 2011 due to a low number of applicants). In 2005, the accounting major was added. In order to broaden the channels for Sino-foreign cooperation in education, the college established a cooperative relationship with the University of Southampton, UK in 2007. In 2008, it became the first institution in Anhui Province to teach courses under the British Council for Business and Technical Education (BTEC) and issue the National Certificate of Advanced Education (HNC) in the UK. In 2011, the college collaborated with the University of Southampton Sorrente in the UK to hold the HND Business Administration program. Prior to the summer enrollment, it was approved by the Provincial Department of Education and included in the annual

enrollment plan.

The Sino- foreign cooperative education program began in 2004, and the Sino-Australian program began admitting students

from the “3+1” program in 2004. Enrollment ceased in 2019; The China UK program began admitting students from the “3+1” program in 2011 and also ceased enrollment in 2019.

Table 1. List of Sino foreign Cooperative Education in Anhui Vocational Colleges

Colleges	Foreign cooperative colleges	Collaborative majors
Anhui Zhong-Ao Institute of Technology	TAFE in Western Australia, TAFE College in Brisbane North, and Oroney College in the United States	Business English, Business Management, Accounting Computerization
Anhui Economic Management Cadre College	Edith Cowan University in Australia and Sorrente University in Southampton, UK	Tourism management, Marketing, Accounting
Anhui Vocational College of Finance and Trade	Aslon Institute of Technology in Ireland, University of Sunderland in the UK, and Dongming University in South Korea	Accounting, International Business, Software Technology, Infant and Child Care Services and Management
Anhui business vocational college	University of greenwich	Physical Distribution Management
Anhui occupational college of city management	Singapore East Asia School of Management	Physical Distribution Management
Anhui Vocational College of Foreign Economics	Australian International Business School	Finance, Accounting, etc
Anhui Mechanical and Electrical Vocational and Technical College	Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia	Mechanical Design and Manufacturing
Anqing Medical College	Gaye University in South Korea	Nursing
Anhui Vocational and Technical College	Hogwarts University in the United States	Software Technology
Anhui Communications Vocational & Technical College	Kaiser University in the United States and Daejeon University in South Korea	Computer Application Technology and Digital Media Technology
Anhui Institute of International Business	Athlone Institute of Technology	International Business, Accounting, and Business English
Anhui Medical College	Chungwon University in South Korea	Nursing
Luan Vocation Technology College	Union University of Nebraska in the United States	Preschool Education
Hefei Preschool Teachers College	Yosun University in South Korea and University of Chichester in the UK	Preschool Education, Music Education, and Primary School English Education
Hefei Vocational and Technical College	Jacksonville University in the United States and New Star University in South Korea	Accounting, Marketing, Automotive Testing and Maintenance
Wuhu Institute of Technology	Hoseo University	Electrical automation technology
Chuzhou Vocational and Technical College	University of Malaysia	Animation production technology
Wanbo Technology Vocational College	Raffles College of Higher Education in Singapore	Multimedia design and Production, Tourism Management

2.3 Anhui Vocational College of Finance and Trade

Since 2008, Anhui Vocational College of Finance and Trade has been actively expanding its cooperation and exchange space with multiple universities in Singapore, Malaysia, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.

After two years of preparation and exploration, the college chose to carry out Sino- foreign cooperative education projects with Aslon Institute of Technology in Ireland. In March

2011, it applied to the Provincial Department of Education for Sino-foreign cooperative education projects in accounting (international accounting direction), hotel management, and software technology. In May of the same year, it was approved by the Provincial Department of Education and filed with the Ministry of Education; In March 2012, the newly applied Sino-foreign cooperative education project for the International Business major was approved by the Provincial Department of Education in May of the same year and filed with the

Ministry of Education. The enrollment of Sino-foreign cooperative majors will be included in the autumn unified enrollment plan, with a single enrollment system for each major. After enrollment, students will have their academic status under the unified management of the college, and their daily management will be distributed in relevant secondary colleges. In 2011, the school officially launched international cooperation project enrollment. After 3 years of specialized studies and passing grades, students will obtain a domestic diploma. Under the premise of meeting the IELTS standards and family economic conditions, one can apply for undergraduate studies at overseas cooperative universities. In 2011, two majors, International Accounting and Hotel Management, were recruited. In 2012, enrollment was suspended due to a shortage of students majoring in hotel management. The International Business major was newly added that year. From 2013 to 2016, the International Cooperation Program maintained enrollment in two majors: International Accounting and International Business. Starting from 2017, the International Accounting major has been renamed as the accounting major for enrollment. In 2021, software technology and infant and toddler care services and management majors will be added.

2.4 Anhui Vocational College of Foreign Economics

At the beginning of this century, Anhui Foreign Economic Vocational College established a long-term and stable cooperative relationship with the Australian International Business School (IIBT). Both parties have collaborated to hold vocational education programs in accounting and international economic and trade programs. After completing their studies, students will receive a higher vocational diploma issued by the Chinese side, as well as a diploma in accounting or international trade from the Australian International Business School issued by the foreign side.

In addition to cooperating with the Australian International Business School, Anhui Vocational College of Foreign Economics has also collaborated with foreign educational institutions such as Korea's Hanrui University. These collaborative projects typically include

associate degree programs (3+2 programs) and associate degree programs (3+3 programs). Students will first study at Anhui Vocational College of Foreign Economics for 3 years, and after passing the exam, they will receive a domestic diploma and a bachelor's degree program credit recognized by foreign cooperative universities. Subsequently, students can choose to continue their studies at cooperative universities abroad, and upon completion of their studies, they will receive a recognized bachelor's or master's degree both domestically and internationally.

The Sino-foreign cooperative education program of Anhui Foreign Economic Vocational College provides students with international educational resources and learning environment, aiming to lay a solid foundation for their career development. In 2011, a sister university was established with Han Rui University in South Korea to carry out a Sino-Korean cooperative education project.

Adopting a university operation model that is in line with international standards, introducing advanced teaching concepts and educational technologies from abroad, and adopting small class teaching with foreign teachers. More than 500 students have completed their bachelor's degrees and pursued master's degrees at universities such as the University of Melbourne, National University, Curtin University, University of Sydney, and University of Queensland in Australia.

3. Overview of Development History

3.1 Initial Stage (2001-2005)

The Sino-foreign cooperative education programs in Anhui vocational colleges started in the early 21st century and usually choose to cooperate with universities or educational institutions in Australia, South Korea, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The purpose is to introduce advanced teaching concepts, curriculum systems, and teaching resources from abroad, provide students with better quality educational services, and meet the demands of some students to continue their studies abroad.

3.2 Rapid Development Stage (2006-2010)

With the passage of time, the scope of Sino-

foreign cooperative education in Anhui Vocational College has gradually expanded, covering more professional and disciplinary fields, and meeting the diverse learning needs of students. At the same time, the forms of cooperative education are becoming increasingly diverse, not only providing students with more learning choices and opportunities, but also promoting deep exchange and integration of educational resources between China and foreign countries.

3.3 Transformation and Development Stage (2011-2015)

The history of Sino- foreign cooperative education is a process of continuous development and innovation. With the deepening development of globalization and internationalization of higher education, Anhui vocational colleges are strengthening cooperation and exchanges with foreign educational institutions, promoting the continuous development and improvement of Sino- foreign cooperative education projects. With the cooling of the foreign language craze, the attractiveness of business majors to candidates is gradually weakening, and new collaborative projects are constantly being developed.

3.4 Gradually Shrinking Stage (2016-2020)

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 source of students for Sino- foreign cooperative education programs is even less ideal, and most of the students recruited are unable to handle the learning of foreign courses. Many schools have decided to suspend Sino- foreign cooperation projects.

3.5 Iterative Upgrade Phase (After 2021)

Related vocational colleges are continuously improving their internationalization level. Firstly, they are “bringing in”, strengthening cooperation with developed countries in vocational education, introducing high-quality vocational education resources, participating in the formulation of international standards, developing internationally recognized professional standards and curriculum systems, launching a batch of high-quality professional

standards and curriculum standards with international influence, and building an international brand of Chinese vocational education; Second, “go global”, participate in the “the Belt and Road” and international production capacity cooperation, promote people to people and cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, and explore channels and models for assisting vocational education in developing countries; Carry out international vocational education services, undertake education and training for overseas employees of Chinese enterprises going global, build a number of Luban workshops, and promote the localization of technical and skilled talents.

4. The Benefits Brought by Collaborative Projects

In the implementation process of Sino- foreign cooperative education projects, Anhui vocational colleges focus on improving teaching quality and the comprehensive quality of students. They continuously improve the quality and level of teaching by introducing advanced teaching methods and means from abroad, strengthening the construction of teaching staff, and optimizing curriculum settings. At the same time, they also focus on cultivating students’ international perspectives and cross-cultural communication abilities, laying a solid foundation for their future career development.

Specifically, Sino- foreign cooperative education usually brings the following benefits:

One is to enrich educational resources. By introducing advanced teaching concepts, methods, and resources from abroad, the educational resources in Anhui region can be enriched and the quality of teaching can be improved. The second is to improve teaching level. Teachers from foreign universities usually have rich teaching experience and professional knowledge. They collaborate with local teachers to teach, which can improve the learning effectiveness of students and the teaching level of teachers. The third is to enhance international exchanges. Through cooperation with foreign universities, it can promote exchanges and cooperation between schools in Anhui region and the international education community, and expand the international influence of schools. The fourth

is to improve the competitiveness of students in employment. Students who participate in Sino- foreign cooperative education programs can usually obtain dual degrees or internationally recognized degrees, which helps improve their employment competitiveness and better adapt to the international employment environment. The fifth is to promote local economic development. Sino- foreign cooperative education programs usually attract foreign students and teachers to study or work in Anhui, which helps to promote the development of local education, tourism and related industries, and promote local economic growth [4].

5. Existing Problems

5.1 Unclear Educational Positioning

Some vocational colleges blindly follow the trend when choosing Sino- foreign cooperative education projects, without considering whether they meet the school's situation and educational goals. The curriculum plans focus too much on the introduction of external resources and neglect the cultivation of students' vocational abilities.

5.2 Professional Settings Do Not Meet Social Needs

The Sino- foreign cooperative education programs in Anhui vocational colleges are mostly concentrated in humanities majors such as culture and education, finance and commerce, while engineering majors are relatively few, some of which are duplicated and cannot highlight the characteristics of Sino- foreign cooperative education in vocational colleges. This leads to a lack of competitiveness in the enrollment of cooperative education programs, which is not conducive to the further development of internationalization of higher vocational education in the long run.

5.3 The Management Mechanism is Not Sound

Sino- foreign cooperative education faces many challenges, such as cultural differences, different educational systems, and difficulties in implementing cooperation agreements. Therefore, in the process of education, it is necessary for both parties to strengthen

communication and coordination, establish effective management mechanisms, and ensure the smooth implementation and sustainable development of cooperative projects [5].

5.4 Poor Quality of Student Sources

With the continuous expansion of channels for going abroad, the trial implementation of joint undergraduate training, and the establishment of vocational colleges, vocational colleges are facing a further exacerbation of the dual decline in the number and quality of students.

6. Strategies for Improving the Level of Sino- foreign Cooperative Education

Vocational colleges must adhere to the main battlefield of cultivating skilled talents, take improving quality as the key point, and promote the connotative development of Sino- foreign cooperative education [6-9]. Improving the quality of Sino- foreign cooperative education in vocational colleges should mainly focus on the following aspects:

6.1 Clarify the Training Objectives

Sino- foreign cooperative education in higher vocational education should focus on the international flow of technology and cultivate high-quality technical and skilled talents with international standards and perspectives. We should also strengthen the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities, so that they can become high-quality talents with innovative spirit and practical ability.

6.2 Optimize Course Offerings

Introduce advanced foreign curriculum resources and educational concepts, and combine them with the actual situation in China to localize the curriculum. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on the internationalization and practicality of course content to ensure that the knowledge and skills mastered by students are in line with international standards.

6.3 Innovative Training Mode

We should not only focus on foreign diplomas, but also pay more attention to cultivating students' internationally recognized professional abilities, making them skilled talents who can participate in international competition. In curriculum teaching, especially in language and cultural courses, attention

should be paid to cultivating students' awareness of cross-cultural communication.

6.4 Strengthen Teaching Management

Establish a scientific and standardized teaching management system to ensure the orderly conduct of various teaching activities in Sino- foreign cooperative education. Establish a comprehensive talent cultivation quality evaluation system, strengthen teaching quality monitoring and evaluation, timely identify problems and make improvements, and promote the continuous improvement of teaching quality.

6.5 Strengthen the Construction of the Teaching Staff

Introduce more foreign teachers and teachers with international backgrounds, while strengthening international training for Chinese teachers to enhance their English teaching level and cross-cultural communication abilities. This helps Chinese and foreign teachers to better integrate and jointly improve teaching quality.

6.6 Building an Educational Brand

By improving the quality and level of Sino-foreign cooperative education, we will gradually build an education brand with international influence. This helps to enhance the school's visibility and influence, attracting more domestic and foreign students to come and study.

In short, improving the quality of Sino- foreign cooperative education requires multiple efforts. Vocational colleges should continuously explore and practice, strengthen cooperation and exchange with internationally renowned universities or educational institutions, continuously improve teaching level and quality, and cultivate more high-quality talents with international perspectives and cross-cultural communication abilities [10].

7. Conclusion

The Education Department of Anhui Province has repeatedly emphasized the need to strengthen the management of Sino- foreign cooperative education, with me as the main focus, drawing on advanced foreign curricula, educational concepts and management methods, promoting school teaching reform, and cultivating high-quality workers with good

English proficiency and strong vocational comprehensive abilities for social and economic development.

Internationalization of vocational education requires facing a series of challenges, such as poor student quality, incomplete curriculum system, unclear educational positioning, and inadequate management and operation mechanisms. In order to solve these problems, higher vocational colleges need to comprehensively improve the quality of Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools and better serve the "the Belt and Road" initiative from the dimensions of optimizing the school running mode, strengthening the construction of teachers, strengthening management and supervision.

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