

Research on the Internationalization Cooperation Strategies of UK's Higher Education Based on SWOT Analysis: Taking the University of Warwick as an Example

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Abstract: This article studies the strategic development of internationalized cooperation of the UK's higher education based on SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. SWOT analysis is a widely used strategy tool for formulating strategic development. Taking the cooperation between the University of Warwick, UK and the Southern University of Science and Technology, China as an example, it suggested that the UK's higher education should enhance the long-term and stable development of internationalization collaboration with other countries, including China, to keep promoting and sustaining the growth of education exports and international student numbers.

Keywords: strategic development; internationalization cooperation; SWOT analysis; higher education; UK

1. Introduction

Globalization is an excellent opportunity for all countries, and education is a critical part of globalization. In recent decades, the higher education institutions in most countries have undergone significant changes and shown a trend of expanding scale, diversified academic system, diversified student structure, and strengthened higher vocational and technical education. Among them, the internationalization of higher education has attracted particular attention and has gradually become an essential indicator for measuring the quality of colleges and universities worldwide^[1].

At the same time, the internationalization of higher education has shown new trends, such as more intense competition and more robust regional cooperation^[2]. In addition, the increasingly complex and unstable world development makes the sustainable development of higher education face unprecedented challenges, such as people mobility, digital development, and the COVID-19 pandemic^[3].

This article uses SWOT to analyze the case of internationalization cooperation strategies between the University of Warwick, UK (hereafter referred to as "Warwick") and the Southern University of Science and Technology, China (hereafter referred to as "SUSTech") to provide ideas for the internationalization cooperation strategy of higher education. The main reasons we selected Warwick as the research object of the internationalization cooperation strategies of the UK's higher education are as follows:

The UK is the world's second most popular study destination, reaching 600,000 International students in 2019^[4]. The UK's higher education institutions are among the most renowned and prestigious in the world and play an essential role in international markets.

The UK government attaches great importance to the internationalization of education and has a series of strategies and actions. The UK government published the International Education Strategy: Global Growth and Prosperity in 2013, which set out an ambition for the government and education sector to work together and take advantage of global opportunities. In 2019, the UK government proposed to grow the number of international higher education students studying in the UK to 600,000 by 2030 to increase the UK's global reach and influence^[5].

Ranked 64th in the 2023 QS World University Rankings, Warwick is a representative fast-developing university in the UK located in the industrial city of Coventry, England. It is one of the UK's greatest research-oriented institutions independent of the government, with outstanding research achievements. It has 33 academic departments and more than 50 research centers, offering 120 undergraduate degrees

in various disciplines and more than 100 master and doctoral degrees. As a member of the Russell Group of British universities, it has an important position among British universities.

Located in Shenzhen, SUSTech is a representative fast-developing double first-class university in China. It is a national experimental University of Comprehensive Higher Education Reform, which focuses on science, engineering, and medicine and combines business with distinctive humanities and social sciences. It has 28 departments with 34 undergraduate majors. Intending to become one of the world's first-class universities, SUSTech set up its development strategy of education internationalization marked by international elements, global vision, and international ideas. Internal internationalization measures are also carried out, striving to build an all-around communication and cooperation platform for all teachers and students. As for now, it has 69 institutions of higher learning in Europe, Asia, North America, and Oceania, according to its website.

Warwick and SUSTech signed a cooperation project agreement in 2016, adopting the training mode of cooperation between the two universities and the dual tutors' system. Many scholars are engaged in studying the internationalization process of higher education, so our study of the available information can provide better ideas for collaboration between the UK and China.

2. Literature Review

Christen & Eyring stated the process of internationalization of higher education could be divided into two periods: the pre-reformation "convergence" period and the recent "partial re-convergence" period^[6]. British universities have been exploring the road of overseas cooperative education for more than one hundred years. The UK government has actively promoted the internationalization process of education and introduced a series of policies, regulations, and measures to provide a basis for its educational internationalization. The Green Book, published by the UK government in 2009, clearly expressed the need to expand links with other universities worldwide and attract more foreign academics and administrators so that UK universities can maintain their status as world-class universities. Bai explored some strategic initiatives for the internationalization of higher education in the UK at the practical level, including student and faculty mobility, curriculum internationalization, international research cooperation, and transnational education. He believed that the UK has rich and detailed content and a flexible and well-coordinated mechanism in the internationalization strategy of higher education^[7]. The UK started cooperating with China after the Regulations of PRC on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools was promulgated in 2003. Yang & Shi emphasized that the UK is the country with which China has the most significant number of cooperative institutions and programs and also analyzed the development of Sino-British cooperative education^[8].

The UK government and universities or institutions have actively formulated relevant policies to expand the international higher education market. The internationalization of higher education cooperated with China closely, and the number of Chinese postgraduates enrolled in the UK was the central part of UK-based postgraduates^[9]. The UK has many collaborative education and research exchange programs with China. For example, the University of Reading explored the inspiration of the development experience of the Internationalization of UK higher education for China and launched joint education programs. Both parties agreed that attracting international students to study abroad could improve international research cooperation and vigorously promote collaborative education^[10]. In 2016, China C9 Universities Consortium and Russell University Group issued a Joint Statement to seek collaboration in scientific research, talent training, etc. In 2017, 15 Chinese and British universities signed a contract to establish the first engineering education consortium in China.

3. Methods

The SWOT analysis was initially used in business and marketing, and now it is also broadly adopted in other research fields, including higher education institutions^[11]. Generally, the SWOT model can assess the internal and external factors that should be considered when formulating a strategic plan. The strengths and weaknesses of an organization or a strategic plan are the internal factors, while the opportunities and threats/challenges are the external factors^[12]. The internal assessment examines the aspects of an organization's locations, personnel, facilities, services, etc. At the same time, the external review scans the political, economic, social/cultural, technological, environmental, and legal (PESTEL) environments^[13]. Matching the external and internal factors, converting the threats/challenges into an opportunity and weakness factors into strengths, and turning SWOT into TOWS are necessary to reveal

generic methods into specific and operational strategic actions to make valuable SWOT^[14].

4. Result

4.1 SWOT Analysis of the Cooperation Project between the Two Universities

4.1.1. Project Strengths Analysis

The two universities have solid educational strengths. Warwick's scientific research capability is recognized not only in the country but also in the world. It is ranked 50th in the world in the QS World University Rankings 2012 and ranked in the top ten of the overall UK University Rankings by The Times and the Guardian for several years, making a significant contribution to the economy, culture, and life of the Coventry area. In the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), Warwick ranked 7th in the UK, successfully transforming itself into a first-class research university. Its scientific research department is 65% rated "world-leading" or "internationally outstanding," achieving 3/4-star good grades, with 19 departments in the UK's top 10.

Regarding SUSTech, in 2021 Shanghai Ranking's Global Ranking of Academic Subjects released by Soft Science and Technology, a total of 15 SUSTech disciplines were ranked on the list, with a record number of selected fields, and 6 of them ranked in the world's top 100. SUSTech has reached a new high of 13th in the world and 1st in China, according to The Times Higher Education's 2022 Global Young University Rankings.

The two universities attach great importance to the joint project. The development of international education has been incorporated into their development strategies. They ensure a blueprint for the top-level design, a plan for work tasks, and a starting point for the promotion and implementation of building an international education brand. The two schools have set up a particular international college responsible for international education-related affairs.

The educational internationalization level in the two universities is constantly improving. Since the 1980s, Warwick has been aggressively pursuing internationalization. With the support of a series of national policies, the university offers international courses, expands the global student market, participates in international research cooperation, and brings in outstanding scientific talents from all over the world. It is committed to building a highly supportive and innovative community. Providing international courses, including undergraduate and postgraduate courses, is a crucial way to promote and implement the internationalization of university education. The study's primary purpose is to build a comprehensive learning platform for scholars from all over the world. The curriculum of Warwick reflects the quality of the faculty and teaching of a leading university. It offers courses for full-time international students and 2+2 community courses, and introductory degree courses. Initially, the programs attracting international students were limited to humanities and social sciences. With the increasing internationalization, the university began to set up national science and technology courses in engineering, chemistry, physics, and dynamics. The common feature of this kind is that the content, quality, and level are internationalized.

Overseas exchange and study is an essential part of the talent training of SUSTech, as well as a critical advantage and feature of its international education. Aiming at the latest positioning of double first-class construction, SUSTech has held four seminars studying the practice of international running of world-class universities. It also wrote a five-year plan for undergraduate overseas exchange study at the university, integrating overseas study into undergraduate talent training. By mid-March 2022, 76 students from SUSTech went overseas to study. The global impact of top universities is not only reflected in their ability to train excellent students at home but also in the world. During the epidemic, SUSTech attracted outstanding international students by inviting famous university professors to participate in online lectures. The application number of international students has increased by 101% compared to the year 2021.

Development of scientific research is a source driving universities to advance. The mechanism of scientific research evaluation plays a critical leading role in universities. Under the guidance of the scientific research evaluation mechanism, British universities take the pursuit of "excellence" as its purpose and take the evaluation results as the basis for allocating scientific research funds, thus encouraging British universities to attach importance to the production of high-quality and original achievements.

Excellent international teachers. The internationalization of teachers is the primary condition to

realize the internationalization of universities. To optimize the age structure of teachers, as early as 1994, Warwick spent 10 million pounds to carry out the Warwick Research Fellowships (WRF), which selected 50 outstanding researchers from all over the world. Warwick provides plenty of opportunities for university teachers to communicate with scholars from around the world every year. SUSTech pays great attention to the construction of a talented team as well; it has established a human resource management system in line with the modern university system, and has initially established a high-level international faculty team. SUSTech has 1363 faculty members, including 59 academicians, 58 international scholars, and 39 specially appointed professors (young scientists included) of the Chinese Ministry of Education. More than 90% of the teaching and research faculty have overseas work experience, and more than 60% have worked or studied in the world's top 100 universities. About 65% of the faculty are high-level talents.

High-cost performance. The study duration in this program is four years, two years at SUSTech and two years at Warwick. A maximum of 5 students are enrolled in a joint training program each year. SUSTech provides up to 4 years of scholarship for its students. During the overseas study period, SUSTech provides scholarships according to partner universities' standards for doctoral students. During the study period at SUSTech, students from the joint program can get RMB 100,000 per year for the scholarship and only need to pay RMB 10,000 per year for tuition and RMB 1,300 per year for accommodation.

4.1.2. Project Weaknesses Analysis

The program's focus is joint doctoral training, and the maximum enrollment is five students per year. Therefore, the project can cover only a limited number of students, and the attraction needs to be stronger. As a result, the project's sustainable development will be limited by a certain number of students and international influence.

This program adopts a dual training system, which is advantageous, but in actual operation, there are too many details that need management intervention and implementation. For example, how do the supervisors of the two universities achieve uniform requirements, consistent goals, and proper planning of students' scientific research time in the actual process of training students? Joint training is not only to provide students with corresponding high-quality resources. More importantly, the joint training mechanism should definitely train excellent international high-end talents based on students' actual scientific research needs.

Entrance requirements are high. Students applying for the program need to meet the Ph.D. application requirements of these two universities, such as IELTS 6.5 and a GPA of 3.0, the equivalent provisions of most overseas Ivy League universities. Thus, if applicants meet these requirements, most of them may choose to study overseas directly rather than apply for this joint training program.

Students face challenges from foreign and domestic tutors, supervisors, administration departments, and multiple supporting organizations. The awkward situation of students in the "sandwich position" is becoming increasingly evident^[15]. Firstly, the different attitudes of tutors and supervisors at home and abroad are the main reasons. The domestic graduate education and training system could be more convenient. Many doctoral students not only need to complete the training program's relevant courses but also undertake the supervisor's task and carry out the relevant investigation and research work, making the short graduate training stage more compact. Secondly, students need to learn an efficient and concise way to contact foreign supervisors.

4.1.3. External Opportunities Analysis

With the development of globalization and a knowledge-based economy, universities have become critical hubs for acquiring and disseminating knowledge. Internationalization of higher education has become an important measure to enhance national competitiveness and cultivate high-quality talents. In response to the challenges of globalization, 29 European countries and international institutions, including the UK, signed the "Bologna Declaration" in 1999, launching the "Bologna Process" characterized by regional integration in Europe. Currently, the Europe 2020 Strategy (2010-2020) of the Bologna process is continuing the Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010) to create the world's most competitive "knowledge economy." The Bologna reform aims to create a "global knowledge community model," which is highly aligned with the goal of Internationalization of British higher education^[16].

British higher education enjoys a high reputation globally, with a high degree of internationalization and distinctive characteristics, and its position is crucial. As a tertiary industry, higher education plays a vital role in promoting the economic development of the UK. According to the British Schools Association survey, in 2011-2012, universities in the UK contributed 73 billion pounds of output value,

accounting for 2.8% of the UK's GDP of that year and providing 750,000 jobs^[17]. Higher education is the UK's fifth largest service sector export sector, and the UK government aims to increase education exports from £ 18 billion in 2012 to £30 billion by 2020. The Internationalization of British higher education is so profound that it will surely help British universities to explore a more suitable path for their development.

In the new era, China has introduced the policy of accelerating and expanding the opening-up of education. In 2020, Opinions of the Ministry of Education and the other eight divisions on Accelerating and Expanding the Opening up of Education in the New Era stated that the opening up of education should be unswerving upheld. In addition, proposing a series of major strategic concepts, such as innovation-driven development, "Going out," "bringing in," and "Internet Plus," which have extensively promoted the development of higher education internationalization in our country.

After the Belt and Road Initiative was launched in 2013, the internationalization of higher education in China entered the fast lane. The main manifestations include the fact that the number of international students in China is increasing rapidly. China has surpassed many countries to become the third-largest destination for overseas study. The flow of international academic talents is becoming large-scale and regular. Many overseas academic talents (including foreign talents) teach in China's higher education system. The flow of Chinese and foreign academic talents (academic, vocational, short-term, and information flow) is becoming increasingly frequent^[18]. Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools continues to advance. While the number of cooperative schools is increasing rapidly, the numbers of suitable countries, cooperative universities, and cooperative disciplines are increasingly diversified.

The rapid development of modern educational science and technology. The means of teaching are diverse. Technologies such as network communication and electronic equipment have enriched the means of knowledge transmission and reception and broadened the learning channels of international education. During the COVID-19 epidemic, online teaching mode has opened the thinking and exploration of new global teaching modes.

4.1.4. External Threats Analysis

The UK Government's supervision of international education could be better. University must undertake management responsibilities such as quality assurance, public information, standard confirmation, and certificate framework in the process of education opening. In 2003, the White Paper on Higher Education clearly stated that the UK Government gives universities as much freedom and flexibility in running schools as possible. Universities can adjust positively to market demands and obtain school funding through various channels. Meanwhile, universities were granted financial freedom, encouraging them to invest following their research plans. It also provided financial support to conduct world-class research and innovative knowledge transfer. While higher education institutions have a high degree of autonomy, ensuring the quality of the growing number of international students is a future challenge for every university.

With the continuous development of international education, the competition among programs has become more intense. With the constant advancement and development of higher education internationalization in China and the UK, more and more Ivy League universities are coming to China and carrying out various cooperation and exchanges with China's 985 or 211 universities. The emergence of diversified international dual training programs will specifically impact some existing programs, especially when competing with the joint programs of solid institutions like Tsinghua University and Cornell University.

The strategic cooperation and exchanges in higher education between the UK and China are based on the political mutual trust and strategic partnership between the two countries. With the constant change in the international social environment, the political and diplomatic relations between the two countries may affect the implementation of various strategies between transnational universities at any time. Therefore, in the unstable period of bilateral relations, the cooperation and exchange of international universities will also be affected and impacted.

Impact of major public health emergencies. The international situation is still grim, and international exchanges have not fully returned to normal, directly affecting the enrollment, teaching, internship, and graduation of international education in local universities.

Brexit could lead to a decline in the UK's international cooperation level. International research cooperation and the flow of researchers provide strong support for the UK to maintain its position in the global research market. After "Brexit," international cooperation in scientific research is expected to be

significantly reduced, and the UK's leading edge in scientific research in the European region may no longer be apparent. In addition, after "Brexit," the loss of research funding and the loss of high-end talents in the UK may damage the local scientific research base and cause damage to the international reputation of scientific research, weaken international competitiveness, and threaten the UK's position as a global leader in scientific research and innovation^[19].

4.2. SWOT-based Development Strategy

According to the SWOT analysis, the international cooperation development strategy of British higher education can choose to implement four strategies: growth strategy (strength-opportunity), internal development strategy (weaknesses-opportunities), external development strategy (threats-opportunities), survival strategy (weaknesses-threats)^[20]. Recently, Warwick has incorporated the development of international education into its strategic planning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the global education environment has undergone mass changes, and its impact is continuing, significantly affecting the recruitment and teaching of British universities. Taking the cooperation between Warwick and SUSTech as an example, this article hopes to overcome the internal weaknesses of the university by taking advantage of external opportunities, seizing internal benefits, and improving internal weaknesses through SWOT development strategy analysis. To develop international education with high quality and realize the cooperation and development of the Internationalization of British higher education.

4.2.1. Strengths-Opportunity Strategy (SO)

Relying on the school's superior disciplines, encourage cooperation and exchanges with overseas universities to create international education characteristics. Since the 1980s, Warwick has actively developed international courses. With the continuous strengthening of internationalization, humanities and social sciences and science and engineering are becoming advantages and characteristics of this international school. In addition, 2+2 community courses, introductory degree courses, and doctoral training programs with SUSTech have been established. It carries out the mechanism of mutual credit recognition and overseas credit and encourages schools to develop student exchanges with overseas universities. The school also actively set up overseas language centers. And it declares International cooperative school-running projects, and the establishment of overseas colleges improves the international student education management system and creates international education characteristics.

Use the encouragement policies issued by the state to increase international cooperation in schools. The UK government provides ongoing policy guidance to promote internationalization. For example, the "Robbins Report" issued in 1963 proposed that international evaluation standards should be integrated into the university's school-running policy, development strategy, funding mechanism, and management; and should subsidize 9 million pounds for foreign students every year to attract overseas students. Seize the opportunity to promote the cooperation and development of the internationalization of higher education.

Make full use of the international status of British higher education. The school has many opportunities for cooperation and exchange, and it promotes international higher education exchanges and cooperation. British universities should actively go out and regularly visit China to advertise university cooperation projects. It broadens the channels for international students to understand British universities and strengthens exchanges and cooperation between British universities and the world through various forms of cooperative schooling, mutual exchange of teachers and students, and sharing of teaching resources.

4.2.2. Internal Development (WO)

Improve the construction of teaching staff. Excellent faculty is a favorable condition for international cooperation, and the faculty in the current project needs to be strengthened. Schools can use internal training, participation in international academic exchanges, overseas activity, and the introduction of outstanding foreign teachers to improve the international level of teachers and regularly organize and manage personnel to conduct exchanges and training at home and abroad. In addition, teachers from the two countries in the cooperation project can jointly teach and learn teaching models and advanced concepts from each other's lectures.

Optimizing the setting of cooperation projects. Take the dual-supervised doctoral training program between Warwick and SUSTech as an example. It seems to be an advantageous program, but in actual operation, there are too many details that require management intervention and implementation, making it difficult to practice. International cooperation projects should be optimized to cultivate excellent

international high-end talents who can truly start from the actual scientific research needs of students.

Improve the training mechanism and improve the quality of international education. At present, students in the project are in the awkward position of a "sandwich filling." In light of the characteristics of international academics, we should standardize enrollment, formulate training programs, clarify training objectives, improve daily management and services, grant degrees and scholarships upon graduation, and further improve international education.

4.2.3. External Development Strategy (TO)

Actively carry out transnational higher education, adopting forms such as cooperation with foreign educational institutions in running schools and cooperation projects. Due to major public health emergencies, the current international epidemic situation is still severe, and international exchanges have not yet returned to normal, which has affected the enrollment, teaching, internship, graduation, and other related work of international education in colleges and universities. We should promote mutual recognition of overseas credits and degrees, confer degrees and scholarships, etc., actively carry out cross-border higher education cooperation projects, or continuously increase the cooperation of British universities in running schools around the world. For example, the University of Nottingham established the University of Nottingham Ningbo in China.

Actively participate in EU and other regional and global higher education exchange and cooperation programs. "Brexit" has led to a decline in international cooperation in the UK. The UK can use the EU and other regions as a platform to reach multi-faceted scientific and technical cooperation agreements with many member states. At the same time, the UK can also build a platform for British college students to study abroad through multilateral scientific research exchanges.

Establish friendly international relations and strengthen international scientific research cooperation and exchanges. Scientific research is one of the critical strategies of national strength. In the context of globalization, it is still necessary to carry out international cooperation, share resources, learn from each other and scientific research models, and cultivate outstanding scientific research talents. It makes British universities cooperate with international universities, such as the cooperation between Warwick and SUSTech. The two universities attach importance to scientific research and innovation and can collaborate on scientific research.

4.2.4. Survival Strategy (WT)

The Internet plus education model can enhance international cooperation capabilities and promote exchanges in higher education. Due to the difficulty of dual training, students are in the embarrassing situation of "sandwich filling" the difficult international epidemic situation makes international exchanges have not returned to normal. British universities can use the Internet platform to have English courses, expand distance education, and use online course modes to promote the cooperation and development of international higher education. The introduction of overseas credential certification measures also effectively ensures the growth of online international education. Students can also study other countries' university courses or academic certificates in their countries.

By implementing specific measures such as preferential policies and scholarship systems, the schools will vigorously expand the market for international students and create charming universities. It is possible to improve the facilities of old buildings in British universities, renovate dormitories, optimize food conditions, and set up service centers. They help international students integrate into British life. The schools or the government increase subsidies and scholarships for international students, thereby increasing the influence and attractiveness of British higher education.

Improve international visibility by vigorously developing advantageous disciplines and strengthening the construction of inferior fields to create attractive professions. Universities should set up international courses to open up the market of international students. Warwick can continue highlighting its advantages in humanities and social sciences and open science and engineering nationalization courses in engineering, chemistry, physics, dynamics, etc. It Creates high-quality international disciplines.

5. Discussion

Global competition in the international education market continues to increase during the COVID-19 pandemic recovery. And its effects have continued to be felt across the world with disruption to international mobility and a slowdown of the global economy; the UK government needs to keep promoting and sustaining the growth of education exports and international student numbers.

International collaboration in educational institutions between the UK and other countries worldwide shall recover gradually.

Following US's step, the UK chose the policy to make systematic rivalry against China, which led to the destruction of the sound development of China-UK relations. China shall not be the priority country of the UK's education exports as stated in IES 2021 update: Supporting recovery, driving growth. The UK government will increase education exports to £35 billion per year by 2030, which shall strongly support several new initiative projects in the priority countries and regions. Although China is still an important market, the higher education collaboration between UK and China tends to decrease without solid financial support. To enhance the long-term and stable development of international cooperation between the UK and China, we may consider making improvements in the following aspects:

The higher education in UK should optimize the collaboration mode, with close integration of industry, education, and research, and cultivate excellent international high-level talents who do scientific research starting from the actual needs of social and industrial development. It would be a win-win policy that the industry gets good research outcomes and professional talents and institutions get financial support for training and development.

The higher institutions and universities need to improve the training system and international education quality. To encourage multicultural international campuses, strengthen students' international practical experience, and develop their cross-cultural ability. It is also necessary to further enhance international education by standardizing enrolment, innovative courses, clarified training objectives, good daily management, and services, as well as scholarships and employment support after graduation.

The UK universities have to improve faculty teams of the collaborated programs, set up similar qualifications for recruitment of international faculty and strengthen the teaching and research cooperation between them and enhance international academic exchanges, such as regularly organizing the exchange of teachers training abroad, visiting scholars, and annual seminars.

The UK education government should have the better focus on several key collaboration projects with Chinese "first-class" universities and provide programs at the master's or lower vocational level, which can train more students needed in the Chinese labor market.

Collaboration is based on mutual respect and understanding, and the development and success of international cooperation lie in one essential goal - each party makes the other better. We believe that UK and China shall continue to cooperate in educational internationalism and jointly cultivate competitive international talents with creative spirits and practical abilities.

6. Limitations

There are some limitations in this article. Firstly, our sample is limited to the cooperation program between Warwick in the UK and SUSTech in China. Secondly, since the publishing timing of the research literature, some of the policies are the most recent, and the preliminary guidelines may not be included. Finally, it may be expressed as a broad generalization rather than specifics and have biased perceptions in our study results because of the limitation of the SWOT analysis method.

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