

Research on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools in Private Colleges and Universities —A Case Study of Hunan International Economics University

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Abstract: *As a renowned private university in China, HIEU has developed its own way of going global. Over the 13-year period, CFCRS in HIEU has experienced difficulties, problems, uncertainties and instability. Cooperative projects are easily affected by internal and external factors, which can bring beneficial or detrimental effects to the projects. Nevertheless, because of the support of the government and the university leaders, HIEU can always flexibly adjust itself to adapt to new situations. To achieve healthy and sustainable development in CFCRS, it is critically important for HIEU to increase the quality of the joint programs, employ high-quality resources of both sides to form core competitiveness, and expand channels for international cooperation.*

Keywords: *Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools, Private Colleges and Universities, Hunan International Economics University, Influencing Factors*

1. Introduction

Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCRS) strengthens international exchange and cooperation in the field of education and promotes the development of education. For any university seeking for further development, whether it is public or private, joint-school running can be an advisable choice and a critical stage, allowing the institution to effectively introduce high-quality foreign educational resources, expand social influence, enhance international reputation, and fulfill its educational and development goals. However, compared with public universities, CFCRS in the field of private higher education is insufficient, and this can be attributed to several reasons, including the lagging of CFCRS-related law and policies, the weak capacity of private universities, the lack of understanding and choice hesitation concerning CFCRS of university leaders and so on ^[1]. Hunan International Economics University (HIEU) is a renowned privately-run university in central south China, ranking top 10 in China's private higher education. Although it has 13 years' experience of cooperating with overseas universities, CFCRS in HIEU is far from being sufficient and it is still confronted with a number of problems. The reasons mentioned above can partly explain the situation, but there are more factors.

2. Review of Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools in HIEU

CFCRS began in HIEU in 2009, when it became a member of Laureate International Universities and had the opportunity to going global. Since the establishment of its International Education School, cooperative education in HIEU has mainly experienced four stages.

During the initial period (2009-2013), the number of students and cooperative projects was quite limited. At the very beginning, there was only one project, American Credit Education (ACE), and no more than 10 students were enrolled. ACE was an undergraduate project, in which students studied for two years in China, taking language and academic courses, and then applied for universities in the US with their credits for academic courses recognized. Due to lack of students, the project was cancelled in 2012. In 2011, the project with Holmesglen Institute of TAFE in Australia was officially approved by the educational authority. Graduates would be awarded Diploma of Accounting. Also, the number of students recruited failed to meet expectations.

The following 2 years (2014-2015) witnessed the development of CFCRS in HIEU. In addition to TAFE, HIEU began to cooperate with Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School (BMIHMS) in Australia to run the undergraduate course of Tourism Management (Hospitality), and University of Hertfordshire (UH) in UK in the undergraduate course of Accounting. Both projects were officially approved, and in 2014 all three projects enrolled 209 students in total. However, because the teaching equipment and facilities could not reach the requirement of the course, BMIHMS ended its cooperation with HIEU in 2015.

In 2016, the joint project with Holmesglen terminated mainly for two reasons. One reason is that the project had expired. The other is that the Australian Government adjusted its policy for cooperation in running schools. Under the new policy, students must go to Australia to finish the academic courses in the third year in order to get the diploma. Although the joint project with UH was the only one left, CFCRS in HIEU entered the stage of standardized development. From 2016 to 2018, Talent Training Plan for Accounting was revised twice to meet the requirement of international applied talent training. The quality of teaching is the lifeline of the Sino foreign cooperative education project. Over the period, the internal and external teaching quality assurance system was constructed. The project was under the supervision of both parties of the cooperation, the Chinese government, and the public ^[2]. HIEU submitted report to educational authority annually. In 2017, the joint project passed the evaluation of CFCRS by the Ministry of Education.

In 2019, Yuhua Education became the controlling shareholder of HIEU, and CFCRS in the university entered the stage of diversified development. From 2019 to 2022, HIEU has cooperated with more than 20 higher education institutions in Britain, France, and Thailand to run junior college, undergraduate and postgraduate courses, involving Finance, Finance Management, International Economics and Trade, English, Chinese Language and Literature, and Business Administration. Unfortunately, after 7 years' enrolling, the joint project with UH, Accounting, stopped the enrollment in 2022 mainly because students went to the UK to finish their undergraduate education were not sufficient in number.

The review reveals that although HIEU attaches great importance to going global, over the 13-year period, it has gone through difficulties and problems in CFCRS. The projects are unstable, and CFCRS can be easily impacted by internal and external factors.

3. Factors Affecting Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools in HIEU

Factors that affect CFCRS can be diverse. Zheng points out these factors include the quality of the project, the approval and support of the Board of Directors and administration officials, the involvement of the teachers of both sides, the financial support, policies of both parties and the government ^[3]. Other factors can involve the cost of overseas education for students, public health events and so on. And these factors can be further categorized into internal and external ones.

3.1 Internal Factors

As for HIEU, the primary factor is the support of the Board of Directors. Successive leaders of the university can understand the significance of CFCRS and take effective measures to support its development. International Education School enjoys favorable policies in enrollment, teaching facilities, teacher staff, faculty training, and other aspects.

CFCRS can also be affected by the change of controlling shareholders, which results in the overall change of the CFCRS environment. When Laureate International Universities became the actual controller in 2009, HIEU enjoyed the teaching and educational resources offered by the Laureate network, more than 75 institutions with undergraduate and graduate degree programs around the world. ACE and the joint program with BMIHMS were carried out under this background. When Yuhua Education took the place of Laureate in 2019, it brought with it the resources of Stamford International University in Thailand. In the following 3 years, cooperation has been conducted between the two universities in undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

The type of the school is another key element that influencing CFCRS. As a private university, HIEU cannot get financial aid from local and state government, and tuition is the main source of its income. This means that private education may be confronted with the problem of fund shortage, and the cost and profit of the joint program would be critical factors the Board of Directors consider when making decisions. If a certain project needs the university to invest in a big sum of money but the profit potential is minimal, it probably will not be considered even if it can be profitable in the long term. This is the case

with the joint project, Tourism Management (Hospitality). BMIHMS ended its cooperation for HIEU failed to provide teaching equipment and facilities for the course.

In the process of CFCRS, that HIEU can survive the challenges and difficulties can also be attributed to its great flexibility and adaptability. The university can always adjust itself to adapt to new situations. While it is quite challenging to start government-approved programs, HIEU cooperates with overseas education agency to run new projects. While the cost of studying in the UK can be expensive for some learners, HIEU takes the advantage of free higher education in public French universities.

Lastly, the involvement of the faculty staff is a factor that ensures the smooth operation of the projects. Dedicated teaching staff guarantee the quality of the courses. In addition to lectures, extensive extra-curriculum activities are organized to cultivate students' practical ability and broaden their horizons. Members in the administration sector offer service to teachers and students. Also, overseas education agencies provide consultation concerning applying, living and studying abroad.

3.2 External Factors

The Chinese government has always valued cooperation between Chinese and foreign educational institutions, which provides a favorable environment for the development of CFCRS. Regulations on CFCRS states: The State adopts the policies of opening wider to the outside world, standardization of running schools, exercising administration according to law and promotes its development. The State encourages Chinese institutions of higher learning to cooperate with renowned foreign institutions to introduce high-quality educational resources^[4].

The changes in the policies of the partner can also influence the running of cooperative programs. For instance, in the TAFE program, the alteration in the policy of the Australian government had negative effect on the program. Before the alteration, if students could meet the language requirement, they finished all courses in China and obtained the diploma of both sides. However, after the alteration, they must go to the Australian campus to finish their 3rd year education. As a result, the education cost would be far higher and it would be much more difficult for students to graduate. So, the policy alteration was the main reason leading to the termination of the program.

In addition, major public health events may have a detrimental effect on CFCRS. The pandemic beginning at 2020 greatly influenced students' willingness to study abroad. According to the survey carried out by one university in Liaoning Province, before the pandemic, 55.65% of the sophomores had the intention to go abroad, but after the outbreak, 79.92% students changed their thoughts because they might face higher risks and more uncertainties^[5]. Actually, during the pandemic, the number of students in the program with UH decreased dramatically.

Apparently, CFCRS in HIEU can be easily influenced by factors inside and outside of the university, and these factors can bring both positive and negative effects to the programs. The support of the government and Board of Directors provide a sound environment for the development; the changes in actual controllers bring new opportunities; the type of university means that it has to consider cost and profit when running joint programs; the involvement of faculty staff ensures the smooth operation; policy alteration of the partner and factors like major public health events may influence the cooperative programs detrimentally; however, because of its flexibility and adaptability, HIEU can always seize opportunities and adjust itself to adapt to new situations in CFCRS.

4. Suggestions on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools in HIEU

Although HIEU has accumulated experience in CFCRS, the future is not optimistic for the programs are not stable and can easily be impacted by various factors. To achieve healthy and sustainable development in CFCRS, it is critically important for HIEU to increase the quality of the joint programs, employ the high-quality resources of both sides to form core competitiveness, and expand channels for international cooperation.

The evaluation of the program and degree of student satisfaction play an important role in the success of cooperative education. Students' opinions influence the reputation of the program directly. If they believe the program is of high quality and is beneficial for their professional and personal development, they are likely to recommend it to their friends and relatives. As a result, the program can gain a good social effect and expand its social influence.

Also, HIEU should identify its orientation in running schools with overseas institutions and take full

advantage of the resources of both sides. For instance, International Economics and Trade is recognized as the first-rate undergraduate discipline in Hunan Province. By cooperating with renowned French universities in this discipline, HIEU can offer students the best resources and opportunities to further their education in graduate schools in overseas universities. In this way, HIEU can form its core competitiveness.

Lastly, to achieve further development in CFCRS, HIEU should expand the channels of international cooperation. For one thing, going global means not only encouraging students to study abroad but also attracting overseas students to study in HIEU. This can be fulfilled by running exchange programs with partners in other countries. For another thing, as an application-oriented university, HIEU should work with multinational companies and enterprises to provide students with opportunities of internship in an international context. This would help to cultivate talents' ability and improve the quality of the program.

5. Conclusion

As a renowned private university in China, HIEU has developed its own way of going global. Cooperative projects are easily be affected by internal and external factors, which can bring beneficial or detrimental effects to the projects. Over the 13-year period, CFCRS in HIEU has experienced difficulties, problems, uncertainties and instability, but because of the support of the government and the university leaders, HIEU can always flexibly adjust itself to adapt to new situations. If the university can improve the quality of cooperative education, form core competitiveness, and expand channels for international cooperation, the future of CFCRS is promising.

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