

# The Challenges of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education - A Qualitative Analysis from Cooperative Institutions

Weiwei Liu, Zainudin Bin Hassan, Guangwen Li

Faculty of Educational Sciences and Technology, University Technology Malaysia

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.908000151>

Received: 01 August 2025; Accepted: 06 August 2025; Published: 01 September 2025

## ABSTRACT

Chinese-foreign cooperative education is an important form of internationalization of China's higher education, through which China realizes the optimization and redistribution of higher education resources and promotes the development of its higher education. Since China's reform and opening up, the internationalization of Chinese higher education has developed rapidly. In recent years, the number of Chinese-foreign cooperative education institutions in China has been increasing, and the number of students and colleges and universities involved has also been increasing, but in the process of rapid growth, it is also facing some new problems and challenges. This study will take a qualitative research approach to conduct in-depth interviews with a Chinese-foreign cooperative institution which has more than 20 years of running school experience. Through in-depth interviews with 20 participants, including senior managers, lecturers and students, we found out the challenges that Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions are facing, explore the reasons for these challenges, and then put forward corresponding countermeasures. Through the study, we found that Chinese-foreign cooperative education organizations are mainly facing challenges from two aspects: cooperative in running schools, and the teaching and learning adaptability, which affect the development process of Chinese-foreign cooperative education. This study provides useful suggestions for Chinese-foreign cooperative education institutions through deeply interviews and literature analysis. Chinese-foreign cooperative education institutions can actively deal with the challenges faced in running schools by reducing homogeneous enrollment competition, adjusting and optimizing the direction of professional settings, improving the management level of the institution. The strategies of improve of the teaching and learning adaptability can be adjusting the configuration of faculty structure, jointing global recruitment and multi-channel cooperation and exchange, etc.

**Keywords**— Chinese-foreign cooperative education, Internationalization of higher education, Challenges, Chinese-foreign cooperative education institutions

## INTRODUCTION

Economic globalization is a trend in global economic development. Economic globalization has helped to promote the internationalization of politics, culture, science and technology. Accompanying this trend is the internationalization of higher education, which has become a central issue in the field of higher education in recent decades (Alex, 2021; Bedenlier et al., 2018; Buckner, 2019). With the increasing mobility of international students and international institutions, the internationalization of higher education has received more and more attention from more scholars (Alpenidze, 2015; Al-Youssef, 2009; Cai et al., 2025). In the early days, internationalization of higher education was more about the movement of international students, and as more and more international campuses were opened outside the country, the movement of institutions and the movement of faculty became more frequent.

Since the reform and opening up of China in 1978, China has gradually opened its doors to a wider world stage, and the internationalization of higher education in China has developed accordingly, especially after China's accession to the WTO in 2001, which expanded the scope and depth of opening up, and the internationalization of higher education in China has also become more frequent (Iftekhhar & Kayombo, 2015; Xue & Li, 2023; Zhu et al., 2017). According to the statistics of "2024 China Study Abroad White Paper", since the reform and opening up to the end of 2022, the cumulative number of Chinese students studying abroad exceeded 8

millions(People's Daily Overseas Edition, 2025). The number of international students from Mainland China ranked first among the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Germany, and Italy in terms of the share of international students in these countries(Yangcheng Faction, 2024). China has become a very important player in the internationalization of global higher education.

Since the promulgation of the Regulations on Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education in 2003(State Council, 2003), the internationalization of higher education in China has gone through a process of continuous change and development. In this process, some problems and challenges have been encountered gradually. Some scholars have begun to conduct research on Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education(CFCE), which mainly involves English teaching(Al-Shikaili, 2019), quality assurance(Hou & Rohayati, 2024), student experience etc.(Amado Mateus et al., 2023), but few scholars have studied the challenges faced by CFCE through empirical research. This study will provide some ideas for the development of CFCE by examining the challenges faced by Chinese-foreign cooperative education so far.

This study will examine the following specific research objectives:1. what are the challenges facing the development of Chinese-foreign co-operative education so far? 2. what are the reasons for facing these challenges? 3. how to deal with these challenges?

## **BACKGROUND**

### **A. Internationalization of China's Higher Education**

With the sweeping wave of economic globalization, especially since China's accession to the WTO in 2001, China has become more and more proactive and open to globalization. It has accelerated the development of higher education in China and promoted the long-term strategy of internationalization of higher education in China. We can see that since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy in China, China has made certain achievements in the internationalization of higher education, especially in the international exchanges of teachers and students(Iftekhar & Kayombo, 2015; Liu, 2021). Internationalization of higher education has become an important goal for the development of Chinese universities(Li, 2021; Li & Xue, 2023). Exchanges between Chinese universities and foreign universities and academic institutions are increasing, and the platform for intergovernmental cooperation and exchange is expanding.

Promoting the internationalization of China's higher education is a national strategy in China, and there are various forms of internationalization, such as Chinese students studying abroad, attracting foreign students to study in China, and setting up academic institutions at home and abroad(Li, 2021). The earliest activity of internationalization of higher education is the study abroad of Chinese students, and since the reform and opening up, the number of foreign students in China has been increasing, The cumulative number has China's soft power continues to grow, under the guidance of the opening-up policy and the Belt and Road Policy, China has begun to set up educational institutions or international branch campuses in foreign countries, such as the Confucius Institutes around the world. Or opening overseas branches of universities, such as Xiamen University Malaysia.

### **B. Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education (CFCE)**

Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education (CFCE) is a important form of internationalization of higher education in China, which is used by China to introduce foreign high-quality educational resources in order to promote the development and improvement of its own higher education. China's internationalization of higher education started relatively late, which is related to China's specific national conditions. It was only after China's reform and opening up in 1978 that China gradually began to open up the country's gates and allow non-Chinese things to enter China. At the beginning of reform and opening up, due to the overall level of China's higher education is relatively backward, need to learn more from the advanced education of the developed countries in the world, so China's education sector gradually began the process of foreign learning and exchange, the internationalization of higher education is also from this time onwards, and gradually appeared in the vision of China's education sector(MOE of China, n.d.).

In order to boost the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions and to encourage colleges and universities to operate schools in collaboration with international organizations, the Chinese government has put in place a number of policies and initiatives since the reform and opening up of China. The number of the undergraduate or higher colleges and universities with separate legal qualifications is 1,390 among the totally 1,778 Chinese-foreign cooperation educational programs and institutions in the country in 2025(MOE of China, n.d.). China's educational system has been continuously developing as a result of the scale and quality of CFCE. Both the number of cooperative programs and the scope of CFCE have grown in recent years. The most significant shift is the increased diversity of CFCE, which includes everything from joint school operations, technology and experience sharing, and curriculum development to close collaboration on policies and regulations.

Due to China's political system, China does not allow foreign colleges and universities or educational institutions to set up branch campuses directly in China; instead, it adopts the way of cooperation between foreign educational institutions and Chinese educational institutions to run schools, which is the Chinese-foreign Cooperative in Running School(CFCRS) or Chinese-foreign Cooperative Education (CFCE)that we see nowadays(Cai et al., 2025; Li, 2021). Foreign educational institutions can cooperate with Chinese universities to open educational institutions or programs in China, recruit Chinese students through 2+2, 1+3, 4+0 and other joint training methods, that is, through a certain length of study in China, such as 1 year, 2 years, plus a certain number of years of study abroad, such as 3 years or 2 years, and through the relevant assessment, the students can obtain a certificate of graduation from a Chinese university or a foreign joint institution, even both. Through this mode of education, China has not only introduced high-quality higher education resources from abroad, but also retained its own management authority over higher education institutions, which is in line with the needs of its political system, and has realized the optimization of education resources.

In order to develop compound talents with an international perspective and to advance the globalization of China's higher education, which can aid in the development of both China and the rest of the world, CFCE naturally combines traditional Chinese education with western educational concepts(Han et al., 2023; Li & Xue, 2023). It does this by absorbing and borrowing western teaching resources, curriculum structure, management strategies, teaching quality control, and academic evaluation system, among other things.

## **SAMPLE AND METHOD**

This study selected a Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education Institution(CFCEI) that has been in operation for more than 20 years as a case study, and adopted qualitative interviews as the research method to conduct in-depth interviews with administrators, teachers and students from the Chinese-foreign cooperative institution to find out how they perceive the challenges faced by the Chinese-foreign cooperative school, the main reasons for the challenges in their opinion, and how their school responds to these challenges. The study was conducted with a targeted sample of students. A purposive sampling method was used to select administrators and lecturers with extensive management and educational experience in the institution, and some students from different grades were also invited to participate in the interviews as stakeholders(Bekele & Ago, 2022). A total of 20 participants took part in this interview, and they answered and explained their knowledge and views on issues related to CFCE from their different perspectives.

We designed a guide for conducting semi-structured interviews. The guide has been reviewed by 2 experts to confirm its rationality and accuracy, and appropriate modifications and adjustments have been made to the guide according to the experts' reviews(Cassell & Symon, 2004). In the data analysis and organization phase, we used Nvivo15 as a research tool to analyze and compare all the interviews several times, and coded and reorganized all the interviews using thematic analysis to get what we wanted to discover(Alam, 2020).

This semi-structured interviews allowed us to explore complex issues in detail and to identify the different challenges faced by CRCE as seen from the perspectives of various different stakeholders(Alhabsyi, 2022; Nuzhat Naz, 2022). The interviews covered a wide range of topics, including the goals for internationalization, the specifics of instruction, and the use of funds, and also asked about specific initiatives and programs implemented by the institution. The adaptable nature of the semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their responses and provide concrete examples to support their views. Rather than handing out

questionnaires, such in-depth conversations enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of how CFCEI carry out their offerings, as well as to understand some of the details of the process, so that we could make in-depth analyses and discussions about the challenges they face.

## RESULTS

### A. Challenges in the Operation of the College

#### **The sharp increase in the number of CFCEI has led to great internal competitive pressure:**

With the rapid development of Chinese society, the number of CFCE has increased sharply, and there are more than 100 CFCE programs and institutions approved every year, and CFCE is no longer a scarce resource, which is sought after by students and parents, and there is great pressure for competition between similar CFCE programs and institutions. The pressure is very great, and it also leads to the quality of student sources starting to decline.

Interviewee AD-1-F, a senior manager of the college, mentioned, *"In recent years, due to the increasing number of CFCE programs, the number of students we can recruit has dropped drastically compared to the past twenty years, around 2005, the number of students enrolled in the 2+2 program of our college reached about 110, while in these years, there are less than 50 students."*

An administrator AD-2-F from the International Department told us, *"Now, there are more than 10 Chinese-foreign cooperative programs owned by our university alone, and the content of the programs is mostly in the direction of business, with little difference in general, and the sources of students between several programs come from the unified enrollment quota of the school, so the pressure of direct competition between colleges and programs is very great, plus the pressure of direct competition between colleges and programs is very great now. The number of students applying for Chinese-foreign cooperative programs is not as many as before, and this competition between student sources has become even greater."*

#### **The Aging of Professional Settings No Longer Meets the Needs of Social Development:**

The aging of specialties is also one of the major challenges encountered by the CFCE. The CFCEI has been in operation for more than 20 years, and the current specialties have not changed much from those of 20 years ago. However, along with the development of society, the demand for talents regardless of specialties is close to saturation, and it has become more and more difficult for graduates to find employment.

A student manager AD-3-F told us that *"In the class of graduates who just graduated, more than 50% of the students have not been able to find jobs matching their majors, and most of the current students are engaged in sales jobs after graduation, although some of the students are engaged in foreign trade-related jobs, but it is a great pity that most of the students don't have much employment advantage when they are employed. The advantageous majors that we have been proud of don't seem to be in that much demand anymore."*

Another teaching administrator, AD-4-F, said that *"At peak of our CFCEI, our Accounting major had to enroll 4 classes at a time of nearly 150 people or so per year, and now the number of students enrolled in the Accounting major has also declined a lot, and there are currently only 2 classes in the major offered at school, at each grade level. Students and parents have expressed that it is difficult to find suitable jobs for this major. And in our latest application to the Ministry of Education, such business majors have not been further approved."*

#### *Restricted Management Mechanisms Affecting the Overall Development of the Programme:*

I believe that one of our great challenges in the process of school management comes from the restrictions of internal management. Since our co-operative institution is a non-independent subordinate college in a university, the overall management has to follow the management requirements of the host university.

However, AD-1-F mentions that *as a CFCEI, "we are very different from other subordinate colleges in terms of*

*our cultivation objectives, operation methods and the direction of capital expenditure, but we are required to be the same as other subordinate colleges, especially in terms of expenditure, which affects our development very much. "*

*"We don't even have the funds to celebrate some foreign festivals with the foreign teachers because there are no corresponding festival expenses in China, so our applications for funds won't be approved by the host university, and we are required to use the same expenditure items as the other colleges, as mentioned in FM-5-F. Therefore, we can only give up the opportunity to communicate with the foreign teachers, or else I have to pay out of my own pocket to solve the expenses. "*

*"Restrictions on the use of funds are also reflected in the hiring of foreign teachers. The salary of each foreign teacher is restricted by the relevant conditions of the university, and the salary package cannot be too high, but, as you know, it is difficult for us to recruit good foreign teachers without a high package as an attraction, and we have been losing our own foreign teachers in recent years. The Director of the Teaching and Research Department," FM-3-F, said with great regret.*

## **B. Challenges in Teaching and Learning**

### **Difficulty of Students' English Proficiency in Meeting the Needs of Programme Learning:**

Many of the courses in the cooperative school are taught in foreign languages, which requires a certain level of foreign language proficiency of the students, especially when the students have not been exposed to any learning of foreign language specialization courses and related education before, and it is a big challenge for the students to learn a foreign language while at the same time learning a foreign language specialization course, which is also not easy for the local lecturers.

Interviewee student ST-3-M said that *"foreign language learning is the most problematic issue for me, I like the relaxed and active learning atmosphere here, and I also like to communicate with foreign teachers, but very often my foreign language proficiency restricts me from this desire. I know that I will need to communicate and write in all foreign languages when I go to study abroad in the future, but it's really a big challenge for students from non-native English-speaking countries like us. I don't speak particularly well enough to express myself in daily communication, and when I encounter specialized English, I need to look it up one word at a time, which is very time-consuming and can easily block my train of thought, so that I can't keep up with the teacher's course content at once.*

Respondent FM-1-F mentioned that *as a foreign language lecturer, I obviously feel the decline in the quality of the student population, and the English level of students enrolled in the last two or three years has a big gap compared with that of the previous students, which makes it more difficult for students to meet the language requirements of the other university after enrolment. Fewer and fewer students are able to get higher scores in the IELTS exam.*

Another director of the department, FM-2-F, also pointed out that *our full-time teachers have been improving in terms of qualifications and teaching experience, however, in recent years there seems to be no significant improvement in the foreign language proficiency of the students, but rather an increase in the number of students who are unable to meet the language requirements and are unable to go to the partner universities abroad as planned, which is very disturbing to us.*

### **The Challenge of Insufficient Foreign Teacher Resources to Meet the School's Operational Needs:**

In the regulations of the Ministry of Education of China on CFCE, the teaching hours and the number of courses of foreign teachers are stipulated accordingly, and cooperative education must meet the corresponding requirements of teaching hours and the number of courses, or else it will be judged as unqualified. Therefore, foreign teachers are a very important indicator in CFCEI.

Interviewee ST-1-F mentioned that *"As a senior graduate of CFCEI, we have not been exposed to foreign*

*teachers particularly, at least not as much as we thought. Foreign teachers mainly offer language courses, and there are fewer foreign teachers for specialized courses, and many of them are only available through online courses, which is not a very good experience or rewarding. "*

Interviewee FM-3-F said that *"Our foreign teachers' resources are very tight, as we run the school earlier, we also have more regular foreign lecturers than ordinary colleges, but with the increase of CFCEI and the pressure of direct competition in the same industry, a lot of the original foreign teachers have left our college to serve in other institutions due to various problems such as salary, research platform, and living environment, etc. In recent years, we have lost a lot of long-term cooperative teachers.*

Interviewee AD-2-F said, *"As a staff member of the International Exchange and Cooperation Office, I can clearly feel that in recent years, it has become more and more difficult to recruit foreign teachers, and it is very difficult to recruit foreign teachers who are professionally matched and experienced in teaching, which of course has a great deal to do with the fact that we cannot offer them a satisfactory salary. This has a lot to do with the fact that we are not able to offer them a satisfactory salary. In fact, we do not have the right to decide on this salary, so we can only watch the loss of quality foreign teachers without doing anything about it.*

### **Local teachers and students still face challenges in terms of cultural adaptation**

Because of the integration of foreign curricula, foreign teachers and foreign management, CFCE inevitably has the problem of cultural adaptation, which is not only manifested in the students, but also in the local teachers.

Interviewee ST-2-F talked about how during the several years of study, *"we not only had to study the curriculum of general university students in China, but also had to study the curriculum prescribed by the foreign side, and the pressure of coursework was very great, but this was not the most disturbing thing. The most difficult thing to overcome is the challenge of cultural adaptability of the course content caused by cultural differences. Of course, part of these adaptability problems may come from the differences in understanding caused by the lack of high level of our foreign language proficiency, and on the other hand, they also come from different cultural backgrounds and social concepts, it is difficult for us to achieve the understanding of some foreign things that our foreign teachers would like to have. Both teachers and we feel some helplessness and powerlessness."*

Interviewee teacher FM-2-F said that *"Cooperation in teaching and research with foreign teachers is inevitable in cooperative education, but it can be said that such cooperation is difficult. In the process of teaching, we have different perspectives and approaches to the same content, but the class time is limited and we have to reach a certain agreement to complete the course, however, this requires constant interaction from both sides, and often requires compromises, which is often not a pleasant experience."*

Teacher FM-3-F also said, *"I would like to cooperate with foreign teachers in research, but it is very difficult for both sides to cooperate in terms of research platforms and resources, and it is very difficult to cooperate on an equal footing due to the limitations of both sides and the inequality of resources. We find it quicker to do our own research, but in fact we both know that this is a waste of the resources for international cooperation."*

## **DICUSSION**

### **A. Response to the Challenges of Schooling and Strategies**

#### **Optimize enrollment pathways to ensure the quality of student sources**

As a special mode of school running, CFCEI is very different from other Chinese universities, and has strong special characteristics in terms of governance modes(Feng, 2022; Ge, 2021). However, the current governance mechanism hinders the development of CFCE. At present, CFCE, as a cooperative school-running institution, receives various restrictions from the mother university in the process of daily management because it belongs to a subordinate college of a university and does not have independent legal person rights. For example, in terms of enrollment, CFCEI is not able to cross the university's restrictions to carry out enrollment, the source of students is occupied by the parent university's enrollment targets, which has resulted in a large degree of

internal competition. In addition to competition for students, there is also competition for funds, because CFCE student fees are much higher than ordinary university fees, and this part of the income can not be exclusively shared by the parent university, so this internal competition has brought about adverse effects on the development of CRCRS. The parent university will not give CFCE too many enrollment quotas to affect its own enrollment and tuition revenue, and in order to achieve a certain balance within the same university, it will also allocate the corresponding enrollment quotas to other colleges belonging to the same university, which disperses the source of students of CFCE, especially some high-quality students. With the creation of other collaborative programs within the university, this competition at the source intensifies, which in turn leads to a further decline in the quality of the student body.

The decline in the quality of the student body has posed a very significant challenge to the development of CFCE, which is mainly manifested in a decrease in revenue. The decrease in income will lead to cuts in CFCE's investment in faculty, research, student activities, etc., which will affect the sustainable development of CFCE in the long run. On the other hand, the decrease in student population has led to a decline in the quality of student population. The original rich source of students allows CFCE to have more space in the selection of student sources. Since CFCE enters the institution through the secondary enrollment screening, the way of entering the institution through the fierce competition and screening process greatly improves the quality of the student source, allowing CFCE to obtain a higher quality of student sources, and laying a good foundation for the quality of the subsequent delivery of students to the foreign colleges and universities. Therefore, CFCE must continue to optimize enrollment pathways and ensure the quality of enrollment.

### **Innovative specialization to reduce homogeneous competition**

Outdated specialties have also become a major challenge for some CRCFS. At the beginning of the establishment of CFCE in China, most of the majors were business majors, which coincided with the rapid economic development of China for quite a long period of time after the reform and opening up, which required a large number of economic and management talents, especially those who were able to connect with foreign countries in terms of knowledge and language, which had a strong and special demand. Therefore, some CFCE which started earlier, many of them have opened business cooperative education programs. Now, due to the changes in the needs of social development, the economic growth of Chinese society no longer relies mainly on opening up to the outside world, the introduction of foreign capital, the export of processed goods as the main mode of economic growth, and after decades of development, the internationalization of economic management personnel is no longer an urgent need for the development of China's social demand for talents(Li & Eryong, 2022), so these old CFCE if you can not achieve their own transformation, then these Therefore, if these old CFCE cannot realize their own transformation, these institutions are facing the risk of declining efficiency or even stopping enrollment.

Therefore, these CFCE whose specialties are not adapted to the development needs of the country should seek transformation. In the survey and research, we found that some original business institutions have begun to explore some new specialties, such as new business, business integration. For example, the institution we are conducting research is actively exploring the opening of a business artificial intelligence major that combines artificial intelligence and business, which combines the most popular AI technology and business development, and mainly cultivates business + AI composite talents combining IT technology and business decision-making(Li & Xue, 2023; Zhang, 2020). We give full play to our original business advantages and foreign high-quality educational resources, combine with the new market demand, cultivate high-end international composite talents, and make the old CFCEI glow with new vitality through resource integration and provincial renovation on the original specialty.

### **Innovation and Enhancement of Internal Management Mechanisms:**

Through investigation and research, we found that the current CFCEI generally has the problem of internal management mechanism limiting the development, and the deep-seated reason is still the deep-seated confinement of the old management system and centralized management thinking. Modern higher education management theory has undergone several iterations, from the new institutionalism governance(Austin & Jones, 2024; Elamine, 2021), gradually to the direction of pluralistic governance theory and new public management,

while the Chinese-foreign cooperative university as a multi-principal educational institutions, the traditional institutionalism management mode is completely unsuitable for its development needs. Since CFCEI needs to coordinate the needs of Chinese universities, foreign universities, the market and its own development, the pluralistic governance system is more suitable for its development needs. Although CFCEI is a non-independent secondary college established under a Chinese university, the setting university should fully consider its special nature and special needs, and carry out a more flexible management mode rather than a one-size-fits-all convergent management; CFCEI itself is a new model of flexible allocation of educational resources, and it should be run with a more flexible management mode, or else it will not be able to play the role of optimal allocation of resources. In terms of staffing, financial expenditure and management mode, it is necessary to seek new changes and explore boldly in order to realize the healthy development of CFCEI.

Under the decentralized management mode, CFCEI has more autonomy and can be more flexible in establishing cooperative relationships with local enterprises. Specific forms of cooperation include co-built laboratories, joint R&D projects, customized training programs, etc. to jointly develop new technologies and apply them to actual production (Frost et al., 2016; Li & Xue, 2023). This not only improves the research level of universities, but also enhances the technological strength of enterprises. Meanwhile, decentralized management allows faculties and departments to design and implement more effective practical teaching programs according to their own professional characteristics and enterprise needs. By flexibly arranging internships, practical training, project cooperation and other practical aspects, students are able to come into contact with the actual working environment earlier and accumulate valuable practical experience, which greatly improves their practical ability and professionalism.

## **B. Response to Teaching Challenges and Strategies**

### **Efforts to improve foreign language teaching and enhance students' motivation to learn:**

CFCEI offer a large number of foreign language courses during the school year in China in order to achieve the slant of subsequent courses after going abroad and for students to be able to live and study fluently in a foreign language after going abroad (Han, 2023; Liao et al., 2025). These courses include language courses and specialized courses. Some schools have adopted the approach that Chinese teachers and foreign teachers are each responsible for a portion of the classes. For example, in language courses, foreign teachers are often in charge of speaking and writing, which allows students to have a better language communication environment and to learn writing in a standardized way that is more in line with the needs of foreign writing. As for reading and language exams, it will be better if experienced Chinese teachers teach the exams. Chinese teachers have more in-depth research on the exams, and some parts of the exams that are difficult for students to understand will be communicated more smoothly between Chinese teachers and students. In this way, a better learning effect can be achieved. In addition, some schools also take the language test outsourcing way, that is, the language test this part to the professional test tutoring organizations to complete, the students through their own payment of a certain amount of money or the school deducted a certain amount of tuition fees, please professional tutoring organizations to help students overcome the examination difficulties.

### **Expanding the Recruitment of Foreign Teachers through Multiple Channels:**

In the study, we found that the shortage of foreign teachers is a challenge faced by many cooperative education institutions (Liao et al., 2025; Wang, 2020). Although it is a cooperative school, the foreign partner school may not be able to send enough foreign teachers to teach in the cooperative school on time due to various reasons. Some institutions have adopted the joint recruitment method to solve the problem of shortage of foreign teachers, that is, the two partners conduct joint recruitment worldwide to recruit suitable foreign teachers to make up for the shortage of teachers. Some universities have also adopted the method of part-time teachers, hiring part-time teachers from other universities of the same type to teach some of the courses. However, on the whole, in order to ensure that the quality and teaching level of the courses meet the requirements of both sides, the own teacher resources are still the best choice. Therefore, at the beginning of the cooperation between the two sides, the courses and teachers should be matched according to the faculty situation of both sides, and the alternative programs of joint recruitment and part-time teachers can also be adopted for the temporary shortage of faculty due to other temporary reasons such as visas.



## Expanding Cultural Exchange through Multiple Ways:

Different countries and nationalities have different cultural backgrounds and logic systems due to different historical and social environments, which is one of the inevitable obstacles in the process of global communication. CFCE is one of the ways to link and break through such obstacles, and therefore will also face such problems and challenges in the first place. In the process of communication and interaction between people of different countries and nationalities, it is precisely because of the encounter with these different existences that makes such exchanges more meaningful and rewarding. China, as a socialist country, is ideologically different from the predominantly capitalist countries in terms of state system (Gong et al., 2021; Holmén, 2022). On the other hand, as an ancient oriental country, it has different living habits, language habits and thinking habits from those of western countries. Therefore, in cooperative education, Chinese students and teachers need to contact and understand Western culture through more ways to reduce all kinds of incomprehension and asymmetry caused by cultural differences (Galloway et al., 2020). Such ways are not limited to the classroom. Some schools have done some meaningful exploration. We have found that some schools regularly offer cultural experience activities, through which both sides can learn more about and understand each other's culture and customs through experience activities outside the classroom. Some institutions, before students formally go abroad to study in the foreign country, use holidays to organize students to go to the partner university to feel and learn in summer camps and other ways, so as to enhance and stimulate students' motivation to learn in class and help them understand the foreign culture. Some schools also offer short-term exchange programs to help students adapt to future learning styles through short-term study abroad and mutual recognition of credits. Of course, CFCEI faculty members also need to continuously improve their own cultural adaptation skills, through short-term study visits to foreign universities, short-term teaching trips to foreign universities, or working as teaching assistants at foreign universities, etc., to strengthen close cooperation with foreign universities in order to ensure that the content of the lectures meets the academic requirements of foreign universities as well as the academic standards of Chinese universities.

## CONCLUSION

Through in-depth interviews with CFCEI, this study reveals the challenges faced by CFCEI from different stakeholders' perspectives, and also puts forward some strategies to deal with the challenges from the perspective of literature analysis. Chinese-foreign cooperative education is still in the process of maturing and development, and the research on CFCE is still in the initial stage, so we hope that through more thinking and research from different perspectives, we can continue to promote the development of Chinese-foreign cooperative education.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge the financial support from University Technology Malaysia (R.J130000.7353.1U050) and (R.J130000.7353.4B872) under the International Grant. Opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in the material are those of authors and do not necessarily reflect the university.

## REFERENCES

1. Alam, Md. K. (2020). A systematic qualitative case study: Questions, data collection, NVivo analysis and saturation. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 16(1), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-09-2019-1825>
2. Alex, C. L. H. (2021). Internationalization of Higher Education in Southeast Asia: A Systematic Literature Review.
3. Alhabsyi, F. (2022). Semi-structured Interview: A Methodological Reflection on the Development of a Qualitative Research Instrument in Educational Studies.
4. Alpenidze, O. (2015). Conceptualizing internationalization strategies for higher education institutions.
5. Al-Shikaili, J. (2019). The Perceived Role of the International University Partners in Assuring the Quality of Teaching in Offshore Programmes: A Study of Omani Private Higher Education Institutions

- [Ed.D., The University of Liverpool (United Kingdom)]. In PQDT - Global. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2511937906/abstract/8D77CB716C648EBPQ/9>
6. Al-Youssef, J. (2009). The internationalisation of higher education institutions: A case study of a British university. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-internationalisation-of-higher-education-A-case-Al-Youssef/a71fdac8dfd867f3f02b1bc90a6741d5e14b10bf>
7. Amado Mateus, M., Guzmán Rincón, A., & Cuero Acosta, Y. A. (2023). Student experience scale: Factor analysis in higher education institutions. *Frontiers in Education*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.1057651>
8. Austin, I., & Jones, G. A. (2024). *Governance of higher education: Global perspectives, theories, and practices* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003283652>
9. Bedenlier, S., Kondakci, Y., & Zawacki-Richter, O. (2018). Two Decades of Research Into the Internationalization of Higher Education: Major Themes in the Journal of Studies in International Education (1997-2016). *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 22(2), 108–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315317710093>
10. Bekele, W. B., & Ago, F. Y. (2022). Sample Size for Interview in Qualitative Research in Social Sciences: A Guide to Novice Researchers. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, 4(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2022.3>
11. Buckner, E. (2019). The Internationalization of Higher Education: National Interpretations of a Global Model. *Comparative Education Review*, 63(3), 315–336. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703794>
12. Cai, L. (Lily), Wilkins, S., Zhao, L., & Zhang, Y. (2025). Student identity in transnational higher education: International branch campuses versus sino-foreign institutes. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 0(0), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2024.2393120>
13. Cassell, C., & Symon, G. (2004). *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. SAGE.
14. Elamine A. (2021). Political governance in higher education. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 14, Number 2, pp. 97–117. ISSN: 1755-0912. <https://doi.org/10.1525/CAA.2021.14.2.97>
15. Frost, J., Hattke, F., & Reihlen, M. (2016). Multi-level governance in universities: Strategy, structure, control. In J. Frost, F. Hattke, & M. Reihlen (Eds.), *Multi-Level Governance in Universities: Strategy, Structure, Control* (pp. 1–15). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32678-8\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32678-8_1)
16. [16] Galloway, N., Numajiri, T., & Rees, N. (2020). The ‘internationalisation’, or ‘Englishisation’, of higher education in East Asia. *Higher Education*, 80(3), 395–414. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00486-1>
17. Gong, Y. (Frank), Gao, X. (Andy), Li, M., & Lai, C. (2021). Cultural adaptation challenges and strategies during study abroad: New Zealand students in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 34(4), 417–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1856129>
18. Han, S. (2023). English medium instruction at Sino-foreign cooperative education institutions in China: Is internationalising teaching and learning possible? *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 36(1), 83–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2022.2032127>
19. Han, S., Zha, Qiang, & and Xie, J. (2023). Understanding Chinese universities’ strategic responses to the ‘double first-class’ initiative and the potential outcome on higher education diversity: An exploratory study. *Studies in Higher Education*, 48(11), 1624–1638. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2206426>
20. Holmén, J. (2022). The autonomy of higher education in finland and sweden: Global management trends meet national political culture and governance models. *Comparative Education*, 58(2), 147–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2021.2018826>
21. Hou Yanfang, & Rohayati Mohd Isa. (2024). Teaching quality assurance of Chinese-foreign cooperation education in provincial universities in western China. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 20(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v20i2.27393>
22. Iftekhhar, S. N., & Kayombo, J. J. (2015). Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCE): A policy analysis. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 5(4), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrse.2015.1323>
23. Li, J. (2021). “four branches” of internationalization of higher education in China: A policy retrospective analysis. Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-4205-0>

24. Li, J., & Eryong, X. (2022). New directions towards internationalization of higher education in China during post-COVID 19: A systematic literature review. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 54(6), 812–821. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2021.1941866>
25. Li, J., & Xue, E. (2023). Examining the Internationalization Policy of Higher Education in China: Historical Stages, Challenges, and Strategies. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 4(4), 673–686. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-04040010>
26. Liao, S. J., Zhang, L. J., & May, S. (2025). English-medium instruction (EMI) language policy and implementation in China's higher education system: Growth, challenges, opportunities, solutions, and future directions. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 0(0), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2025.2453263>
27. Liu, W. (2021). The Chinese definition of internationalisation in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 43(2), 230–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2020.1777500>
28. MOE of China. (n.d.). Information Platform for Supervision of Overseas Cooperation Education Programs. Retrieved 19 July 2025, from <https://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/news/search>
29. Nuzhat Naz, F. G. (2022). Development of Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Case Study Research. *Competitive Social Science Research Journal*, 3(2), Article 2.
30. People's Daily Overseas Edition. (2025, May 30). Blue Book of 'China's Overseas Study Development Report': Overseas students' willingness to return to China has increased. [https://edu.cnr.cn/list/20250530/t20250530\\_527189825.shtml](https://edu.cnr.cn/list/20250530/t20250530_527189825.shtml)
31. State Council. (2003). Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools. Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools. <https://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/news/index/3>
32. Wang, J. (2020). Effective strategies for developing academic English: Professional development and language outcome of Chinese-foreign cooperative education. <https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.200402.038>
33. Xue, E., & Li, J. (2023). Examining Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools During the Epidemic Period: A Macro Education Policy Analysis. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 4(4), 766–772. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-04040017>
34. Yangcheng Faction. (2024, March 25). The '2024 China Study Abroad White Paper' was released, indicating a full recovery of the study abroad market, with strong momentum in studying in the UK and Australia. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1794502165648689293&wfr=spider&for=pc>
35. Zhang, H. (2020). Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education: Facts, Challenges and Ways out.
36. Zhu, T.-T., Peng, H.-R., & Zhang, Y.-J. (2017). The influence of higher education development on economic growth: Evidence from central China. *Higher Education Policy*, 31. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-017-0047-7>