

SURVEY REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS IN HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES IN SHANDONG PROVINCE, CHINA

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ABSTRACT: *This article surveys international cooperation projects in 37 higher vocational colleges in Shandong Province, China, summarizing the most popular cooperation modes, predicting trends and needs in following years in higher vocational colleges in Shandong Province.*

KEYWORDS: international cooperation; higher vocational college; Shandong Province; trends and needs

INTRODUCTION

The writer of the paper works in a higher vocational college in Shandong Province, being in charge of international cooperation projects of the college. In order to find out how international cooperation projects could be better designed and carried out, this survey is made among 37 high quality vocational colleges in Shandong Province.

Higher vocational education in Shandong Province, China

Shandong Province, a northern province in China with the second largest population of over 0.1 billion¹, and also hometown of Confucius, the greatest philosopher and educator in ancient China, attaches great importance to education. A total number of 80 higher vocational colleges (66 public and 14 private) in Shandong Province² hold 7270 thousand students³. Given its large number, it is quite possible to get a glimpse of China's higher vocational education from that in Shandong Province.

International cooperation in higher vocational education

From the official website of Ministry of Education of China PR, international cooperation in higher vocational education could be traced back to the year 2007, when the ministry started "China-Germany Higher Vocational Teachers Training Program" and released a notice calling for applicants for the program. Following that,

¹ National Bureau of Statistics

<http://data.stats.gov.cn/search.htm?s=%E5%B1%B1%E4%B8%9C%20%20%20%E4%BA%BA%E5%8F%A3>

² [List of High Education Universities and Colleges with Admission Qualification 2020](http://edu.shandong.gov.cn/art/2020/7/7/art_11982_9274412.html), Shandong Education Department, http://edu.shandong.gov.cn/art/2020/7/7/art_11982_9274412.html

³ [Latest Data on Students Number in Higher Vocational Colleges](https://www.sohu.com/a/324254522_451178), https://www.sohu.com/a/324254522_451178

in 2011, five German automobile manufacturers and five higher vocational colleges in China launched “Chinese auto mechanic training”. In 2012, International Vocational Education Exchange Branch of China Education Association for International Exchange was established, followed by establishment of a national reform zone in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province in 2013. The year 2015 is a significant point in international cooperation development of higher vocational education. With the presence of “One Belt and One Road” initiative, international cooperation in higher vocational education is greatly encouraged. Up to mid of 2017, the number of international cooperation projects in higher education had come up to 928, according to data from Department of International Cooperation and Exchange, Ministry of Education. ⁴

Survey

In order to better understand the status quo, predict the development trend of international cooperation in higher vocational education in Shandong Province and also better design the international projects in the writer’s college, a survey is conducted.

Survey sample

37 high quality higher vocational colleges have been chosen for the survey. “Shandong High Quality Higher Vocational College Construction Project” is a project initiated in 2017 by Shandong Provincial Department of Education and Shandong Provincial Department of Finance, in order to improve quality of higher vocational education and play a leading role in Shandong Province. 16 colleges were chosen in 2017 as the first batch of construction schools, and 21 more colleges were chosen in 2018. These 37 colleges are to some degree examples for the other colleges to follow in development. Thus, it makes sense to get a glimpse into international cooperation of higher vocational education in Shandong Province through survey of these 37 colleges.

Survey method

Due to the control and prevention of COVID19, the survey is mostly conducted online. Data is collected mostly from official websites, yearly quality reports of the colleges, and online interviews.

FINDINGS

After investigation, there are some findings about international cooperation projects in these 37 colleges.

⁴ China Education Action on One Belt and One Road.

http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/moe_2082/zl_2017n/2017_zl29/201705/t20170516_304698.html

Imbalance in international cooperation of 37 colleges

The international cooperation projects are not distributed evenly in these 37 colleges. The college with the greatest number of cooperation schools has as many as over 50 cooperation schools while three colleges have none. There are also some rules regarding location of the colleges with more international cooperation projects. The colleges with more than 10 international cooperation schools are located either in coastal cities like Qingdao, Yantai and Weifang, or Jinan, capital of Shandong Province.

Popular cooperation countries and regions

These 37 colleges show obvious tendency over which countries and regions to cooperate with. Top three most popular countries are Korea, Australia and Japan. The most popular region is Taiwan. In an interview, a director of international affairs explains that Japan and Korea are popular destinations among students partly for the shorter distance and similar culture background, and partly because of their pop culture which has been a fad in the past few years, especially among young people.

Table 1. popular cooperation countries or regions

Country or region	Number of cooperation colleges
Korea	8
Australia	6
Japan	4
Taiwan	7

Australia has become one of the most popular cooperation partners with its rising influence in vocational education, especially after establishment of Australia Vocational Education Alliance, an international education management organization specializing in alliances between China and Australia. Compared with Germany, another vocational education model to most Chinese colleges, Australia has its advantage in language, given the fact that English is most often learned foreign language in China. The greatest advantages of studying in Taiwan include the same cultural identity with mainland and much lower expense.

Popular cooperation majors

Students may have tendency over which programs to study, similarly, colleges have tendency over which fields to internationalize in. Most colleges have international cooperation projects in computer related programs, which is understandable in this information age. Another two popular programs are accounting and design.

Popular cooperation forms

As most vocational colleges in China do not offer bachelor's degree program, a large proportion of students enrolling in international cooperation projects expect to get a bachelor's degree in cooperation country. Consequently, 3+1 (3 years in China and 1 year abroad) or 2+2 (2 years in China and 2 years abroad) forms are frequently seen in international cooperation projects. Another popular cooperation form is postgraduate qualifying program. It is particularly difficult for vocational college graduates to apply for postgraduate programs in most Chinese universities, which makes it reasonable to apply for postgraduate programs in other countries. The third most popular form of international cooperation is oversea internship, which is most often seen in tourism related majors. This is due to the fact that work experience is of great importance in job market and work experience with foreign ventures values more.

Factors of international cooperation work

There are several factors affecting how the international cooperation work is done, and top three of them are location, policies and the leaders' opinions. The significance of location could be seen from the fact that as many as 65% of the 37 high quality vocational colleges are located in either capital or seaside cities. In addition, it is no coincidence that the top four cities in GDP ranking list (Qingdao, Jinan, Yantai, Weifang) hold up to 46% of the 37 high quality vocational colleges. Both encouragement and mandatory policies could stimulate international cooperation work of vocational colleges. In the high quality college construction project, number and quality of international cooperation projects is one of the main indicators in college quality assessment. Two interviewees also revealed that the leaders' recognition of international cooperation projects will play a major role in the work as colleges have more autonomous rights and the leaders' opinions are usually decisive regarding the work focus.

CONCLUSION

In the following years, there could be some tendencies in international cooperation project development in higher vocational education in Shandong Province.

The number of international cooperation projects will still increase

In 2020 June, "Opinions of the Ministry of Education and other eight departments on Speeding up and Expanding the Opening up of Education in the New Era"⁵ was released. According to the document, China has become the world's largest source country of overseas students and the hottest destination of study abroad in Asia. The document also states that reform of Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools

⁵ http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s5147/202006/t20200623_467784.html

will be intensified in following years. Consequently, it is predictable that there will be an increase in number of international cooperation projects in Shandong Province.

The international cooperation forms will diversify

The survey shows that the main participants of international cooperation in higher vocational education in Shandong Province are colleges and universities. However, in “Opinions of the Ministry of Education and other eight departments on Speeding up and Expanding the Opening up of Education in the New Era”, it is specifically stated that in the field of vocational education, vocational colleges are encouraged to participate the global cooperation on production capacity along with enterprises. As a consequence, it is most likely that there will be increasing number of cooperation projects between colleges and enterprises in addition to the most often seen college-university cooperation.

There will be more other Belt and Road countries involved

The “Co-building One Belt and One Road Education Initiative”, a policy document introduced in 2016 by Chinese Ministry of Education, made it a focus of education development in cooperation with other Belt and Road countries. Following the initiative, “China Education Modernization 2035 Framework”⁶ was released in the early 2019, in which further opening the education sector to the world is listed as the ninth strategic mission. Education open-up has been a focus of work for the Ministry of Education in 2019. As stated in the framework, solid progress should be made in “One Belt One Road” education action. With encouragement of all policies, it is predictable that there will be more vocation education cooperation between China’s colleges and Belt and Road countries and more Belt and Road countries will be involved in China’s vocational education.

China’s influence in international vocational education will further enhance

The open-up of China’s vocational education has taken effect. According to the Ministry of Education, “Ruban workshop” and “Silk Road College” have become new brands in vocational education international cooperation. In the year of 2017, 351 international projects have been launched by higher vocational colleges in collaboration with Belt and Road countries. China provided academic education to nearly 6,000 students from Belt and Road countries as well as nonacademic training to over 100,000 people.⁷

The number of international students in China has been increasing steadily since 2008,

⁶ http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-02/23/content_5367987.htm

⁷http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/xw_fbh/moe_2069/xwfbh_2018n/xwfb_20181107/sfcl/201811/t20181107_353846.html

including students receiving vocational education. In 2018, 17,000 international students came to China as full-time students for higher vocational education and the Belt and Road countries have become the major source countries of international students.⁸

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Appendix

Interview outline

1. When did your college start international cooperation?
2. Do you find international cooperation necessary for development of your college?
3. How would you describe your international cooperation work now?
4. What do you think are the barriers for your international cooperation work?
5. What do you think are the potential problems for international cooperation work in higher vocational education?

⁸ <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1636910640560276809&wfr=spider&for=pc>