

OPTIMIZATION OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR SINO-FOREIGN COOPERATIVE EDUCATION UNDER HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of high-quality development becoming the core orientation of China's educational reform, Sino-foreign cooperative education has become an important form of internationalization in higher education. Ensuring the quality of such programs is crucial for maintaining educational standards and enhancing international competitiveness. Based on collaborative governance theory and quality management theory, this study adopts a systematic literature review method to analyze existing research on quality assurance in cross-border higher education and Sino-foreign cooperative education. By reviewing relevant international and Chinese literature, the study identifies key challenges in the current quality assurance system, including insufficient policy coordination, inconsistent quality standards, limited dynamic monitoring mechanisms, and weak international collaboration. On this basis, a four-dimensional collaborative quality assurance framework consisting of policy coordination, internal institutional management, third-party evaluation, and international collaboration is proposed. The framework aims to promote the transformation of Sino-foreign cooperative education from scale expansion to high-quality development and provides theoretical and policy implications for improving quality governance in transnational higher education.

Keywords: High-Quality Development, Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education, Quality Assurance System

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INTRODUCTION

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly puts forward that "we should give priority to the development of education and accelerate the construction of a high - quality education system", establishing "high - quality development" as the core strategic orientation in the field of education. As an important form of China's educational opening - up, Sino-foreign cooperative education in higher education has formed a development pattern of "institutions and projects" since the implementation of the Regulations on Sino-foreign Cooperative Education. Up to now, there are 361 Sino-foreign cooperative education institutions and 1367 projects at all levels from undergraduate to postgraduate in higher education approved nationwide, which have played an important role in cultivating international talents and introducing high - quality educational resources.(Lin & Liu, 2007). However, behind the expansion of scale, there are hidden quality concerns. Some projects have problems such as "emphasizing approval over supervision", "insufficient substantial foreign resources" and "disconnection between internal and external quality standards", which are obviously different from the requirements of "high - quality development"(Wang & Guo, 2023). In this context, constructing a quality assurance system suitable for high - quality development is not only a practical need to standardize the order of running schools and improve the level of running schools, but also a core path to promote the transformation of educational opening - up to "improving quality and efficiency", which has important theoretical and practical value. This study follows a logical framework of "problem identification – system construction – path optimization". It analyzes relevant policy documents and academic research, defines core concepts and theoretical foundations, examines the experiences and deficiencies of existing quality assurance practices, and proposes strategies for optimizing the system. At the same time, this study is based on a literature review of existing academic research and policy documents related to cross-border higher education and Sino-foreign cooperative education. Through synthesizing relevant studies, the research identifies key issues in the current quality assurance system and provides theoretical support for the proposed framework.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a literature-based analytical approach to examine the quality assurance system of Sino-foreign cooperative education in higher education. Literature review is widely used in educational research to synthesize existing knowledge and identify key development trends in a specific research field(Nguyen et al., 2025). The literature search was conducted in major academic databases including Web of Science, Scopus, CNKI, and Google Scholar. The search keywords included "cross-border higher education", "Sino-foreign cooperative education", and "quality assurance in higher education". The time range of the literature mainly covered studies published between 2000 and 2025. Relevant studies were screened based on their relevance to higher education internationalization and quality assurance governance. These studies provide important theoretical and empirical references for analyzing the development of quality assurance mechanisms. The collected literature includes journal articles, academic research reports, and policy-related studies on international educational cooperation and quality governance. Through comparative analysis and thematic synthesis, this study summarizes the current development status, governance mechanisms, and major challenges of the quality assurance system for Sino-foreign cooperative education. Based on the analysis of existing literature and policy documents, this research further proposes a four-dimensional collaborative framework for optimizing the quality assurance system under the guidance of high-quality development.

CORE CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Definition of Core Concepts

High-quality development: "High-quality development" is not a native term in education; rather, it is a derivative concept from economics and has its own specific connotations (Yang, 2026). High-quality development in the field of education emphasizes "Intrinsic improvement", which is manifested in the optimization of educational resource allocation, the improvement of talent training quality and the enhancement of the ability to serve national strategies. Its core is "sustainable development centered on quality". Cooperative Education Programs between China and Foreign Countries: The "Provisional Regulations on Cooperative Education Programs" issued by the former Ministry of Education of China on January 26, 1995, clearly expounds the nature, significance, and principles of cooperative education programs. It clearly states that "cooperative education programs refer to the cooperation between foreign legal entities, individuals, and relevant international organizations and Chinese legal educational institutions and other social organizations within China to establish educational institutions that mainly recruit Chinese citizens" (Wang & Li, 2013). Quality assurance system: It refers to the sum of systems, mechanisms, standards and processes established to ensure that the quality of education reaches the preset goals, covering multiple links such as policy norms, process control, assessment and feedback.

Theoretical Foundations

Collaborative governance theory: It emphasizes that multiple subjects (government, universities, society, international organizations) achieve common goals through the division of rights and responsibilities and resource integration, providing theoretical support for building a "multi-participant" quality assurance system. Total quality management theory: It advocates quality control from the whole process of "input - process - output", requiring quality assurance to cover all links such as enrollment, teaching and graduation, which is in line with the "whole - process quality concept" of high - quality development. Sustainable development theory: It emphasizes the long-term and coordination of development, providing guidance for the dynamic optimization and international adaptability of the quality assurance system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International research on cross-border higher education has developed rapidly in recent decades, particularly in relation to governance mechanisms and quality assurance frameworks. Scholars have pointed out that the globalization of higher education has led to increasing mobility of students, institutions, and educational programs across national borders, which poses new challenges for quality regulation and policy coordination. Studies by Knight and De Wit emphasize that transnational education requires multi-level governance mechanisms to ensure academic standards and institutional accountability. More recent research has further highlighted the importance of collaborative quality assurance systems involving governments, higher education institutions, and international organizations. These studies suggest that effective quality governance in cross-border higher education should integrate national regulatory frameworks with international quality assurance standards, thereby promoting transparency, comparability, and international recognition of educational programs. Building on these international discussions, research on quality assurance in cross-border higher education has attracted increasing attention from scholars and policymakers. Recent studies have explored the governance structures and evaluation mechanisms of quality assurance systems in international higher education. For example, Carvalho et al. (2024) analyzed the role of quality assurance agencies in regulating cross-border higher education in Europe and emphasized the importance of coordinated governance mechanisms. Similarly, Ruangying and Chavisschinda (2022) pointed out that the establishment of clear regulatory frameworks is essential for ensuring the quality and credibility of cross-border education programs. Existing studies have explored

different aspects of governance mechanisms, including the introduction of high-quality international educational resources, policy regulation, and institutional quality management. Empirical studies also highlight that effective internal quality assurance mechanisms play a crucial role in improving teaching quality and program sustainability in Sino-foreign cooperative education (Yanfang & Mohd Isa, 2024). For example, Lin & Liu (2007) discussed the rational introduction and effective utilization of high-quality higher education resources in Sino-foreign cooperative education. More recent studies have examined governance challenges and optimization paths for cooperative education programs under the background of educational modernization (Wang & Guo, 2023). However, existing studies still exhibit several limitations. First, most studies focus on individual aspects of quality assurance, lacking an integrated analytical framework. Second, there is insufficient attention to dynamic monitoring mechanisms in the context of high-quality development. Third, international collaborative governance remains underexplored in Sino-foreign cooperative education. Other scholars have also emphasized the potential risks associated with introducing foreign educational resources and the importance of establishing effective supervision mechanisms to ensure educational quality (Wu, 2021). These studies provide important insights into the development of quality assurance systems in Sino-foreign cooperative education. However, existing research often focuses on specific governance issues, and relatively few studies propose an integrated framework for improving the overall quality assurance system.

CURRENT SITUATION AND PROBLEMS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR SINO-FOREIGN COOPERATIVE EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Development Status and Existing Assurance Framework

Development achievements: After a long period of development, China-foreign cooperative education has become an important method and effective channel for cultivating high-level international talents, promoting comprehensive educational reforms, and facilitating cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. The approval, management, evaluation and exit mechanisms for cooperative education have been continuously improved. (Xinhuanet, 2024). **Existing assurance framework:** At the policy level, with the Regulations on Sino-foreign Cooperative Education and the Measures for the Approval and Administration of Sino-foreign Cooperative Education Programs in Regular Institutions of Higher Education as the core, a policy chain of "approval - supervision - evaluation" has been formed (Lin & Liu, 2013); At the school level, most institutions have established internal institutions such as teaching committees and quality monitoring offices to carry out curriculum review, teaching evaluation and other work; For third - party evaluation, the Ministry of Education has entrusted institutions such as the Service Center for Scholarly Exchange of the Ministry of Education to carry out quality certification, and some provinces and cities have introduced social evaluation institutions to participate in monitoring.

Prominent Problems Under the Guidance of High - Quality Development

Insufficient policy coordination: The connection between central and local policies is not smooth, and some localities have vague implementation of the specific requirements of "high - quality development"; Differences between Chinese and foreign laws and regulations lead to conflicts in the implementation of quality standards, such as credit recognition and degree awarding rules (Altbach, 2006). As the practice of cooperative education between Chinese universities and foreign universities continues to deepen, some of the current regulations and their supporting implementation measures are not well-suited to the needs of cooperative education in Chinese universities in the new era. Some rules and regulations do not fully match the actual educational practices (Cheng, 2024).

Unified quality standards: There is a lack of core quality indicators suitable for international talent training, such as standards for cross - cultural ability training and the proportion of international curriculum certification; Some projects apply foreign standards, ignoring local needs, or are overly localized, losing their international characteristics. Lack of dynamic monitoring mechanism: Most of the existing evaluations are "post - acceptance", lacking real - time monitoring of the teaching process, teacher level and student development; Data collection is scattered, and a unified national quality database has not been formed. Insufficient depth of international collaboration: The enthusiasm of foreign parties to participate in quality control varies greatly. In some projects, foreign parties only provide curriculum resources and do not participate in teaching management in depth; The international third - party evaluation is not widely recognized, and the quality results are difficult to obtain wide international recognition(Lin, 2018).

CONSTRUCTION FRAMEWORK OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF HIGH - QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

Construction Goals and Principles

Core goals: To achieve "controllable quality, comparable standards, distinctive characteristics and international recognition", and support the transformation of Sino-foreign cooperative education from "scale expansion" to "connotative development". Construction principles: The principle of policy adaptability: docking with the national high - quality development strategy and educational opening - up policies; The principle of multi - collaboration: integrating the forces of the government, universities, society, international organizations and other parties; The principle of dynamic adjustment: establishing an optimization mechanism that changes with the practice of running schools and international education trends; The principle of international comparability: quality standards are in line with internationally accepted rules to improve international recognition.

Four-Dimensional Integrated System Framework Design

Policy guarantee dimension: At the national level, relevant policies are issued to clarify core quality indicators, such as the proportion of core foreign courses and the proportion of Chinese and foreign joint teaching teachers; At the local level, a provincial quality assurance coordination mechanism is established to formulate implementation rules according to regional characteristics, such as the internationalization needs of coastal areas and the discipline complementary needs of central and western regions; For international policy connection, promote the establishment of quality standard mutual recognition mechanisms with major cooperative countries to reduce legal conflicts. Internal quality control dimension: For input control, strictly audit the qualifications of foreign cooperative universities, which must have international certification qualifications, establish a "double appointment and double review" system for Chinese and foreign teachers. Foreign teachers must pass the Chinese teaching ability certification, and Chinese teachers must have cross - cultural teaching ability; For process control, construct the whole - process quality standards of "curriculum - teaching - research", and implement the "bilingual teaching quality evaluation scale" and "cross - cultural practice credit certification system"; For output control, establish a graduate development tracking mechanism, and incorporate the employment rate, international further study rate and employer satisfaction into the core indicators of quality evaluation. Third-party evaluation dimension: For domestic third parties, cultivate professional educational evaluation institutions and develop a "high-quality development evaluation index system", including indicators such as policy implementation, resource input and quality achievement; For international third parties, In the West, assessment and accreditation have become the most widely used external guarantee method for educational quality.(Knight & De Wit, 2018), promote cooperation with institutions

such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, and introduce international certification standards. International collaboration dimension: Establish a Sino-foreign joint quality committee, which is composed of the management of Chinese and foreign universities, academic experts and industry representatives, to jointly formulate quality standards and evaluation rules; Promote resource sharing and quality co - supervision: foreign parties deeply participate in curriculum design, teacher training and quality evaluation; Establish a transnational quality monitoring platform to share teaching data and evaluation results in real time.

OPTIMIZATION PATH OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Improve the Policy Coordination and Standard Unification Mechanism Establish a "national - local - university" three - level policy linkage platform, and regularly carry out policy interpretation and implementation feedback; Clarify the "minimum standards and characteristic indicators" in key areas such as curriculum, teachers and evaluation, and allow institutions to develop differently within the standard framework(Zhang & He, 2023). Build a Dynamic Quality Monitoring and Feedback System Build a national unified quality database for Sino-foreign cooperative education, integrate data on enrollment, teaching, employment, etc., and use big data technology to realize real - time early warning of quality risks; Implement the "annual quality report" system, requiring institutions to disclose quality data and accept social supervision. Strengthen international collaboration and internationalization of assessment, incorporate the depth of foreign participation in quality control into the review indicators of educational qualifications, and activate an early warning mechanism for foreign partners who have not been involved in substantive management for a long time. At the same time, we should actively participate in the construction of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and play our own role to safeguard our country's vital interests in international education trade.(Wu, 2021). Enhance the core competitiveness of teaching staff and course quality, introduce the best teaching resources from partners as much as possible, gradually improve the professional and foreign language proficiency of Chinese teachers through training, further education and other means, and gradually cultivate a high-level teaching staff for Sino-foreign cooperative education (Zhu et al., 2016), establish a joint training base for Chinese and foreign teachers, Carry out specialized training on cross-cultural teaching ability, international curriculum design, etc. Implement the "internationalization certification System for Courses", and core courses must pass joint reviews by China and foreign countries to ensure "international standards and local adaptation".

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Under the guidance of high-quality development, the construction of the quality assurance system for Sino-foreign cooperative education in higher education needs to break through the traditional "single supervision" model and turn to the four - dimensional collaboration of "policy - school - third party - international". The system framework proposed in this paper provides a path to solve the current problems such as inconsistent quality standards, lagging monitoring and low international recognition by clarifying core quality indicators, strengthening dynamic monitoring and promoting international collaboration. Future research can further deepen the subdivided fields such as "digital quality assurance", such as the application of blockchain technology in credit recognition, and "regional characteristic quality standards", such as the differentiated guarantee of cooperative education with countries along the "the Belt and Road", so as to promote the continuous optimization of the system and provide more accurate support for the high - quality development of educational opening - up. The findings also provide policy implications for improving governance mechanisms of transnational higher education in

developing regions and contribute to the broader discussion on global quality assurance in higher education.

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