

The Implementation and Evaluation of Online Joint Program for Masters Between China and Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Abstract: In the context of Belt and Road cooperation, China and the central and eastern European countries have been developing the cooperation under the frame of “17+1” multilateral cooperation mechanism, with remarkable outcome achieved. With the increasing exchanges and cooperation in the fields of economy and trade, education, humanities and so on, the number of Chinese-funded enterprises in central and eastern European countries has been increasing, the demand of international integrated talents with strong cross-cultural communication ability is on the rise. This paper aims to find a resolution of cultivating qualified talents with the capacity in both cross-cultural communication and academic majors, by carrying out a study on the joint master program between two higher educational institutions of China and eastern Europe. Tianjin University of Technology and Education of China together with University of Banja Luka in Bosnia-Herzegovina has carried out an online joint program for masters majoring in economics and trade with mutual recognition of academic credits. The study evaluated the result of the joint program through various interviews and data analyses, which showed good an outcome in promoting mutual understanding and academic major improvement. The paper described in detail the profits of the program for the students, the teachers and universities from both sides and then further listed the future cooperation strategies and steps from the aspects of governments, universities and faculties, etc. Hope this study can provide a good example of joint talent-cultivation for the higher educational institutions between China and the central and eastern European countries, thus providing talent support for the cooperation between China and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and even for the development of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Keywords: Belt and Road, Online Joint Program, Mutual Recognition of Credits

1. Introduction

1.1. Cooperation Between China and the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC)

In the context of Belt and Road cooperation, China has actively carried out extensive cooperation with CEEC and formed the “17+1” multilateral cooperation mechanism. Over the past nine years, the cooperation mechanism between China and CEEC has been improving day by day with fruitful results. [1]

With the deepening of Belt and Road initiative, China’s cooperation with CEEC in the political, economic, cultural and educational fields is also strengthening. [2] As more and more Chinese-funded enterprises enter CEEC, economic and trade cooperation requires talents not only with professional

knowledge in the field of economic and trade, but also with relevant language skills and understanding of Chinese national condition and culture, i.e. integrated talents with strong cross-cultural communicative abilities. [3]

1.2. Cooperation Between China and BiH

On June 26th, 2002, the Chinese government and the Council of Ministers of BiH signed an Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, aiming at strengthening the friendly relation between the two countries and promoting bilateral cooperation in the cultural field. [4] Thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative and China-CEEC cooperation, China and BiH enjoy friendship and mutual trust. The completion and successful operation of the Stannari

Thermal Power Station has become a model of cooperation between China and BiH. [5] At the same time, BiH also signed a concession agreement with China on the construction of the Banja Luka prijedor Highway. In addition, the two countries will also work together to build a hospital in Doboi city of BiH, where Chinese companies will install the most modern equipment. Like the Chinese people, the Bih people believe that different cultures should respect each other, exchange and learn from each other. In 2011, the Chinese Language Department of East Sarajevo University was established. In 2015, the first Confucius Institute in BiH, Confucius Institute at University of Sarajevo, was officially inaugurated. [6] The second Confucius Institute, jointly established by Tianjin University of Technology and Education (TUTE) and University of Banja Luka (UBL) in BiH, was inaugurated in February 2019. Taking Confucius Institute as a platform, the two universities have carried out deep cooperation and exchanges to serve the Belt and Road initiative and promote the friendship between two peoples. In 2010, UBL was approved to open the Chinese-language major at undergraduate level. A Confucius Classroom in the local Grammar school was set up in 2020. From March 2021 to January 2022, the two universities carried out the online joint program for Chinese and BiH postgraduate students, with mutual recognition of credits, aiming to cultivate qualified international interdisciplinary talents for cooperation between China and BiH, and CEEC.

2. Implementation of the Online Joint Program

The online joint program aims to help the master students improve their professional knowledge, broaden their international vision, improve their cross-cultural communication skills, and lay a good foundation for their future career development. The two universities designed specialized courses for program students to learn from each other through economic and trade seminars and lectures, and to learn China-CEEC business cooperation mode, "17+1" cooperation mechanism, Belt and Road initiative, China and CEEC historical background, such as social, cultural, political, economic, religion, traditional customs and so on, aiming at improving their language communicative ability, intercultural communication ability and practical ability, making them become highly qualified international talents and promoting the cooperation in the fields of education, culture and trade between two countries.

Affected by the epidemic of COVID-19, the joint master program was carried out online for one academic year. A total of 8 courses are offered by both parties, 4 by each party, and credits are recognized by each other. In addition, lectures on business cooperation models between China and CEEC, the "17+1" cooperation mechanism, the Belt and Road Initiative and China's national conditions were also held. To make sure the smooth progress of the program, experts from both sides

contacted for many times, determined the courses to be taught, and the teaching software in the form of Zoom or Tencent conference.

2.1. Courses Carried out by Two Universities

Table 1. Courses and modules carried out by two universities.

International finance
Topic 1: QE and taper in the U.S. monetary policy: mechanism and effects
Topic 2: Digital currency: emergence and development
Supply chain Management
Topic 1: Remanufacturing Supply Chain Management
Topic 2: Social Loafing in Online Brand Communities
Human resource Management
Topic 1: Managing Human Resources
Topic 2: Human Resource Department and its Professionals
E-commerce Management
Topic 1: Management of Customer Relationship in the Internet era
Topic 2: Social, Mobile, and Local Marketing
Managerial Skills
Topic 1: Interpersonal Communication
Topic 2: Presentation skills
Strategic Decision Policy
Topic 1: Strategic Decision and the process
Topic 1: Main factors influencing Strategic Decision
Customer Management in the Context of Internet
Topic 1: New features of customers in the context of Internet
Topic 2: Challenges and opportunities for customer management
Presentation Skills
Topic 1: Categories and content of presentations
Topic 2: How to deliver presentations

In addition to the above major courses, special presentations were also held by the two universities to introduce the achievements of the Belt and Road Initiative, the "17+1" cooperation mechanism and China-BiH cooperation.

2.2. Implementation of the Joint Program

During the implementation of the program, teachers and students of the two universities showed great enthusiasm. A total of 15 master students from TUTE and 10 from UBL participated in the program. The program lasted for 24 weeks, with 3 hours of online teaching every week. The two sides had 144 teaching hours in total, and each school undertook 72 hours. Each class consisted of courses teaching with idea-exchange and discussion interaction. The online media are Tencent conference and Zoom, which was held every Saturday from 15:30 to 18:30 Beijing time. The courses were taught in English.

3. Evaluation of the Joint Program and Suggestions for Cooperation

3.1. Evaluation of the Online Joint Program

In the end of 2021, the two universities conducted an evaluation of the implementation of the program, interviewed

the teachers who participated in the program, and issued questionnaires to the program master students, collecting relevant feedback information based on the characteristics and advantages of the program and analyzed the collected data. The collected information and data are sorted out. 96% of the teachers and students gave high appraisal of the program, thinking it excellent and the rest 4% thought it good.

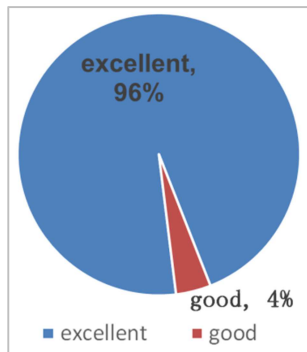


Figure 1. Evaluation of the program.

The feedback of the project effect and evaluation is as follows:

3.1.1. The International Visions of Program Students Were Broadened

The program students from both parties reported that they had expanded their professional knowledge by participating in the exchange program, and increased their knowledge of national conditions, culture, language, and education of both countries. Master students from TUTE expressed that they had little knowledge and contact with CEEC before, let alone "17+1" cooperation. After one year of study of the exchange program, they gained more understanding of BiH and CEEC, as well as the cooperation between China and CEEC. As for the academic courses offered in BiH, they learned a lot of knowledge that could not be learned in China, and their international visions were broadened. Amazed at the achievements of the Belt and Road Initiative, they were encouraged to participate in building a community of shared future for mankind. The students from BiH said that they knew little about China and they once even refused the chances of scholarships to study in China because they did not know China and did not have the courage to come to China. Through this year's study and exchange, they gained more understanding of the achievements made in the past 40 years after China's reform and opening-up, as well as deep understanding of China's national conditions, economic development and traditional Chinese culture. The mastery of professional knowledge also exceeded their expectations. They expressed that he would definitely create opportunities to study in China in the future and hoped to become a messenger and bridge of friendship between China and BiH.

3.1.2. Introducing Advanced Teaching Resources, Both Sides Promoted Their Curriculum

The online joint master program adopted academic credit

recognition. Before the program, the deans and experts of the school of Economics from both sides conducted online communication for many times to study each other's advantageous courses and determined the professional courses to be undertaken by both parties, so as to learn from each other and adopt advanced teaching concepts. The Chinese teachers said that UBL had a flexible school-enterprise cooperation model, and the training programs effectively integrated professional contents in business management and interpersonal communication. Meanwhile, they analyzed the trends and prospects of the current international trade system, so that they had a better understanding of the international trend of development. The two sides have incorporated the advantages of the partner into their own programs, benefiting teachers and students from both sides.

3.1.3. The Communication Skills of the Program Students Were Improved

Through participating in this exchange program, both Chinese teachers and students said that they had improved their English communication skills and English listening and speaking abilities. The Chinese students expressed that they had more understanding of cross-cultural communication and had more courage to open their mouths to communicate in English. Students from BiH said that through listening to lectures and participating in various activities of Confucius Institute, they had gained more understanding of Chinese and could even speak some simple Chinese. [7] They said that they would continue to learn Chinese in Confucius Institute and actively participate in some cultural exchange activities.

3.1.4. The Cooperation Between Two Universities Was Deepened

Through this exchange program, the cooperation between the two universities has been deepened. In the future, more in-depth cooperation on multiple levels on the platform of Confucius Institute will be carried out. In terms of disciplines and specialties, the cooperation can be expanded to engineering, art, literature and education, etc. Courses can be extended to undergraduate courses. The Chinese side is considering opening the Serbian language and sending volunteers who understand the Serbian language to work in the Confucius Institute at UBL.

3.1.5. Cooperation at Government Level Was Promoted

From the establishment of the Confucius Institute at UBL to the implementation of this exchange program, the governments of both sides have attached great support and assistance. The vice Mayor of Tianjin Municipality attended the opening ceremony of Confucius Institute at UBL. [8] The Mayor of Banja Luka, BiH visited Tianjin. Minister of Education and Minister of Science and Technology of BiH led a delegation to Tianjin to attend Davos Forum and visited TUTE. The implementation of this program has been fully promoted and supported by both governments, to serve the Belt and Road Initiative. [9]

3.2. Suggestions for Future Cooperation

3.2.1. Strengthen Governmental Dialogue Mechanism to Design for Future Cooperation

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, leaders of both countries have expressed several times their firm will to work together in times of difficulty. The cooperation in fighting against the epidemic fully reflects the friendly relationship between two countries and the profound friendship between two peoples. China is ready to work with BiH to further strengthen pragmatic cooperation and people-to-people exchanges and push for all-round development of the bilateral relation. The two governments can strengthen the dialogue mechanism and make a top-level design for the next step of cooperation. [10]

3.2.2. Deepen the Cooperation Between Two Universities

The implementation of this master joint program lays a foundation for all-round cooperation between the two universities in the future. School leaders from both sides should strengthen exchanges, communication and visits. Affected by the epidemic, they can carry out "online dialogues" on a regular basis and attach importance to the exchanges and cooperation between the two schools. With the support of TUTE, UBL has set up an undergraduate Major in Chinese language, which will train more local Chinese teachers and contribute to the development of international Chinese education in the local area. China considers providing various types of long-term and short-term scholarships and opportunities for BiH students to study in China, so that more young BiH people can learn about China, and promote bilateral exchanges and friendship between two peoples. [11]

3.2.3. Establish an Innovative Collaborative Mechanism

Strengthen the research on the characteristics of higher education, take the joint graduate program as a basis, promote the international cooperation in higher education personnel training mechanism, and create the cooperative innovation cooperative mechanism. On this basis, the mechanism of international cooperation and exchange in higher education between China and BiH can be established to promote the development and exchange of international cooperation in education between two countries. [12]

3.2.4. Explore Cooperation Between China and CEEC

In the context of the Belt and Road Initiative implementation and cooperation platform, the "17+1" cooperation mechanism aims to promote trade and investment, educational exchanges and cooperation between China and CEEC, and to strengthen the Belt and Road Initiative with the development strategies of each country. [13] The implementation of this program can promote exchange and mutual understanding between Chinese and BiH youths and promote the friendship between two peoples, providing an example for the joint cooperation programs and significance for reference to develop the educational exchanges and cooperation between China and CEECs. With the efforts made to promote the cooperation between China

and CEEC, the friendship can be improved, the Belt and Road Initiative can be strengthened and a human community with a shared future can be promoted. [14]

4. Conclusion

Under the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, Tianjin University of Technology and Education of China and University of Banja Luka of BiH adjusted the joint program of masters from offline to online cooperation. Although it was carried out online, the research showed that the outcome was more beneficial and fruitful than the original expectation. Firstly, the program saved the cost of assigning the program master students to the partner university to study as expected. Secondly, more students participated in and were benefited from the program. Originally totally 10 students were planned to attend the program and actually 25 students from both sides in the joint program. Thirdly the cooperation online made it flexible and convenient for the two universities to put the program into practice, for it reduced the possibility of being infected by the COVID-19 pandemic of the program teachers and students. But the online cooperation had some disadvantages compared with the offline cooperation, which was that the program students could not experience the foreign culture by immersing in the native environment with zero distance. Generally speaking, the joint program is successful by cultivating the students with international visions and academic improvement, who can be more suitable for the talent demand of the current international society to promote the development of the human community with a shared future. [15] Thus we can say the cooperation and exchanges between China and CEEC can be expanded and explored. At the same time, BiH can also expand cooperation and exchanges with other universities in China to achieve a virtuous cycle and maximize the promotion of bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms.

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