

Exploration on the Promotion of Nursing Education Faculty in Sino-foreign Cooperative Education under the Background of Hainan Free Trade Port: A Case Study between Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England

Xinmei Ju, Caihong Zhang, Guoguo Li, Jianghua Wan, Hua Zhang*

Hainan Medical University, Haikou 571199, Hainan, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of accelerating globalization and the robust development of the Hainan Free Trade Port, the promotion of the nursing education faculty in the joint program between Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England has emerged as a crucial means of enhancing regional nursing education and cultivating internationally oriented nursing talents. This paper aims to explore the requirements for nursing education faculty in the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port, analyze the current situation and challenges in faculty promotion, summarize the main achievements, and propose strategies and suggestions for further optimizing faculty promotion. By strengthening the promotion of a faculty that aligns with international standards, Hainan Medical University has not only improved teaching quality and research levels but also will supply a large number of high-quality, international-oriented nursing talents for the development of the nursing industry in the Hainan Free Trade Port and across the country. Taking the nursing education joint program between Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England as an example, this paper delves into the current situation, strategies, achievements, and challenges in the promotion of the nursing education faculty in Sino-foreign cooperative education. By summarizing the practical experiences of both sides in faculty selection, training, and teaching cooperation, it aims to provide references for other Sino-foreign cooperative education projects.

Keywords: Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools; Nursing education; Faculty promotion; Internationalization; Teaching quality

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1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, the internationalization of higher education has become an irreversible trend. Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools, as an important form of higher education internationalization, not only promotes the international sharing of educational resources but also drives the exchange and integration of educational concepts and teaching methods. As China's opening-up pattern continues to expand, nursing education, an essential part of the medical and health undertakings, faces unprecedented development opportunities and challenges. The Hainan Free Trade Port, as one of the major national strategic deployments, has put forward higher requirements for the demand for nursing talents in its construction and development. In this context, Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England launched a joint program, aiming to cultivate nursing talents with an international perspective and innovative spirit for the Hainan Free Trade Port and the whole country by introducing high-quality international educational resources. Nursing education, as an important part of medical education, is directly influenced in terms of the quality of nursing talent training by the teaching level and internationalization level of its faculty. As the Sino-foreign cooperative education model enters a period of rapid development, the internationalization of higher education has become a new topic of great concern in the field of domestic higher education. Faculty promotion and management serve as the basic support for ensuring the quality of Sino-foreign cooperative education and are also the core of running schools^[1]. Therefore, strengthening the promotion of the nursing education faculty in Sino-foreign cooperative education is of great significance.

2. Background of the joint program between Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England

2.1. Requirements for the nursing education faculty in the construction of the Hainan free trade port

2.1.1. Demand for international talents

The construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port has attracted a large number of domestic and foreign enterprises and institutions. There is an urgent need for nursing talents with cross-cultural communication skills and knowledge of international nursing standards. Therefore, the nursing education faculty must have an international perspective and literacy, enabling them to guide students in mastering international nursing knowledge and skills and adapting to the nursing work environment in the context of globalization.

2.1.2. Demand for high-quality talents

With the continuous development of medical technology and the increasing health demands of the people, nursing work is gradually moving towards specialization and refinement. The nursing education faculty must possess solid professional knowledge, excellent nursing skills, and good humanistic qualities, so as to cultivate high-quality nursing talents with a high sense of responsibility, love, and patience.

2.1.3. Demand for innovative talents

Under the guidance of the innovation-driven development strategy, the nursing education faculty also needs to have innovative awareness and capabilities. They should be able to guide students to pay attention to the cutting-edge trends and hot issues in the nursing field, conduct scientific research and technological innovation, and contribute wisdom and strength to the development of the nursing industry^[2,3].

2.2. Current situation and challenges in the promotion of the nursing education faculty

2.2.1. Overview of the current situation

In recent years, Hainan Medical University has achieved remarkable results in the promotion of the nursing education faculty. Through measures such as introducing and cultivating outstanding teachers and strengthening exchanges and cooperation with internationally renowned institutions, a faculty with a reasonable structure, excellent quality, and an international perspective has been initially formed^[4]. At the same time, the school also focuses on improving teachers' teaching abilities and research levels, encouraging teachers to participate in domestic and international academic exchanges and cooperation projects, which provides strong support for the development of nursing education.

2.2.2. Challenges faced

However, there are still some challenges in the promotion of the nursing education faculty in the joint program. First, the degree of internationalization needs to be improved. Although the school has introduced some foreign teachers and teachers with overseas study backgrounds, overall, the degree of internationalization is still not high enough to fully meet the demand for international nursing talents in the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port. Second, there is a shortage of high-level teachers^[5]. With the continuous development of nursing education and the increasing demand for reform and innovation, the shortage of high-level teachers has become one of the important factors restricting the development of nursing education. Third, the faculty promotion mechanism needs to be improved. In the process of faculty promotion, issues such as how to establish a scientific and reasonable incentive mechanism and evaluation system and how to promote teachers' professional development and growth still need to be further explored and resolved.

Based on this, Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England began to explore cooperation in running schools in 2019. With the strong support of the Hainan Provincial Government, the Sino-foreign cooperative education institution jointly established by the two universities was officially approved by the Ministry of Education in July 2022 (Approval No.: MOE46UKA02DNR20222305N). This project aims to enhance the internationalization level of China's nursing education by introducing high-quality foreign educational resources. The two sides have jointly set up undergraduate and master's degree programs in nursing and developed talent training plans and teaching plans^[6].

One-third of the faculty in the joint program comes from the UK, one-third is recruited globally, and one-third is selected from outstanding teachers of Hainan Medical University. This diverse faculty structure provides a strong talent guarantee for the development of nursing education. However, how to achieve "homogenization" of the faculty has also become a challenge. In response to this challenge, for British teachers, the cooperative institution mainly organizes pre-class collective lesson-planning. By taking the opportunity of communication between teachers from both sides, the characteristics and background of higher nursing education in Hainan Medical University are introduced. An "Introduction Week" is also set up before classes to enhance the mutual understanding between British teachers and students and help British teachers understand Chinese culture and the characteristics of Chinese students, paving the way for the smooth implementation of teaching. For globally recruited teachers, the key is how to make good use of them in the "local context". Currently, these teachers mainly teach public English and professional English. On this basis, a "one-to-one" assistance plan is established based on majors, courses, and personal interests. They assist each other with the selected teachers of Hainan Medical University in English and professional courses, making progress together to serve the cultivation of students in the joint program^[7].

For the one-third of the faculty selected from Hainan Medical University, the key point is how to cultivate them to have an international perspective, evidence-based teaching concepts, and the ability to conduct fluent English-medium teaching and guidance, so as to achieve the goal of jointly cultivating students^[8]. To ensure the smooth implementation of the cooperation project and lay a solid foundation for the faculty, both sides have invested a lot of energy in faculty promotion and formed a unique mechanism for selecting, training, and managing Chinese faculty.

3. Strategies for the promotion of the teaching staff team

3.1. Strict selection criteria for teachers

To ensure teaching quality, Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England have jointly developed strict faculty selection criteria. Specifically, candidates need to meet the following conditions:

- (1) Fluent in English: They should have worked in the field of nursing teaching for more than five years and possess good English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, enabling them to teach professional or basic professional courses in English without barriers^[9].
- (2) High academic level: They should hold a doctoral degree or a professional title above associate senior level. Outstanding lecturers who have won national-level English teaching awards are also eligible. They should have published SCI papers in the nursing field or have long-term experience in English-medium teaching with good results, demonstrating high academic attainments and research capabilities.
- (3) Overseas background: Those with overseas work or study experience are preferred, as they can better understand and integrate into foreign teaching concepts and methods^[10].

3.2. Systematic teacher training programme

For selected faculty, both sides have developed systematic training programs aimed at enhancing their teaching abilities, cross-cultural communication skills, and research levels. The training content includes:

- (1) Language training: According to the language test (internal test) conducted by the Language Center of the University of the West of England for all faculty, English language training courses covering all aspects of teaching are specifically offered to address the insufficient English proficiency of some teachers, so as to improve their English teaching abilities.
- (2) Teaching training: The integration of Chinese and Western teaching concepts is both a highlight and a difficulty^[11]. The cooperative institution invites well-known domestic and foreign education experts to conduct training on teaching methods, teaching design, and teaching evaluation, helping teachers master advanced teaching concepts and techniques. Based on the English test scores, outstanding students are selected to participate in the PGCert LTHE (Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education) training organized by the University of the West of England. After completing this module, students are required to, based on their practical backgrounds and relevant reference materials:
 - (a) Critically evaluate teaching research suitable for their roles and apply it to their academic practice and research;
 - (b) Critically engage with and apply general and subject-specific learning and teaching theories to their practice;
 - (c) Create diverse learning, teaching, and evaluation opportunities at the module level to inspire, engage, and help students progress;

- (d) Critically reflect on their learning journey as learners, the effectiveness of teaching, and other forms of feedback with reference to students' responses;
 - (e) Provide evidence-based practice methods based on values, including a critical understanding of inclusive planning for different groups, equality of opportunity, and how students' living environments affect their well-being and achievements;
 - (f) Prove and explain their participation in appropriate academic and professional practices and cooperation with peers^[12].
- (3) Cultural exchange: Teachers are organized to participate in cultural and educational exchange activities between China and the UK to enhance mutual understanding and trust and lay a good foundation for teaching cooperation. British teachers visited Hainan Medical University in June 2022 and July 2023 to gain an in-depth understanding of the teaching environment, teaching equipment, teaching management, curriculum settings, and teaching evaluation. Some Chinese teachers went to the UK in July 2024 to participate in a three-week Summer School activity, experiencing the entire process of course design, implementation, and evaluation in the UK, providing inspiration and reference for subsequent cooperative teaching activities. At the same time, multiple batches of teachers have been sent to domestic and foreign mature educational institutions for exchanges and learning. In 2024, 16 key teachers were dispatched to the University of the West of England for a one-month exchange and learning, which has played a positive role in promoting the educational concepts, curriculum integration, teaching reform, and in-depth cooperation between the two sides.

3.3. Teaching cooperation and exchange

In terms of teaching cooperation, both sides have taken various measures to promote communication and interaction among faculty:

- (1) Experience sharing: Teachers with rich teaching experience from both sides share their teaching insights and successful cases during the exchange period, providing reference for other teachers.
- (2) Collective lesson-planning: Teachers from both sides participate in the course-based lesson-planning process. They conduct in-depth discussions and consultations on teaching syllabuses, curriculum designs, teaching methods, etc., to ensure the accuracy and scientific nature of teaching content. Especially for professional courses, teachers record sample courses and deeply discuss the nursing operation process samples, and finalize the content based on a consensus between the two sides^[13].
- (3) Construction of teaching platforms: Both sides jointly build teaching-assisting tools such as the Blackboard platform to achieve the sharing of teaching resources and mutual supervision of the teaching process.

4. The effectiveness of the promotion of the teaching staff team

After five years of efforts, significant achievements have been made in the construction of the nursing education faculty in the joint program between Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England:

- (1) Remarkable improvement in teaching staff level: Through strict selection and systematic training, the overall quality of the faculty in the joint program has been greatly enhanced. A group of outstanding teachers with an international perspective and high academic levels have emerged. 100% of the faculty have passed the IELTS (internal IELTS test). Many teachers have won first, second, and third prizes

in the school-level, provincial-level, and national-level young teachers' English-medium teaching competitions^[14].

- (2) Steady improvement in teaching quality: Benefiting from the excellent faculty and advanced teaching concepts, the teaching quality of the joint program has been widely recognized by students and society. The satisfaction rate of students' teaching effectiveness surveys is 97.6%. The teaching methods and evaluations of Hainan Medical University have received high recognition from the British side, with a satisfaction rate of 93%. Teachers' international perspectives, evidence-based education concepts, and the student-centered and student-development-oriented educational concepts have been deeply implemented. At the same time, students' comprehensive qualities and innovation capabilities have been significantly improved.
- (3) Deepening of international cooperation: Through teaching cooperation and exchanges, a deep-seated friendship and trust have been established between the two sides. The number of scientific research cooperation projects among teachers has increased by 37% compared with that before the cooperation, and the joint training of postgraduate students has reached 100%^[15]. This has laid a solid foundation for future in-depth cooperation. At the same time, the joint program has also attracted more excellent students (including international students), further enhancing the international reputation and influence of the school.

5. Challenges

Although significant achievements have been made in the promotion of the nursing education faculty in the joint program between Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England, there are still some challenges:

5.1. Teaching staff shortage

Due to the relatively superior treatment and working environment in foreign universities, some outstanding teachers may choose to leave the joint program and go to other units or abroad for development. In addition, there is a shortage of teachers who are both highly professional and fluent in English teaching. Therefore, how to retain outstanding faculty and introduce "dual-strong" talents (professional and English-proficient) has become an urgent problem to be solved.

5.2. Cross-cultural communication barriers

Despite the positive efforts made by teachers from both sides in cultural exchanges, due to differences in the understanding of culture and educational concepts, there are still certain cross-cultural communication barriers. In future cooperation, it is necessary to further strengthen communication and understanding to promote the in-depth integration of cultures.

5.3. Scientific and reasonable incentive mechanism and evaluation system

To continuously stimulate teachers' enthusiasm and creativity, the institution needs to establish a scientific and reasonable incentive mechanism and evaluation system. Measures such as formulating a complete salary system, promotion system, and reward system should be taken to encourage teachers to actively engage in teaching, scientific research, and social services. Special consideration should also be given to the gender of introduced

teachers to give full play to their maximum value. At the same time, the school should establish a scientific and reasonable evaluation system to comprehensively evaluate teachers' teaching abilities, research capabilities, and social service capabilities and provide corresponding rewards and incentives based on the evaluation results. This can not only stimulate teachers' enthusiasm and creativity but also promote their professional development and growth.

5.4. Strengthening the promotion of teachers' ethics and style

The promotion of teachers' ethics and style is an important part of faculty promotion. In particular, cooperative education institutions should strengthen the construction of teachers' ethics and style, guiding teachers to establish correct educational and professional ethics concepts. Through organizing teachers to participate in training on teachers' ethics and style and conducting relevant assessments, teachers' ethics levels and professional qualities can be continuously improved. At the same time, the school should also strengthen the supervision and management of teachers to ensure that they always abide by professional ethics and behavior norms and fulfill the task of "cultivating talents for whom".

6. Conclusion

Driven by the background of globalization and the construction needs of the Hainan Free Trade Port, remarkable achievements have been made in the promotion of the nursing education faculty of Hainan Medical University. By strengthening the promotion of a faculty that aligns with international standards, the school has not only improved teaching quality and research levels but also will supply a large number of high-quality, international-oriented nursing talents for the development of the nursing industry in the Hainan Free Trade Port and across the country. However, in the face of future opportunities and challenges, Hainan Medical University still needs to further optimize its faculty promotion strategies, increase the intensity of introducing international talents, improve the training mechanism for high-level teachers, establish a scientific and reasonable incentive mechanism and evaluation system, and strengthen the promotion of teachers' ethics and style to continuously promote the sustainable development and innovation of the nursing education faculty. Hainan Medical University and the University of the West of England will continue to deepen cooperation, continuously improve the faculty promotion mechanism, and enhance teaching quality and research levels. The two sides will also actively explore new cooperation models and approaches to make greater contributions to cultivating more nursing talents with an international perspective and innovative spirit. At the same time, the school will also pay attention to exchanges and cooperation with international nursing organizations and institutions, actively participate in the formulation and promotion of international nursing education standards, and contribute to the development of global nursing education.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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