

Effects of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program (SOJEP) on Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) in Southwestern China

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program (SOJEP) on the Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) in Chinese southwestern area. Study focuses on the experiment research of two universities' internationalization construction in this region in order to investigate how much Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program (SOJEP) can improve the degree of Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) and the satisfaction from SOJEP staff and students. With very close comprehensive strength of the university and similar degree of internationalization construction as well as being located in the similar area, it is hypothesized that the experimental university will undergo significant changes in the degree of internationalization construction and has a certain degree of improvement in the satisfaction of the program's staff and students as well as the comprehensive strength of the university after the implementation of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program(SOJEP).Through the 2-year experiment, the internationalization level and the overall comprehensive strength in the experimental group have changed significantly after the successful implementation of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program(SOJEP), and the experimental university have had obvious advantageous changes compared with the control university. And the reputation and fame of the experimental university is better in terms of the satisfaction of the students and teachers involved in the program. The research concludes that the Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program (SOJEP) has obvious effect on the improvement of internationalization level of universities in southwestern China, and that the leaders at higher education institutions should consider it as a tool with which to manage and evolve their internationalization strategies.

Keywords: Internationalization of Higher Education; Transnational Cooperative Education; Sino-Overseas Joint Education; Educational Experimental Research; China

Introduction

With the development of economic globalization, the internationalization of higher education has become an inevitable trend. While Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program (SOJEP) is the main form of internationalization of higher education in China, and it is an important measure for Chinese universities to improve and expand their level of running and managing universities. "In the past over 10 year, the Interim Regulations on Chinese-Overseas Joint education, issued by the former State Education Commission in 1995, provide legal safeguards for the development of Chinese-Overseas Joint education and accelerate the development of Chinese-foreign cooperation, which is issued by the former State Education Commission have provided legal protection for the development of Chinese-Overseas Joint education and accelerated the development of Chinese-Overseas Joint education(Lin, 2011). Tan Zhen believes that premium educational resources can improve the quality of education and promote the development of education, therefore, the criterion for determining premium educational resources is whether they can contribute to education and teaching (Tan, 2007). In the case of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program (SOJEP), our institutions should make full use of the information platforms to understand the qualification and level of education of the foreign partner institutions, and to confirm whether the introduced educational resources can promote the quality of education in our higher education.

Zhang Xinyu and Wang Xinfeng et al. (2005) proposed three main models which have basically formed in China in recent years in Sino-Overseas Joint Education. Most researchers study management problems by posing problems, analyzing and solving them, such as Wang Minli (2004) 's "Regurgitation of Management Problems of Sino-Overseas Cooperative Schools and Foreign Teachers" and Xu Shengdao's "Problems of Sino-Overseas Cooperative Schools and Their Regulation and Standardization.

These research did not include the in-depth rationales of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program (SOJEP) and the fundamental impacts on Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE), and the scope were limited to international policies, educational laws, quality of resources and so on, rather than the root justification and preliminary motivation of SOJEP in IHE, which is a gap that our study aims to fill.

Our study aims to contribute to the scholarly discussion about the Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE), with the case of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program. The study also extends the body of literature on IHE research, by implementing SOJEP in higher education institution and exploring the satisfaction of SOJEP in IHE through a quasi-experiment research. Practically, this study reviews and provides implications for institutional policymakers about internationalizing, evaluating, and incentivizing IHE research in China.

Literature Review

At present, international research on co-operative education is still in its infancy and in the stage of continuous exploration. There are limited research results that can be searched on the Internet, national libraries and the university library networks.

Firstly, the issue of international student mobility. Lewis (1984) and Beddow (1984) analyzed the benefits and costs of foreign students studying in the United States. Throsby (1999) discusses in detail the trends and characteristics of foreign student mobility, using Australia and the United Kingdom as examples.

Secondly, the economic benefits of internationalizing higher education. Williams (1992), a British economist, has shown that the tuition fee income of international students has changed the structure of income sources of British universities, and to a certain extent, it has alleviated the financial crisis caused by the government's funding cuts in higher education.

Thirdly, the analysis of the reasons for the emergence of cross-border education, Dirk Van Damme (2002) believes that economic and social development as well as the development of technology and information have created favorable conditions for international mobility and the possibilities of distance education.

Fourthly, the impact of cross-border education on importing countries. Some scholars, such as Altbach (2004), argue that cross-border education weakens the control of nation and states over their higher education systems. Fifthly, the study of international branch campuses. Richard Garrett, for example, analyzes the behavior of international campuses, using the Nottingham Malaysia campus as an example.

From the compilation of related literature, it can be seen that foreign scholars have a clear policy orientation in their research on cross-border education, hoping to provide recommendations for policy makers in their own countries.

CNKI in China

In the biggest database of China--China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), there are a total of 6,731 retrieval results in the CNKI database by using the keyword "Sino-Overseas cooperative education", including 4,629 academic journals, 293 dissertations, and 6 books, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1
Statistics of Literature Review in China

	Periodicals	Thesis	Conference Papers	Sci-Results	Patents	Laws	Foreign Periodicals
Total	6531	648	215	5	6	1352	0

The existing research results related to the introduction of foreign higher education resources mainly include the following aspects.

Firstly, research on Laws and Regulations of Sino-Overseas Joint Education in higher education. Chen (2014) discusses in detail how to improve the regulatory legislation in view of the problem of "conversion defects" in Sino-Overseas cooperative schools. Professor Lin (2011) provides a more systematic overview of the history of foreign cooperative education and the historical development of related policies since the late Qing Dynasty, and analyzes the management system and reform trends of Sino-Overseas Joint Education.

Secondly, the study of overall quality of imported foreign educational resources. Some scholars believe that it is difficult to attract top international universities to work with us because of our current level of economic development and education, and also because international first-rate universities pay close attention to the impact that the quality of students has on their schools (Lin et al. 2010).

Thirdly, the research on the introduction of overseas premium teaching staff. According to Feng (2007), the teaching staff of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program (SOJEP) should have four basic requirements: good moral and emotional qualities; excellent English and professional knowledge; the ability of continuous learning and the ability to cooperate with others. Li (2012) believes that the overall level of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program

(SOJEP) in China's higher education institutions is not high, there is a lack of long-term training planning, and the evaluation and incentive mechanism needs to be improved.

Methodology

This study took a quasi-experimental research method. Compared with the true experiments, the biggest difference between the two is that quasi-experiments have a lower level of control over experimental conditions and variables. However, research in educational science cannot be separated from the real social and cultural context, and research cannot be conducted by the method of true experimental research in the actual social situation.

In a strict sense, educational experiments can only be quasi-experiments, so in the field of education, there is a need for adequate research and promotion of quasi-experimental research methods. Therefore, this experimental research adopted a quasi-experimental educational research method.

Selection of Experimental Objects

Two universities in southwestern China were randomly selected for the Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program construction, in the process of which one was built according to the traditional university internationalization standard and the other runned the Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program for internationalization. The experimental results were analyzed and compared after the experiment so as to draw conclusions.

Two universities were randomly assigned in the center of southwest China-the city of Chengdu, for the implementation of international education cooperation projects in Sino-Overseas Joint Education Programs. Before the experiment, one of the universities was designated as the experimental university and the other university was set as the control university. And the degree of internationalization of the two universities was very close before the experiment.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the experimental university would undergo significant changes in the degree of internationalization construction and would have a certain degree of improvement in the satisfaction of the program's teachers and students as well as the comprehensive strength of the university in the implementation of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Programs in the same region, with very close comprehensive strength of the university and similar degree of internationalization after initiating the Sino-Overseas Joint Education Programs.

Experiment Process

1. Experiment Duration: 2 years, September 2020 - July 2022
2. Experiment Plan

Firstly, the selection, classification and application of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Programs are carried out and the analysis of the internationalization construction of universities before the experiment and then the relevant data will be collected. Secondly, the contents of internationalization evaluation criteria will be set and the changes of internationalization of this experimental university after the experiment will be determined according to the 2-year implementation cycle, and the comparison between the experiment university and the control one will be conducted with pre-test and post-test data study.

3. Experiment variables

The independent variable of the experiment is the Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program, and the dependent variable of the experiment is the change in the internationalization of the

university's internationalization and the development of the university's comprehensive development and overall strength.

4. Experimental Measurement

The experiment started from September 1, 2020, which is divided into 2 aspects. Firstly, the experimental university and the control university were tested and the data were collected. The test was scored using the details specified in the rules of internationalization construction standards of Chinese universities and the data obtained were archived.

One year after the successful start of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program, the data before and after the experiment were analyzed and processed to get the experimental results. Secondly, after the experiment, we interviewed and surveyed the teachers and students of the experimental university and the control university who participated in the program, and conducted comparative analysis of the relevant findings to get the experimental results.

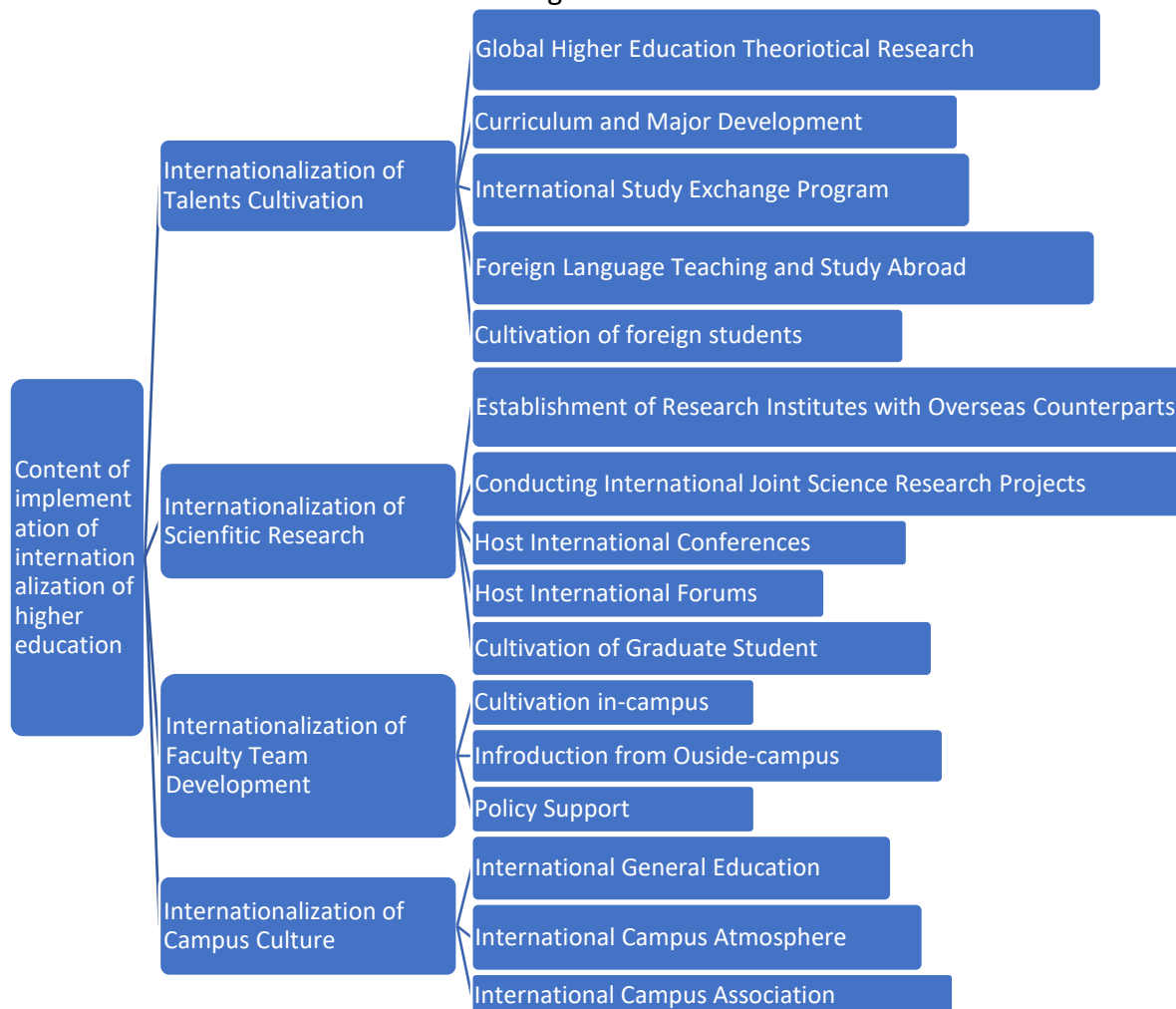
5. Treats to Validity

Before the experiment, to ensure that the experiment was conducted under as non-differentiated conditions as possible, the experimental and control universities were selected to be very similar in various aspects, geographically belonging to the same city (both universities are located in the central city of Southwestern China-Chengdu suburb), with close domestic rankings (449th in CD University and 295th in WC University), close world rankings (neither was on any world ranking list in 2020), and similar degrees of internationalization (data available for pre-experimental measurements), all of these factors could ensure the validity of the experiment to some extent.

And during the experimental process, the 2 universities carried out similar international development steps as much as possible, such as international cooperation, overseas talent introduction, international academic conferences and seminars, etc.

However, it is worthy pointing out that the experiment was conducted in the period of the global pandemic-COVID 19, so the internationalization development of higher education in the 2 universities was basically and simultaneously at a stagnant standstill.

6. Content of internationalization in colleges and universities

**Design and Implementation of the Interview**

The reason why this experimental research needs to design an interview session is that the core of education is people, especially in higher education, the feelings and satisfaction of the participants in education, whether they are teachers, administrators, students or parents, are getting more and more attention from the Ministries of Education and each university worldwide, and may become the focus and direction of the future development of educational society, so the development and construction of internationalization in universities should also include the perception and satisfaction of internationalization as one of the evaluation criteria.

The content of this interview was a questionnaire survey on the perception and satisfaction of internationalization in the universities of two experimental groups of students and faculty members. The contents of the perception questionnaire were based on 7 dimensions: strategic goal and direction for internationalization, foreign affairs management mechanisms/positions at the faculty level, International Exchange Program, International Academic Conferences/Forums/Humanities Exchange, International Student Association/Center, International Scholarships and Funding, as well as Campus International Atmosphere Construction.

And the contents of the satisfaction questionnaire were based on 7 dimensions as well: Level of instructors, Tutor assistance and management, Internationalized Curriculum, Internationalized assessment and evaluation mechanism, Program Fee Standard, Program management mechanism, and Student feedback/evaluation mechanism, which was collected after this experiment.

The interviews were conducted both directly on campus and through the online platform. Interviews were conducted with the management staff, program teachers and current students.

In experimental universities, a total of 250 survey questionnaires were distributed respectively, 232 questionnaires were returned, 31 invalid questionnaires were excluded, and a total of 201 valid questionnaires were collected as **table 2** showed. While in control university, a total of 250 survey questionnaires were also distributed, 240 questionnaires were returned, 36 invalid questionnaires were excluded, and a total of 204 valid questionnaires were collected as **Table 2** showed.

Table 2
Questionnaire on Perception of Internationalization in Universities

FACTOR	University's strategic goal and direction for internationalization	Foreign affairs management mechanisms/positions at the faculty level	International Exchange Program	International Academic Conferences/Forums/ Humanities Exchange	International Student Association/Center	International Scholarships and Funding	Campus International Atmosphere Construction
Know	62/63	55/58	82/82	88/92	50/61	68/77	70/86
Not Sure	58/51	59/62	30/47	26/40	82/73	53/61	73/62
Unknown	81/90	87/84	89/75	87/72	69/70	80/66	58/56
Experimental Uni	31.2%	27.4%	40.8%	43.7%	24.9%	33.8%	34.8%
Control Uni	30.8%	28.4%	41.2%	45.1%	22.9%	33.7%	42.2%

Table 2 shows the seven aspects of internationalization of the experimental university and the control university before experiment, including, university's strategic goal and direction for internationalization, foreign affairs management mechanisms/positions at the faculty level, International Exchange Program, International Academic Conferences/Forums/Humanities Exchange, International Student Association/Center, International Scholarships and Funding, Campus International Atmosphere Construction, etc., depicting the ratio of the number of teachers and students who were surveyed. It can be seen from Table 2 that before the experiment started, the perception of teachers and students towards the two universities in seven aspects of internationalization are very close.

And, In experimental university, a total of 250 survey questionnaires were distributed after this experimental duration, 250 questionnaires were returned, 20 invalid questionnaires were excluded, and a total of 230 valid questionnaires were collected as **Table 3** showed.

Table 3**Questionnaire on Post-test Satisfaction with Internationalization of Uni**

FACTOR	Level of instruct ors	Tutor assistance and managem ent	Internationali zed Curriculum	Internationali zed assessment and evaluation mechanism	Progra m Fee Standa rd	Program managem ent mechanis m	Student feedback/evalu ation mechanism
Satisfied	203	199	210	213	202	196	225
Unsure	6	4	1	3	12	11	2
Unsatisfi ed	21	27	19	14	16	23	3
Percenta ge	88.2%	86.5%	91.3%	92.6%	87.8%	85.2%	97.8%

Table 3 depicts the satisfaction standard in experimental university only, while in control university, the post-test "Questionnaire on "Satisfaction with Internationalization was not collected because the Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program (SOJEP) haven't been constructed yet. We can see from **Table 3** that program teachers and students are very satisfied with the internationalization of the university and the program construction, after the completion of 2 years' experiment of SOJEP implementation in the experimental university, all reaching more than 80% satisfaction, and even 3 items reaching over 90%.

Experimental Data

The development of internationalization of higher education mainly includes the introduction of foreign intellectual resources, sending teachers on overseas study tours, further training and exchanges, establishing academic exchanges and cooperation with foreign institutions of higher education, sending publicly funded and self-funded students abroad, global ranking as shown in **Table 4**, and each of them has different specific manifestations with the development of globalization and the passage of time.

Table 4**Pre-Experiment Data in 2 Universities**

Internationalized content	Experimental Group	Control Group
Introduction of foreign intellectual resources	A total of 4 foreign experts were hired	A total of 6 foreign experts were hired
Sending teachers for overseas study tours, further training and exchanges	9 people for participation in international conferences, 12 attending international conferences, and 10 papers exchanged	12 people for participation in international conferences, 18 attending international conferences, and 10 papers exchanged
Establishing academic exchanges and cooperation with foreign institutions	Established with 6 universities and cultural units in 3 countries and regions	Established with 12 universities and cultural units in 6 countries and regions
Admission of current foreign students	340 People	456 People
Sending students abroad	127 People	142 People
Domestic Ranking	NO. 449	No. 295
World Ranking	Not Available	Not Available
Internationalization Awareness	33.8%	34.9%

Table 4 shows the 8 aspects of internationalization content of the experimental university and the control university before experiment, including Introduction of foreign intellectual resources, Sending teachers for overseas study tours, further training and exchanges, Establishing academic exchanges and cooperation with foreign institutions, Admission of current foreign students, Sending students abroad, Domestic Ranking, World Ranking and Internationalization Awareness, depicting the exact numbers and ratios. It can be seen from **Table 4** that before the experiment started, all the data of international content towards the two universities in 8 aspects are very close.

Table 5 is the data after experiment towards the content of internationalization.

Table 5

Post-Experiment Data in 2 Universities

Internationalized content	Experimental Group	Control Group
Introduction of foreign intellectual resources	A total of 16 foreign experts were hired	A total of 7 foreign experts were hired
Sending teachers for overseas study tours, further training and exchanges	22 people for participation in international conferences, 35 attending international conferences, and 22 papers exchanged	8 people for participation in international conferences, 11 attending international conferences, and 13 papers exchanged
Establishing academic exchanges and cooperation with foreign institutions	Established with 6 universities and cultural units in 3 countries and regions	Established with 12 universities and cultural units in 6 countries and regions
Admission of current foreign students	530 People	468 People
Sending students abroad	0 People	0 People
Domestic Ranking	NO. 299	No. 256
World Ranking	NO. 3912	Not Available
Internationalization Awareness	66.8%	35.3%

* Ranking comes from Essential Science Indicators and THE University Rankings 2022 of Times Higher Education.

Table 5 takes the same data from the content of Internationalization of 2 universities, namely, Introduction of foreign intellectual resources, sending teachers for overseas study tours, further training and exchanges, establishing academic exchanges and cooperation with foreign institutions, Admission of current foreign students, Sending students abroad, Domestic Ranking, World Ranking and Internationalization Awareness. Apparently, the data of the experimental university's internationalization has increased to a large extent, while the data of the control university has only slightly increased after the experiment, and some data have even declined.

Experimental Results and Analysis

An analysis and comparison had been made between the experiment university and control university as shown in **Table 6**.

Table 6

Pre- and Post- Comparison between the Experiment and Control Group

Internationalized content	Pre-data of Experiment	Post-data of Experiment	Pre-data of Control	Post-data of Control
Introduction of foreign intellectual resources	4	16	6	7
Sending teachers for overseas study tours, further training and exchanges	31	79	40	32
Establishing academic exchanges and cooperation with foreign institutions	6	6	12	12
Admission of current foreign students	340	530	456	468
Sending students abroad	127	0	142	0
Domestic Ranking	449	299	295	256
World Ranking	/	3912	/	/
Internationalization Awareness	33.8	66.8	34.9	35.3
Internationalization Satisfaction	/	89.9	/	/

From the **Table 6**, it can be seen that the internationalization of the 2 universities has developed. However, it is obvious to see that all the data of the experimental university have improved and changed significantly, while all the indicators of the control university have only changed slightly or remain the same level.

For example, the domestic ranking of the experimental university had improved from No. 449 before the experiment to No. 299, up 150 places, while the ranking of the control university has only improved 39 places, what's more, the experimental university had successfully entered the list of world universities ranking.

Besides, it should be noted that the cases when the data in the table did not change or was 0 are due to the global epidemic reason.

Discussions

A. Internationalization requires vigorous development of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Programs

The internationalization construction of colleges and universities in southwest China requires bold attempts and brave first steps, based on the completion of comprehensive construction of higher education, vigorous reform and innovation, access to international educational resources, and internationalization construction and innovative initiatives using all high-quality courses, teachers, management modes and means.

B. Cultivating International Construction Talents

To create internationalized talents, we must firstly have internationalized resources and platform. Educational administrative departments at all levels need to use various measures to assist regional colleges and universities in internationalization level construction, to introduce international talents from domestic regions with advanced internationalization development as well as overseas educationally developed countries, to create internationalization construction conditions for colleges and universities in southwest China, and to train a new generation of international talents for further construction activities.

At the same time, each university in the region should establish the correct concept of internationalization construction, enhance and clarify the construction ideas and

conscientiousness, improve the comprehensive strength and management ability of the university itself continuously, be good at absorbing the latest international education development achievements and models for reference, skillfully use modern internationalization means, and improve the university's own innovation consciousness and internationalization development concept.

C. Construction of innovative mode of Sino-Overseas Joint education and development of diversification

Changing the traditional mode of Chinese-Foreign Joint education is the trend of internationalization of universities in the future. The traditional mode of Chinese-foreign cooperation in terms of cooperation mode, overseas partner countries and institutions, and course offering methods still has some gaps with the innovative international education advocated by China nowadays, and the existing mode also has many unreasonable or inefficient parts, which fetters the development of internationalization of Chinese higher education and the cultivation of international innovative talents.

We must make use of global high-quality educational resources on the basis of extensive absorption of modern international education running concepts, creatively do appropriate research and reform of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program mode in line with China's national conditions, construct new modes of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Programs, develop diversified development directions.

Conclusions

Through the 2-year experiment, with the internationalization level of higher education in the 2 universities being close in all aspects, the internationalization level and the overall comprehensive strength in the experimental group have changed significantly after the successful implementation of Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program, and the experimental universities have had obvious advantageous changes compared with the control universities. And the reputation and fame of the experimental universities are better in terms of the satisfaction of the students and teachers involved in the project. Therefore, the experiment shows that the Sino-Overseas Joint Education Program has obvious effect on the improvement of internationalization level of universities in southwestern China.

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