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Mentors' and Mentees' Experiences in a Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education Programme: A Phenomenological Study in a Public University in China

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Abstract. This phenomenological study explores the experiences of mentors and mentees in a Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education (SFCE) programme at a public university in China. Since the implementation of the SFCE programme in 2015, no study has been conducted to investigate the experience of mentors and mentees. Using purposive sampling, data were collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observations with six mentors and six mentees, who were selected from a public university in China. The data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach, from which five major themes emerged. The findings highlight the benefits of the SFCE programme for participants, especially for mentees. However, mentors and mentees also faced challenges related to cultural differences and effective mentoring relationships in teaching assessment, teaching style, and management. The facilities and educational resources also require further improvement to ensure the effective implementation of the SFCE programme, and, notably, mentors do not share enough educational resources with mentees. The programme schedule was intensive for mentors and mentees and, thus, needs to be adjusted to improve the SFCE programme. The study concludes with recommendations for both the foreign and Chinese universities that participated in the SFCE programme, to set up a Programme Management Committee to improve communication, to encourage building up better mentoring relationships, and to create a supportive training environment.

Keywords: experiences; mentor; mentee; phenomenological study; thematic analysis

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1. Introduction

Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education (SFCE) refers to foreign legal entities or international organisations that cooperate with Chinese educational institutions, or other legal, social organisations, to set up educational institutions or programmes and carry out educational activities within the territory of China (Li & Xue, 2022). SFCE allowed China to quickly learn from and absorb valuable experiences, advanced teaching methods, and curriculum design from developed countries.

The SFCE programme offers specialised courses from a foreign cooperative university every semester; the teaching time of the teachers at the cooperative university is required to be at least one-third of the total class hours (Li, 2021). Foreign teachers teach in English, and Chinese teachers teach in both Chinese and English. Foreign teachers and Chinese teachers work together to teach in the SFCE programme. The foreign teachers are the mentors, and the Chinese teachers are the mentees.

Chinese teachers can learn advanced teaching methods, improve their teaching skills, and exchange knowledge about culture with foreign teachers in the implementation of the programme by working together, which is an important reason why the government supports SFCE (Song & Wang, 2020).

Mentors and mentees are the core elements for the implementation of SFCE and an important dimension to test the effectiveness of the introduction and absorption of quality foreign resources (Xia, 2020). However, since the operational and management system of the SFCE programme differs from the normal teaching programme, there are many problems and developmental blocks for the teaching staff (Lin, 2019). Factors such as cultural and system differences between China and the foreign countries involved affect the teaching and learning of the mentors and mentees in the SFCE. The programme has not effectively cultivated Chinese teachers or promoted professional development in Chinese universities (Zeng, 2020).

The researchers adopted a phenomenological approach, which provides an account of the experiences of the mentors and mentees in a SFCE programme at a public university in China, including their responses to the programme's teaching and learning, the educational resources and facilities, the schedule, the level of motivation, and the assessment methods throughout the SFCE programme. By determining the experiences of the mentors and mentees, we can highlight how the SFCE can be improved.

2. Literature Review

This section presents a literature review on the SFCE programme in China, teaching in the SFCE and mentoring relationships.

2.1 SFCE in China

There are nearly 2,300 SFCE programmes and institutions at different levels in China as of June 2020 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China

[MOE], 2020). More than 600,000 students are enrolled in SFCE programmes at a bachelor's level or above (Lin, 2022). In China, the duration of an undergraduate SFCE programme is 4–6 years. Engineering, finance, automation design, accounting, architecture, management, and international economics and trade are some of the majors available in the SFCE programme (Zhu & Huang, 2020).

2.2 Teaching in SFCE

The teaching syllabus of an SFCE programme must meet the requirements of the teaching policies and content of Chinese and foreign teachers (Zeng, 2020). The Ministry of Education (MOE) also evaluates whether the training objectives conform to China's guiding ideology; whether the programme reflects Chinese specifics requirements; whether the SFCE educational objective is scientific, meaningful, and feasible; and whether the objective is consistent with the commitment made upon obtaining certification (Supervisory Information Platform for SFCE Ministry of Education, 2021).

The teaching content of the SFCE programme should be in line with the teaching policy, teaching content, and teaching modes of the Chinese and foreign parties (Zeng, 2020). Due to the high language requirements of the SFCE programme, there may be too much English-subject content in the SFCE programme education. However, students' weak listening and speaking abilities in English lead to confusion with the use of professional vocabulary and terms in courses taught in English (Yan & Chernytskyi, 2022).

The teaching schedule in the SFCE programme is intensive, and there is no continuous guidance for students and Chinese teachers (Liu, 2018). By looking at the course schedules, it can be seen that most students prioritise the courses offered by foreign teachers. Chinese teachers' time is very limited, and their courses are even held in the evenings or on weekends (An, 2016). Within the limited time and conditions, adjusting the schedule of courses can also improve teaching quality (Li et al., 2020).

In terms of teaching methods, there are differences between Chinese and foreign teachers' teaching methods (Wu et al., 2019). In the SFCE programme, teachers often use case studies, multimedia, game-embedded, mind-brain mapping, problem-based learning, and online teaching methods to promote students' learning motivation (Wang, 2021). Amidst the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers, students, and schools coped with and adjusted to distance learning education (Gocotano et al., 2021). In SFCE programmes, final exams are the primary means of assessment, regardless of individual student differences. The teachers in the SFCE should strengthen their diversified assessment methods and place special emphasis on formative assessment in the context of post-COVID-19 (Martínez Huamán et al., 2022; Shi et al., 2023).

A previous study analysed the structure of the SFCE evaluation system and proposed the selection of school-running conditions, teaching quality, and cultural differences, such as teaching methods, communication methods, school-

running effectiveness and employment competence, as measure indices (Yu & Dong, 2021).

Other scholars have also attempted to evaluate SFCE programmes from the perspective of multi-subject participation (Li & Liu, 2019; Pan, 2017). It has been found that teacher satisfaction is important to the development of the SFCE programme. The teachers in the SFCE programme feel less satisfied and more stressed than teachers in normal teaching programmes (Yu, 2023).

Teachers in the SFCE programme have attracted increasing research attention, but most of the research has focused on the current situation, teaching methods, and construction of models for bilingual teaching (Feng, 2022; Li, 2021). Teachers' experiences, feelings, and mentoring relationship during the implementation of the SFCE programme have not yet been sufficiently studied.

2.3 Mentoring Relationship

Mentoring in education refers to a relationship between two people, one of whom is experienced and plays a supportive and advisory role for the other who has little experience (Argente-Linares et al., 2016). The benefits of mentoring in education have been reported by many scholars (Clutterbuck, 2014), for both mentors and mentees (Bean et al., 2014).

Mentors are crucial for guiding and nurturing mentees and helping them to build positive feelings about their careers (Ellis et al., 2020). Mentors can also use their experience and knowledge in a convenient way to support mentees' development (Ellis et al., 2020). Mentors provide mentees with guidance, advice, and feedback, and they also play many roles, such as that of advisor, sponsor, and advocate.

A mentor can be a professional coach and an emotional support system and play a sociocultural role in fostering mentoring relationships (Banerjee-Batist et al., 2019). Mentors can encourage mentees to develop relevant skills and attitudes for the future and, in particular, help mentees set goals and identify actions.

According to the MOE's specifications, the proportion of courses in SFCE programmes taught by foreign teachers should not be less than one-third of the total number in the four-year curriculum. The Chinese teacher and the foreign teacher should co-teach together in the programme, forming a mentoring relationship (Supervisory Information Platform for SFCE Ministry of Education, 2021).

Age, ethnicity and gender affect the mentoring relationships between mentors and mentees (Daniel et al., 2019). There may be difficulties in mentoring caused by cultural complexity and sensitivity between cultures that are present across mentoring relationships. These difficulties may be overcome by a sense of understanding differences, and a desire for meaningful sharing, trust and respect (Parker et al., 2022).

From the standpoint of the mentoring relationship, there is a lack of research on mentors and mentees in SFCE programmes; moreover, research on mentoring in China has concentrated more on vocational education and less on international education (Ma et al., 2019).

3. Methodology

The phenomenological approach focuses on explaining an experience from the perspective of the subject by analysing the words that they have said or written (Sohn et al., 2017). Phenomenological research is conducted on a small number of participants, which makes the selection of participants essential to obtain significant and accurate data. Collecting extensive details regarding the participants and their relationships to the phenomena is essential for qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). The present researcher used the phenomenological approach, as the purpose of this research was to investigate the experiences of mentors and mentees who have participated in the SFCE programme in a public university in China.

3.1 Setting

The SFCE programme is a collaboration between a public university in China (pseudonymous University X) and a university in Europe (pseudonymous University Y). The case was specifically selected (Creswell, 2013) for its unique SFCE programme in China on Hospitality Management at the undergraduate level. This study investigated the mentors' and mentees' experiences regarding the implementation of the programme.

3.2 Participants

The purposive sampling method was used, which means that only those who were willing to participate in and had teaching experience in the SFCE programme were selected, which ensured the pertinence of the interview information obtained. Creswell (2013) recommended 8–12 participants as an appropriate size range for a phenomenological study. There were 12 participants in the study: six mentors and six mentees. All participants had at least one full semester of teaching in the SFCE programme and the experience of cooperating with a mentor (mentee).

Pseudonyms have been used throughout the study to ensure the confidentiality of the mentors and the mentees in the SFCE programme: for example, M represents a mentor from University Y, and MT represents a mentee from University X. Mentors and mentees worked together to teach one course (Table 1).

Table 1: Coding of participants

Course Name	Mentor	Mentee
Strategic Management (SM)	(M1-University Y)	(MT1-University X)
Foundations of Hospitality Marketing (HM)	(M2-University Y)	(MT2-University X)
Revenue Management (RM)	(M3-University Y)	(MT3-University X)
Food & Beverage Cost Management (FBM)	(M4-University Y)	(MT4-University X)

Management Information System (MIS)	(M5-University Y)	(MT5-University X)
Finance Management (FM)	(M6-University Y)	(MT6-University X)

3.3 Data Collection

Phenomenological studies typically collect data from interviews, observations, audio visual materials, and written documents (Creswell, 2013). Given the research objectives of the SFCE programme, three main methods of data collection were applied: document collection, observation, and semi-structured interviews. Documents related to the SFCE policies, education objectives, teaching standards, assessment standards, and cooperative agreements were analysed to compare the gaps within teacher performance and to help researchers understand the development and history of the programme.

The researcher observed the mentors and mentees at the teaching site using the observation checklist. Semi-structured interviews were conducted according to the designed interview protocol. The interview questions were used to address the key research question: What are the mentors' and mentees' reactions towards the implementation of the SFCE programme at a public university in China with regard to teaching and learning, educational resources, facilities, schedules, motivation, and assessment methods? The researcher designed the interview protocol around the research question separately for the mentors and mentees. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to obtain as much information as possible from the interview process. The interview questions and observation checklist were checked by content experts to ensure validity and reliability.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data from the documents were read carefully. The data from the observations were recorded as field journals, and the data from the interviews were transcribed into text documents. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the main method applied to help the researcher answer the research question. A number of themes emerged through reading and rereading each transcript and coding it, looking for common words and themes.

4. Findings

During the data analysis, five themes emerged (Figure 1).

Theme1: Suitability of the methods of teaching and learning	Theme 2: Suitability and drawbacks of resources and teaching facilities	Theme 3: Suitability of course duration and schedule of SFCE programme	Theme 4: Motivation and drawbacks	Theme 5: Suitability of assessment methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentors use student-centred teaching methods Mentors and mentees adjust the teaching content and methods to accommodate the students and course itself of this SFCE programme Epidemic makes teaching in SFCE programme difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentors and mentees were satisfied with the teaching facilities and equipment Facilities and equipment needed constant maintenance and updating Network problems were the most crucial issue There was also a shortage of software Mentors shared teaching resource with mentees, but mentees felt the resource was not necessarily beneficial to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule was continuously optimised Schedule was too intensive Mentors satisfied with the schedule arrangement Mentees complained about the scheduling Some of the arrangements of the courses were inappropriate Contact hours for teaching in some courses were insufficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing the working experience in the hospitality industry with students Mentors want to gain a deeper understanding of China through this SFCE programme A good mentoring relationship Financial rewards Reputation of University Y Maintaining English communication skills Being encouraged by the mentors The preparation of course materials reduced mentors' and mentees' motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abide by University X's examination requirements Used a variety of methods to assess the learning process The assessment was necessary to stimulate students to study in this SFCE programme Several factors limited their assessment practices The assessment should be continuously improved

Figure 1: Five themes

4.1 Theme 1: Suitability of the Methods of Teaching and Learning

It is important to adopt appropriate methodologies for delivering a lesson (Rajagopalan, 2019). All of the mentors stated that, in the SFCE programme, they commonly use student-centred teaching methods, such as case studies, group discussions, and presentations, to promote student learning.

"I prefer to use group presentation in the classes because I feel that the spirit of cooperation is a necessary quality for hotel professionals." (M1)

"I use questioning in my teaching to encourage students to think." (M2)

Three mentors and four mentees reported that they adjusted the teaching content and methods to accommodate the students and the course itself in this SFCE programme.

"I will adjust the depth of instruction on certain points. Moreover, I included exercises in class to facilitate student engagement." (M5)

"The teaching methods I use would depend on the topic and seniority of the students. I usually use group work in the classes because the number of students is large and time is limited, not suitable for individual work with corrections." (MT6)

"I often assign exercises or quizzes for students to do in the class to test and reinforce what has been learned. Because it's a Management Information System course, students need to know how to apply the knowledge." (MT5)

However, the pandemic made teaching SFCE programmes difficult. Due to COVID-19, foreign teachers were unable to travel to China to teach physical classes and were forced to rely on distance learning. Teachers' options for teaching methods were limited by distance learning because online classes reduced their interaction with students. Two interviewees described the experiences of student learning:

"The students responded less in online class; only a few students answered the teacher's questions via the Tencent dialogue box." (MT6)

"In distance learning, interaction in the classroom is significantly reduced." (M4)

The researcher's observations also confirmed the participants' claims. Furthermore, the teachers were not adequately equipped with digital media skills. Mentors and mentees experienced the unavailability of a network, a shortage of digital devices, a distractible learning environment, and a lack of digital literacy skills.

4.2 Theme 2: Suitability and Drawbacks of Resources and Teaching Facilities

The SFCE programme should be implemented with good teaching facilities and equipment. Appropriate facilities and equipment allow the mentors and mentees involved in the programme to feel the school's support and attention, which increases motivation and confidence.

An advantage of the SFCE programme at University Y is that its mentors share foreign teaching resources. All of the participants indicated that they were

satisfied with the teaching facilities and equipment in this SFCE programme. The mentors and mentees believed that the equipment of this SFCE programme was better than that of the other teaching programmes at University X. An independently operated hotel provided a practical teaching environment for students. The researcher observed that the teaching environment was clean, tidy, and air-conditioned, and that it had good teaching equipment and facilities.

"In addition to the excellent specialised laboratories, such as wine-tasting, hotel rooms, and pastry laboratories, the programme also had good multimedia classrooms, projectors, and computers, which could enhance teaching and learning." (MT3)

"I was fascinated by the teaching surroundings and the teaching facilities were well equipped. "(M2)

In contrast, at University X, since the programme had been in operation for seven years, the facilities and equipment appeared to be somewhat old and needed constant maintenance and updating. At least three mentees said that some equipment could not meet teaching needs.

"The projector in the small lecture hall was not clear." (MT2)

"The projector is old." (MT1)

"Some air conditioners do not cool." (MT5)

Network problems were the most crucial issue. Most mentors and mentees complained about the network's system and speed.

"The network was not stable." (M3)

"The network was bad; I have to restart the system frequently." (MT4)

"I need to take a long time to connect to the Internet." (M5)

Three mentees reported that there was also a shortage of the software needed to teach specific courses or disciplines.

"We do not have the specialised software for finance." (MT6)

"SPSS and NVivo are necessary for research and data analysis." (MT1)

"We should have translation software to help students adapt to full English instruction more effectively." (MT4)

The sharing of relevant academic resources by the mentors with the mentees was vital in implementing the programme. The mentors are the sources of technology and information. All of the mentors mentioned that they were willing to share their materials, such as PowerPoint displays, reference books, test papers, articles, cases and even teaching tips and class experiences.

"I gave my mentee the name of the book in the beginning, and then I sent her all of the course materials." (M4)

"I like to share my experience, and I have some tips that I like to give to my mentee." (M6)

However, four of the six mentees reported that the educational resources that the mentors shared with them were not necessarily beneficial.

"Sometimes the teaching resources provided by my mentor could not be downloaded directly." (MT5)

"The shared resources must be localised because they don't meet China's educational requirements." (MT1)

4.3 Theme 3: Suitability of Course Duration and Schedule of the SFCE Programme

In September 2015, the SFCE programme enrolled its first batch of students. According to the MOE, the duration of an undergraduate programme is 4 years. Classes are scheduled according to the programme content and instructor availability, but the total number of student sessions per day should not exceed eight, and no unscheduled classes may occur. During the implementation of the SFCE programme, the course schedule was continuously optimised and made more appropriate than the original arrangement.

"The latest course schedule is more reasonable than the previous one."
(MT5)

However, most mentees and mentors described the programme's schedule as too intensive. Thus, the students felt tired and did not have time to participate in other activities on campus. The following statement was endorsed by eight interviewees:

"The freshman courses in the SFCE programme run from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. with practical lessons and then run from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. with theory courses, without a real break in between: from morning to evening, there is no time to reflect and process information." (MT2)

Mentors were more satisfied with the schedule arrangement. The programme management team communicated with the mentors prior to scheduling courses each semester.

"I am consulted for my availabilities at the beginning of the semester. If I don't have time, I will not take it." (M5)

In contrast to the mentors, the mentees complained about the scheduling. The mentees had to accommodate the mentor's time. Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the mentors at University Y could not travel from Europe to China to teach face-to-face; they had to teach online. Due to the time difference and the large number of courses, many classes had to be held in the evening and at night, which made mentees feel tired and ineffective.

During the interview, all of the mentees reported that they had lessons at night.

These quotes reflect the mentees' feelings about scheduling:

"I'm taught on Friday night from 7:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. in China; It's almost 12:00 a.m. when I get home from university. That is terrible."
(MT3)

"I get to the school at 8:20 in the morning and don't leave until 9:30 at night." (MT4)

Another problem with the course schedule was that some of the arrangements of the courses were inappropriate.

"The Thesis Writing course should be scheduled before the students write their thesis, but it was scheduled in the last semester of the fourth year, at

which point some students had completed or had partially completed their thesis. "(MT5)

"The spreadsheet course should be scheduled for the semester before the Revenue Management course." (MT3)

However, two mentors and two mentees reported that the contact hours for teaching in some courses were insufficient.

"The Interior Design for Hotels course is very specialised. However, the students in the programme lacked the relevant professional design foundation, and it was difficult for them to understand and master the topic in depth in only 34 hours of study." (MT4)

"The number of hours in the Revenue Management course was insufficient, and I would need at least 45 hours to present the same content in the classes at University Y." (MT3)

While there were some unsatisfactory aspects of the course schedule, some participants were optimistic and made concrete suggestions for improvement. Some mentors suggested that more elective courses could be offered to meet the needs of students with different interests and schedules, as well as reduce the course content.

4.4 Theme 4: Motivation and Drawbacks

This theme resonated with three participants who have working experience in the hospitality industry. They wanted to share what they knew about the hospitality industry with the students, and sharing was a way to deliver education:

"I have many years of experience in education, and I love education. That is the most important motivation for my participation in the programme." (M2)

"I have 10 years of experience in the hospitality industry, and I would like to share this with students." (M4)

"Students are future professionals, and I shared knowledge with students as a way to contribute to the development of the hospitality industry." (M3)

The researcher's observations also confirmed the enthusiasm of the mentors for education. Most mentors' facial expressions were pleasant, they used body language appropriately, and they spoke at a very proper pace and tone.

Another primary motivation for the mentors to participate in teaching in the SFCE programme was a desire to gain a deeper understanding of China. Mentors were very interested in the Chinese market and hoped to learn more about the developments and changes in the Chinese hospitality industry through teaching in the SFCE programme. A mentor explained why he agreed to participate in this programme:

"I hoped to learn more about Chinese culture through co-teaching with Chinese teachers." (M4)

In addition, having a good mentoring relationship was also a motivation for some mentors to choose to participate in the SFCE programme. One mentor articulated her feelings:

"I think the relationship with the SFCE programme members at University X was a "family" relationship: family members can be honest and can learn from each other, and I liked the family-type relationship."
(M6)

Extrinsic motivation, such as rewards, also affected the mentors' enthusiasm and motivation to participate in this SFCE programme. A mentor was very candid in the interview:

"The financial rewards were one reason I taught in the programme." (M5)

In contrast, all the mentees were motivated to participate in the programme because University Y is world-renowned in the field of hospitality education, and the mentees wanted to learn more and improve their professional ability through the programme.

"The QS ranking of University Y of Hospitality Management is No. 1."
(MT1)

"The Hospitality Management programme at Y University is well-known worldwide." (MT6)

Of the six mentees who participated in the interviews, five had a background of studying or working abroad and were familiar with the international teaching model. The English-speaking environment in the SFCE programme helped the mentees maintain their English communication skills, which is one of the motivations for wanting to teach in this SFCE programme.

"I graduated in the USA." (MT1)

"I got my master's degree in the UK." (MT3)

Another three mentees stated that part of being motivated was being encouraged by the mentors. They were inspired by their mentor's extensive knowledge and industry experience, excellent teaching skills, and dedication.

"I want to learn effective teaching techniques from mentors." (MT5)

"I respect the teacher's ability to thoughtfully prepare materials for each class, and I should take a cue from him." (MT2)

However, the preparation of course materials reduced mentors' and mentees' motivation to participate in the programme. The biggest problem was the preparation of teaching materials. A dispiriting point for the mentors and mentees was the conflict over the teaching requirements, which resulted in mentees spending a lot of time redoing and collating the teaching materials.

"The biggest problem is the preparation of our teaching materials; the mentor is not in line with our university's requirements, which led us to spend a lot of time redoing and collating." (MT5)

"The specifications for teaching materials differ across University X and Y. I have to get two distinct sets." (M6)

4.5 Theme 5: Suitability of Assessment Methods

The assessment of student performance allows programme management staff to assess how well the programme is being delivered. With regards to the assessment, all mentors and mentees stated that they must abide by University X's examination requirements. Based on compliance with these requirements, mentors and mentees used a variety of methods to assess the learning process according to the needs of the course and their preferences including role play, presentation or "wake-up call" attendance, and completion of class assignments. The quotes below recounted how mentors designed the assessment:

"I gave students quizzes, three exercises in the class, and some extra exercises as homework. I also gave students an Excel application programme or higher programme analysis." (M5)

"Presentations were my most common assessment method because I wanted students to talk, apply their learning, and think more deeply. I wanted students to ask questions when they did a presentation, which was also the best way to develop a sense of collaborative teamwork." (M1)

Throughout the interviews, it was evident that assessment was necessary to stimulate students to study in this SFCE programme. Mentees and mentors pointed out that assessment methods could motivate students to interact with the instructor in the classroom.

"Exams make students take the course more seriously and complete all assigned work." (M2)

"Students are more active in answering questions in class." (MT1)

However, mentors and mentees reported that several factors limited their assessment practices. The first is the number of students. They could not do an "individual presentation and case study" assessment because of the large number of students.

"I cannot agree that eighty students do the individual presentation." (M2)

"The size of the class is quite big, so it is tough to have more discussion." (M3)

The second factor is online teaching. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as courses were taught via distance-learning, it was difficult for the teachers to organise presentations, and students were less motivated to participate compared to classes taught in person. For these reasons, most mentors and mentees reported that online teaching also limited assessment.

"If the class is face to face, there are things I would do differently." (M4)

The third factor is the individual student. Mentors and mentees agreed that the ability of exams to promote learning depended on the individual student. This resonated with most mentors and mentees:

“Learning is very personal, so students need to have some forms of assessment; if there is no assessment and measurement, then the teachers cannot evaluate their effectiveness.” (MT3)

Most mentors and mentees still believed that assessment should be continuously improved. It would be beneficial to increase the weight of the learning progress assessment to 50% or 60% of the total score. There should also be more emphasis on the application of knowledge in assessment; two mentees suggested that competitions could be incorporated into the course assessment.

“In addition to exams, students should be encouraged to participate in business projects and discipline-related competitions. Competition results can be part of the course scores to stimulate their interest in course learning.” (MT1)

5. Discussion

Due to the demand for SFCE programmes in China over the last decade, it is critical to understand faculty experiences with the implementation of these programmes. First, the SFCE programme improves mentees' teaching skills, professional knowledge, and international competencies, but cultural sensitivity and differences are evident in the process of implementing a SFCE programme, thus reducing the mentors' and mentees' experience.

Further discussions are presented as follows:

A difference is in the assessment method. Assessment is an important means to check the effectiveness of teaching programmes, and the mentees and mentors agreed that appropriate assessment methods must be used to motivate students' learning. However, due to the single and mandatory nature of the Chinese teaching administration, using a final written exam was the primary means and method of assessment, regardless of individual differences among students. This finding was consistent with other research (Pan et al., 2020; Sun, 2018). Similar assessment methods are also used in traditional teaching programmes, which do not fully reflect the advantages of the SFCE programme.

In terms of assessment, Chinese teachers primarily use examinations and scores as the final result for assessment, whereas Western teachers use a variety of teaching evaluation methods and place a greater emphasis on the learning process (Guo et al., 2022). Therefore, more assessments could be used, such as projects, performance assignments, concept maps, self-assessments, peer-assessments, observation, portfolios, drama, diagnostic trees, journals, posters, and instructor and student interviews (Tosuncuoglu, 2018).

Another difference appears in teaching styles. Foreign teachers (mentors) in the SFCE programme place a high value on interactive teaching and the development of students' abilities, but they frequently overlook the teaching of fundamental knowledge. Chinese teachers (mentees), in contrast, do not fully use “student-centred” teaching methods but they allocate more time to teaching in the class. Teaching model or methods should be matched with course objectives in the SFCE programme (O. Li, 2021; Liu, 2020; Zhu & Zhao, 2022). Diversified teaching methods can help achieve the objectives of SFCE programme.

The objectives of this SFCE programme only emphasised the description of specialised competencies but did not adequately integrate moral character and global employability in terms of students' worldviews, attitudes, and transferable skills (Wu et al., 2022).

Management style and culture are the third facets of cultural difference. The Chinese mentors' single teaching management style restricts the implementation of this SFCE programme. For example, Chinese administrators do not understand their partners' teaching philosophy. The requisite full compliance with Chinese regulations in the preparation of teaching materials and the design of criteria in teaching evaluation does not account for cross-cultural differences.

It is also notable that trust between the mentors and mentees is important in building effective mentoring relationships. Mutual commitment, respect and trust are vital elements in forming a good mentorship. The personality and attitude of the mentee motivate the mentor (Goodsett, 2021).

Teaching resources, teaching environment, and facilities need to be continuously improved. This study found that, in general, mentors and mentees were satisfied with the teaching resources, facilities, and equipment of the SFCE programme and that they were proud to work in such a teaching environment. The faculty felt distinct from regular teaching programmes (Chang et al., 2020). Studying in a cofounded programme with advanced facilities and foreign teachers allows students to obtain international study experience (Knight & Liu, 2016).

The findings from this study also indicated that the Chinese university and the foreign university need to pay more attention to the renewal and maintenance of programme facilities and equipment with time. Older facilities and equipment cannot support the development of the programme in terms of functionality and aesthetics (Zhang & He, 2019). Sakibu and Kamugisha (2022) identified improving facilities as the main factor contributing to academic achievement, and the quality, appropriateness, and adequacy of facilities contribute to quality education. This finding justifies the notion that ensuring sufficient facilities and space is one of the ways to upgrade the quality of the SFCE programme. To achieve the integration of teaching and information technology, more appropriate teaching software should be added.

The programme's schedule was intensive and affected the mentees' teaching experience. The mentors were consulted before the course was scheduled, but the mentees had no choice, they had to follow the mentor's class schedules. These SFCE programmes tend to prioritise the courses of foreign teachers. The time for Chinese teachers was very limited. As a result, mentees' courses were even scheduled in the evening or on weekends (An, 2016). This is important, as Marciniaik et al. (2022) have demonstrated that course schedules affect mentees' and students' academic performance.

In addition to intrinsic motivations, such as enthusiasm, reputation, and self-improvement, external incentives such as a higher income and good mentorship

will affect mentors' and mentees' experiences. A similar comparison was with Nyangau (2018), who found that faculty motivation originated from their desire to facilitate students' qualification for the requirements of global citizenship. The motivations of the mentees and mentors for participating in the SFCE programmes included self-improvement, self-satisfaction, reputation, making a contribution, and extrinsic motivations, such as financial rewards. This finding corroborates the work of Bandura (1989) and Mullins (2005), who noted that intrinsic motivation is associated with psychological rewards, while extrinsic motivation is associated with tangible rewards. Thus, it is necessary to improve the bonuses for teachers participating in the SFCE programmes.

Finally, the global COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on everyone's social and professional lives. Without a doubt, higher education faces significant challenges in the delivery of teaching and research, particularly in terms of academic mobility. Distance learning limits teachers' ability to interact with students in teaching and learning and affects teaching assessment. Therefore, resuming physical classes as soon as possible was the best way to improve the teaching experience. Meanwhile, COVID-19 was an opportune time to consider "internationalisation at home" (Brandenburg et al., 2019) and utilise existing international quality educational resources, such as international students, foreign teaching materials, cross-border programmes, diversified curriculum, and international conferences, to create an international campus with local characteristics and to provide opportunities for cross-cultural and international exposure for all students on campus (Wang, 2019).

6. Recommendations

There were three points to consider for recommendation.

6.1 Establish a Programme Management Committee to Run the SFCE Programme to Improve its Communication Management Mechanism

According to the MOE's requirements, universities implementing SFCE programmes should set up a Programme Management Committee to be responsible for the management, promotion, and strategic planning of the programme. First, the Programme Management Committee should be responsible for informing the faculty about programme objectives and strategies. Second, the Programme Management Committee should respect different pedagogical and cultural differences and work together to establish applicable standards and evaluation requirements for the programme. The Programme Management Committee should create a compromised set of standards for the programme, taking into account the feasibility and suitability of the programme. University X and University Y should design distinct management requirements and processes for the programme. The approach could effectively solve the problem of cultural differences such as teaching methods, assessment methods, and differences in management systems. Both partners should keep an open mind and accept any differences.

6.2 Encourage Adequate Communication Between Mentors and Mentees to Improve the Mentoring Relationship

The mentoring relationship is significant in implementing the SFCE programme. Some mentors and mentees mentioned a lack of communication about the

programme objectives and the sharing of quality resources, which led to a poor teaching experience. Therefore, it is necessary to consciously construct a regular consultation mechanism for running the SFCE programme to facilitate understanding between the two sides of the school running the programme. For instance, mentors and mentees should meet regularly at the semester's beginning, middle, and end, in a collaborative process to discuss co-teaching styles, content, assessment, and student feedback to enhance mutual understanding. Simultaneously, effective feedback is imperative. The mentor must be able to deliver constructive feedback, and the mentees should be receptive to feedback and upfront to let the mentor know their goals and needs.

6.3 Establish a Regular Training Mechanism and Set Up a Mentoring Workshop to Create a Supportive Training Environment

Mentees need more training and mentoring opportunities. The Programme Management Committee should set up a training workshop and clarify the relationship between the mentor and mentee from both universities. In the workshop, mentors should guide mentees' teaching and research, and assess them to promote their continuous improvement.

University X should develop a mentoring programme in collaboration with University Y, and its overseas resources, to create a pathway for sustained faculty involvement. Also, University X should implement policies that consider the workload for mentees based on the specific needs of mentoring. There is a need to improve the training of the personnel involved in the management of the SFCE programmes, particularly those who have more contact with mentors, so that they can gain an understanding of how international people from different cultural backgrounds perceive the world and their values, and then learn to use various communication skills to cope with and solve problems encountered during programme implementation.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study clarified the experiences of the mentors and mentees who participated in the SFCE programme at a public university in China. By extracting data from the interviews and observations of mentors and mentees, this study provides a unique insight into the implementation of the SFCE programme including: (a) suitability of the methods of teaching and learning; (b) suitability and drawbacks of resources and teaching facilities; (c) suitability of course duration and schedule; (d) motivation and drawbacks; and (e) suitability of assessment methods.

The study's findings are significant in proposing a new approach to further develop the SFCE programme in China's public universities. As part of the call to improve the quality of the SFCE programme, the Chinese and foreign universities running the SFCE programme should establish a Programme Management Committee to improve the communication management mechanism of the programme, encourage building up better mentoring relationships, and establish a regular training mechanism to create a supportive training environment. Based on these findings, future research could be conducted in other SFCE programmes

in different majors and at different universities. To achieve exemplary teaching and learning outcomes, educational programmes require multiple stakeholders to collaborate, and subsequent research could examine students' and employers' experiences regarding SFCE programme implementation.

8. References

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