



Karya Journal of Emerging Technologies in Human Services

Journal homepage:
<https://karyailham.com.my/index.php/kjeths/index>
ISSN: 3093-6551



Research on the Talent Development Strategies in Private Universities Under the Context of International Competition

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 July 2025

Received in revised 4 August 2025

Accepted 5 September 2025

Available online 19 September 2025

Keywords:

Talent development; private universities;
international competition; employability; global
competence; higher education strategy

ABSTRACT

In the context of intensifying global competition, private universities in China are facing growing pressure to cultivate talent that meets both domestic development needs and international standards. Despite their expanding enrolment and contribution to regional development, private institutions often struggle with limited resources, weak industry connections, and insufficient international integration in their talent development strategies. This paper explores effective strategies for talent cultivation in private universities under the pressures of globalization. Using a mixed-methods approach that includes institutional analysis, expert interviews, and international benchmarking, this study identifies key challenges such as outdated curriculum design, lack of experiential learning opportunities, and low global engagement. It proposes a multi-dimensional framework to enhance graduate employability and international competitiveness, emphasizing industry-academic collaboration, global competence education, digital pedagogy, and outcome-based curriculum design. The findings aim to guide policy makers and university leaders in designing more adaptive, forward-looking, and globally resonant talent development models in the private higher education sector.

1. Introduction

As globalization and knowledge-based economic continue to grow rapidly, higher education institutions around the world are feeling pressure to reform their talent development approaches. In China, many of which were established to meet the growing demand for tertiary education. These universities face challenges in meeting both local needs for skilled workers and global demands for internationally prepared graduates. The growing of international competition increased the urgency

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<https://doi.org/10.37934/kjeths.2.1.19>

for reform, requiring private institutions to update their educational models, strengthen industry linkages, and improve their global involvement.

Currently, private universities in China make up over 20% of all undergraduate enrolment showing they are a key part of the country's higher education system. However, they are often perceived as being behind public universities when comes to quality, innovation, and internationalization. This paper investigates how these institutions can reposition themselves strategically in the global talent ecosystem. It focuses on these key questions such as What are the major constraints private universities face in cultivating competitive talent? What strategies can enhance their graduate outcomes and international adaptability? How can they align with national goals such as innovation-driven development and talent rejuvenation?

Private universities have become important in China's higher education system, contributing to more than 20% of undergraduate enrolment. However, they face various persistent challenges in developing globally competitive talent. The majority of these universities suffer with little resources, outdated education models, and weak industry connections. The courses they provide usually lack of practical application, education, and global topics. Furthermore, global exposure is limited with many academic staffs lacking foreign expertise and students having limited chances for cross-border exchange. These limitations reduce universities' ability to prepare their graduates for both the local workforce and the global job market. Private universities tend to left behind due to a lack of policy attention and resources as national policies such as the "Double First-Class" plan and the "Innovation-Driven Development" strategy foster the expansion of public universities. These private universities face greater pressure to reform due to increase in global competition. The lack of a clear, flexible, and context-specific structure for talent development further undermines their position. Private universities' potential in contributing to China's national talent strategies and worldwide competitiveness remains undeveloped if they don't address these challenges directly.

The main objective of this study is to explore and identify effective strategies that can improve talent development in China's private universities under the pressures of global competition. The study seeks to investigate how internal and external factors affect talent development in these institutions, focusses on key challenges like educational reform, industry and global collaboration, and assessment of learning outcomes. This study combines institutional analysis, expert interviews, and international benchmarking to investigate current gaps and identify scalable solutions. The study specifically investigates how private universities can improve students' global competence, graduate employability, and educational quality with limited resources. This research also looks into how private universities might integrate their objectives with national innovation and talent initiatives while maintaining their distinctive market-driven identity. This study highlights the challenges and also attempts to create a useful framework for university leaders and policymakers to implement. The goal is to help these universities educate graduates that ready for the future and can compete in both local and global industries, especially when operating under limited resources.

This research is significant because it fills a gap in understanding how private universities can adapt to global trends which they sometimes been overlooked in national education reforms. Recent research and regulations are centred on top public universities, leaving private universities with little or no support. Besides, this study offers practical recommendations that go beyond standard approaches, pushing private universities to prioritise quality education, real-world abilities, and global engagement. It introduces practical strategies such as industry-based teaching, outcome-based learning, and global collaborations. The research also delivers a broader message to policymakers where recognising success in higher education should not be measured solely by enrolment numbers or facilities, but also by how effectively universities ready students for today's workforce. This study adds to academic literature and practical improvements by demonstrating that

innovation and global readiness may be achieved even in limited contexts. It provides a road map for change and a demand for more inclusive policies that benefit all sorts of higher education institutions.

2. Literature Review

Talent development in higher education has evolved significantly over the past two decades, transitioning from traditional content delivery to a more holistic, skills- and competency-based model designed to meet the demands of a rapidly changing global landscape [1]. This shift is driven by the increasing influence of international competition, marked by accelerated technological innovation, fluid labour mobility, and the growing need for graduates who possess cross-disciplinary knowledge and adaptive learning capacities [2]. In this context, universities are being challenged to move beyond rote learning toward cultivating what Marginson [3] describes as “global graduates”, individuals equipped with intercultural fluency, digital literacy, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving abilities. Universities must prepare students not only for local labour markets but also for the internationally, this means that there’s a need to reevaluate their teaching strategies, curriculum structures, and institutional goals [4].

In China, several national policies, the “Double First-Class” plan and the “Innovation-Driven Development” strategy show the country’s commitment on building top-level universities and developing high-quality talent to support its economic and social growth. These policies have encouraged public universities to invest in their research, attract international faculty, and engage in global academic partnerships [5]. In contrast, private universities which now educate over 7 million students are struggling with deeper issues that limit their ability to fully participate in these reforms.

Globally, higher education systems have responded by embedding 21st-century competencies into curricular frameworks, promoting experiential learning, and fostering international collaborations. The European Bologna Process, for example, prioritizes student mobility and academic recognition across borders, while the U.S. and Australia emphasize work-integrated learning and graduate employability in their national education strategies. These trends are further reinforced by the emergence of global university rankings that increasingly consider international outlook, industry partnerships, and graduate outcomes as key indicators of institutional quality. Studies shown that when universities adopt international education models, the quality of graduates improved. For example, Guo and Yang [4] found that students who experienced international education performed better than those who followed traditional methods, showing a 5.4% improvement in both skill quality and learning results. Figure 1 shows the analysis of the comprehensive quality of talents and the training effect of innovative talents under international education.



Fig. 1. Analysis of the comprehensive quality of talents and the training effect [4]

2.1 Challenges Faced by Private Universities

Previous studies have reported several barriers to effective talent development in China's private higher education system. One major issue is the lack of financial support, along with the shortage of qualified faculty or a strong research environment. These factors make it difficult for private universities to update their teaching methods and course design. Furthermore, poor connections with industries and limited collaboration with employers cause a disconnect between what students learn and what skills are actually needed in the job market [6]. Although they educate a large number of students, they often have fewer resources than public universities. They lag behind public universities in building relationships with global institutions and industries. Many private universities still rely on outdated teaching methods and have limited exposure in international education, which weakens their ability to produce competitive graduates [7].

Lack of faculty with global experience and weak partnerships with global academic or business communities further impede their ability to innovate and internationalize. Yan [8] research on Chinese universities reported that many of them still depend heavily on textbook-driven instruction instead of problem solving or real-world applicability. There are some private universities have started to improve by including entrepreneurship, mixing subjects, and online collaborations with foreign universities. However, these changes are not common or consistent among the universities. Moreover, the regional disparities between western and eastern China in higher education compound the challenges for private universities to attract and retain global talent [9].

2.2 Talent Strategies in a Globalized Context

Although private universities face many challenges, global developments in higher education offer new opportunities for growth through internationalization. This concept has grown beyond just sending students abroad, it includes updating academic programs, working with overseas research partners, and hiring faculty with international experience [10]. In addition, many universities are now using hybrid and online learning models to reach students in different locations and reduce the limits of physical distance [11].

Another growing trend is the use of English as the language of instruction. For instance, in Azerbaijan, universities have widely adopted English-Medium Instruction (EMI) policies to attract international students and staff, helping to raise their reputation and improve their international presence [12]. This approach could also benefit private universities in China as they work to expand their global impact.

Some scholars also suggest that a well-rounded international talent strategy is needed. This includes offering globally relevant courses, using a variety of assessment methods, and creating reward systems to keep talented staff. These steps are in line with national programs like the "Ten Thousand Talents Program" and the "Thousand Talents Program," which aim to support both the return of overseas experts and the development of talent within China [13].

Research based on real-world data provides more understanding of these trends. A recent study of medical universities in Guangdong showed that international efforts such building global partnerships strengthened the universities' overall abilities [14]. Similar strategies have been used in Malaysia and South Korea, where universities have introduced hybrid degree options, outcome-based education (OBE), and virtual exchange programs to make education more globally accessible and to better prepare students for international careers.

At the University of Rome "Tor Vergata," researchers found that allowing students to follow flexible learning paths such as the Dual Career policy helped boost student satisfaction, reduced dropout rates, and improved academic success [15]. These student-centered practices could be

useful models for private universities in China seeking to attract more diverse learners and offer more appealing international programs.

Despite ongoing limitations, several reform efforts are starting to emerge within private universities. Some institutions have begun offering entrepreneurship-focused education and forming international partnerships to make their curricula more relevant and give students wider exposure to global trends [16]. Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which emphasizes clear learning goals and practical skills, is becoming more common especially among universities trying to distinguish themselves with a more career-focused and practical teaching approach [17].

In addition, researchers recommend closer ties with industry to make academic programs more relevant. This includes working with employers to co-create course content, inviting professionals for guest lectures, and offering certifications that are jointly recognized by both schools and industries [18]. Internationalization also plays an important role. Some experts suggest that expanding English-language courses, virtual study abroad experiences, and short-term international programs can help students—especially those in non-elite private schools—build the global skills they need [19].

However, a clear and adaptable framework for growing talent in private universities is still lacking. Few studies show how these schools can meet both local needs and international standards at the same time, especially when facing tight budgets and a constantly changing global education system [20]. This paper contributes to this underexplored area by synthesizing these insights and proposing a strategic and applied framework tailored to private universities operating within the pressures of international competition.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative-dominant mixed methods approach to explore talent development strategies within Chinese private universities amid international competition. Three private universities from different regions of China were selected for case analysis, chosen based on their program diversity, enrollment size, and engagement in innovation or international initiatives. Document analysis of institutional strategies, curriculum structures, and employment reports was conducted to understand internal approaches to talent development.

In-depth interviews were held with fifteen participants, including university administrators, faculty members, industry partners, and education policy advisors. The interviews explored how institutions interpret the demands of international competition, implement curriculum reform, and collaborate with external stakeholders. Additionally, this study conducted a benchmarking analysis of innovative talent development practices in selected private institutions from South Korea, Malaysia, and Germany, countries recognized for their effective integration of employability and global competencies in higher education.

All qualitative data were coded and thematically analysed using NVivo software. Triangulation across institutional documents, interview data, and international case benchmarks to ensure depth and credibility.

4. Findings

The research uncovered four primary challenges in talent development within China's private universities. First, most institutions still rely on traditional, knowledge-heavy curricula that are poorly aligned with global industry trends. These programs have limited hands-on experience, teamwork, real-world problem solving or use of digital tools. As a result, graduates are not well prepared for the current job market demand in this rapid changing environment.

Second, the connection between universities and industries remain weak. Even though some universities offer internships, they often short-term and they were not given too much opportunities to hands on. There is little effort to create lessons with help from companies, and professionals from industries rarely take part in teaching or advising.

Third, global competence is often underdeveloped. There are limited courses with global case studies, include language training or intercultural communication. International exchange programs are limited, and many academic staff do not have or limited experience in working or studying abroad which often due to lack of funding.

Fourth, learning outcomes are primarily assessed through exams and assignments. This often fails to capture students' innovative thinking or practical capabilities, only a few universities use practical methods such as group projects or performance-based assessments to assess the students' skills.

Despite these limitations, several promising innovations were identified. A university in eastern China created a dual-system where students get guidance from both professors and industry professionals. This helps students apply their knowledge to real problems. Besides, another institution started a business course co-taught in English in partnership with a university in Southeast Asia. This course includes startup activities, team challenges, and presentations to improve both business and language skills. One more example is a university that tried an outcome-based teaching model for its engineering courses. This model focused on helping students build specific skills and used new ways to test their progress, like projects and presentations.

Although these efforts are still limited, they highlighted the potential for broader reform. With stronger support from leadership, faculty, and international collaboration, private universities could enhance graduate employability and international competitiveness.

5. Significance and Impacts

This study provides significant insights for university leaders, policy makers, and education experts. For university leaders, the study provides a clear plan for improving education. Instead of trying to enroll more students, universities should focus on offering high-quality teaching that helps students build useful skills. The research shows how integrating practical training, global understanding, and learning outcomes into talent development frameworks. It underscores the need to move beyond enrollment growth and focus on quality, adaptability, and innovation in curriculum and pedagogy.

For policymakers, this research emphasises the need of adopting specialised regulatory and financial frameworks that recognise the unique role of private institutions. Unlike top public universities, private universities confront greater budget limits and commercial pressures. Performance assessment systems should therefore extend beyond input-focused measures (e.g., faculty degrees, infrastructure) and incorporate outcome-based indicators such as graduate employability, employer satisfaction, and international exposure.

At the systemic level, the research contributes to the global conversation on how non-elite, resource-constrained institutions could still be effective competitors in the global talent market. Private universities may make significant contributions to national plans such as "Made in China 2025" and the "Innovation-Driven Development" plan by emphasising adaptability, cooperation, and curriculum reformation. The findings also show that international partnerships and modern teaching methods are possible even without large budgets.

For other researchers, this study fills an important gap on talent development in the private sector of higher education where most research in this area focuses on top public universities. It

offers the framework for future empirical research into best practices, faculty development, and policy alignment in many types of higher education institutions.

6. Recommendations

For private universities to address the identified challenges and improve their talent development, this study proposed the following detailed recommendations. Private universities can better position themselves in the global talent race and contribute more meaningfully to China's educational modernization by adopting these recommendations.

6.1 Redesign Curriculum to Focus on Skills

Private universities should change their program from content-heavy syllabuses to skill-based programs. This means adding teamwork, communication, digital tools, and real-world problem-solving. Program design should include regular consultation with industry to ensure that learning outcomes are aligned with workforce requirements. The curriculum should be modular and adaptable, allowing students to choose paths that match with their interests and professional ambitions.

6.2 Implement Outcome-Based Education (OBE)

OBE ensures that education and evaluation are based on measurable results that are relevant to social and industry expectations. Universities should use performance-based evaluations including project work, real-life challenges, and portfolios. Learning outcomes should be linked to program and institutional objectives with ongoing feedback for quality improvement.

6.3 Strengthen University-Industry Collaboration

Engagement with businesses should be more than just offering internships. Universities should invite employers to assist in designing courses, invite industry practitioners for guest lectures, and certifications that are recognized by both faculty and industries. Students would benefit from the guidance of both faculty and industry experts.

6.4 Embed Global Competence Across All Programs

Global learning should not be limited to selected programs. All courses should integrate case studies with global context, bilingual teaching where possible, and promoting intercultural communications. Partnerships with foreign universities can enable virtual exchanges, global webinars and also offering dual degree programs.

6.5 Enhance Faculty Development and Incentives

Teaching reform depends on faculty capabilities. Universities should offer regular training programs for academic staff to upskill, digital learning tools, and global education practices. Incentive rewards encourage educational innovation, research that informs teaching, and international collaboration.

6.6 Leverage Technology for Flexible Learning

Digital platforms should be used to deliver hybrid learning models that allow access beyond physical campuses. Learning management systems (LMS) should support flipped classrooms, interactive modules, and real-time student tracking. Online mobility programs and global webinars may enhance the limited physical exchange opportunities.

6.7 Match Programs with Local Industry Needs

Institutions should utilize its local economic and cultural characteristics in designing courses. For example, universities near manufacturing or technology hubs can focus on IT or engineering programs, while those in tourist area can focus on hospitality management.

6.8 Align with National Talent and Innovation Policies

Private colleges' strategic plans should be aligned with national goals like as the "Belt and Road" project, innovation clusters, and talent development initiatives. This collaboration may improve policy support, better funding opportunities and gain a stronger reputation.

7. Conclusion

This paper research on how private universities in China can improve strategies for talent development under the context of international competition. The research showed that these institutions face challenges in preparing their students for global job market while expanding access to higher education. These challenges include outdated teaching methods, weak industry connections, limited international involvement, and poor evaluation of student learning outcomes. This study identified both the challenges and possible solutions by using a combination of case studies, expert interviews, and international comparisons. Although many private universities continue to rely on traditional models, some are starting to introduce innovative practices.

Besides, the study highlighted that talent development in private universities must go beyond increasing enrolment. Instead, the focus should be on improving the quality of education by aligning courses with industry needs, enhancing global competence, and using better ways to assess student performance. The involvement of faculty, industry, and international partners is key to these improvements. In addition, this paper provided recommendations that include redesigning curriculum to focus on skills, improving university-industry cooperation, promoting internationalization, and strengthening faculty training. Even with limited resources, these strategies are achievable if universities commit to long-term development goals and align with national education and innovation policies.

In summary, private universities in China have the potential to become important contributors to the country's talent and innovation goals. These institutions can better prepare students for both domestic and global opportunities by adopting the suggested strategies and focusing on quality. This research provides a useful roadmap for future improvements and a foundation for continued study in this important area.

Acknowledgement

This research was not funded by any grant.

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