

Opportunities and Challenges for Business English Graduates in GBA—Take the Business English Graduates From Guangdong Baiyun University as an Example

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In 2015, the Chinese government announced the establishment of Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao Bay Area, hereinafter referred as “the Great Bay Area (GBA)”, in which the development of foreign trade has entered a new stage. The development of GBA demands a large number of interdisciplinary talents who are proficient in English language and understand intercultural business communication as well. However, at this stage, there is still a shortage of high-quality interdisciplinary Business English talents. The graduates who have been employed in Business English cannot fully meet the requirements of enterprises in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao. This paper surveys the employment situation of business English graduates from Guangdong Baiyun University and the demands and requirements of enterprises in GBA for business English talents, explores the opportunities and challenges faced by business English majors in the context of GBA, and eventually puts forward a number of strategies so as to cultivate business English professionals in line with the development of GBA.

Keywords: GBA, business English major, opportunities, challenges, cultivation strategies

Introduction

The concept of “Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao Great Bay Area” was first explicitly put forward in “The Vision and Action for Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” jointly issued in 2015 by China’s National Development and Reform Commission, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce, in order to give full play to the role of Qianhai Shenzhen, Nansha Guangzhou, Hengqin Zhuhai, and other open cooperation zones and deepen cooperation with Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, to push deep-level reform by means of expanding opening-up, to innovate the open economic system and mechanism, to intensify scientific and technological innovation, and finally to form the new advantages in participating in and leading international cooperation and competition, and to become the leader and main force for the development of “One Belt, One Road” Initiative, especially for the 21st Century Sea Silk Road Construction. This concept will play a unique advantage in overseas Chinese and that of Hongkong and the Special Administrative Region of the Taiwan Strait, involving them to actively participate in

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the construction of “One Belt, One Road” (National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, 2015). The construction of Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao Great Bay Area will not only find new economic growth points for the Pearl River Delta region and build a new open economic system, but also help the country build a modern economic system and integrate into the global market system (Liang, 2019). It can be also said that, politically, the building of Great Bay Area (GBA) will serve a variety of China’s national developmental strategies, as well as the international interests and strategical goals such as maintaining the stability of the surrounding areas and it is a vital platform to implement and serve the “One Belt, One Road” strategy, that economically, deepening reform and opening up and building a new type of regional cooperation are important measures to deepen Pan Pearl River cooperation and regional coordinated development, and that, strategically, it serves as the fulcrum of the strategy of allocating and integrating resources and vigorously developing marine economy (Zhang & Gu, 2017).

The GBA enjoys the reputation of “world factory” and has a large industrial scale, which has formed the advantages and characteristics of industrial agglomeration development, where the demand for professional and technical talents, comprehensive talents, and innovative talents continues to grow. More than 180 colleges and universities, 16 Fortune 500 enterprises, eight national high-tech parks, and 500 innovation institutions are gathered in GBA, forming a complementary characteristic industry development mode of “Hong Kong and Macao colleges and universities + Pearl River Delta developed industrial base + huge market demand in the mainland”. Especially in recent years, Internet, big data, smart city, green energy, financial services, electronic communication, artificial intelligence, and other industries occupy the forefront of employment demand in GBA, and the overall salary level has a strong advantage in China (Jia, 2020). At the same time, China’s foreign trade industry also ushered in rapid development, the demand for compound talents who understand both foreign trade and English language is increasing. With the rapid development of foreign trade, English, as an international language, is becoming more and more important. Data show that 90% of China’s international trade uses English as the medium language (Lu, 2020). The growing demands for both business English talents and the increasing requirements on professional knowledge and skills mean that business English graduates will face more opportunities and challenges. Taking the current situation of business English graduates of Guangdong Baiyun University as an example, the annual employment rate of business English graduates has reached more than 98%, but only about 30% of them are really engaged in Business English related work in enterprises (Liu & Lei, 2014). Based on the questionnaire surveys on business English graduates from Baiyun University and on enterprises in GBA, this paper aims to understand the opportunities and challenges faced by business English graduates in the context of the construction of GBA, and try to put forward some effective strategies, so as to cultivate talents who meet the requirements of the times, especially the business English professionals who can serve the development of GBA.

Research Methodology and Results

For the study, the study team created two questionnaires separately on the employment situation of business English graduates and the demand of enterprises for business English graduates respectively. In order to clarify the orientation of the questionnaires and to strengthen their relevance, the authors set basic questions and a few innovative questions in both questionnaires. And in order to make the response convenience and to reduce the difficulties, single choice and multiple choice questions as well as short answer questions were designed in the two questionnaires. The main content of the survey was divided into two parts, with the first

part to find out the current employment situation of business English graduates, and the second part to find out the demand for business English majors in foreign-related enterprises in GBA. The respondents of the survey came from the graduate in Business English from Guangdong Baiyun University and the senior managers of foreign-related enterprises in GBA, which the Baiyun University graduates were working for.

The survey was conducted by online questionnaires, which are distributed through WeChat, QQ, and other China’s popular social platforms. From the graduates, 230 valid questionnaires were collected and from the senior managers in foreign-related enterprises and 110 collected questionnaires were valid. The survey was effective and the questionnaires would offer the authors efficient data about the study target.

Data Analysis

The study team conducted detailed analyses on each question, but limited to space, three questions from each questionnaire have been given special explanations, with bar graphs to illustrate the findings that are most relevant to the studies: What are the opportunities and challenges faced by business English graduates in the context of GBA?

The following are the results of three questions selected from each of the two questionnaires administered to business English majors at Guangdong Baiyun College and foreign-related enterprises in the Greater Bay Area.

Results and Findings From Business English Graduates

The three questions selected from the questionnaire surveying business English graduates were: (1) What opportunities has the construction of GBA brought to business English graduates? (2) What problems do business English graduates face in the work process? And (3) what do business English graduates consider to be the required competency for professionals in their field of work? The three questions are multiple choice questions and the results are shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

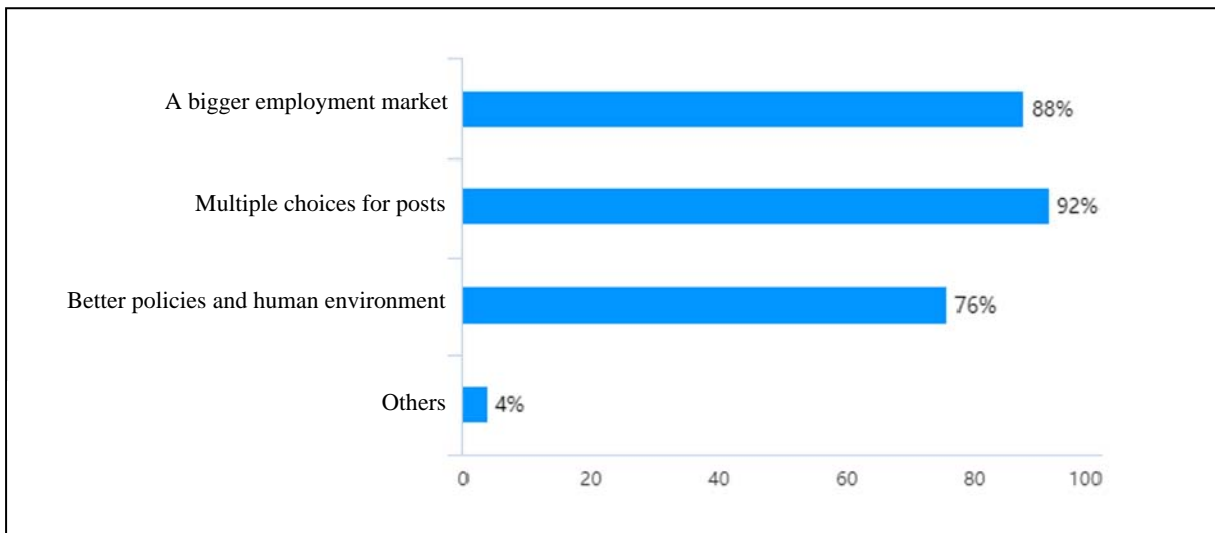


Figure 1. Opportunities for business English graduates brought by the construction of the Greater Bay Area.

As can be seen from Figure 1, more than 75% of graduates majoring in Business English believe that the construction of GBA has opened up a wider international market, provided more diversified employment opportunities and offered a favourable policy and human environment. 4% of graduates also believe that it has

brought other opportunities, such as promoting mutual exchanges among young people in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau in their lives, studies, and jobs.

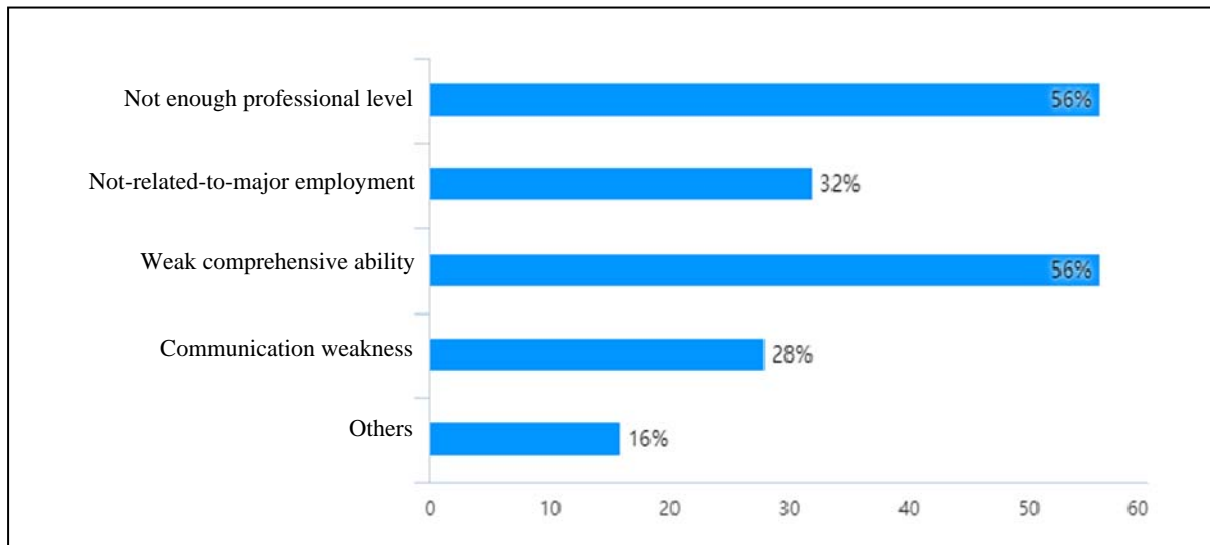


Figure 2. Problems faced by business English graduates in the workplace.

The results of the survey in Figure 2 show that when it comes to the problems faced by business English graduates at work, 56% of the graduates believe that their professional level is not adequate for their jobs, and still 56% respondents confess that their comprehensive ability is not strong, more than half of the business English graduates facing these two problems, which shows the two greatest bottlenecks in their career development. Following are the ones who choose mismatch between employment and profession (which accounts for 32%) and who think their communication is deficient (which accounts for 28%). 16% of those respondents still think they are deficient in other aspects, such as unfamiliarity with product technology, etc.

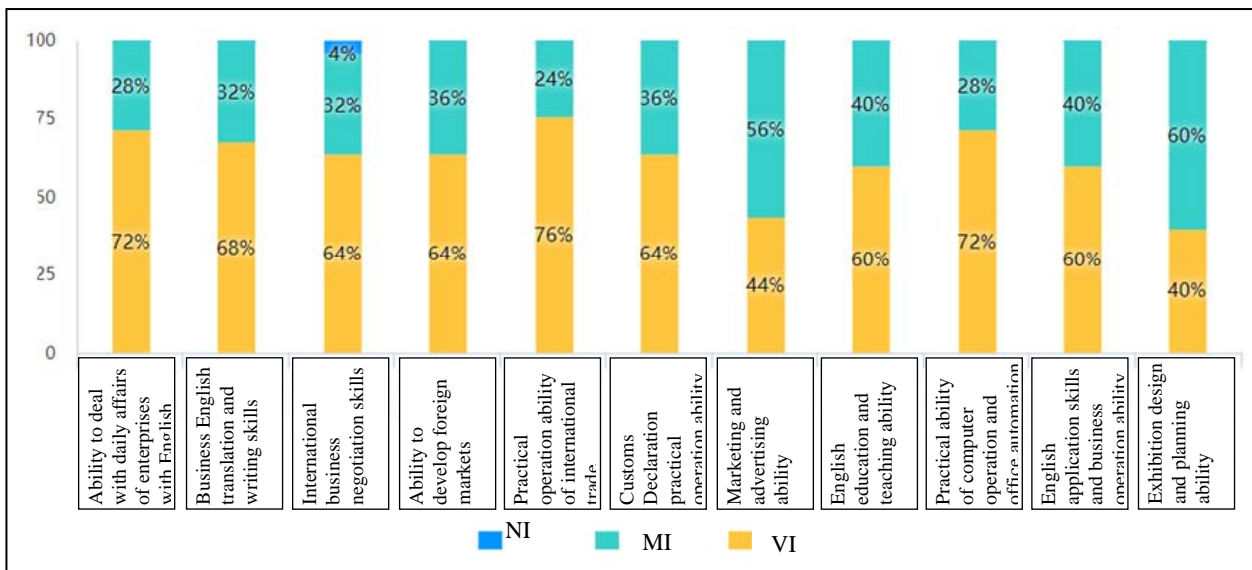


Figure 3. The structure of competencies that graduates of the business English stream consider necessary for this profession. (NI refers to “Not Important”; MI “Moderately Important”; and VI “Very Important”).

The above figure clearly shows that, the competencies involving English language, especially business English are deemed very important or moderately important in most respondents' views.

Results and Findings From Enterprises

The three questions selected from the questionnaire survey on foreign-related enterprises in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area are: (1) What kind of positions do enterprises offer to Business English graduates? (2) What kind of professional knowledge and skills are required by enterprises? And (3) what kind of business English professionals are most needed by enterprises in GBA? These three questions are all multiple choice questions, and the statistical results are shown in Figures 4, 5, and 6 respectively.

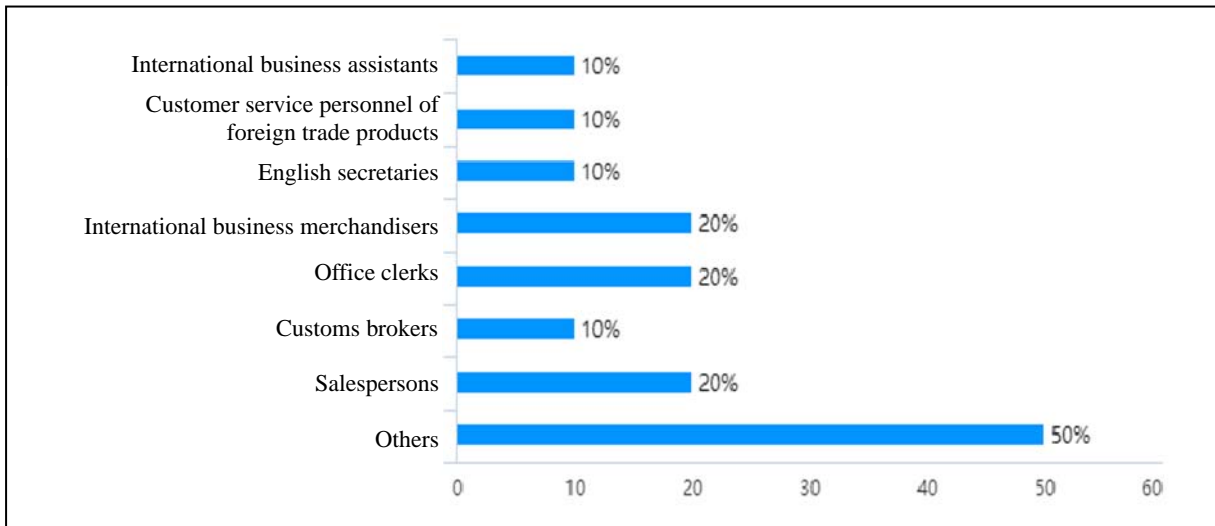


Figure 4. Job offers from companies for business English graduates.

As can be seen from Figure 4, the proportion of traditional jobs related to Business English, such as Chinese-English secretaries, international trade merchandisers, office clerks, is low, only accounting for 50% altogether, while the enterprises in this area tend to provide the English business graduates with more jobs in other domains, such as cross-border electric business, online education.

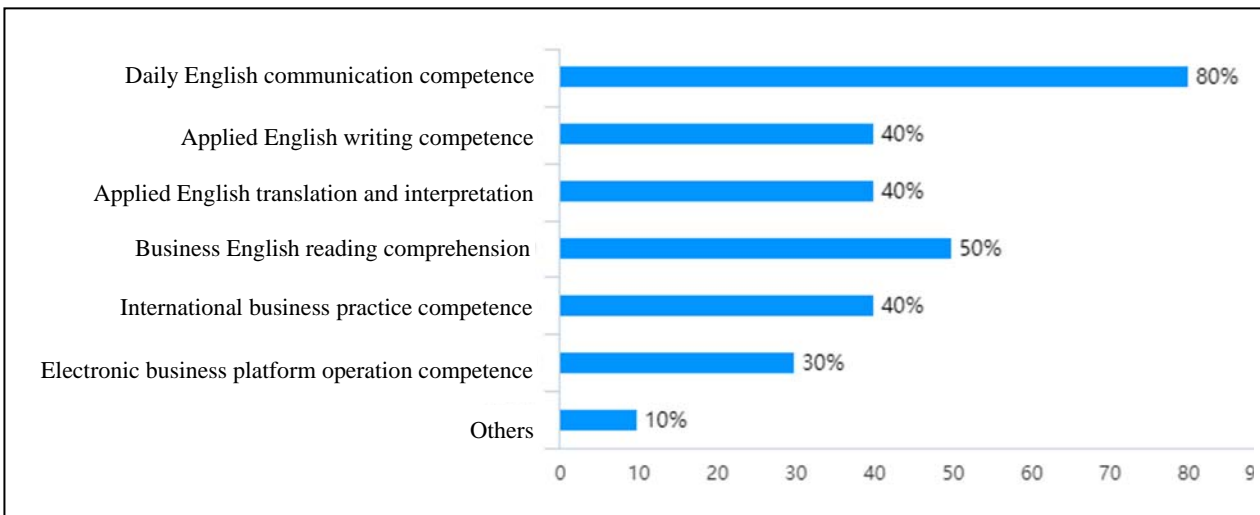


Figure 5. Professional knowledge and skills required by companies for business English graduates.

When asking about what the most important skill that a business English major should master, most enterprises still stick to the choice of daily English communication skills in GBA (with the proportion accounting for 80%), followed by business English reading skills, with 50% of the respondents arguing for its importance. Still, other skills involving English language application are also significant in the enterprises' standpoint, including Chinese-English translation, interpretation, writing, international business practice, and electronic business platform operation.

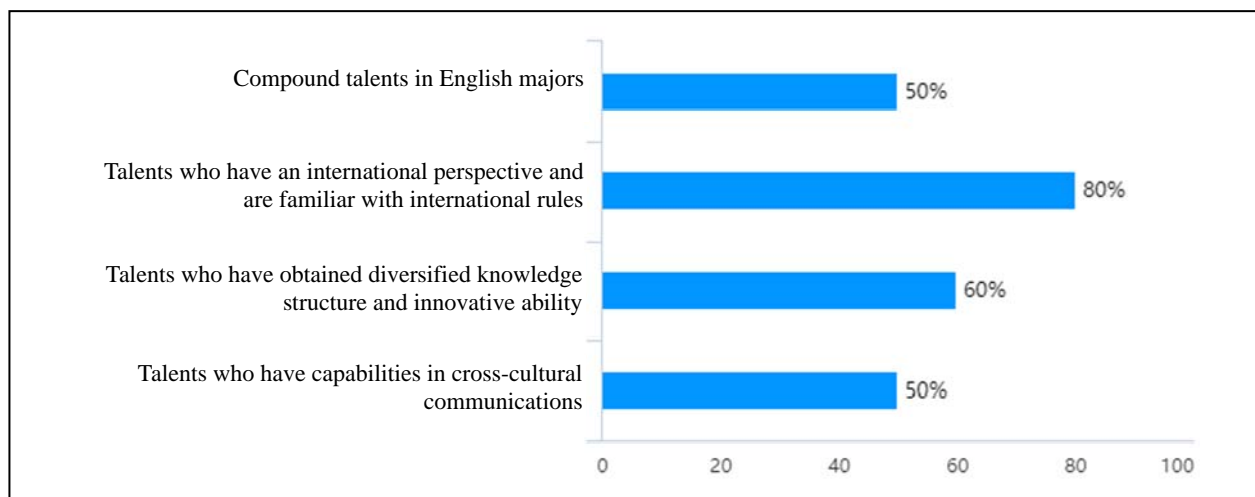


Figure 6. The most wanted business English professionals by enterprises.

Figure 6 shows that when it comes to the type of business English talents that companies in GBA are most in need of, 50% of the respondents choose talents with a combination of specialisms; 80% of the respondents choose talents who have an international perspective and master knowledge of international rules; 60% of the respondents desire talents with a diversified knowledge structure and the ability of innovation; and 50% of the respondents want talents with cross-cultural communication skills. The above four types of talents account for 50% or more as the most desired talents for the respondents, which shows that it is important for companies in GBA to have talents with a complex professional profile, talents with an international perspective and knowledge of international rules, talents with a diversified knowledge structure and innovation ability, and talents with cross-cultural communication ability, which are precisely what they lack most.

Opportunities and Challenges for Business English Graduates in the Context of GBA

The survey on business English graduates from Guangdong Baiyun College and foreign-related enterprises in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has enabled the team to obtain a lot of valuable feedback. Based on the survey and analyses, it is found that in the context of the construction of the GBA, graduates majoring in business English will face the following opportunities and challenges.

Opportunities

More employment opportunities for business English graduates. On April 19, 2019, WiseNews Recruitment, a Chinese well-known recruitment information platform, released “The Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau Greater Bay Area Industrial Development and Talent Mobility Report”, which conducted specific comparisons and analyses on several aspects including talents’ quality structure, flow direction, salary

expectations, and employment environment requirements, providing a certain reference value for all sectors of the society, especially for the job seekers and recruiters. Throughout this report, we can see that the Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao Greater Bay Area has been attracting a lot of preferential policies for talents, and Shenzhen and Guangzhou have both increased their financial and policy support for the introduction of high-level talents, which is a significant effect of the Greater Bay Area's talent policy on attracting external talents and continues to strengthen the attractiveness of international talents (Xie, 2019). With respect to the impact of the construction of the Greater Bay Area on business English graduates, it was also found that more than 90% of the graduates believed that the construction of GBA would provide more diversified choices for employment positions, and with the respect to the positions offered by foreign-related enterprises in the Greater Bay Area to business English graduates, it was found that fewer traditional business English positions would be supplied than 10 years before, and half of the senior managers of the enterprises who were surveyed believed that they would recruit English business graduates into other types of positions. Therefore, in the context of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, there are more and more diversified employment opportunities for Business English graduates.

A positive development outlook. 76% surveyed graduates believe the construction of the GBA will provide them with fine policy support and human environment. And in "The Outline of the Development Plan of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area", it is also proposed that the Greater Bay Area should become a quality living area that is good for living, working, and traveling. It should become a major maritime route for world trade and a core point of economic and trade convergence between Asia and Europe, which not only gives business English graduates in the Bay Area a good quality of life but also more opportunities to improve themselves, which makes their development prospects good.

A wider international job market. Hong Kong, Macau, and the nine cities in the Pearl River Delta are the most externally-oriented economic regions in the Mainland and important windows for opening up to the outside world. The number of multinational enterprises coming to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area will increase, and the survey results also show that 88% of graduates believe that the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has opened up a broader international market, so in the context of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, a broad market can be provided for graduates majoring in Business English.

Challenges

English language expertise and business expertise to be further strengthened. In the above survey results, it is mentioned that the professional level of business English majors is not adequate, and nowadays, the professional requirements for business English talents in the Bay Area are increasing. When asked in the questionnaire what kind of competence structure business English graduates think they should have, they all feel that they need not only basic business English skills, but also other abilities. When asked what skills business English graduates are required to have, the enterprises have a consensus that requirement for English expertise is still relatively high, especially in terms of daily oral communication skills, and they argue that if business English graduates do not have the expertise required by companies, they will not be able to fill the positions offered by foreign companies.

The overall quality to be strengthened. According to the survey, foreign-related enterprises in the Guangdong-Hong Kong Greater Bay Area are now most in need of talents with a complex professional profile,

an international perspective and knowledge of international rules, a diversified knowledge structure and the ability to innovate, and the ability to communicate across cultures. However, the result from the survey on business English graduates' employment situation suggests that a large proportion of these graduates still are deficient in overall qualities. Thus, business English graduates need to focus on strengthening their overall quality; otherwise it will pose a threat to their employment.

Suggestions

Through the surveys on business English graduates and foreign-related enterprises in GBA, we can understand the problems faced by the graduates and the requirements on international business talents from enterprises under the background of GBA. In view of these problems and requirements, we can take measures from the following aspects to improve the quality of talents cultivation.

Strengthen Professional Abilities

Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao will build an international leading platform, aim at the forefront of world science and technology and industrial development, and build a base for emerging industries, advanced manufacturing and modern service industries in the world. In order to adapt to the development of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, business English graduates must have the solid professional and technical knowledge required by the post, and have the ability of listening and speaking, reading in foreign languages, writing letters and business contracts, which is the basis of being competent for the post.^[8] We found from the survey that the daily Chinese and English business processing ability and computer operation ability are particularly important among the enterprises, so for the business English majors, the focus should be put on strengthening these abilities when they are in university.

Cultivate Comprehensive Talents

The construction of GBA adheres to the basic principle of keeping pace with the times and pays attention to the cultivation of interdisciplinary and high-quality talents. Hence, for business English majors, it is necessary to gain interdisciplinary language abilities, who not only master foreign language knowledge and skills, but also have business knowledge in specific industries, and have good cross-cultural communication ability, innovation ability, information analysis and processing ability. In a word, we should cultivate comprehensive talents with excellent language skills and other professional knowledge.

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