

## Research on Cultivating Business Talents Through In-Depth Cooperation Between Universities and Enterprises

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### Abstract

The demand for skilled business professionals has reached unparalleled heights in the context of the constantly globalizing world. The China-Shanghai Cooperation Organization Demonstration Zone for Local Economic and Trade Collaboration in Qingdao (Qingdao SCO demonstration zone) has garnered attention as a prominent hub for fulfilling the growing need in this area. The notion of collaboration between universities and enterprises has become an essential approach, assuming a crucial role in the development of these individuals. The phenomenon described is particularly conspicuous within the domain of cross-border electronic commerce, a sector that is currently undergoing rapid expansion and significant changes.

This extensive study delves into the intricate dynamics of university-enterprise cooperation inside the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone. The methodology employed in this study is characterized by its robustness, as it incorporates a comprehensive examination of the available literature, statistical investigations, and real-world implementations of the collaboration model. Notably, there is a particular focus on the city of Qingdao. The research also examines the incorporation of the “industry-university-research” model at a societal level, investigating its ramifications and efficacy of business talent cultivation in the domain of cross-border e-commerce.

The initial results of the study underscore the exceptional efficacy of the university-enterprise collaboration paradigm. This model has demonstrated its significance in enhancing students’ understanding of the market, their ability to adapt, and their overall potential for employment. The emerging cross-border e-commerce industry in Qingdao has introduced a new set of demands for skilled professionals in the business sector. These span complex topics such as cross-cultural communication, innovative digital marketing tactics, and a comprehensive awareness of the numerous legal and regulatory frameworks governing e-commerce businesses. In this particular context, the strategy known as “SCO-Integration-Combination” has been introduced as an innovative technique aimed at enhancing the collaboration between academic institutions and enterprises inside the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone.

The findings of this study highlight the crucial significance of enhancing partnerships between universities and enterprises in the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone. These strategic relationships serve to accelerate the process of talent development and guarantee a smooth synchronization between educational paradigms and the constantly changing industrial requirements of China, particularly in the dynamic field of cross-border e-commerce.

**Keywords:** university-enterprise cooperation, business talent cultivation, Qingdao SCO demonstration zone, cross-border e-commerce, SCO-Integration-Combination

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid growth of economic globalization and information technology, the business environment has become increasingly complex and competitive, posing new challenges to business talents, and requiring them to possess strong practical, creative, and leadership skills (C. Liu, 2022). At this time, it is crucial to discover a new model that can effectively combine theory and practice. One such model is the in-depth university-enterprise cooperation, which shows promise in broadening students' horizons through exposure to business cases and the resolution of real-world problems (J. Y. Lu, 2023). This cooperation model also enables the perfect integration of education and business, providing enterprises with talents that are urgently needed in the market, offering more opportunities for internships and jobs, strengthening the linkage between industry, university, and research institute, as well as enhancing commercialization efficiency of research findings (J. Y. Lu, 2023). In the practical activities, students' innovation consciousness and hands-on abilities can be improved, and they can better adapt to the job market after their graduation (J. Y. Lu, 2023). Meanwhile, the university-enterprise cooperation can promote the fusion of universities and society and generate synergistic benefits to better serve the socio-economic development and industrial upgrading (J. Y. Lu, 2023).

Given this context, it's worth looking at the situation in the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone. In this area, the cross-border e-commerce industry is expanding swiftly, fostering further exchanges and cooperation with 15 cities in the 12 SCO member states (Peninsula Metropolitan Daily, 2023). To date, Qingdao has established cordial ties with these cities or made evident its intention to do so (Peninsula Metropolitan Daily, 2023). This represents a historic breakthrough in both the quantity and quality of Qingdao's sister cities as the number of such cities has expanded by 300% and the proportion of capital cities has climbed from 33% to 58% (Peninsula Metropolitan Daily, 2023). Because of these positive changes, businesses are looking for more skilled employees than ever before. However, the current lack of cross-border e-commerce talents in the region and the unreasonable talent structure have seriously hampered the development of the industry (L. X. Liu, Y. Wang & H. Zhao, 2023). Therefore, it is of great practical and theoretical significance to study how to cultivate cross-border e-commerce industry talents in a targeted manner through university-enterprise cooperation and collaboration.

## 2. Literature Review

The study of university-enterprise cooperation dates back decades. As early as the 1980s, Etzkowitz introduced the concept of university-enterprise cooperation, highlighting its significance in knowledge and intellectual property transfer and technology diffusion (E. Cerver Romero, J. J. Ferreira, & C. I. Fernandes, 2021). He proposed that by collaborating, businesses and universities could learn from each other and make academic research more grounded and applied, and enterprises could have access to cutting-edge research findings and technologies through this cooperative model (H. Etzkowitz, 1983). Following that, Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff expanded on this concept by introducing the "Triple Helix" model, which sees the dynamic interaction between universities, businesses, and governments as a key driver of knowledge innovation (Y. Cai & M. Amaral, 2021). They contended that the interaction of these three parties could not only promote technological innovation, but also help to create an environment conducive to creative thinking, hence fostering socioeconomic development (H. Etzkowitz & L. Leydesdorff, 1995). University-enterprise cooperation has not only acquired widespread attention in theory but is also being accepted by an increasing number of businesses and universities in practice. Cooperation between universities and businesses not only encourages technological advancement but also aids in talent training and development and teaching reform (L. Mathisen & E. J. B. Jørgensen, 2021). This offers novel perspectives that can be implemented in university-level business education. Furthermore, Yılık and Kondakçı asserted that university-enterprise cooperation improves students' employability by providing them with rich practical experience and vocational skills (M. A. Yılık & Y. Kondakçı, 2023).

Moving to a more localized context, in China, university-enterprise cooperation is also highly valued as a significant approach to business education. According to Zhang (Y. Zhang, 2022), collaboration between universities and businesses helps to build a talent training model that is tailored to the demands of businesses and stimulates innovation in teaching content and methodologies. With the backing of this approach, students have more chances to take part in actual commercial operations, enabling them to strategically develop their practical skills and to think outside the box (Y. Zhang, 2022). Xu conducted an empirical study on the effect of university-enterprise cooperation on the employment prospects of business students and concluded that it was beneficial (M. B. Xu, 2022). This is because a strong relationship between universities and companies improves students' market literacy and flexibility, which in turn boosts their employability (M. B. Xu, 2022). The business talent cultivation strategy in China is constantly being modified and explored. For instance, Liu presented a new type of business talent development model with the integration of "industry-university-research" at societal level (X. Liu, 2023), whereas Wang and Bin focused on the usefulness and applicability of business talent cultivation (J. Wang & H. Bin, 2023). In the cross-border e-commerce industry, Song observed that the growth of cross-border e-commerce has engendered new requisites for business talents, encompassing the domains of

cross-cultural communication, digital marketing, and comprehension of the legal and regulatory frameworks governing e-commerce industries (H.Y. Song, 2022). To this end, Liu put forth a model centered around university-enterprise cooperation, intended for cultivating potential and talented individuals in the realm of cross-border e-commerce (W.X. Liu, 2022). It was posited that the integration of university-enterprise collaboration with hands-on pedagogy, as well as instruction in innovation and entrepreneurship, would serve to enhance students' comprehensive aptitude and passion for new ideas (W.X. Liu, 2022). There are also several studies on university-enterprise cooperation in specific regions of China. Zhuo, for example, examined the university-enterprise cooperation model in Qingdao and discovered that the efficacy of such collaboration is contingent upon the indispensable role played by governmental leadership and policy support (H. Zhuo, 2022). In addition, Qingdao has formulated a clear development plan and implementation strategy for training high-end e-commerce talents, creating a favorable environment for university-enterprise cooperation (Q. Lan, 2023).

In general, existing research has fully demonstrated how crucial it is of university-enterprise cooperation in talent development, technical innovation, and industrial development, particularly in business talent training and cross-border e-commerce talent training. However, it is imperative to conduct additional research and engage in extensive deliberations about the in-depth university-enterprise collaboration framework within the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone, as well as the precise strategies for nurturing competent business experts in the new era.

### **3. The Role of University-Enterprise Cooperation in the Cultivation of Business Talents**

The concept of university-enterprise cooperation, forged through the collaborative efforts of educational institutions and businesses, has played a pivotal role in nurturing the development of tomorrow's business leaders (L.L. Guo, F.H. Li & X.T. Zhou, 2022). According to data sourced from the Chinese Ministry of Education in the year 2022, it has been revealed that a noteworthy number exceeding 3,000 industry-university integrated enterprises have been established, and 21 industry-university integrated cities have been designated as pilot projects within the confines of the Chinese territory (H. Hu & J.L. Bai, 2022). Cooperation between universities and businesses provides students with the opportunity to directly participate in corporate initiatives, thus contributing to the development of their motivations, and improving their self-learning and collaboration skills (L.L. Guo, F.H. Li & X.T. Zhou, 2022). Simultaneously, it propels the endeavor of curriculum content reform (L.L. Guo, F.H. Li & X.T. Zhou, 2022).

Furthermore, university-enterprise cooperation also helps bridge the gap between the two sectors (H.Y. Wei, 2023). It facilitates the process of businesses in identifying and implementing effective resolutions to practical challenges, while concurrently fostering the development of students' resiliency (H.Y. Wei, 2023). This model integrates enterprise requirements and academic research in a manner that allows instructors to gain industry insight and access to professional trends, thereby making education more responsive to social development and talent market demand (H.Y. Wei, 2023). Therefore, the role of in-depth university-enterprise integration in the development of new business talents is multifaceted, and it can cultivate talents with greater market competitiveness and value for future business growth.

### **4. The Current State of Cross-Border E-Commerce Industry in Qingdao SCO Demonstration Zone**

As of 2023, there are 165 cross-border e-commerce pilot zones in China; 105 of those have been approved for review, but only 10 cities have received a first rank evaluation (Y. Shi, 2023). Qingdao is the only northern city among those evaluated as "first rank" for two consecutive years, firmly establishing itself as the "northern first city" of cross-border e-commerce (Y. Shi, 2023). Remarkably, cross-border e-commerce import and export transactions in Qingdao reached 258.3 billion yuan from January to July in 2023, a 38% rise over the same period last year (Chuhaibang, 2023). Over time, Qingdao has developed its own distinctive model for cross-border e-commerce expansion, with the SCO demonstration zone becoming an essential hub for this growth. Specifically, the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone's foreign trade volume increased by 38.3% to 36 billion yuan in 2022, including 8.1 billion yuan in imports and exports from the core zone to SCO nations (Peninsula Metropolitan Daily, 2023). In order to promote the new mode and model of foreign trade, Qingdao has made efforts in policy support, service support and model innovation, as depicted in Figure 1, optimizing and improving the effectiveness of China (Qingdao) cross-border e-commerce comprehensive service platform, supporting the platform to expand value-added services such as government, finance, supply chain and overseas warehouse, building online ecosystem, and promoting data integration, innovation integration and industry integration (Y.J. Xu & N.C. Zhai, 2022). In 2023, Qingdao took a further step by issuing the Implementation Rules on Accelerating the High-Quality Development of Cross-Border E-Commerce on Several Policy Measures, which aims to promote the high-quality development of Qingdao's comprehensive cross-border e-commerce pilot zone from various perspectives, including enhancing the city's cross-border e-commerce ecosystem and supporting the construction of streamlined facilities for cross-border e-commerce exports (X.Y. Chen & X.W. Chen, 2023). In general, Qingdao has a favorable outlook on the growth of cross-border e-commerce, and efforts

have been made to assist it through both policy and service (X.Y. Chen & X.W. Chen, 2023). The current status of cross-border e-commerce development in SCO demonstration zone exhibits great potential.

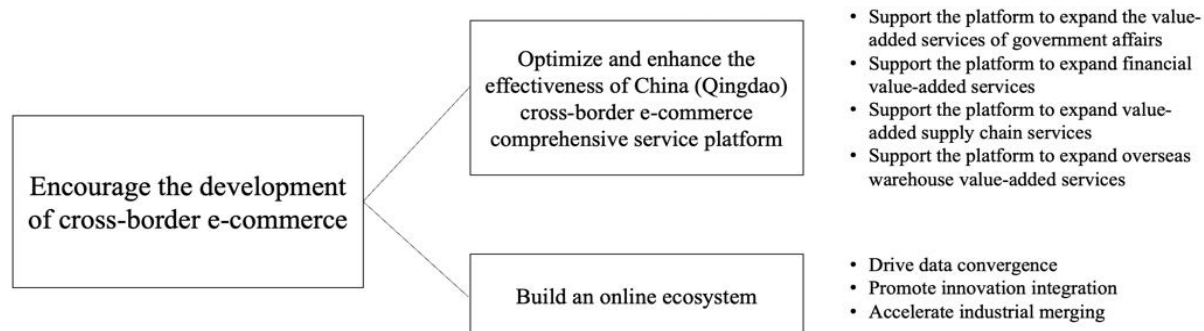


Figure 1. Concept map of Qingdao's measures to promote foreign trade development

Nonetheless, despite the promising status of cross-border e-commerce in the SCO demonstration zone, there are still challenges that must be addressed, such as increased market competition, diverse consumer demands, and the need to improve industry standards (S.L. Yan, 2023). Consequently, novel prerequisites for business talents have emerged, involving higher levels of professionalism, business sensitivity, as well as innovation and practical skills (S.L. Yan, 2023).

## 5. Strategies for Cultivating Business Talents Through In-Depth Cooperation Between Universities and Enterprises in Qingdao SCO Demonstration Zone

### 5.1 Optimizing the Construction of Professional Disciplines and Curriculum Design

Deeply influenced by its unique geographical advantages, the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone emphasizes the practicality and foresight of its universities' majors and courses in the development of business talents for the new era. As the only 4F airport and railroad container terminal, as well as the first airside comprehensive bonded zone in Shandong Province, the zone has 203 scheduled airlines to 145 domestic and international destinations worldwide (Peninsula Metropolitan Daily, 2023). It also has 31 domestic and international trains to 54 cities in 23 countries along the SCO and "One Belt, One Road" routes (X. Bai & G.S. Yang, 2023). This international logistics corridor has built a global network that offers abundant learning opportunities to business students.

Universities can implement the "SCO-Integration-Combination" strategy, as depicted in Figure 2, to create new business majors and design curriculum that meet the requirements of present and future talents. The "SCO" refers to the idea that universities and colleges should base their training of future business leaders on Qingdao, particularly the SCO demonstration zone. It further advocates offering services to the demonstration zone. The overarching goal of the "SCO" part of this strategy is to facilitate the growth of the demonstration zone by supplying it with educated individuals who possess the necessary skills and expertise. Especially in cross-border e-commerce, universities can organize "enterprise challenge projects" so that student teams can use the demonstration zone as a channel of international logistics corridor to solve the actual logistics and e-commerce operation issues encountered by local companies. Such a curriculum design can help students not only understand the latest business theories, but also improve their abilities to address real-life problems. "Integration" refers to an approach that prioritizes the development of interdisciplinary development, the introduction of basic and extension courses for business majors, and the creation of specialist clusters centered on competency for digital business. This integration enables students to acquire a broader spectrum of knowledge and be more prepared to adapt to the changing demands of society. In cross-border e-commerce talent training programs, for instance, students can learn theoretical concepts such as international trade legislation while also becoming acquainted with e-commerce data analysis tools and learning the entire operational process (Q. Fang & W.T. Huang, 2021). "Combination" refers to the idea that the whole process of training business talents is embedded with English and Russian courses in order to cultivate high-quality technical capabilities talents with a global perspective. Universities can also learn from the most up-to-date educational theories and methods, such as project-based learning as well as problem-oriented learning, and incorporate the needs of contemporary enterprises into business classes in English or Russian. This combination of language education not only provides students with the required communication skills, but also offers a broader international viewpoint, allowing them to better adapt to a cross-cultural work environment and excel in a worldwide business climate.

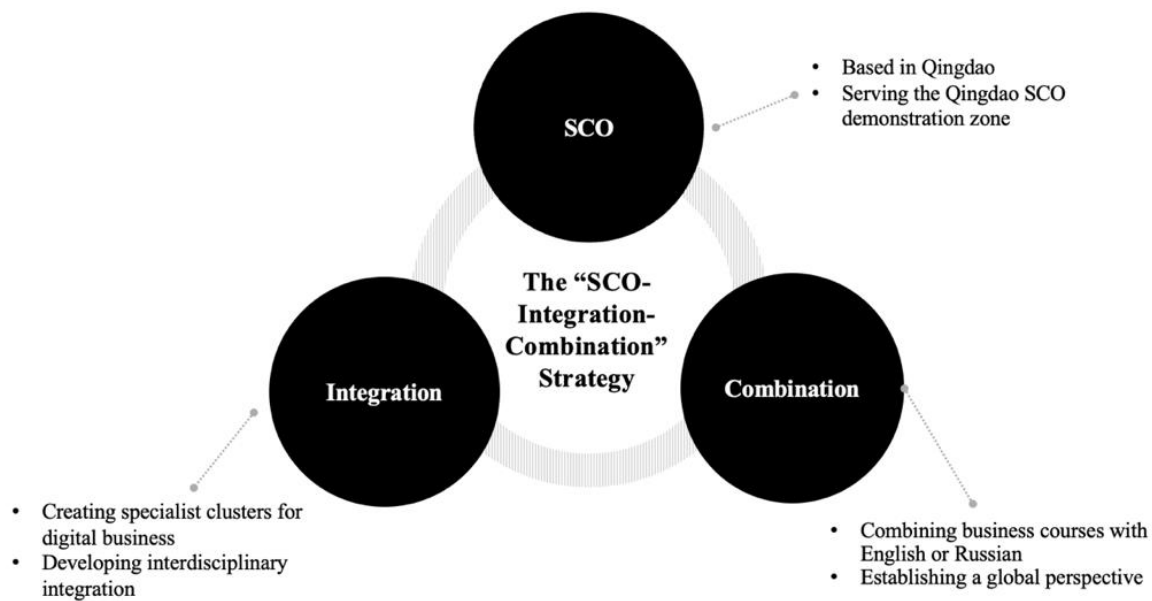


Figure 2. Circle chart of the “SCO-Integration-Combination” strategy

### 5.2 Enhancing Practical Teaching

Practical teaching is an essential component of nurturing business talents. In the realm of cross-border e-commerce, the vast enterprise ecosystem of Qingdao SCO demonstration zone can provide a high-quality resource pool for practical teaching, allowing students to immerse and internalise themselves in e-commerce operations and feel the pulse of business (Q. Wu & H.L. Luo, 2022). In November 2022, the China-Shanghai Cooperation Organization Local Economic and Trade Cooperation Comprehensive Service Platform, the first of its kind in China, was unveiled at the SCO Demonstration Zone (X. Bai & G.S. Yang, 2023). This service platform offers a comprehensive array of services to enterprises via its 3 primary functions of comprehensive information display, comprehensive function application, and comprehensive data release, as well as its 8 application modules and 73 sub-functions (X. Bai & G.S. Yang, 2023). Additionally, it encompasses special applications such as SCO cross-border credit collection, intelligent query of customs clearance information, and paperless business of customs transit (X. Bai & G.S. Yang, 2023). Nearly 5,000 businesses have joined the platform to date (X. Bai & G.S. Yang, 2023). For business students, such a comprehensive platform provides a wealth of academic resources as well as practical experiences. The featured applications of the platform enable businesses to not only give students real business cases to consider but also practical teaching infrastructure like laboratories and innovation bases so that students can carry out field operations, gain an in-depth understanding, and master pertinent skills and proficiency. In addition, universities can utilize the data and information resources of the platform to establish a variety of practical teaching programs, such as workshop-based learning and simulated business operation, to meet the diverse learning needs of students, deepen their understanding of business operation, and improve their overall quality and professional ability (Q. Wu & H.L. Luo, 2022).

### 5.3 Setting up a Business Mentoring Program

The business mentoring program is an important aspect of business talent development since it can assist students have a better understanding of the real business environment. The Qingdao SCO demonstration zone has been energetically active at work since 2023 developing a succession of active and effective policy combinations centered on the concept of “project landing” and the treatment of “city partners” with genuine financial investments (Peninsula Metropolitan Daily, 2023). In the financial sector, for instance, the maximum settlement award for national corporate financial institutions is 150 million yuan; for enterprise listing, newly settled listed enterprises receive a one-time award of 15 million yuan; the first listing of domestic and foreign enterprises obtains a cumulative maximum of 15 million yuan, which draws in an enormous number of entrepreneurs (Peninsula Metropolitan Daily, 2023). In such a situation, colleges should invite enterprise executives or experts to serve as mentors in the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone, so creating a continuous learning environment for students from the classroom to practice (J.Y. Cheng, 2023). Especially for the field of cross-border e-commerce, corporate mentors can not only guide students to anticipate the challenges they will face after gaining experience from a variety of perspectives, but also share their own experiences in the e-commerce field so that students can comprehend the e-commerce operation situation and industry trends. With this exposure and instruction, students can learn more about the state of cross-border e-commerce in the SCO

demonstration zone, seize opportunities, and develop their operational e-commerce literacy.

#### *5.4 Providing Diverse Internships and Training Programs*

Qingdao SCO demonstration zone has attracted more than 2,000 trade entities and constructed over 10 trade platforms, which can offer a large number of internship and practical training opportunities and create an ideal environment for translating theoretical knowledge into practical skills (Qingdao Daily, 2023). In cross-border e-commerce, students are involved in every step of the business, from choosing products to conducting market research and developing marketing strategies to running and managing the online storefront (C.Y. Zhu & S.Z. Weng, 2023). Universities play a “bridge” role by partnering with businesses in the demonstration zone to provide students with hands-on workplace experience, where they can learn important transferable abilities like teamwork, project management, problem solving, etc. Simultaneously, internships provide students with a forum for industry exchange and linkage, enabling them to adapt to industry developments and increase their employment competitiveness (C.Y. Zhu & S.Z. Weng, 2023). Moreover, these internships lay the foundation for students’ future careers, allowing them to make connections within the industry (C.Y. Zhu & S.Z. Weng, 2023).

#### *5.5 Facilitating Industry-Related Competitions*

Competitions are a key tool for identifying and developing outstanding talents. Qingdao SCO demonstration zone offers a distinct advantage in this regard. The demonstration zone has a substantial industrial base that unquestionably offers a rich and varied practical environment for competitions. This industrial base includes 31 of the 41 national industry categories, more than 15,000 registered industrial businesses, and more than 232,000 market players (Peninsula Metropolitan Daily, 2023). E-commerce planning contests and competitions about running an online store are two examples of the kinds of competitions that could be organized here. These events provide a one-stop practice opportunity for students to stay up to date on industry news (J. Song & D.P. Jin, 2023). Taking the E-Commerce Operation Competition as an example, students are required to learn how to optimize user experience, precision marketing, etc., thereby exercising their creative thinking skills.

#### *5.6 Conducting Cooperative Research Projects Between Universities and Enterprises*

Joint university-enterprise research projects play a significant role in business education. The Qingdao SCO demonstration zone has held 114 sessions and trained over 9,500 people in economic and trade training, emphasizing the value of scientific research (H. Hu & J.L. Bai, 2022). Students could gain a thorough understanding of how the business world functions through such projects. Topics of research conducted jointly by universities and businesses may include e-commerce market trends, consumer behavior, and data-driven marketing strategies (D.L. He, 2023). These research aspects can help enterprises in the area satisfy their commercial needs while also giving students an in-depth grasp of cross-border e-commerce operations and management as well as boosting their research exploration capabilities. In addition, joint research efforts between universities and businesses can provide enterprises with innovative problem solutions and technical support (D.L. He, 2023). This strong collaboration among academia, industry and government will help the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone grow as a cross-border e-commerce hub.

#### *5.7 Establishing Joint Education Bases Between Universities and Enterprises*

The university-enterprise cooperative education base is vital in the process of cultivating business talents. Qingdao SCO demonstration zone has developed the main direction and integration strategy of “SCO + The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) + Industrial Internet + Belt and Road” in accordance with the cooperation method of “Management Committee + Platform Company + Head Enterprise + Social Capital” especially in cross-border e-commerce (Qingdao Daily, 2023). The “5-2-1” matrix development concept has been established (Qingdao Daily, 2023). Universities in the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone can take advantage of this strategy to establish bases in collaboration with businesses on a wide scale. Using 20 industrial clusters for economic and trade cooperation with SCO countries, the joint education bases will rely on 24 head enterprises and projects currently in development, giving students access to a comprehensive business environment from which they can learn the idiosyncrasies of e-commerce (J. C. Zhuang, 2022). Students can obtain first-hand industry experience by participating in website operations, product launches, marketing, data analysis, and so on (L.J. Yang, 2021). Moreover, the university-enterprise joint education base may also provide the businesses with the talents they require, which is advantageous for the companies’ long-term growth (L.J. Yang, 2021). Hence, this type of base is not only useful for students to get experience, but also for businesses to find and develop new talents.

### **6. Conclusion**

University graduates are under increasing pressure to find jobs in the new era, yet businesses are suffering from a severe deficit of qualified workers. To address the issue of talent imbalance on both sides, universities and industries in the Qingdao SCO demonstration zone must have a correct and in-depth understanding of university-enterprise cooperation. In order to improve the outcome and quality of talent cultivation, they should

recognize and address the problems and deficiencies in the process of university-enterprise cooperation in a timely manner, actively innovate the strategy of university-enterprise cooperation, and optimize the cultivation mode of business talents.

With its unique location advantages and enterprise resources, Qingdao SCO demonstration zone will assist in developing business talents and human capital for organizations in the new era of the War for Talent. It will provide a steady impetus for the growth of cross-border e-commerce in the region. Universities are expected to consistently develop the practical ability and innovative thinking of business talents through in-depth university-enterprise cooperation, respond to the problems of the new era with higher education quality, and construct a more ideal business talent cultivation system.

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