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Navigating the Fault Lines of Regional Integration: A Comparative Analysis of Pre-Service Kindergarten Teacher Education in the Greater Bay Area

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Abstract

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) is a dynamic megalopolis in South China engineered to integrate economic, technological, and infrastructure growth across eleven distinct cities. Backed by robust national strategies and forward-looking policies, the central government has actively propelled the region into a global powerhouse of innovation and connectivity. Crucially, this ambitious blueprint for regional synergy extends far beyond commerce and infrastructure—it also encompasses a profound integration within the realm of education.

Grounded in Woldegiorgis's middle-range theories of regional integration, this study examines pre-service kindergarten teacher education (PKTE) in the GBA, analyzing how cross-border institutional variations across Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao shape the dynamics of functional cooperation and structural integration. Utilizing a qualitative design, the research triangulates documentation analysis of official curricula and programmatic frameworks with semi-structured interviews from 10 deans or programme leaders across colleges and universities.

The findings reveal that while a shared pedagogical commitment to foundational professional knowledge and teaching practicums provides a solid baseline for functional cooperation, profound systemic divergences impede structural integration. Specifically, Hong Kong exhibits a highly diverse, decentralized qualification matrix (Higher Diploma, B.Ed., PGDE) with a layered, responsive curriculum. Conversely, Macao adopts a university-centered liberal arts model that optimizes bilingual adaptability but suffers from centralized regulatory rigidities. Guangdong operates on a bifurcated structural path, where top-tier universities prioritize research competencies while vocational colleges lean heavily toward practical skill training. Hong Kong's multi-tiered quality assurance mechanism fosters local autonomy and rapid adaptation. In contrast, Macau's centralized quality assurance model,

led by the Education and Youth Development Bureau, and Guangdong's adherence to national regulations highlight the institutional friction between centralized policy implementation and regional curriculum flexibility.

The study concludes that although functional convergence is actively occurring through shared cross-border educational exposure and field experiences, achieving systemic structural integration remains constrained by deep-seated regulatory, linguistic, and governance boundaries. This highlights the dualities of practical alignment versus policy harmonization in complex transnational economic zones.

Keywords: Pre-service Kindergarten Teacher Education, Regional Integration, Functional Cooperation, Structural Integration, Quality Assurance