



CHINA'S EXPECTATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS BASED ON EMPLOYMENT POLICY DOCUMENTS

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 31.10.2024

Revised date: 25.11.2024

Accepted date: 10.12.2024

Published date: 20.12.2024

To cite this document:

Zhang, Z., & Ahmad, H. (2024). A China's Expectations for University Students' Employment Outlook: A Qualitative Analysis Based on Employment Policy Documents. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 9 (38), 398-406.

DOI: 10.35631/IJLGC.938026

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Abstract:

This study examines the influence of China's employment policies on university graduates' attitudes and career expectations. As a key part of the workforce, graduates' views on employment affect both individual career paths and social stability. Amid the Fourth Industrial Revolution, high-quality development demands, and challenges like the U.S.-China trade war, COVID-19, and demographic shifts, graduates in China face growing employment pressures. In response, the government has introduced policies to reduce these pressures and promote high-quality employment. Through a qualitative analysis of 13 policy documents from 2015 to 2023, this research explores what are China government and society's expectations to graduates' employment. The analysis identifies four central themes: career direction, industry alignment, regional guidance, and employer type. The findings highlight a focus on value orientation, grassroots employment, and diverse career paths, urging graduates to combine personal goals with national development, seeking grassroots jobs, and exploring new economic opportunities.

Keywords:

Employment Outlooks; Employment Policy; Government; Graduates

Introduction

University graduates, as a crucial human resource in society, have employment outlooks that not only affect their individual career development but also directly influence social and economic stability (Wang, Y, 2012). In the face of unprecedented global changes, the industrial

transformation brought by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the latest requirements for high-quality development (Philbeck, T., & Davis, N, 2018), coupled with economic challenges from the U.S.-China trade war (Lau, L. J , 2020), health challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic (Lau, L. J, 2020), and internal challenges from demographic shifts, graduate employment has encountered numerous new problems, significantly impacting their employment outlook. In response, the government has introduced a series of employment policies to alleviate job market pressures and promote high-quality employment (Qiang, L., 2024). However, with ongoing technological advancements and changing market demands, whether graduates' employment outlooks align with national development goals has become a pressing issue that requires further research.

Research Objectives

This study, based on a qualitative analysis of China's current employment policies, aims to explore the government's expectations for graduates' employment perspectives, analyze how policies guide students to form appropriate career expectations and work attitudes, and examine how these policies help graduates adapt to market demands and achieve their career goals.

Research Question

What kind of employment outlooks does the government expect university graduates to have?

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research method using text analysis. Text analysis, as a research strategy proves to be effective in the following key areas:

Authority and Systematic Nature of Texts

Policy documents are authoritative official expressions (Aslanidis, P, 2018). They not only reflect the intentions and directions of policymakers but also directly influence societal and individual behaviors. By analyzing policy documents, researchers can accurately grasp the values, expected goals, and implementation logic conveyed by the policies.

Revealing Social Expectations and Norms Behind Policies

Text analysis helps to uncover the social expectations underlying policy formulation (Patton, C., Sawicki, D., & Clark, J, 2015). For instance, by analyzing the keywords and themes in employment policies, researchers can discover how policies shape and guide university graduates' employment perspectives, as well as society's expectations for graduates' career choices. Policy documents typically represent the government's formal response to certain societal issues, making them an essential channel for understanding societal expectations.

Freedom from Subjective Bias

Unlike surveys or interviews, text analysis relies on existing policy documents, avoiding the subjective bias that may arise from direct interaction with respondents. The foundation of text analysis is public, verifiable data, enhancing the research's objectivity.

Providing a Basis for Future Empirical Research

Text analysis can lay the groundwork for future empirical studies. After understanding the anticipated impacts of a policy, researchers can further collect and analyze empirical data to verify whether the policy has achieved its intended effects.

In summary, text analysis effectively reveals the social values and expectations behind policy documents, offering robust theoretical support, systematic structure, and logical rigor. It provides deep insights for policy studies and the social sciences. Hence, this study conducts a qualitative analysis of China's current employment policies.

Research process

The relevant policy documents and meeting highlights retrieved from websites such as the Chinese government portal, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security serve as the research subjects. A total of 13 national-level policy documents have been collected, starting from the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

Table 1: The Policy Documents On College Student Employment

Year	Title
2015	Employment Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China (Revised)
2015	Recommendations of the CPC Central Committee on Formulating the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development
2016	Opinions of the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council on Further Guiding and Encouraging College Graduates to Work at the Grassroots Level
2017	Opinions of the State Council on Employment and Entrepreneurship Work for the Present and Future Period
2017	Notice of the Ministry of Education on Employment and Entrepreneurship Work for 2018 Graduates of Regular Higher Education Institutions in China
2018	Notice of the Ministry of Education on Employment and Entrepreneurship Work for 2019 Graduates of Regular Higher Education Institutions in China
2018	Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China (Revised)
2020	Recommendations of the CPC Central Committee on Formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives for 2035
2021	Notice of the Ministry of Education on Employment and Entrepreneurship Work for 2022 Graduates of Regular Higher Education Institutions in China
2021	14th Five-Year Employment Promotion Plan of the State Council
2022	Notice of the General Office of the State Council on Further Promoting Employment and Entrepreneurship for College Graduates and Other Youth
2023	Notice of the Ministry of Education on Employment and Entrepreneurship Work for 2024 Graduates of Regular Higher Education Institutions in China
2023	Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Civil Affairs on Social Organizations Supporting College Graduates' Employment in 2023

There are several reasons for selecting these 13 policy documents for analysis:

Coverage Of Key Periods In Policy Evolution

These policy documents span several significant years from 2015 to 2023, reflecting the Chinese government's policy orientation toward college student employment at different stages. This period is suitable for studying the long-term impact of China's socio-economic development and changes in the job market on college students' employment outlook. For example, the Employment Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China (Revised) (Liaoxin, 2015) and the 14th Five-Year Employment Promotion Plan (Wei Houkai, Nian Meng, & Li Le, 2020) encompass the policies and measures adopted by the state to address employment issues during different periods, providing a foundation for examining the impact of policy changes on employment perceptions.

Authority and Representativeness of the Policies

These documents are issued by authoritative institutions such as the State Council, the Ministry of Education, and the central government, and possess a high degree of policy guidance and representativeness. They not only reflect the country's emphasis on college student employment but also demonstrate the specific actions taken by the government to promote employment. By analyzing these documents, one can gain a deeper understanding of the role and expectations of national policies in shaping and guiding the employment perspectives of college students.

Reflecting the Comprehensiveness of the Policies

These documents cover various aspects of policy content, including legal protections in the Employment Promotion Law (Liaoxin, 2015), specific implementation measures in the Notice on Employment and Entrepreneurship Work for College Graduates (Peng Jiachao et al., 2024), and strategic planning for future job market development in the 14th Five-Year Employment Promotion Plan (Wei Houkai, Nian Meng, & Li Le, 2020). These policy documents comprehensively impact college students' employment choices from legal, economic, and social perspectives. Analyzing these documents helps reveal the multi-level influence of policies on college students' employment outlook.

Closely Related To Changes In The Job Market

These policy documents are closely related to the changing trends in China's job market, particularly in areas such as high-tech industries, emerging sectors, and grassroots employment. For example, the Opinions on Further Guiding and Encouraging College Graduates to Work in Grassroots Positions (Chao Zhao, Litian Huang, & Jiao Feng, 2022) specifically emphasizes encouraging graduates to work at the grassroots level, while the 14th Five-Year Employment Promotion Plan (Wei Houkai, Nian Meng, & Li Le, 2020) reflects the country's focus on high-quality employment and innovation-driven entrepreneurship. These documents reflect the evolving demands for talent in various fields and industries.

Policy and Education System Linkage

These documents not only address employment policies but also focus on the linkage between education policies and the job market. The content related to university curriculum design, career guidance, and internship arrangements is directly connected to the employment readiness of college students. For instance, the Notice on Employment and Entrepreneurship Work issued annually by the Ministry of Education (Peng Jiachao et al., 2024) outlines in detail

how universities should provide career guidance and support for students. These policies influence students' career planning and employment expectations.

Text Organization

Print Policy Documents: Print all 13 policy documents and arrange them in chronological order to facilitate subsequent reading and analysis.

Create an Analysis Table: Develop a table with columns such as "Policy Name," "Date of Issuance," "Main Objectives," "Employment-Related Sections," "Keywords," and "Key Measures." This will clearly record the key points of each policy.

Read Each Policy Document Step by Step: Carefully read each policy document and highlight the core keywords and phrases such as "employment promotion," "entrepreneurship support," "grassroots employment," "innovation talent," etc.

Theme Summary: Summarize the main themes of each policy document. By extracting keywords, identify the key focus areas of the documents, such as encouraging entrepreneurship, promoting employment equity, and enhancing high-quality talent.

Results

Several documents explicitly encourage college graduates to pursue innovation and entrepreneurship. In terms of personal ideals, graduates are urged to "consciously integrate their personal aspirations into the nation's and people's causes" and "embed their personal dreams into the process of realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation" (Li, Wen, & Wang, Yajuan, 2016). Regarding employment choices, college graduates are guided to "seek employment in the central and western regions and in remote and underdeveloped areas" and "find employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in strategic emerging industries." In terms of employment perspectives, they are encouraged to "adopt a 'first employment, then career choice' mindset," "develop a correct outlook on employment and career choice," and "establish a scientific view of employment and personal success." These insights ultimately highlight four key themes: destination orientation, industry orientation, regional orientation, and organizational orientation.

Discussion

Under the theme of destination orientation, terms such as "self-employment," "grassroots service programs," and "joining the military" appear frequently, reflecting several key characteristics:

Emphasis on grassroots employment orientation: Terms like "grassroots service programs," "grassroots public management and social services," and "urban and rural grassroots" highlight the focus on directing graduates toward grassroots employment.

Alignment with national development strategies: High-frequency terms include "key fields," "major projects," "priority regions," "major initiatives," and "key industries," underscoring the alignment of employment with the country's strategic priorities.

More flexible and open employment choices: Concepts such as "new forms of employment," "new employment spaces," "self-employment," "flexible employment," and "internships or

positions in international organizations" suggest a broader and more diverse range of employment opportunities for graduates.

These trends indicate a shift toward encouraging graduates to engage in a variety of employment pathways that align with both national needs and emerging job market trends.

Industry Orientation refers to specific employment sectors, with terms such as "modern service industry," "modern agriculture," and "strategic emerging industries" appearing frequently. This orientation reflects the new economic normal, the background of industrial transformation and upgrading, and the new requirements for national economic development. These industries are closely related to the country's "new four modernizations" process, which promotes new industrialization, informatization, urbanization, and agricultural modernization.

The focus on these sectors highlights the alignment of employment opportunities with the nation's strategic goals in advancing these key modernization processes.

Regional Orientation focuses on specific employment regions, with terms such as "central and western regions," "remote and underdeveloped areas," "northeastern regions," and "impoverished areas" frequently appearing. Phrases like "guiding graduates to work in the northeastern region, central and western regions, and remote and underdeveloped areas" emphasize the call for graduates to contribute to these regions. Employment in areas related to poverty alleviation is part of the national agenda and a significant appeal to college graduates in response to the country's strategic needs and challenges.

This reflects the government's efforts to balance regional development by encouraging talent to support underserved and strategically important areas.

Organizational Orientation focuses on specific types of employment units, with terms like "small and micro enterprises," "grassroots government agencies and public institutions," and "state-owned enterprises" frequently appearing. Among these, "small and micro enterprises" is mentioned the most, indicating that employment in small and micro enterprises is a key employment direction promoted by the state for college graduates.

This emphasis reflects the government's recognition of the significant role that small and micro enterprises play in providing employment opportunities, fostering innovation, and supporting economic growth.

Conclusion

This study, through in-depth interviews with recruitment personnel from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, explored their views on the employment outlooks of Japanese language graduates and revealed key factors influencing their recruitment decisions. The findings indicate that while Japanese majors possess solid language skills, there exists a gap in career planning, cross-cultural adaptability, and interdisciplinary skills compared to the Ministry's actual needs. Recruiters generally feel that Japanese graduates lack a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of diplomatic work, particularly when facing multicultural contexts and complex international situations. These results suggest that there is insufficient alignment between the career choices of Japanese majors and the talent needs of the Ministry. The analysis above highlights the nation's expectations for college graduates' employment

outlook in the new era, characterized by value orientation, grassroots orientation, and diversity orientation.

Value Orientation: As China embarks on the journey toward socialist modernization, college graduates are viewed as vital human resources and key contributors across various sectors. The government places significant emphasis on guiding graduates in their career choices and fostering the correct employment values. Cultivating an employment outlook is seen as an important aspect of moral education and holistic education (Liang Wei, Ma Jun, & Mei Xucheng, 2020). This is reflected in encouraging and guiding graduates to integrate their personal aspirations with the realization of the Chinese Dream, the country's modernization drive, and the nation's development. Graduates are urged to align their career choices with national priorities and take active roles in major national projects, key fields, and initiatives, working where the country needs them most. The integration of personal choices with national needs is demonstrated through four main combinations: National Action Plans: Graduates are encouraged to participate in fields related to national initiatives like "Made in China 2025" and "Internet Plus," supporting China's aspirations to become a global leader in technology, cyberspace, and transportation. Major National Strategies: Graduates are guided to seek employment in regions and sectors tied to significant national strategies such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Yangtze River Economic Belt, and the coordinated development of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei. Regional Coordinated Development Strategy: Graduates are encouraged to seek employment in the northeastern regions, central and western regions, and remote and underdeveloped areas. Modern Agricultural Development: Graduates are motivated to engage in sectors related to the transformation of agricultural practices and the construction of new rural areas, focusing on the development of new agricultural technologies, varieties, and modern agricultural management. This approach underscores the intertwining of personal career development with national priorities, encouraging graduates to contribute to critical areas that are aligned with the country's long-term strategic goals.

The second aspect is grassroots orientation. Grassroots employment serves as a significant platform for university graduates, with the government placing great emphasis on encouraging graduates to work at the grassroots level through policy guidance and grassroots projects. In December 2016, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued a notice outlining clear requirements for guiding and encouraging college graduates to work in grassroots positions. As a supporting document, the Ministry of Education released a notice in April 2017 to further encourage graduates to take up grassroots jobs. In November of the same year, a collaborative initiative called the "Grassroots Growth Plan for College Graduates" (2018) was launched by the Central Organization Department, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, and the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League. This plan is comprehensive, covering six sub-areas: capacity training, job practice, promotion pathways, work environment, comprehensive service, and talent reserve, effectively removing multiple barriers to grassroots employment and facilitating career pathways in this sector. In June 2022, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security jointly issued a notice to enhance employment opportunities for college students in urban and rural communities, mandating that all newly recruited positions in these communities be open to college graduates, thereby further expanding grassroots employment opportunities for students.

College students' grassroots employment mainly includes the following channels:

Participation in national and local grassroots employment programs: These include initiatives led by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, such as the "Western Program," the Ministry of Education's "Special Post Program," and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security's "Three Supports and One Assistance." These grassroots programs are structured at both national and local levels. Applying for grassroots public management and social service positions: These positions are specifically designed for communities and rural areas, focusing on public management and social services. Supporting rural revitalization: Under the background of the rural revitalization strategy, there is significant growth potential in fields related to modern agricultural production and operations, resulting in a high demand for college graduates. Employment in small and micro enterprises: Although college graduates show a strong preference for jobs in government agencies, public institutions, and state-owned enterprises, the actual employment distribution reveals that private enterprises, primarily small and micro enterprises, are the main destinations for graduates. Statistics indicate that the number of graduates employed in small and micro enterprises has significantly surpassed that in other types of organizations, making it a major market for new and recent graduates. Joining the military: Encouraging more college students to enlist in the military for national defense construction is also an important form of grassroots employment, allowing them to grow and develop within the military.

The third aspect is diversification orientation. With the continuous emergence of new industries, new business formats, new models, and new methods, the employment landscape for college graduates has become more diverse and flexible. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party emphasized the support and regulation of new employment forms, further broadening the employment choices for university students. Under the new economic context, diversification orientation manifests in the following ways:

Unblocking traditional employment channels: Continued implementation of grassroots employment programs aimed at graduates, with a focus on job opportunities in government agencies, public institutions, and state-owned enterprises for college graduates. Additionally, private enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are seen as vital forces for economic development, encouraging graduates to actively seek employment in these sectors. Expanding new employment spaces: Identifying new employment forms within the sharing economy and platform economy, and engaging in emerging job roles driven by internet, big data, and artificial intelligence technologies. These avenues represent new growth points for diverse employment for graduates. Encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives among graduates: In recent years, the government has introduced various encouraging policies for college students' entrepreneurship, while local governments have launched specific measures to support innovation and entrepreneurship among students, such as interest-free loans, tax reductions, and venue support. This has ignited students' enthusiasm for entrepreneurship, with a significant number of current students and recent graduates engaging in entrepreneurial ventures, making self-employment a new choice in their diversified employment landscape.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by "Hebei Minzu Normal University Institutional Fund Project" (Project ID: PT2023017).

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