

# Employment of University Students in China and Abroad: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

At present, the phenomenon of "employment difficulty" among university students is relatively common. In the past, the academic circle has conducted in-depth research on the employment of university students, and this paper studies research done by Chinese and foreign scholars on the employment of university students. This article is a preliminary study based on literature highlights, readings, inquiries, and views using library resources including circulars, books, journals, and websites. The preliminary survey results indicate that basic theoretical research and assessment methods, both in China and abroad, are relatively mature and have yielded rich results. However, it should be noted that there are still many important problems to be solved, and there is still a large space for deepening and expanding. First, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, putting forward new requirements for university students. So, what is the new connotation of university students' employment views? At present, the research in this area is still unknown. Second, scholars rarely focus on a certain discipline when they study the employment issues of university students. Thirdly, when evaluating the effects of students' employment notions on future employment, research frequently focuses on graduates rather than current students. Finally, very few academics examine it from the standpoint of international relations.

**Keywords:** Employment, Employment Concepts, Graduates, Employability, Employment Difficulty

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## Introduction

As the most creative, vigorous, and energetic group in society, university students not only aspire and ideals but also have mastered relatively systematic knowledge of modern science and culture, making them the most precious talent resource in society (Wang, Ronghua, 2021). The employment of university students has been a focal point in the higher education sector and society at large. The employment issues facing university students have garnered close attention from the government and society, leading to a growing discussion on the topic. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized the importance of employment, stating, "We must prioritize employment and implement a proactive employment policy to achieve fuller employment and create higher-quality jobs." (Authoritative Release: Full Report of the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 2017) (Li, 2017) The employment of university students is crucial for achieving the goals of university personnel training, developing a quality workforce, driving innovation,

and building a moderately prosperous society in all aspects, ultimately transforming China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful. Therefore, promoting the employment of university students in China is essential. This study examines previous research that focused on using Internet technology to address the employment of university students. The paper aims to pinpoint key research gaps in the employment of Chinese university students.

## Research Objective

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to achieve the research objective, which included: 1. Investigating the existing research landscape on the employment of university students in China and internationally. 2. Identifying the primary issues highlighted in recent studies on the employment of university students in China and abroad. 3. Recognizing potential directions for future research in this field.

## Methodology

The systematic literature review is a distinct research methodology that sets itself apart from conventional reviews. It leverages digital indexing and research publications to enhance its methodologies, thereby differentiating it from traditional reviews (Lame, G, 2019, July). A thorough review was undertaken to assess research on university student employment in China and internationally, to identify research deficiencies, and to highlight areas requiring further investigation (Lame, G, 2019, July). The process involved the following steps:

**Define Research Question:** The study aims to address the following research questions: 1. What is the existing research landscape concerning the employment of university students in China and globally? 2. What are the primary concerns emphasized in recent studies regarding the employment of university students in China and overseas? 3. What are potential directions for future research in this area?

**Develop Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:** This study focuses on searching for articles related to "Employment" within the Article Title, Abstract, and Keywords, including articles written in both Chinese and English languages. There are no restrictions on the type of study source or the publication date.

**Conduct a Comprehensive Search:** Identify the relevant search terms and databases. Utilize these terms to conduct a thorough and systematic search. This study searched Scopus and CNKI. China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) is recognized as one of China's largest academic literature databases and knowledge service platforms, providing a wide range of academic resources across diverse disciplinary fields. **Screening and Selecting Studies:** It is important to utilize the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the search results. Initially, screening studies involve assessing titles and abstracts, followed by a review of full texts to make final selections.

**Data Extraction:** It is recommended to develop a structured data extraction form to systematically collect relevant information from each selected study. This form should

encompass details such as study design, sample size, methodology, key findings, and other pertinent data (Xiao & Watson, 2017).

**Data synthesis:** Compile and integrate the findings from the studies included. Depending on the study's nature, this process may involve quantitative meta-analysis, qualitative synthesis, or a blend of both methodologies (Xiao & Watson, 2017).

**Interpretation of Results:** The discussion should focus on the implications of the findings and their relevance to the study topic (Xiao & Watson, 2017). It is also important to identify any existing gaps in the literature and propose potential directions for future research.

The following tables demonstrate the file selection process based on the steps mentioned above.

**Table 1: Literature selection in Scopus**

Layer1	Layer2
“Employment” (Title) *Internal criteria Peer-reviewed articles from 2013 to 2023 Articles are written in Chinese and English Keywords limited to Employment, University Students, and Higher Education	AND “University Students” (All Fields)

**Table 2: Literature selection in CNKI**

Layer1	Layer2
“Employment” (Title) *Internal criteria No annual publication limit. There is no limit on the type of study source. Keywords limited to Employment, University Students, and Higher Education	AND “University Students” (All Fields)

## Results

Extensive research has been conducted on university students' employment abroad and in China, as indicated by the literature review.

Table3: Number of articles related to the Employment of University Students

Source	Scopus
Retrieval Date	2 August 2023
Layer1	15798
Layer2	602
Limited to ENGLISH	549
Limited to CHINESE	8

Table4: Number of articles related to the Employment of University Students in China

Source	CNKI
Retrieval Date	2 August 2023
Layer1	280800
Layer2	3507

## Discussion

### The employment situation of foreign university students

Research on the employment of university students has been a topic of interest among foreign academics since early on. Findings from studies conducted abroad suggest that university students encounter job-related challenges on a global level. Nevertheless, the nature and magnitude of these challenges exhibit significant variations among different countries.

### Previous studies on the employment situation of university students

Amid the grand backdrop of globalization, the career landscape for higher education graduates abroad is undergoing a significant diversification. Taking the United States as a typical case for in-depth analysis, its highly developed and relatively stable university graduate employment framework, despite showcasing a well-designed system, is still unable to fully avoid the increasingly intense competition in the job market and the multiple challenges that accompany it (Gordon, H. R, 2014). In recent years, the explosive growth of technology and the deep penetration of globalization have collectively shaped the high-tech industry into a leading employment frontier targeted by international students (Yuchan, W, 2022) (Guoqiang, L., & Hao, Y, 2016). This trend not only reshapes the job market landscape but also profoundly influences the career orientation and talent cultivation strategies within the educational system. At the same time, entrepreneurship as an emerging career choice is quietly rising on a global scale and gradually becoming a popular path for many foreign university graduates exploring new career development avenues (Hatfield, I, 2015) (Gindling, T. H., & Newhouse, D, 2014) (Leighton, P, 2016). The rise of this trend reflects the strong pursuit of innovation, autonomy,

and personal value realization among contemporary youth, as well as the courage and wisdom of individuals to proactively adapt to changes and seek breakthroughs in the face of increasing global economic uncertainty (Lawan, U. M., Envuladu, E. A., Mohammad, M. A., Wali, N. Y., & Mahmoud, H. M., 2015). Entrepreneurship not only offers graduates more flexible and diverse career development possibilities but also promotes the diversification of the social economy, becoming a vital force driving economic innovation and growth. Leighton, P. (2016) noticed this phenomenon, writing an article that reflects on some of the major changes in the ways that people are working today, changes often driven by a preference for greater autonomy and choice, but also to work on a sharing, collaborative, or networked basis.

### **Previous Studies on The Factors Affecting the Employment of University Students**

The higher education systems and curriculum planning in overseas institutions significantly impact graduates' career prospects. Specifically, the unique characteristics of higher education frameworks and curriculum designs in different countries play a crucial role in shaping the starting points and trajectories of graduates' careers (Karseth, B., & Solbrenke, T. D., 2016; Kaiser, F., Maassen, P., Meek, L., van Vught, F., de Weert, E., & Goedegebuure, L., (Eds.), 2014). Some countries' higher education institutions place a strong emphasis on cultivating students' practical skills and potential for innovative thinking (Ellis, R., & Goodyear, P., 2013; Lozano, R., Merrill, M. Y., Sammalisto, K., Ceulemans, K., & Lozano, F. J., 2017). This educational philosophy is reflected in their carefully designed and implemented extensive internship and training programs, as well as a series of entrepreneurial support initiatives aimed at bridging the gap between theory and practice, and from ideas to realization.

The core value of such educational strategies lies not only in promoting the comprehensive development of students' individual abilities but, more importantly, in enabling graduates to more accurately align with the actual demands of the labour market, thereby reducing the disconnect between education and employment. In the current context of global economic integration, with increasing competition in the job market, graduates with practical experience and innovative thinking abilities undoubtedly demonstrate greater adaptability and competitiveness during the job search process. They are not only able to quickly integrate into the work environment but also play a vital role in solving complex problems and driving innovation, allowing them to stand out in a competitive job market and maintain and expand their professional advantages. Kintu, D., Kitainge, K., & Ferej, A. (2019) introduced the employment guidance work for university students in Uganda and found that emphasizing career guidance led to the formation of a work system centered on career planning, career counselling, internships, and employment services. Karp, M. J. M. (2013) focused on the activities most relevant to students 'entry into programs of study—academic and career planning. Hooley, T., Watts, A. G., & Andrews, D. (2015) thought teachers should be at the heart of a long-term approach to enhancing career and employability learning, especially as schools now have the primary responsibility for the delivery of career and employability learning for young people.

The employment situation of university students abroad is significantly influenced by the core driving force of market demand, with its dynamic nature rooted in the continuous

refinement of global industrial structures and the rapid rise of emerging industries. This process has led to a profound restructuring of talent market demands, signalling the arrival of a new era in which the structure of market demand is undergoing unprecedented transformation (Vaiman, V., Sparrow, P., Schuler, R., & Collings, D. G. (Eds.), 2018). Notably, under the strong impetus of the technological wave, particularly with the rapid developments in high-tech sectors, the demand for professionals with advanced skills and exceptional innovative abilities has surged. This trend has not only intensified competition in the talent market but also underscored the dominant and indispensable role of market demand in shaping and defining the employment prospects of university students abroad. Specifically, as global economic integration deepens, the transition and upgrading of industrial structures from traditional industries to high-tech industries has become an irreversible trend (Matyushok, V., Vera Krasavina, V., Berezin, A., & Sendra García, J, 2021). This shift has directly triggered a sharp increase in the demand for highly skilled talent, requiring graduates to possess not only a solid foundation of professional knowledge but also the ability to quickly adapt to new technologies and environments, along with a spirit of continuous innovation.

Furthermore, the rapid development of technological fields such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing has not only injected new vitality into economic growth but has also profoundly changed the landscape of the job market. These areas have an urgent need for professionals with interdisciplinary knowledge who can solve complex problems and drive technological innovation (Brassler, M., & Dettmers, J, 2017; Tan, O. S, 2021). Therefore, for university students abroad, actively engaging in technological innovation practices and continuously enhancing their core competencies in high-tech fields will be crucial for their future employment prospects.

Among the many factors that shape the career trajectories of university students abroad, the employment policy environment plays a crucial role. Various governments have taken proactive measures by implementing a series of favourable policies and employment assistance initiatives to create smooth pathways for graduates entering the workforce. Research on the employment security systems for university students in foreign countries focuses on how policies, laws, and institutional frameworks ensure job security for graduates. Scholars such as Wang Chuan (2016) and Sun Bin (2014) have studied these systems and found that developed countries generally have comprehensive employment security mechanisms, including employment policies, services, training, and assistance. Liu Yanzhu, Zhang Lixue, & Yang Guorong (2013) have also researched employment policies for university students in foreign countries, revealing that developed nations commonly implement a range of active employment policies, including financial support, tax incentives, and entrepreneurship support.

At the same time, various social organizations and employers actively respond to these efforts, competing to participate in employment promotion and recruitment activities. They work together to broaden graduates' career development paths and growth opportunities, jointly creating a more extensive employment ecosystem that fosters the prosperity and development of the job market. The research by Li Huiqin & Ai Jingjuan (2014) indicates that employment security systems for university students in foreign countries are characterized by diversity, with government, universities, businesses, and society working together to provide comprehensive employment protection for graduates.

## **Previous Studies on The Countermeasures to Solve The Employment Difficulty of University Students**

In the current context of globalization, the academic community has conducted extensive and in-depth discussions on the employment challenges faced by overseas higher education students. Drawing on collective expertise, they have collaboratively developed a series of comprehensive strategies to address these challenges. Scholars mainly put forward relevant employment policies for university students around the aspects of employment supply, employment demand, and supply-demand matching: first, increase effective supply, including improving the employability of university graduates (Lowden, K., Hall, S., Elliot, D. & Lewin, J. 2011); the second is to increase effective demand, including emphasizing that economic growth promotes employment and industrial structure adjustment can create new jobs (Newell, A., Pastore, F, 2000) ; the third is to improve the matching degree of supply and demand , including improving the social security system (Drake, R. E., Skinner, J. S., Bond, G. R., & Goldman, H. H. 2009) and strengthening vocational training (Calvin Cheng, Juita Mohamad, 2020), etc. Alan M. Saks et al. found that job-seeking variables including job-seeking plans, job-seeking behaviours, job-seeking intensity, and career planning have a significant positive impact on employment quality.

In addition, foreign scholars are currently turning their attention to the fields of career exploration for university students' employment. Foreign academia researched on university students' employment relatively early. Judging from foreign research, the phenomenon of university students' employment difficulties also exists widely, but in different countries, the degree and manifestations are also very different. Therefore, based on the perspective of international comparison, an in-depth study of the employment status of foreign university students is very helpful for deepening China's understanding of the current employment problems of university students. In addition, foreign university students' employment concepts, national policies, and employability research have achieved rich results in theory and practice. The previous research run through psychology, economics and other fields, focusing on survey research and data analysis, providing reference to solve the employment problem of Chinese university students.

## **Employment of University Students in China**

On October 1, 1951, the Government Administration Council (now the State Council) introduced the "Regulations on the Reform of the Academic System", which mandated that government allocate jobs for university graduates. Graduates were assigned by the state to work as cadres in units owned by the public, with the prime minister personally overseeing the employment assignments of university students. Consequently, there was scarce literature on the employment of university students for an extended period. Following the reform and opening-up policies, the employment system for university students in China transitioned towards a model of "two-way choice" and "self-selection of careers employment challenges for university students in China, prompting an increase in research on this topic. The findings can be divided into an overview of the current situation, the factors influencing the employment of

university students, and strategies proposed to address the employment difficulties faced by university graduates.

### **Previous Studies on The Current Employment Situation of University Students**

The issue of employment challenges faced by university students has been acknowledged by the government as a longstanding concern that requires resolution. Scholars generally concur that the current employment situation for Chinese university graduates is notably severe, with significant implications for both social stability and economic development (Wang et al., 2023). The coexistence of scenarios where graduates struggle to find a and but are employed, as well as those with and prospects, has been highlighted in the literature Job Prospects al., et al, 2023; Lu Moyuan, 2015). It is important to note that the challenges in university student employment do not stem from a lack of available positions but rather from specific factors such as occupation, location, and salary levels. More specifically, the current employment hurdles for university students are primarily concentrated in urban areas, within organizational systems (referring to structures within state institutions and businesses with hierarchical relationships) (Cui Zhen & Lei Yang, 2021), and in high-paying job sectors (Sun Yanxia, 2020).

### **Previous Studies on The Factors Affecting the Employment of University Students**

In the research on the factors affecting the employment difficulty of university students, the current research results usually attribute it to two aspects: subjective and objective. Analysing from the subjective aspect, it is mainly the employment concept and employability of university students that have problems. At present, there are some obvious problems in the employment concept of university students. Zhong Yunhua and Zhu Jiade (2019) pointed out that when university students establish employment values, they are confused about the orientation of employment values, which is specifically reflected in the confusion between value choices such as self-worth and social value, personal survival needs, and persistence in the pursuit of ideals, and so on. Usually, university students will give priority to the realization of self-worth and the satisfaction of personal survival needs and other rigid needs in the face of the above two groups of choices. This kind of self-centred choice behaviour reflects the backwardness and irrationality of university students' employment concept. Employment concepts affect their employment choices, that is, whether they will choose to "have a job but not get a job" (Xi Jinping, 2016). University students "have a job but can't get a job" will eventually lead to "no job to get a job", making the problem of "employment difficult" more serious. In 2022, a survey shows that there is still a certain gap between the employment outlook of university students and the requirements of the new era, mainly manifested in the ratio of blindly pursuing "within the system" employment, the imbalance between "greater self" and "ego", "slow employment" and "lazy employment" increased (Yuan Cui, 2024).

The objective factors that affect the employment of university students mainly include macroeconomics, higher education, social environment, national policies, family influence, etc. Yu Xin (2014) focused on the in-depth analysis of the social factors that make it difficult for



university students to find jobs and pointed out employment environment, university enrolment expansion, employment concepts, and the education system influence a lot. Li Gonghua (2018) conducted in-depth analysis on the employment of medical graduates, and believed that the main factors that promote the employment are: strong industry demand; strong employment competitiveness of graduates; universities continue to optimize the talent training system and improve the quality of talent training; the job market is prosperous, and students have a wider range of employment; the concept of employment is more rational, and the willingness to become a talent is strong. Liu Yang (2017) analysed the influence of different genders, family locations, parents' education levels and other specific groups in the city of job selection, job salary, unit size, unit nature, and job position on university students' employment choices. Huo Nina (2022) pointed out that family factors also play an important role in the employment of university graduates.

### **Previous Studies on The Countermeasures to Solve The Employment Difficulty of University Students**

The employment problem of university students needs to put forward countermeasures from many aspects. First, give full play to the leading role of the government and establish and improve laws and regulations to promote the employment of university students. Make the employment of university students on the track of legal employment (regulation, procedure, institutionalization, and standardization), and establish a profit-driven mechanism for university students' employment (Jiang Xiao, 2013) Second, improve the quality of higher education and teaching. Du Yubo(2020) pointed out that adapting to social and economic development is an inevitable requirement for the structural adjustment of higher education, and it is also a trend to promote its development. Talent training must meet the needs of social development, and professional talents need to contribute their due value to social and economic development. The setting of disciplines and majors must not only meet the needs of universities and universities, but also meet the needs of social development. Third, improve the labour market mechanism. Wang Yun, Lu Hongyuan, & Chu Limin (2013) believed that the establishment of a market-oriented allocation mechanism for graduates is an inherent requirement to solve the problem of employment difficulty of university students. Sun Wenbo, & Jávez (2016) emphasized that it is necessary to cultivate the employment market for graduates according to the requirements of the market economy, provide employment services according to the actual needs of graduates, and use modern information technology to innovate employment services. Finally, university students themselves need to make changes. Wang Le (2016) and Shi Qinghui(2020)pointed out that university students should actively change their employment concepts and improve their entrepreneurial awareness. Wen Jinfang (2023) mentioned enhancing university students' sense of social responsibility.

Chinese scholars pay more attention to the employment of ordinary university graduates, and there are many research results, including monographs and doctoral dissertations. Judging from the results of the research, it mainly focuses on the investigation and analysis of employment status, the analysis of employment difficulties and countermeasures, the status quo and transformation of employment concepts, and the

improvement of employment guidance. There are also certain limitations: First, most of them talk about university students' employment problems in general, lacking the in-depth analysis of research, and cannot propose practical solutions; second, in terms of research methods, most of them use logical reasoning and lack of empirical analysis; Third, in terms of countermeasure research, more specific countermeasures are put forward from the perspectives of universities, governments, and graduates themselves, ignoring the role of employers and families; Fourth, in terms of the definition of "university students' employment difficulty", it mainly refers to undergraduate graduates, less covers junior university students and postgraduate students, and less research is done on undergraduate students who are in the university.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the study based on the preliminary survey showed that the basic theoretical research and assessment method research in China and abroad are relatively mature and have achieved rich results. However, it should be noted that there are still many important problems to be solved around the employment of university students, and there is still a large space for deepening and expanding. First, times are changing and so are employment environment and concepts. Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, which is a new historical orientation. The period between the 19th and the 20th National Congress is the period in which the timeframes of the two centenary goals converge. The employment concepts of university students have entered a new era, and the new era has put forward new requirements. Under the background of the new era, what is the connotation of university students' employment view? At present, the research in this area is still blank. Second, scholars rarely focus on a certain discipline when they study the employment issues of university students. And there are even fewer studies on the employment concepts of Japanese majors. Third, research objects, most of the research focuses on graduates, rarely from the current students to judge the impact of their employment ideas on future employment. Chinese scholars focus on the employment conception issues of university students, while foreign scholars rarely focus on it. Finally, at present, many scholars analyse the factors affecting the employment of university students from the perspective of economics and education, and few scholars analyse from the perspective of international relations. Recently, the issue of the Fukushima nuclear polluted water discharge has aroused widespread concern and controversy in the international community. As one of Japan's largest neighbours and trading partners, China has expressed strong dissatisfaction and concern and lodged solemn representations and protests with Japan on many occasions. However, Japan has turned a deaf ear to China's concerns and demands and even wondered how to cope with and avoid China's reaction. This attitude has not only exposed the nature of Japan's selfishness and disregard for the interests of others on the issue of nuclear sewage discharge but also led to the deterioration and tension between China and Japan. Many Japanese major students are worried about their future jobs because of anti-Japanese sentiment in China over Japan's actions.

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