

A Review of Research on College Students' Employment Policies in China: Current Situation, Challenges, and Optimization Strategies

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Abstract:

Against the backdrop of high-quality development in the new era, the expanding scale of Chinese college graduates, coupled with economic slowdown and industrial restructuring, has led to structural employment pressure. Flexible employment, though a key transitional choice for new graduates, lacks a sound supporting system. This paper focuses on college students' employment policies, screening 18 authoritative documents via keywords "college students," "employment," and "policies," and categorizes them into four types: policy issue analysis, orientation & countermeasures, situation & evolution, and research in special periods/new perspectives. A policy focus, government-market roles, and research methods. Existing studies contribute significantly through interdisciplinary frameworks, scientific methods, structural problem diagnosis, and multi-level countermeasures. However, they have shortcomings: insufficient discussion on adapting to emerging occupations, lack of group need subdivision, over-reliance on Western models disconnected from China's reality, and inadequate policy dynamic adjustment and long-term evaluation. Accordingly, it proposes research directions on labor relations identification, skill training, social security connection, and inter-departmental collaboration in college students' gig and flexible employment, designing a framework including literature review, policy analysis, and mixed research. Future research should consider emerging technologies, regional differences, and long-term tracking, with theoretical significance in enriching policy research and promoting interdisciplinary integration, and practical significance in guiding policy optimization, supporting employment/entrepreneurship, and boosting social harmony.

Keywords: college students; employment; policy; China.

1. Introduction

Entering a new era, China is accelerating the construction of a high-quality development system led by new development concepts, and the “Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Implementing the Employment Priority Strategy to Promote High-quality and Full Employment” clearly prioritizes employment over macroeconomic policies [1]. Although higher education is advancing from the stage of massification to universalization, the scale of college graduates continues to expand, and new productivity is also accelerating penetration and promoting the transformation of traditional industries to intelligence and high-end. However, due to the slowdown of economic growth and the adjustment of industrial structure, the increase of market-oriented jobs is limited, forming a structural employment pressure of “sufficient total number of jobs but insufficient adaptability.” In addition, the current flexible employment forms, such as part-time work, part-time work and internship, have become an important choice for graduates to transition to employment, but the relevant security system has not yet been improved. Under this severe employment background, the state has promulgated the ‘Notice of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance on Doing a Good Job in the Employment of College Graduates and Other Young People in 2025’ policy, mainly for college graduates and 16-24-year-old youth groups. The aim is to do a good job in the current employment work by excavating jobs through multiple channels, fully supporting the improvement of employment ability, striving to strengthen employment service guarantee, and striving to create a good environment for employment [2]. This policy can increase the supply of jobs for college students, improve their employability, provide employment security and assistance, and help them find jobs and start businesses. Its promulgation is an important manifestation of the implementation of the national employment priority strategy. It is conducive to promoting the transformation of human resources into real productive forces, alleviating social employment pressure, maintaining social stability and economic development. In the short term, it can alleviate the employment pressure of college graduates. In the long run, it can optimize the allocation of human resources, promote industrial upgrading and education reform, and form a benign employment environment for college students. This policy makes an accurate judgment on the current employment situation, and also provides important instructions on the employment of college students. It is the latest policy on the employment of college students. This paper focuses on the employment policy of college

students in the new era. Under the background of prominent structural employment pressure and flexible employment as an important choice but imperfect security system, this paper uses ‘college students’, ‘employment’ and ‘policy’ as keywords to search and screen the literature, and sorts out and classifies the achievements of existing research in problem diagnosis, security mode, countermeasures and suggestions. It points out the shortcomings of existing research in the adaptation of emerging occupational forms and the subdivision of group needs, and then puts forward the research direction for the identification of labor relations, skill training, social security cohesion and department coordination in the part-time and flexible employment of college students. A research framework including literature review, policy analysis, and mixed methods research is designed, which has theoretical and practical significance, such as enriching policy research dimensions and guiding practice optimization.

2. Research Methods and Process

This paper searches journal literature through three keywords of ‘college students’, ‘employment’ and ‘policy’, and adds search instructions of ‘Peking University Core’ and ‘CSSCI’ to improve the authority and accuracy of literature. In order to narrow the scope of literature search, the top ten literatures with most cited, the highest correlation and the latest publication time were selected, so a total of 31 papers were retrieved. Among the 31 articles, 13 articles were deleted, which were long in duration, did not focus on the specific background of the times, and only focused on the social problems of college students ‘employment rather than policy-oriented literature. Finally, 18 articles were screened out.

3. Findings

This article is divided based on research perspective, research methods, data analysis and time level. The 18 documents are classified into the following 4 major categories:

3.1 Research Perspective

3.1.1 Analysis on employment policy issues

Yiliang Wang was the first to point out that the employment policy should shift from “market-oriented” to “people-oriented”, emphasizing the need to reshape the employment environment for graduates through people-oriented approaches and to improve the employment policy. He believes that the current employment mechanism has many problems and that it is necessary to solve

these issues with people-oriented principles at the core [3]. Tengfei Yu, building on this theory, critically argued that the employment policy for college students should shift from “market-oriented” to “people-oriented”, focusing on the matching degree between the policy and market demand, and emphasizing the use of the diversity and variability of the market to provide a rich and diverse range of employment opportunities, with the core centered on the role of the market [4]. The former focuses on people-oriented principles, while the latter focuses on market-oriented principles, presenting two different viewpoints. Qing Guo and other scholars further refined the policy implementation discontinuity in application-oriented undergraduate colleges, combining data to point out cognitive and service deficiencies [5]. Xia Wu introduced the Smith model to criticize policy fragmentation and constructed a four-dimensional analysis framework, while Gongcheng Zheng analyzed the deep-seated reasons, such as economic models and social security deficiencies, from the macro institutional level [6,7]. Xinping Yang comprehensively proposed the employment priority strategy, but pointed out that the implementation of measures was insufficient [8]. These studies progressed layer by layer, forming a problem diagnosis chain of “phenomenon - mechanism - system”.

3.1.2 Employment-oriented and countermeasures categories

Yao Zheng and other scholars, in response to the pain points in grassroots employment, proposed specific approaches such as establishing practice bases and conducting alumni follow-ups [9]. Xishun Li and other scholars broke away from the single countermeasure approach and constructed a policy model for the popularization stage, emphasizing local initiative [10]. From the perspective of the roles of the government and the market, Yumin Lin advocated reducing the risk of unemployment through fiscal investment and developing government guarantee models such as “unemployment insurance for college students”, while Shutao Shi and other scholars further expanded the dimensions, and on this basis proposed to construct a policy system from the perspectives of supply side, demand side, and supply-demand matching, paying more attention to explaining the market-related factors such as regulating the scale of education, professional structure, and promoting industrial transformation and upgrading at the macro level to create job opportunities [11, 12]. In terms of addressing the employment issue for college students, the former emphasizes reducing the negative impact of unemployment, while the latter focuses on creating and enhancing job positions and opportunities for college students. One provides a basic guarantee, and the other promotes

and drives, thus forming a complementarity. The research of the above scholars has achieved a logical progression from “micro measures - mid-level model - macro system”, jointly pointing to the practical operation and systematic design of employment promotion.

3.1.3 Employment situation and policy evolution category

Yujun Yao systematically reviewed the policy evolution from the 1990s to the early 21st century, laying the foundation for historical understanding [13]. Xianwei Fan and other scholars expanded the time dimension, divided it into five stages, and combined with labor force data to diagnose the current situation, achieving the shift from “historical summary” to “quantification of the current situation” that provides a dual temporal and spatial reference for policy research [14].

3.1.4 Employment research in special periods or from new perspectives

Jing Sun et al. took the epidemic as the starting point to reveal the short-term nature of policies [15]. Guojin Xiong used a quantitative model to analyze the imbalance of policy tools under emergencies [16]. Feifei Bi et al. introduced the perspective of new quality productive forces to analyze the new changes in the employment ecosystem [17]. The three of them, from the perspective of special periods to the perspective of technology-driven, have enriched the research dimensions of policies in the dynamic employment environment.

3.2 Research Methods

Yujun Yao mainly summarized the development process of employment policies and conducted a qualitative analysis of the employment situation, and also provided some thoughts on solving the problems [13]. Baitao Liu and other scholars, based on the T. Smith model, proposed an optimization path, constructed targeted employment policy systems, established guarantee mechanisms (legalization, assessment mechanism), enhanced students' employment capabilities, and optimized industrial structure and public opinion environment [18]. On the basis of qualitative research, Guojin Xiong innovatively applied the quantitative research method of constructing a two-dimensional framework of “policy tool - policy theme” and the PMC index model to analyze policy texts [16]. Changming Cui and Kangyu Wang also introduced the PMC index model into the assessment of college students' employment policies and revealed the transformation logic of policies from “passive response” to “active guidance” [19]. The former two's qualitative research was more macroscopic and broad, while the latter two's quantitative

research was more targeted and data-supported, providing multi-dimensional and multi-level analysis for college students' employment policies.

3.3 Data Analysis

Qing Guo et al. proposed detailed information data, such as "50% of graduates are engaged in front-line technical positions", but they did not improve their methods and sources for information acquisition [5]. Later, Jing Sun and Xiaofeng Xie mentioned the relevant data on university graduates' employment, but the difference was that the latter used various data tools such as word cloud analysis, word list, and content analysis to analyze the policy text dimensions [15]. Their data sources and analysis methods were relatively clear, and they were more reliable and rigorous based on the previous studies.

3.4 Time Hierarchy

In the early foundational studies, Yujun Yao summarized the development of employment policies from the 1990s to the early 2000s and pointed out the employment situation and the difficulty in finding jobs at that time [13]. This provides a historical background and basic understanding for subsequent researches, marking the starting point of the research in this field. Later, based on the knowledge laid by previous scholars, Yangjie Huang and other scholars seized the social issues brought about by gender differences nowadays, conducted the first quantitative analysis of the impact of gender differences on the response to entrepreneurship policies, and revealed the transmission mechanism of "policy-spirit-decision" [20]. In addition, Feifei Bi and other scholars integrated the research of the previous two and applied it to the current period. Combining the background of new quality productive forces of the new era, they closely followed the characteristics of the development of the times and analyzed its impact on the employment ecology of college students, as well as the new problems and countermeasures [17].

4. Discussion

4.1 Existing Contributions

Existing research has made important contributions in the field of college students' employment policies. Firstly, it has introduced interdisciplinary frameworks such as public policy theory and social security theory, innovatively proposed theoretical perspectives such as people-oriented orientation and policy insurance, breaking through the single dimension of traditional research. Secondly, it has promoted the scientization of research methods by using

quantitative models, text analysis, and other methods to conduct empirical research on policy implementation and tool effects. Thirdly, it has systematically diagnosed structural problems such as policy fragmentation and supply-demand mismatch, and constructed multi-level countermeasure systems from macro institutions, meso-level implementation to micro practice. It has also sorted out the evolution of policies and responded to emerging backgrounds such as the post-epidemic era and new productive forces. It not only provides a basis for understanding the historical logic of policies but also offers theoretical, data, and practical path support for coping with practical challenges and future trends, forming a three-dimensional cognition of employment policies and laying a solid foundation for policy optimization.

4.2 Limitations of Existing Research

Despite these contributions, there are still the following limitations:

Existing research has not deeply explored how policies should adapt to emerging occupational forms. For example, in emerging forms such as gig employment, platform employment (takeaway riders, self-media practitioners, etc.), and flexible employment, issues such as the identification of college students' labor relations, vocational skill training, and social security connection still lack systematic research.

There are structural and invisible discriminations in employment against groups such as college students with disabilities, graduates from poor families, and female graduates. Existing research lacks subdivision of the needs of different groups (e.g., policies on workplace accessibility transformation for students with disabilities, connection of maternity protection for female employment after graduation).

Existing research over-relies on Western models of policy implementation, fails to combine China's "vertical and horizontal division" administrative system (e.g., local protectionism, inter-departmental interest conflicts), and ignores differences in financial capacity between central and western regions, leading to disconnection from China's reality.

Existing research has not explained how to adjust policies according to market dynamics (e.g., establishing a rapid policy response mechanism) nor clarified the specific linkage mechanism between industrial upgrading and the adjustment of university majors (e.g., how the government guides universities to add majors related to emerging industries).

Many policy studies focus on short-term effects (e.g., employment rate in the current year) and lack evaluation

of the impact of policy implementation for 3 to 10 years or even longer, without tracking the impact of policies on graduates' long-term career development.

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on college students' employment policies, pointing out institutional deficiencies in existing policies regarding the protection of college students' gig work and flexible employment, the adaptability of vocational skill training policies, insufficient social security transfer mechanisms, and barriers to multi-departmental collaboration. In the research process, it first elaborates on the social background of policy introduction, namely, China's structural employment pressure in the new era, the fact that flexible employment has become an important choice but with an incomplete support system, as well as policy content and research significance. The research results classify the literature into four categories, conduct comparative analysis from multiple levels, discuss the contributions and limitations of existing research, and thus propose research issues related to labor relations identification, skill training, social security connection, and inter-departmental collaboration, and design a research idea including literature review, policy analysis, research, comparative learning, and data integration. This paper argues that future research should focus on the identification of college students' labor relations in emerging occupational forms such as flexible employment and gig economy, conduct interdisciplinary systematic analysis combining labor law, social security, and economics, and pay attention to cutting-edge policy pilots to explore policy feasibility. Research needs to refine the employment needs of different groups to propose targeted support policies, combine more empirical data to analyze the causes and manifestations of invisible discrimination, and propose monitoring and intervention mechanisms. For example, research on specific policy frameworks for workplace accessibility transformation for persons with disabilities, exploration of linkage mechanisms between student grants and employment subsidies for poor graduates to connect education and employment, and research on the connection between maternity protection policies and employment policies for female graduates, as well as the design of flexible maternity leave and re-employment support programs. Researcher need Carry out regional comparative studies, analyze differences in policy implementation between eastern and central-western regions to extract policy tools suitable for the reality of different regions, and conduct in-depth analysis of central-local collaborative policy design, such as balancing the financial capacity of central and western regions through transfer payments. Research also

needs to explore the mode of joint talent training between universities and enterprises in combination with China's reality, study how the government guides universities to add majors related to emerging industries such as artificial intelligence through financial subsidies, industry-university-research cooperation, etc., and improve the degree of fit between policies and industrial needs. Relevant research should establish a long-term tracking mechanism for graduates' career development, focus on the impact of policy implementation on graduates' career trajectories, income levels, and social mobility for 3 to 5 years or even longer, and introduce a life-cycle perspective to study policy support for graduates from entry into the workplace to mid-career development, so as to realize the sustainability of employment policies and exert their long-term effects.

Authors Contribution:

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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