

A Preliminary Study on Current Status of Employment Guidance Work of International Students and Improving Strategies in S Province China

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Abstract

With the continuous opening-up to the world and the continuous improvement of the higher education quality, a growing number of international students are choosing Chinese universities for pursuing their further study. At present, China has become the largest destination in Asia and the third largest destination in the world for studying abroad (Miao & Qu, 2022). In addition to the high quality of the educational environment, the ever-growing economic situation and the vast job market have also become one of the most important factors that influence international students to choose to study in China. Around 2017, with the adjustment of relevant national and local policies for the employment of international students, the employment environment for international students in China has become more relaxed and transparent. Meanwhile, more Chinese enterprises have gradually become internationalized and the demand for international talents has also been increasing, thus providing more opportunities for international students to work in China. The gradually favorable employment environment for international students has prompted universities to continuously strengthen, prioritize and improve the employment guidance work for international students. This paper selected one provincial university in S Province, aimed to explore the current situation of international students' employment management, the challenges they face, the necessity of employment guidance for international students in universities and the suggestions for employment guidance management. Through questionnaire with the international students and the semi-structured interviews with the international students and administrators of international student management to summarize and analyze the challenges faced by the current employment guidance work for international students. Hope the findings of this paper can provide feasible strategic suggestions for the employment guidance management of international students in S Province.

Keywords: *International Students, Employment Guidance, Current Status, Improving Strategies.*

Introduction

China has been accepting international students since the 1950s. Due to political, economic and cultural factors at that time, most of the international students were from Eastern European countries. They came to study on scholarships from the Chinese government (Yu, 2009). Since then, with the rapid development of China's economy, the continuous improvement of its international status, and the strengthening of the higher education quality in universities, more and more international students choose Chinese universities for their studies. The nature and structure of international students have also undergone significant changes (Chen, 2020; Ji, 2016; Jiang, 2010). The education of international students in China has shown rapid development momentum. Currently, China has become the third largest destination country in the world and the first in Asia for students to study abroad (Miao & Qu, 2022).

1.1 Problem Statement

As the number of international students continues to expand, increasing attention has been paid to how to attract high-level international students and how to improve the teaching quality of international students. Many scholars have conducted in-depth studies on this issue and put forward many valuable strategies and suggestions. Qian (2016) believed that teachers are the core competitiveness of international education, and only by strengthening the fostering and construction of teachers in universities, upgrading the level of teaching, and highlighting the superior majors can universities attract more excellent international students to China. Wan (2022) stated that universities should optimize the concept of enrollment and put the comprehensive quality of students first instead of blindly pursuing the expansion of the number of international students. Universities should be rigorous in the application process and

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establish multiple, specific assessment criteria to recruit the best candidates. As one of the important criteria for assessing the quality of talent fostering in universities, the employment status of graduates has always attracted the attention of universities as well as the education authorities. The employment status of international students should also be given appropriate attention (Lu & Wu, 2020). With the continuously deepening ties between China and the world, not only are Chinese companies developing rapidly overseas, but many overseas companies are also expanding into the Chinese market. The demand for internationalized talents in the Chinese market therefore continues to rise. International students have a natural advantage compare with others. They have the strengths of diversified backgrounds and rich human resources, and they have a better understanding of the economic environment and social situation of their home countries. At the same time, after studying and living in China, they have a deeper understanding of China's national conditions, which contributes to helping Chinese enterprises better integrate into overseas markets and comprehensively improve their international competitiveness (Xiang, Lin & Duan, 2023).

In 2017, the Chinese government issued “Notification on Issues Relating to Allowing Outstanding International Graduates in Higher Education Institutions to Take Up Employment in China” (hereinafter refers to as the “Notification”) (Ministry of Education, 2017), which allows international students who have obtained a master degree or above or have graduated within one year can apply for the working permit in China. In 2021, the Ministry of Education issued the “Measures for the Administration of Work-Study for International Students in Higher Educational Institutions” (hereinafter refers to as the “Measures”) (Ministry of Education, 2021), which clearly stipulates that international students are allowed to work-study on and off-campus. It also stipulates requirements such as the duration of the working hours, the standard of remuneration, and the endorsement of residence permits for the international students. Although the government is gradually relaxing the policies for international students to work-study and work in China, it is easy to find out from the contents of the two documents mentioned above that the favorable policies on employment in China are mainly for international students who have obtained high academic qualifications, and international students with bachelor's degree or lower qualifications are not entitled to the benefits of the policies. In addition, regulations in the “Measures” are more from the macro level to guide higher education institutions to carry out international student work-study management, and there are no further details and operational procedures, which makes many higher education institutions have been keeping a cautious attitude to deal with the internships, employment and entrepreneurship of international students for fear of touching the diplomatic “red line”, so as to avoid unnecessary troubles and losses, and that's one of the reasons that most of the higher education institutions would rather not do anything about the employment of international students (Meng, 2015).

Employment rate, as an important indicator of teaching quality in higher education, has always been highly valued by all higher education institutions. However, according to the “Higher Education Accreditation for International Students in China” (HEAIS) (China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE), 2020), since the employment rate of international students is not considered as an accreditation indicator, the employment guidance work for international students has never received enough attention from universities (Li, 2021). All along, most universities have a backward concept of internship and employment for international students. They believe that students should go back to their own countries for employment after finishing their study in China, they also believe that the majority of enterprises in China are “inappropriate” for foreign people to work. Therefore, the guidance and instruction on employment and entrepreneurship in the education system for international students is too limited in universities, and some don't even carry out this kind of education at all (Meng , 2015). So far, only a few universities have set up employment guidance centers or departments for international students and provide employment guidance services. The employment guidance centers or departments of most universities only provide services to Chinese students. Due to the factors such as the scale of students and the management system, few universities have been able to establish a similarly complete and high-leveled employment guidance system for international students. Most of the employment guidance centers or departments for Chinese students in universities do not provide systematic employment guidance services to international students as well (Lu & Wu, 2020).

Like Chinese graduates, international students will also consider the return on their educational investment

when choosing countries and universities to study in. International students enhance their academic abilities while planning their careers and choosing an employment aspiration after completing their studies (Xiang, Lin & Duan, 2023). Under such a new situation, it is the mission of the higher education internationalization to combine academic education and employment guidance in the process of fostering international students studying in China, which is in line with the needs of internationalized talent construction and the development of the international students education (Wu , 2018).

Following from the previous problems stated, this paper took University A, a provincial university in S Province, as an example. A survey on the current situation of employment guidance for international students was conducted to understand the views of international students with the employment guidance work of the university. At the same time, through interviews with two groups of international students and international student administrators, this study analyzed and summarized the current situation in international student employment guidance in universities. According to the results of the data analysis, this paper tries to put forward strategic suggestions and explores a new way of employment guidance for international students in universities. Hope this paper can push forward a sustained and continuous development of employment guidance work for international students in S province.

Studies on Employment Guidance of International Students

Although scholars proposed to provide career planning and employment guidance for international students a decade ago, at present, except for very few number of higher education institutions, most universities have not yet incorporated the employment work of international students into the overall layout of the universities' graduate employment work (Li , 2022).

This paper searched China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), a well-known academic resource platform in China, with the keywords of “international students” and “employment”, found that only about 40 papers on the employment of international students since 2018. Among these, only 1 doctoral dissertation and 7 master theses. This indicates that although international students' employment management has attracted the attention of scholars, the relevant research is still in its initial stage, and the depth and breadth of the research on this area are still to be further improved compared with other aspects of international student management (e.g., enrollment, teaching, etc.).

In this published literature, studies on employment of international students are mainly categorized into the following aspects: studies on the improvement of the employability, studies on employment aspiration, studies on employment guidance and studies on the construction of the employment mechanism. Focusing on enhancing the employability of international students, Lu and Wu (2020) focused their research on enhancing the employment guidance strategy for international students. They analyzed the current situation of employment guidance for international students in China comprehensively from the perspectives of the necessity of employment guidance for international students, the current situation of employment guidance, and the problems of employment guidance, etc. They put forward feasible strategies for the establishment of a complete mechanism of employment guidance of international students from the education authority's level. Li (2021), on the other hand, proposed valuable strategies for the fostering the employability of international students from the macro perspective including improving the training quality of international students, strengthening the top-level design by the government, and forming the whole closed-loop process of international student education. In addition, Li (2022) also pointed that enterprises and universities should strengthen in-depth cooperation to develop the synergistic development of local human resources. It can not only provide a talent base for Chinese enterprises to go abroad and help them develop in high quality overseas, but also enhance the attractiveness of studying in China and accomplish the requirements of “improving quality and increasing efficiency” for development in the new stage. Xiang et al. (2023) firstly explained the necessity of enhancing the employability of international students from a macro perspective, then listed the current dilemmas in the fostering of employability of international students, and finally, the paper put forward strategies of enhancing the education of employability in combination with the phased outcome of the current mode of employability fostering of international students in Central South

University China.

Meanwhile, the masters' theses and doctoral dissertations basically focused on exploring the factors affecting the employment of international students through the push-pull theory. Most of these theses and dissertations selected international students from a certain country (e.g., Thailand, Central Asia, South Korea, Mongolia) or studying a certain major in China as the research objects. By selecting the push-and-pull theory as the theoretical basis, they explored the factors which influence the international students to stay in China or to return to their home countries for employment. Then they put forward valuable suggestions from the aspects such as the improvement of relevant policies and regulations, student training, and university-enterprise cooperation in light of the real situation (Chang , 2021; Deng , 2023; Fan , 2021; Ji, 2021; Song , 2018). Also, some theses used quantitative research to identify the employment status or employment willingness of international students. By understanding the current employment willingness and employment status of international students in China, they put forward opinions and suggestions to further optimize the employment environment of international students (Ao , 2016; Yang , 2022). Li (2022) took international students from Burma, Laos, Vietnam and other Asian countries who are studying in universities of Yunan Province as the research object and explored their employment aspiration through questionnaires and interviews. Li stated that universities should incentivize students to improve themselves by strictly controlling the evaluation criteria for scholarships (most of the students interviewed in this study came to China to study through scholarships). At the same time, universities should strictly implement the assessment standards of “enrollment, training and employment” to create an integrated education, thus improving the training quality of international students. In addition, the government should make overall planning, build relevant employment management service organizations, explore innovative service modes, strengthen close cooperation between universities and enterprises, and build a platform for information communication.

Studies on the employment of international students overseas have also yielded fruitful results. However, unlike the aspects that Chinese scholars pay more attention to, the previous studies were more concerned with exploring the opportunity to migrate by staying in the destination country for employment (which is the ultimate goal of most international students who choose to find employment locally). Nunes and Arthur (2013) explored international students' perceptions of what helps and hinders the transition from college to work. They also offered suggestions on how to support international students during the school-to-work transition. Arthur and Flynn (2013) interviewed 14 international graduate students about their career transition experiences from university to employment and permanent immigration to Canada. They summarized the difficulties students encountered during their job search in Canada and proposed viable solutions for this.

In recent years, more and more scholars have put their attention on the employability fostering of international students. Fakunle (2020) argued that the link between the level of internationalization in higher education and the development of graduate employability is an under-explored area of research. He proposed taking advantage of online resources to develop internationalized curricula and promote cross-cultural experiences, thereby enhancing the employability of international students in future digital work scenarios. At the same time, he suggested that the government should prioritize investigating the employability of international students during and after COVID-19 in order to address the policy disconnect between internationalization, employability, and the international student experience. Fakunle and Pirrie (2020) interviewed international students in one-year UK Master program to understand their reflections on the challenges they face in seeking to enhance their employability in order to reassess learning opportunities integrated with work experience. The findings suggested that there was scope for embedding employment development opportunities at a systemic level to enhance the experience of international students.

Methodology

Research Methods

This study adopted mixed methods research. The quantitative research was conducted in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 10 questions, all of which were designed around international students' views on current employment guidance in the university. The questionnaire was used to understand students' feedback on the current employment guidance. The questionnaire was only distributed to international students.

The qualitative research adopted the form of semi-structured interviews. Interview protocols were designed for international students and administrators respectively, and the interview questions were designed to focus on the current situation of employment guidance for international students in universities. Although each interview protocol contained only 5 questions, according to the interviewees' answers during the interview, the interviewer asked further probing questions so that to get more detailed, accurate answers from them, so as to collect more valuable data for the study. The number of probing questions was determined by the responses of each interviewee.

Participants

The respondents in this study were all from the provincial university A in province S. This university has many years of experience in international student management. At present, the management of international students is shared by the International Office and the schools in which the international students are enrolled. The International Office is responsible for students' visa application, life management and employment management, while the schools are responsible for students' enrollment management and their study management.

The questionnaire of this study was distributed to international students only. The interviewees of this study were divided into two groups: international students and international student administrators. Since this study is a preliminary study, a total of four interviewees, two international students and two international student administrators, were selected.

International student A (ISA) and international student B (ISB). ISA is a third-year undergraduate student and ISB is a fourth-year undergraduate student. Since most of the international students currently enrolled in University A are from non-English speaking countries such as East Asia or Central Asia, the interviews for international students were decided to conduct in Chinese. After the interviews, the researcher translated the interviews into English word by word based on the audio recordings of each interview. Both ISA and ISB have been studying in University A for more than two years, and have passed Chinese Proficiency Test (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi, HSK) level 6, the highest level of the HSK test, and have good listening and speaking skills in Chinese. They are able to understand the Chinese questions and answer them well in Chinese. These two students participated in both the questionnaire and the interview.

Administrator A (AdA) and Administrator B (AdB). AdA is currently the deputy director of the International Office in University A and has been involved in the management of international students for more than 10 years; AdB is currently a staff member of the International Office in University A and has been involved in the management of international students for 8 years. Both of them have rich experience in managing international students.

Data Collection

This study was approved by the Human Ethics Committee of Taylor's University. All participants voluntarily completed the consent form before entering the study. Moreover, the questionnaire questions and interview protocols were evaluated by the expert committee of this study and revised prior to the implementation of the real study so that to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected.

Quantitative data collection. The questionnaires were distributed and collected online. Students logged in to the website to answer and submit the questionnaires. Students were informed in advance of the distribution time and the deadline of the questionnaire. They can scan the QR code or visit the link to answer the questionnaire within the required period of time.

Qualitative data collection. After confirming the interviewees, each interviewee was contacted individually to determine the time and format of the interview (all interviews were online because the interviewer was not in the same city as the interviewees). The duration of all four interviews were able to be kept to 45 minutes to an hour. All interviews were fully audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Before analyzing the data, the interviews were first converted from audio to text, and then translated from Chinese to English word by word. The data analyzed in this study are all the converted interviews.

Results from Quantitative Data

Reliability and Validity

A total of 40 questionnaires were collected for this study. Among these, one respondent's answers had all the options selected as "Strongly Agree" and another respondent's answers had all the options selected as "Strongly Disagree". Therefore, these two questionnaires were invalid, and the rest 38 questionnaires were valid. The reliability and validity of the scale development will determine the credibility and reliability of the evaluation results (Xue, 2022). Therefore, after collecting the data, the test for the reliability and validity of the questionnaire was carried out first. This study selected SPSS 26 to analyze the reliability and validity.

The reliability of a scale indicates how free it is from random error (Pallant, 2016). It is the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results (Saunders & Thornhill, 2009). The most used statistics to test the reliability is the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Pallant, 2016). Values range are from 0 to 1, the higher the value, the greater is the reliability (Pallant, 2016). Generally, it recommends that the value of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be above .7 (DeVellis 2012).

Table 4.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.864	10

Note. Table 4.1 illustrates the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of this questionnaire.

Table 4.1 illustrates that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of this questionnaire was 0.864, the value is between 0 to 1 and higher than the recommended minimum level 0.7. Therefore, the result of the analysis shows that this questionnaire has good reliability.

The validity indicates the extent to which the scale measures what it is supposed to measure (Pallant, 2016). It is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about (Saunders & Thornhill, 2009). Higher validity means that the questionnaire is correct and effective if the results of the questionnaire can represent the true degree of the behavior to be tested (Zhang, 2018). Normally, KMO and Bartlett's test have been used to test the validity of questionnaires. The KMO coefficient takes a value ranging from 0 to 1, the closer to 1 indicates that the questionnaire has a better construct validity. According to the significance by Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, if it is less than 0.05, then it also shows that the questionnaire has good construct validity.

Table 4.2 Validity Analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.743
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	216.067

df	45
Sig.	.000

Note. Table 4.2 illustrates the results of the KMO and Bartlett's Test.

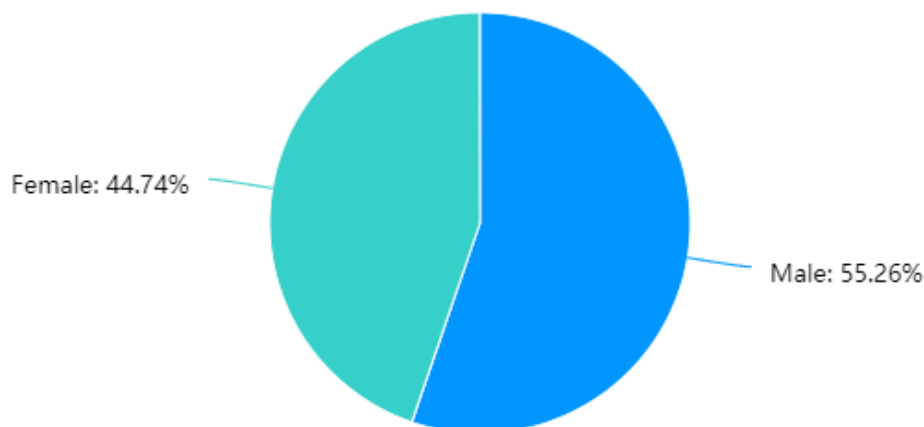
According to the results shown by Table 4.2, the value of KMO is .743 and the significance of the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is less than 0.05. It refers to the fact that this questionnaire has good validity.

Findings

Demographic Information

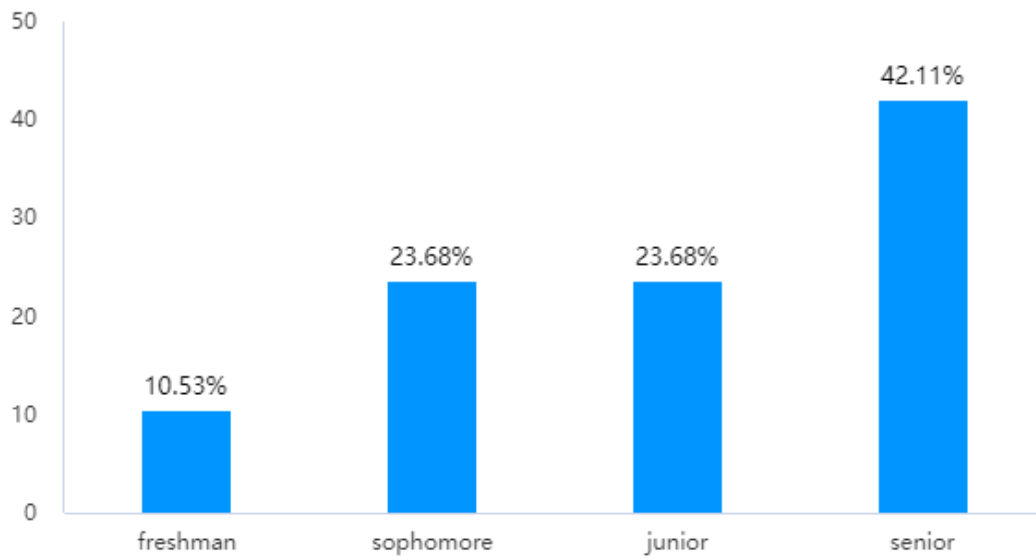
From the results of demographic information, there were 21 male students, representing 55.3% of all students, and 17 female students, representing 44.7% of all students, who answered the questionnaire. The number of male and female students was approximately equal (Figure 4.1). As for the grades (Figure 4.2), there were 13 students in the first and second grades, accounting for 34.21%; 25 students in the third and fourth grades, accounting for 65.79%. Among them, the fourth-year students accounted for the largest proportion, with a total of 16 students responding to the questionnaire, accounting for 42.11% of all students. The purpose of this study is to explore the current situation on employment guidance for international students and the fourth-year students who will face job seeking soon can provide more valuable reference data for this study. According to the purpose of studying in China (Figure 4.3), only 1 out of 38 students came to China for the purpose of Chinese language study, was a language student. The other 37 students came to China for the purpose of pursuing academic degrees, were academic students. Compared with the language students, the academic students have been in China for a longer period of time, their study contents are more systematic and richer, and their desire for employment is more intense. Thus, the data collected in this study can better reflect students' real attitudes towards the current employment guidance in universities. As for reasons for choosing to study in universities in S Province (Figure 4.4), 29 students chose to study in S Province because of its excellent geographical location (located on the east coast of China, with a well-developed economy), while 20 students chose to study in S Province because of its optimistic employment prospects. This showed that employment has become one of the key considerations for international students when selecting a study destination abroad.

Figure 4.1 Distribution of Gender



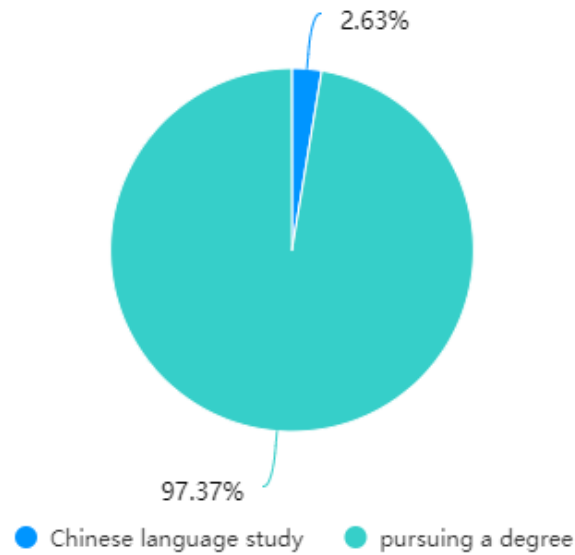
Note. Percentage of male and female students who were participating in the questionnaire.

Figure 4.2 Distribution of Grades

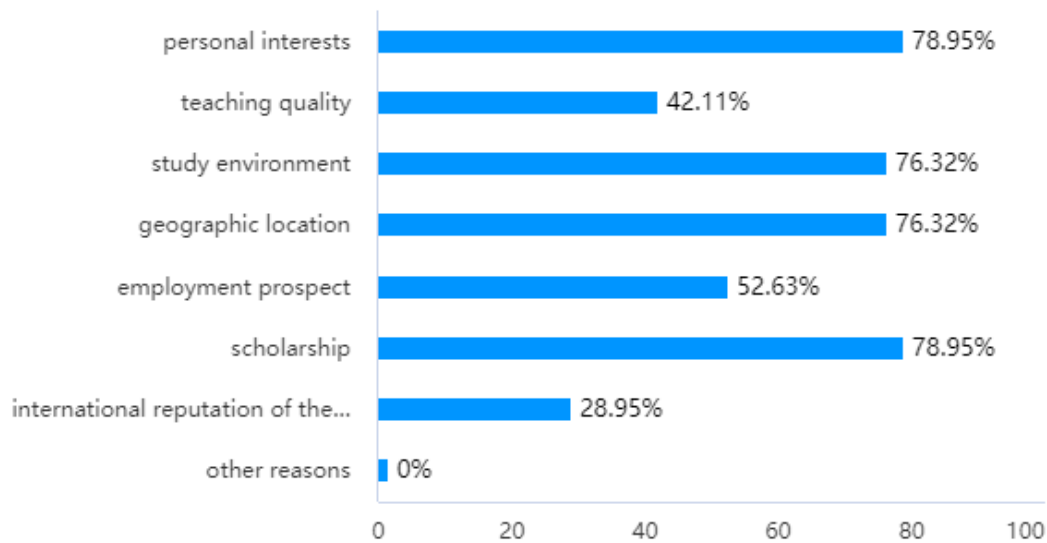


Note. Percentage of grades of students who were participating in the questionnaire.

Figure 4.3 Purpose of Studying in China



Note. Percentage of purpose of studying in China.

Figure 4.4 Reasons for Choosing to Study in Universities of S Province

Note. Percentage of reasons for study in universities in S Province (multiple answer question).

Views on current Employment Guidance

On the question of “are you familiar with the existing rules and regulations related to employment management”, only 26% of the students answered that they were quite familiar with them, while more than 73% answered that they were unfamiliar with or did not know about the relevant regulations. On the question of “whether the university should set up courses on employment guidance”, 79% of the students thought that it was “necessary” or “very necessary”, while more than 18% thought selected “neutral”, indicating that the vast majority of the students thought that it was necessary for universities to set up courses on employment guidance. On the question of “whether (if the university set up) the employment guidance courses can help students to better plan their career plans”, 79% of the students believed that they could, and only about 8% believed that even if relevant employment guidance courses were offered, these courses would not be able to help them to better plan their career plans. On the question of “whether the employment guidance department of the university can help students better plan their careers, more than 84% of the students believed that it was not helpful (according to the interview data, the university has not set up a department specializing in employment guidance for international students, and the employment guidance department for Chinese students does not provide services for international students at present). On the question “the university can provide opportunities for on-campus/off-campus internships”, more than 84% of students believed that the university hasn’t provide many opportunities for on-campus internships; about 90% of students believed that the university haven’t provide enough opportunities for off-campus internships. On the question of “whether to stay in China for employment/entrepreneurship after graduation”, 7.8% of the students said they would not work in China after graduation; 34.2% of the students said they were not sure whether they would work in China for the moment; and more than 50% (57.9%) of the students had the intention to stay in China for employment/entrepreneurship after graduation. On the question of “whether it is easy to find a job in China”, 26% of the students thought that it was not easy to find a job in China; more than 42% of the students were not sure whether they can easily find a job in China; and only about 32% of the students thought that it was easy to find a job in China. On the question of “whether there are international students you know who have obtained Chinese working visas (stayed in China for employment) after graduation”, 32% of the students said “no”, 32% said “not sure”, and 36% said there were international students they know have found jobs in China and obtained China’s working visas. Even though the current situation of employment guidance in the university is not optimistic, more than 90% of students indicated that they

were willing to recommend other students to study in China because of the employment environment, showing that international students are still have great interest and desire to work in China.

From the results of the questionnaire survey, most international students decided to study in universities in S Province because of its favorable geographical location, developed economy and good employment prospects. It can be seen that the availability of good employment opportunities is one of the important factors influencing international students' choice of regions and universities to study in. According to the current situation of international students' employment guidance in university A, most students didn't know much about the policies or regulations about employment (internship) by the government or the university, and there were no special courses or lectures on employment guidance on campus. Students generally believed that if the university can set up relevant courses on employment guidance for international students, it would be helpful for them to understand relevant employment policies in China, supply and demand in the job market, and to plan their career reasonably. In addition, the employment guidance department of the university was also perceived by students as not being able to positively offer help for them in their career planning because it was temporarily unable to provide employment guidance services for international students. Aside from the lack of a professional employment guidance department for international students and related employment guidance courses, students generally indicated that the university hasn't provided enough internship opportunities on campus or off campus.

As an important part of the talent training program for higher education students, internship has not been given enough attention in the education and management of international students, and the university has been unable to create a good internship environment for international students.

Moreover, the results of the questionnaire survey also showed that many international students hold a strong intention to stay in China for employment, while some others have a wait-and-see attitude on whether to work in China or not. This revealed that most students are not resistant to staying in China to work or start their own business, but just remain hesitant due to various reasons (lack of understanding of the relevant employment policies, lack of clarity on career planning, perceived difficulty in obtaining a work visa in China, etc.).

Results from Qualitative Data

Reliability and Validity

The validity and reliability of the interview protocols were verified through two aspects. In this study, a form was designed for the members of the expert committee, which contained the evaluation of the content, layout, and question design of the interview protocols. The experts gave their evaluations based on the content of the interview protocols, the video recordings of the interviews, and the interviewees' answers to the interview questions. Ultimately, they gave their opinions on the validity and reliability of the three interview protocols. For the interviewees, this study selected and coded relevant information based on the content of the interviews, and found that the answers to the questions in the interview protocols were able to reflect the research questions of this research. Combining the opinions of these two parts, the interview protocols of this research is valid and reliable.

Findings

This study analyzed the data collected from the interviews thematically through using the 6 phases for doing a thematic analysis proposed by Braun & Clark (2016). It started with multiple readings of the interview content to familiarize with the interview data, followed by organizing the interview data to generate initial codes. Themes were searched, reviewed and refined based on the codes. Ultimately, four themes were generated for this study.

Theme One: Current Status of Employment Guidance Work in University A

Through interviews with the administrators, the university hasn't set up courses on employment guidance

for international students until now. However, according to the talent training program for Chinese students, the university provides courses on innovation and entrepreneurship for all Chinese students. Moreover, although the university has a specialized student employment service department (department of employment), the department is only responsible for the employment guidance of Chinese students, the university does not have a specialized staff or a specialized department responsible for the employment guidance of international students. Interviewees from international students said that even if they wanted to consult about anything on employment, entrepreneurship, or internships, they did not know which department they should go to. In addition, interviewees from international students indicated that although they would also complete their academic education in China, they did not have the same opportunities to obtain internships (team internship or independent internship) as Chinese students. This internship was a mandatory course for Chinese students. Generally, Chinese students were given a semester for internship which were related to their majors, but there was no relevant arrangement for international students. According to the management of international students, there was no internship part in the talent training program for international students at present. In response to the above situation, some international students thought that the university did not pay enough attention to the employment guidance for international students and did not consider the job seeking for international students after graduation.

Theme Two: Causes of Difficulties for International Students Working in China

Talking about the causes for the difficulties for employment of international students in China, ISA said that a lack of understanding about the policies related to the employment of foreigners in China was an important factor affecting the employment of international students in China. No explanations on the relevant policies have been given to them by the university, and they were not clear about the ways to learn about the relevant policies promptly. When asked if they were aware of the “Notification” issued by the Ministry of Education in 2017, none of the interviewed students said they hear about it. The administrators interviewed also said that they seemed to have heard of the “Notification”, but were not sure what the details were. In addition, the administrators also said that there are no regulations on career planning or employment guidance for international students in the university. The current regulations for international students did not include contents on employment. ISB said that although he has passed HSK level 6, he still cannot understand or express his thoughts exactly in life and in class, especially when it comes to some Chinese dialects or slangs. He also said that his limited understanding of the local Chinese culture may also affect his employment in China, as he may not be able to integrate well into the work team and working environment. He also expressed that the competition in the job market in China for his major (economics) was also very fierce, and that his status as a foreigner may bring a lot of extra procedures for the employer to handle, which made him have no obvious advantage over Chinese students in the job market. ISA said that his major was Chinese Language and Literature, and a better place for this major was to go back to his home country to teach Chinese. It would be difficult to find a job that matches his major in China.

In addition, AdA stated that due to the special status of international students (international students maintain their status as students, but more importantly their status as foreigners), any problems with personal safety during internships can cause very high pressure and bad impact on the university. Additionally, the current assessment system on the quality of international student education (the “Standards”) did not include indicators on the employment of international students. Therefore, he believed that the university was also trying to avoid spreading international student affairs too wide, which could bring a negative impact. Moreover, the university generally believed that international students will choose to return to their home countries to seek job opportunities after completing their studies in China. AdB expressed that, as a staff of international students’ affairs, he only knew that the government had issued relevant management measures to optimize the employment of international students in China, but he needed to check the documents to know the specific requirements, which means that he was not familiar with those documents and regulations. Moreover, the relevant policies issued by the government were mostly macro-level guidelines, and the details of how to be implemented were not clearly defined. The university has not had any measures or regulations for international students’ employment or internships, so if an international student applies for an internship opportunity to the university, it may be decided on a case-by-case basis and reported to the higher authorities of the university.

Theme Three: Content of the Employment Guidance Courses

All interviewees agreed that there was a need for the university to set up courses on employment guidance for international students. Speaking of what should be included in employment guidance courses, the interviewees gave their own answers. The first thing that was mentioned was the relevant policies and regulations on the employment of foreign people in China. Both international students and administrators agreed that the most important content of the employment guidance courses was the detailed explanations of the relevant policies and regulations. ISA thought it would be good for the employment guidance courses to include resume making, interviewing skills, social etiquette, etc. to help students better cope with the job seeking process. ISB said that he would like to learn more about the real demand of the Chinese job market and what kind of job seekers were more popular in the job market through the employment guidance courses, so that he can make some relevant preparations in advance. In addition, the employment guidance courses should also include some contents about skills of job seeking. He also said that the university should provide programs on social security for foreign people who are working in China, such as how to apply for insurance and medical care in China.

AdA, on the other hand, believed that in addition to the content about employment, the employment guidance courses should also include contents on China's national conditions. By explaining China's national conditions, international students can learn more about China, Chinese culture and the Chinese job market. AdB suggested that guidance on employment psychology should also be an important part of the employment guidance courses. International students might experience psychological fluctuations in the process of changing their status from students to social workers. How to help them quickly adapt to the change of identity should also be covered in the courses. In addition, the difference between the actual employment environment and the ideal employment environment, as well as the unsuccessful job seeking process (not being able to find a suitable job for a long time) would also bring great psychological pressure to the international students. How to adjust the attitude was also very important to the success of international students in finding a favorable job.

Theme Four: Suggestions For Improving Employment Guidance of International Students

When asked about the suggestions on the employment guidance and management of the university, ISA expressed that he hoped the university could set up a specialized employment service department or organization for international students, which could provide guidance on international students' employment affairs. Besides, he suggested the university to hold special job fairs specifically for international students to provide more job opportunities for them. He also suggested that the university can set up additional Chinese language courses to help international students improve their Chinese language skills. That would be very helpful for them in seeking jobs. ISB also said whether the university can integrate and translate the employment information of companies into different languages and post it to the student center or classrooms. Or to set up relevant job seeking websites for international students to help them grab the employment information in time. He thought that even if the university cannot set up a special job seeking website for international students at present, it can recommend some existing job seeking websites or public accounts for international students to help them broaden their job seeking channels.

AdB also pointed that although there were still some difficulties in holding special job fairs only for international students, there was still some feasibility if enterprises that had the need to recruit foreign people can be introduced to the job fairs for Chinese graduates. AdA suggested that the university should also establish a specialized staff team for international student employment guidance. The university needed to provide professional training for the staff so that they can not only familiar with the policies and regulations but also have expertise in employment guidance for international students.

Discussion

Based on the analysis results of the collected data, this study put forward the following suggestions for improving the employment guidance work for international students in universities of S Province.

Suggestions for the Government Level

Gradually Improving the Policies and Systems Related to the Employment of International Students

Although the government has gradually relaxed the restrictions on international students' employment in China and issued relevant employment/internship regulations in recent years, however, since these regulations were mostly macro-level guidelines, they lacked clear detailed guidance for universities and were extremely difficult to operate (Miao, Qu, 2022). It is suggested that education authorities can be able to further clarify the status of "outstanding international graduates" on the basis of the existing policies, and clarify the details of employment guidance for international students in China. Provincial education authorities can develop relevant employment guidance regulations for international students according to the real situation of their own provinces (at present, only Beijing, Shanghai and a few other cities have already established relevant policies on the employment of international students, but Province S has not yet issued any relevant policies). Through the continuous improvement of the policies on employment at the national level, it will help universities better pay attention to and carry out employment guidance for international students.

Meanwhile, the employment guidance regulations for international students currently issued are all in Chinese language, which makes it more difficult for students who do not have sufficient Chinese language proficiency to understand the specific details by reading the original documents. This may make them feel more confused in understanding the current policies. It is suggested that the government's education departments issue different language versions of documents related to the management of international students (not only on employment) to make it easier for international students to better understand what the current policies exact mean.

Establishing Public Service Platforms for University-enterprise Cooperation

It is suggested that the government should take advantage of its strengths to coordinate with universities and enterprises to build platforms for employment cooperation. The government should encourage university-enterprise cooperation between universities and enterprises, and establish training modes according to the needs of enterprises. This can effectively improve the employability of international students. It is also suggested to integrate the advantageous majors of universities with the advantageous programs of enterprises to establish internship bases for international students and broaden their internship channels. The government can organize excellent enterprises to attend job fairs (online/offline) so that to provide more channels for international students to find jobs. The government can also reasonably utilize the advantages of public media to create service platforms for releasing employment information and relevant policies promptly.

Integrating the Employment of International Students into the Education Quality Management System

At present, the only program for evaluating the quality of international students' education in China is the HEAIS, which is carried out by CEAIE. Since there is no clear indicator of international students' employment/internship in this accreditation standard, it has become an "excuse" for many universities which do not pay enough attention to the employment guidance work of international students. It is suggested that the employment guidance of international students should be included in the HEAIS system. Specific index requirements should be set to form a complete evaluation of the whole process of "enrollment-employment", so as to enhance the importance for the employment guidance work of international students in universities.

Suggestions for the University Level

Raising Awareness of the Importance of Employment Guidance for International Students

Currently, China continues to promote the depth and breadth of international communications with other countries in the world. An increasing number of Chinese enterprises and worldwide enterprises will continue to increase their demand for international talents due to their business development and exchanges. Under this background, the demand for international students in the job market will continue to increase. As an important platform for the fostering of international students, universities should take the responsibility of fostering international students in aspects such as studying and teaching, employment guidance and cross-cultural awareness. Universities should raise their attention and awareness to the employment guidance work of international students, connect talent cultivation and employment, and form a positive relationship of mutual promotion and progress. Only by drawing attention to the attitudes can universities achieve success in employment guidance work of international students.

Setting up Relevant Employment Guidance Departments and Employment Guidance Courses for International Students

It is known that only a few well-known universities in Beijing and Shanghai, have set up specialized employment guidance departments to provide services for international students (Miao, Qu, 2022). According to the results of questionnaires and interviews, both international students and administrators of international student affairs believed that it is necessary to set up specialized international student employment guidance departments. The establishment of the relevant guidance departments can not only bring the employment work of international students to a new level, but also provide effective help for international students to understand the employment policies. It can also help improve international students' job-seeking ability by organizing and carrying out propaganda on employment policies, lectures on job-seeking skills, special employment/internship job fairs, and Chinese language proficiency improvement training.

In addition to the suggestion of setting up a specialized employment guidance department for international students, international students generally expressed that they would like to have courses on employment/entrepreneurship guidance as Chinese students do. Through the courses, they can better understand the Chinese job market, relevant policies and regulations, and learn practical skills for job seeking. It is suggested that universities can prepare teaching materials on international students' employment guidance based on the structure of Chinese students' employment guidance courses and the key aspects that international students are concerned about. They can also learn from universities at home and abroad that have already set up related courses, and try to establish their own employment guidance courses for international students by learning from other's strengths and advantages.

Enriching Employment Guidance Channels through Various Forms

It is suggested that universities establish international student employment guidance columns through their official websites, WeChat public accounts and other social platforms to update the employment policies and employment/internship information about international students in time. This way can provide more channels for international students to learn about job-seeking information promptly. Universities can also create specialized websites or public accounts for job seeking and update relevant information in time for international students. Besides, the university can help international students in their job seeking by inviting graduates who are already working in China to return to the university to give lectures and releasing videos or interviews of outstanding graduates in working.

In addition to broadening the propaganda channels, the university can also integrate the existing resources, screen from the high-quality enterprises that have cooperation with the university. Then combining these enterprises with the majors or schools with more international students to jointly build internship bases for international students. By introducing the resources of enterprises, the internship opportunities for international students can be expanded and the employability of international students can be enhanced.

Strengthening the Training of Administrators of International Students' Affairs

As expressed by AdB in the interview, the unfamiliarity with the relevant business by administrators is also an important reason that affects the employment guidance work of international students in universities.

Staff members who are engaged in employment and immigration policies counseling in Canadian universities and institutions must be trained and certified by Immigration Canada before they start their work (Lu, Wu, 2022). Therefore, universities should also strengthen regular training for administrators. By inviting the local immigration authorities to conduct lectures about policy explanation and related training for administrators, the professionalism of the administrators and the accuracy of policy explanation can be improved.

Conclusion

This study took provincial universities in S Province as the context, and selected provincial university A as the representative. Through the questionnaire survey of the international students and interviews with international students and administrators, this study aims to understand the current situation of employment guidance work of international students in university A, the difficulties encountered by international students in the process of job-seeking, and the suggestions for improving the employment guidance work of international students. Combined with the analysis of the collected data, feasible suggestions are made for the employment guidance work of international students for universities in S Province. Hope the findings of this study can make a valuable reference to improve the employment guidance work for international students in S Province.

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