

OUTCOMES OF INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION: EMPLOYABILITY OF STUDENT RETURNEES

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Abstract: The growing internationalisation of higher education has brought about an increase in the number of student returnees. However, the employment of student returnees, as an important part of international higher educational outcomes, is widely focused on by educators. Based on the graduate capital model, this paper analyses the employment of returnees in mainland China in recent years through literature analysis and finds that employability is a direct factor affecting employment outcomes. In assessing whether international education has enhanced students' employability, it is necessary to identify which specific types of employment capital have been enhanced. Currently, Chinese employers do not consistently rate the employability of returnees. Returnee graduates should pay attention to changes in the labour market in the pre-study, study and post-study phases, and actively participate in the activities of other employers in order to maximise the employability capital of graduates. Therefore, cultivating and enhancing employability is a process that requires the joint development of universities, students and employers.

Keywords: Employability; Student returnees; International higher education; Graduate capital model

1 INTRODUCTION

China, as a populous nation, has a significant number of young students who pursue their education overseas and subsequently come back to China upon completing their studies. These individuals are commonly referred to as returnees. In recent years, more than 80 percent of Chinese students who study abroad decided to return to China for employment upon finishing their education [1].

The question of Chinese returnees' employability has generated debate, nevertheless. In one respect, a number of returnees have secured lucrative employment opportunities and advanced their careers. For instance, empirical data revealed that the yearly income of postgraduates who returned China after studying abroad was approximately twenty percent higher than that of graduates who graduated from domestic universities in China [2]. Conversely, the employability of certain returnees is significantly low. In contrast to Chinese individuals who returned to their home country in the twentieth century, those who return in the twenty-first century are unable to secure high employability solely based on their status as returnees [3].

The employability of international alumni is vital to the host university's status in the education marketplace, its aim of internationalization, and its ethical commitments to alumni and learners from other countries [4]. The employability of Chinese returnees has become a critical concern. Primarily, it has an impact on social development. They acquired a global perspective, the capacity to communicate across cultures, and expertise in their field. They are key talent treasures for the nation and society [5]. Furthermore, the reintegration of returnees into the workforce has the potential to stimulate industrial advancement and foster economic expansion. Addressing the issue of returnees' employment is essential in order to fully harness their constructive impact on the economy [6-7]. Additionally, the limited job prospects for returnees impose significant strain on both the individuals and their families. This not only hampers their personal growth, but also contributes to social discontent and instability. Hence, enhancing the employability of returnees holds great significance [8].

Employment of returnees is determined via macro and meso variables. The former encompasses the influence of stricter work visa and immigration laws in several countries where students study abroad [9-10], as well as the attraction of incentives for business provided by the national and provincial government for returning talents [11]. Additionally, it encompasses economic expansion, resulting in more favorable employment opportunities, but also heightened competition [12]. Organizations require workers with a variety of talents and have different views about individuals returning to work. Certain individuals prioritize the needs of returnees, while others engage in discriminatory practices against them [13].

2 NOTIONS AND APPROACHES TO EMPLOYABILITY

The concept of employability is undergoing dynamic changes. Employability is an intricate and multifaceted phenomenon that requires comprehensive examination from various perspectives and backgrounds [14]. Consequently, the factors that determine employment success will differ based on individual background, labor market conditions, and the broader socio-economic environment.

Employability is defined as a sequence of accomplishments that encompasses personal characteristics, knowledge, and skills [15]. These accomplishments not only facilitate the employment process for graduates and their success in their

chosen professions, but also have a positive impact on the labor force, community, and economy as a whole. Nevertheless, I contend that this definition overestimates the importance of skills.

Employability refers to an individual's capacity to navigate the job market and achieve their full potential through secure employment [16]. Traditionally, the emphasis has been on equipping graduates with the skills and resources needed to secure and retain jobs. However, contemporary society's expectation for graduates to sustainably maintain employment is becoming increasingly difficult. A recent understanding of employability includes not only obtaining and retaining meaningful employment, but also being adaptable and experiencing career growth [17].

While there are many different approaches to employability in practice, they are not always useful [18]. According to research, the possession, position, or procedure are considered to be important factors [19]. Employability, from a possession standpoint, is determined by the skills and traits that graduates possess or can acquire. These talents and attributes can be tested and strengthened through schooling and instruction. Although this gives a clear framework for assessing graduates' employability, it concentrates too much on individual effort and ignores social and economic issues. The concept of position views employability as a social construct that mirrors the influence and prestige of various societal groups. It highlights the importance of education in reinforcing social inequality and dominance patterns. The benefit of this viewpoint is that it offers an in-depth insight into the different aspects that affect employability. However, it also overemphasizes the structural obstacles to employability. Finally, the process highlights the relationship between students and employers, as well as how graduates build and negotiate their identity depending on the expectations of the job market.

These three approaches offer distinct insights into comprehending the employability of returnees. While developing policies and strategies to enhance graduate employability, it is crucial to thoroughly consider these three perspectives.

3 TWO CAPITALS TO SUPPORT EMPLOYABILITY

3.1 The Graduate Capital Model

The graduate capital model thoroughly encompasses five basic employability capitals, namely culture, human resources, society, identity and psychology [20]. Cultural capital denotes the capacity to effectively address social norms, expectations, and behaviors in a variety of cultural and social contexts; Employers can make good use of their employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities when they have human capital; The capacity to build and preserve professional relationships with coworkers, mentors, and employers is known as social capital; Identity capital refers to one's capacity to envision, pursue, and achieve one's life's objectives in light of one's aspirations for the future; Psychological capital which is the capacity to adjust to one's work environment, is the capacity to learn from experience gained in the face of difficulties, improve resilience to pressure, and recuperate in order to create proactive coping mechanisms [20].

Furthermore, the notion of dynamic capital refers to the capacity to assess individual strengths and limitations and incorporate diverse forms of capital and resource [21]. This notion enhances the dynamic quality of the graduate capital model, despite being distinct from other forms of capital that are defined as resources.

3.2 Human Capital

This paper explores the advantages of Chinese returnees' employability by focusing on human capital. Specifically, it examines how their learning ability, which includes academic and scientific achievements, and their experience value, which includes internship and practice information, impact their job search outcomes. In essence, human capital is acquired via education, but it mainly depends on individual aptitude and prior learning [22]. Education in schools introduces students to the general skill impact and signal influence in the labor. People who lived abroad and then came back will invest in their education in a variety of approaches to enhance their skills and build up more human capital while they are in study. Investing in education and job preparation does not ensure a guaranteed return when seeking employment in China [23]. Variations in personal ability, cognition, random factors, and incomplete signal transmission make it challenging to achieve identical employment outcomes, even with similar levels of educational experience.

It is also worthwhile to consider the influence of this unpredictability on employment pressures and outcomes. Human capital highlights that a person's productivity may be increased through education, which will boost their performance at work [24]. This also indicates that persons with international higher education, such as returnees, obtain greater pay and better work chances in the labor market.

While the mainstream perspective on the connection between educational attainment and employment outcomes has traditionally focused on human capital, this viewpoint has faced criticism. The theory assumes that employers possess the ability to accurately predict and impartially assess the skills and capabilities of prospective job applicants. However, the current labor market situation is frequently fraught with uncertainty, including an incomplete understanding of job seekers' characteristics, worries regarding the quality of education, along with a not complete knowing of future marketplace demand and supply, making it challenging for employers to thoroughly assess job seekers. As a result, present human capital can easily become a factor that makes it harder for returnees to find ideal work.

3.3 Psychological Capital

Psychological capital is the other factor to support employability. As a personal characteristic aspect, psychological capital could improve person's spontaneous development, increase person's job performance and career advancement. They departed from the mainland and traveled to a foreign country to pursue their studies. They successfully overcome linguistic and various other obstacles, resulting in the development of a strong psychological capital [25]. Psychological capital helps returnees retain a healthy and happy psychological state, and keep optimism in the strain and failures of education and life, thinking that success can be conquered by oneself. Promoting psychological capital is highly important for improving the employability of university students [26]. A strong psychological capital fosters the self-assurance of individuals returning from abroad. When students experience failure in their job search or career advancement, possessing a substantial amount of psychological capital could enhance their resilience and promote a sense of tranquility. In addition, psychological capital can enhance the well-being of individuals who have returned to work and contribute to the long-term and positive growth of their employability.

4 A PROGRAM TO IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY

According to the analysis provided, this study has developed an online instruction workshop for Chinese individuals who have returned to their home country, with a focus on enhancing their human capital. The primary objective of this project is to facilitate the efficient integration of young Chinese returnees' skills and knowledge with the current demands of the local Chinese labor market. For two months, it is intended to be conducted in small groups. The grouping approach can be categorized based on industry or professional areas, where individuals within the same industry or field are placed together in a group, facilitating the accumulation of contacts for them. The criterion for selecting alumni or trainers will need them to have plans to return to China within a period of 5 years and possess up-to-date knowledge about the current circumstances of employers and returnees in mainland China.

There will be a total of eight live online sessions, each lasting two hours, over the course of two months. The specific course material involves inviting returned alumni with international and Chinese work experience to offer focused vocational skills, like programming, financial analysis, branding, and so on, based on their work experience and market need in China. Furthermore, team members can role-play mock interviews and written exams. Moreover, team spirit is fostered by replicating the real working scene, which helps returnees in China adjust to the local workplace. The project's executors will consist of managers from various industries in China, with a particular emphasis on Human Resources recruiters.

5 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE TRAINING

The alumni workshop is an effective structure designed to enhance the employment of fresh returnees with precision. The effectiveness of this approach has been demonstrated through interviews conducted with Vietnamese individuals who have returned to their home country, as well as through alumni workshops or industry connection initiatives, which have proven to be incredibly advantageous [4]. It is due to alumni's background has a great value for reference in human capital [27].

Furthermore, workshops offer participants the chance to acquire and excel in professional expertise and abilities in a given domain through participatory methods, enabling them to develop a profound comprehension and mastery of said knowledge and skills [28].

The rationale behind the grouping of returnees from a similar major or industry is to facilitate the identification of their current level and the improvement of their skills through peer review. Many individuals who have returned from studying abroad sometimes lack a clear and unbiased assessment of their skill levels. They tend to rely on the prestige of graduating from top colleges worldwide, while disregarding the fact that they may have several deficiencies compared to their peers in the same field [29]. The group members can alternate conducting mock interviews using the live conference software to expand their perspectives and identify errors and suggestions via peer review [30-31]. This program offers a limited selection of trainers who have just returned from China within the past 5 years. These trainers are knowledgeable about the current labor market scenario and can provide up-to-date information.

In addition, the features of this project have been thoroughly addressed. The program is developed as an internet-based platform, as it offers convenience for both individuals who have returned and those who are considering returning. Whether individuals are in the process of planning to return to China but are yet to do so, or have recently returned, they can easily fulfill the necessary requirements. Small cohorts within the same industry facilitate seamless communication and the exchange of up-to-date professional information.

6 CONCLUSION

Employability is the process of increasing the overall worth of graduates' employability assets by encouraging college students to take initiative and effectively communicating their employability to employers. However, it should be noted that the profitable switch of graduates from academia to the professional world is not solely reliant on individual efforts. Various stakeholders within the organizational field or institutional system play an equally crucial role in fostering and establishing employment capital. To facilitate the seamless integration of college and university graduates into the workforce, the collaboration of higher education institutions, companies, the government, and other societal players is vital. Every participant, including graduates, must possess a comprehensive understanding of the responsibilities of the others and actively engage in the activities of other parties in order to optimize the employability capital of students.

Thus, the process of fostering and improving employability necessitates the collaborative development of universities, students, and companies.

Employability can encompass skills and qualities. Thus, in assessing the impact of international education on students' employability, it is crucial to identify the particular form of employment capital that has been improved. Currently, Chinese businesses lack uniformity in their assessment of returnees. More specifically, certain employers may value the employment capital, which includes skills and traits, possessed by certain international graduates, while others may not recognize its worth. This disparity is generated by the contrasting opinions of employers and how these perspectives are institutionalized in a certain job market. Hence, in order to examine the perspectives of foreign graduates and employers regarding the employability associated with overseas experience, it is imperative to carry out a thorough analysis of both similarities and discrepancies. An investigation of their perspectives should ascertain their consistency or inconsistency and whether they pertain to the same category of employment capital. In other words, the investigation should not just simply evaluate whether the company supports the foreign experiences of graduates, additionally analyze the unique employability capital earned via global expertise that the employer acknowledges.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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