

Research on the Employment Competitiveness of Overseas Returnees and the Construction of an Evaluation System

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Abstract: The study involved conducting both quantitative and qualitative analyses on the employment competitiveness of 186 overseas returnees and then developed an evaluation system for assessing their employment competitiveness. The study also compared the disparities between self-evaluation and social expectations among the returnees. Based on the findings, several countermeasures were proposed. At the individual level, emphasis should be placed on fostering professional and foreign language skills, early career planning, and establishing clear employment evaluation criteria. At the government and social levels, it is recommended to establish a database and strengthen the formulation and implementation of employment policies for these students.

1. Introduction

Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China points out that “we will speed up work to build a strong educational system, greater scientific and technological strength, and a quality workforce”, and “we will move faster to build world hubs for talent and innovation, promote better distribution and balanced development of talent across regions, and strive to build up our comparative strengths in global competition for talent”¹. Based on the changes in the 21st century and a new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial revolution, the ever-growing team of returned overseas talents provides a strong workforce and intellectual support for building China into a great modern socialist country. The employment competitiveness of returnees means the competence and comprehensive quality of the students who have learned systematic knowledge and mastered professional skills overseas and meet the needs of employers compared with other competitors in finding employment at home.

According to statistics by the Ministry of Education, from 1978 to 2019, a total of 6,560,600 personnel of all kinds have studied abroad, and 4,231,700 of them returned to China to seek careers after completing their studies, accounting for 86.28% of those who finished their studies². The groups of overseas returnees are in line with a global talent circulation model of “going abroad for further study and returning to China for employment”³. These returnees, after returning home, carry forward the glorious tradition of patriotism, take on the mission of the times, and make contributions on the

broad stage at home, becoming a strong workforce for the development of various industries in China.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the employment competitiveness of overseas returnees, and to create the national and social requirements for their ability and professional accomplishment; meanwhile, this paper analyzes in quantitative and qualitative research their employment competitiveness in groups by questionnaires, makes an in-depth analysis of the problems and challenges faced by the re the number of literatures turnees in employment and explores the gaps between overseas returnees and social requirements, and thus provides corresponding solutions.

2. The Formulation of Research Questions

The literature on studying overseas students has generally shown an upward trend in recent years. The papers are mainly generated in higher education, and the research mainly focuses on applications. Existing literature researches mainly focus on overseas students’ status quo after returning from abroad, career development, and a series of measures and suggestions to attract overseas students returning to China, as well as political and ideological education and cultural adaptation. Wang Huiyao thinks that the proportion of high-level overseas students has been continuously increasing in the field of global talent flow and cultivation, and it is one of the significant tasks for building a powerful country with talents to provide overseas returnees with more targeted support for employment and entrepreneurship and attract top overseas talents to work at home⁴ Researches by Wang

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Huiyao (2022), Miao Danguo (2018)^[5], Jae-Eun Jon, Yun-Jeong Shin & Gerald W. Fry (2018)^[6], Jasvir Kaur Nachatar Singh^[7] and other scholars on overseas students, and those by Lei LI (2022)^[8], Yin Zhaohua (2023)^[9] and other scholars on employment competitiveness of colleges also provide a theoretical perspective for this study.

The current research focuses much on attracting better overseas students to find employment at home and participate in building Chinese modernization. He Haixia believes that with the rapid development of China's economy, the number of overseas returnees in China is increasing year by year, and the employment and entrepreneurship of these returnees have become a prominent problem¹⁰. Taking the returnees of new generations as the research object, Liu Yunyun and Ye Yinghua discussed the influence of social demography, overseas education experience, and domestic job-seeking activities on their employment quality in subjective as well as objective aspect¹¹. Yangmei made relatively comprehensive research on the returnees' working areas, industries, and employer types¹², Wei Huaying believes that the main factors affecting the job satisfaction of overseas returnees are salary, corporate culture, corporate system, and personal development¹³. Wang Runye and Li Renda (2023) analyzed the problems of overseas returnees returning to employment from the perspectives of policy, cultural differences and career planning, and put forward relevant suggestions.¹⁴ It needs to be addressed urgently that we should understand in-depth the current situation of the returnees' employment competitiveness, build an evaluation system of their ability to compete, and help them further to improve their competitiveness, thus providing stronger intellectual support for building China in the new era.

Given the existing academic literature at home and abroad, many scholars generally focus on investigating and studying the external environment of studying abroad, the international flow of overseas students, and "brain return", while lacking a scientific and systematic

evaluation mechanism of the ability of the returnees, which provides an opportunity for this paper to go ahead. Therefore, this paper aims to combine the individual of overseas returnees and the surroundings and link the national and social needs with the employment competitiveness of students. Given the impact of the external environment on the returnees and the comprehensive evaluation of their ability, this paper will make the overseas returnees realize the gap between national and social requirements and their ability, thus providing guidance and reference to choose from for promoting employment competitiveness of the students and making best of the individual value.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This research selected students studying abroad and those who have returned to China as the subject of the questionnaire survey and interview. Moreover, it conducted online questionnaire surveys mainly on returnees from Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area cities such as Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Dongguan. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed, 186 were valid, and the validity was 93%. Twenty people were engaged in in-depth interviews, and 8 in the expert investigation. The questionnaire was compiled regarding employment industries, salary, placement guidance, development platforms, working cities, cultural atmosphere, and existing problems. After recognizing the basic employment situation of the overseas returnees and their mindset, the employment competitiveness of respondents and other affecting factors were analyzed following the research results.

The research methods used in this study include document research, structured interviews, expert interviews (Delphi method), and analytic hierarchy process (AHP). The demographic characteristics of the sample are as Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample

Basic Content	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	80	43.01%
	Female	106	56.99%
Age	Under the age of 30	154	82.80%
	30-39 years of age	27	14.50%
	Over the age of 40	5	2.70%
Political Affiliation	Member of the CPC	53	28.5%
	Member of the CYLC	72	38.7%
	The Masses	61	32.8%
Destination of Studying	The United States	18	9.68%
	The United Kingdom	48	25.81%
	Australia	15	8.06%
	Canada	First	0.54%
	Japan	30	16.13%
	South Korean	9	4.84%
	France	8	4.30%
	Germany	Second	1.08%
	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	20	10.75%
	Macao Special Administrative Region	4	2.15%

The Highest Degree	Others	31	16.67%
	Doctor's Degree	12	6.40%
	Master's Degree	111	59.70%
	Bachelor's Degree	63	33.90%

4. Empirical Analysis and Findings

(I) Use Delphi method to establish the evaluation index of overseas returnees' employment competitiveness

This study uses Delphi method to establish an evaluation index system of overseas returnees' employment competitiveness. Following the literature review research and interviews, the research group designed three rounds of expert consultation

Table 2: Expert authority

Number of rounds	Positive Coefficients	Coefficients of Adjudication (Ca)	Coefficients of Sense (Cs)	Coefficients of Reliability (Cr)
First	1.00	0.864	1.00	0.932
Second	1.00	0.871	1.00	0.935
Third	1.00	0.900	1.00	0.950

It is concluded from Table 2 that the positive coefficient, the coefficient of adjudication, the coefficient of sense, and the coefficient of reliability of the third round are 1.00, 0.90, 1.00, and 0.95, respectively. In summary, the four coefficients are over 0.8, representing that the expert authority of this study is considerably high.

questionnaires based on the evaluation index system. The panel of experts comprises specialists in overseas student employment, human resources managers, and college staff responsible for employment services. The listed indicators are scored one after another by the experts consulted, and the content validity and the weight coefficient of the returnees' employment competitiveness are measured according to the consulting results.

The filtering of findings and analysis through Delphi method presents that there is a final convergence of views as some indicators are deleted based on the modified opinions of experts; as a result, the evaluation index system on the employment competitiveness of overseas returnees is established eventually in line with Delphi method (see the Table 3).

Table 3: The evaluation index system on the employment competitiveness of overseas returnees according to Delphi method

First-class Index	Second-class Index
Professional competence	Great competence
Foreign language	Master of core technology
Self-development	International perspective
Practice	Foreign language advantage
Background	Precisely self-positioning and seizing a chance
	Adaptability
	Career planning
	Extensive working experience
	Teamwork
	Ranking of graduate schools
	Family background and social relationships

(II) Constructing the evaluation system of the employment competitiveness with Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

The members of this research group use AHP to determine the weight of the index system. Through the determination procedure, the employment competitiveness of overseas returnees is subdivided into different indices; according to the expert scoring, a quantitative process will be achieved to obtain index weight at all levels and complete the consistency test of indices.

Table 4: Consistency Test Results of First-class Index

Consistency Test Results				
Maximum Eigenvalue	Value of Consistency Index (CI)	Value of Random Index (RI)	Value of Consistency Ratio (CR)	Consistency Test Results
5.429	0.107	111	0.097	Pass

From Table 4 the results of AHP display that the maximum eigenvalue is 5.429. According to the RI table, the corresponding RI value is 1.11. Therefore, $CR=CI/RI=0.097<0.1$, passing the consistency test.

Table 5: Consistency Test Results of Second-class Index

Consistency Test Results				
Maximum Eigenvalue	Value of Consistency Index (CI)	Value of Random Index (RI)	Value of Consistency Ratio (CR)	Consistency Test Results
3.074	0.037	0.525	0.07	Pass

From Table 5 the results of AHP display that the maximum eigenvalue is 3.074, and the corresponding RI value is 0.525, according to the RI table. Therefore, $CR = CI / RI = 0.07 < 0.1$, passing the consistency test.

As a result of the hierarchical analysis of the collected data, the final weight summary is obtained according to the judgment matrix: the final weight of each second-class index in the evaluation system. The

obtained weight distribution of the evaluation index of overseas returnees' employment competitiveness is as follows (Table 6):

Table 6: Weight Distribution of the Employability and Competitiveness Evaluation Index Assessed by Experts

First-class Index	Weight	Second-class Index	Weight
Professional competence	35.40%	Great competence	25.00%
		Master of core technology	75.00%
Basic abilities	26.01%	International perspective	46.46%
		Foreign language advantage	53.54%
		Precisely self-positioning and seizing a chance	40.70%
Self-development	11.75%	Adaptability	28.97%
		Career planning	30.33%
		Extensive working experience	83.33%
Practice	18.28%	Teamwork	16.67%
		Ranking of graduate schools	50.00%
Background	8.56%	Family background and social relationships	50.00%

Based on the collected data from questionnaires regarding the employment competitiveness of overseas returnees and the constructed evaluation system, the scores of their competitiveness within this group were derived..

Table 7: Scores for overseas returnees' employment competitiveness

Index	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Master of core technology	3.07	1.034
Great competence	3.69	0.923
International perspective	3.71	0.894
Foreign language advantage	4.01	0.929
Precisely self-positioning and seizing a chance	3.53	0.911
Adaptability	3.9	0.966
Career planning	3.71	1.013
Extensive working experience	3.11	1.238
Teamwork	3.74	1.103
Ranking of graduate schools	3.58	1.014
Family background and social relationships	3.21	1.102

It can be seen from the Table 7 that in terms of the returnees' employment competitiveness, the average score of "great competence", "foreign language advantage", "adaptability", "teamwork," and "ranking of graduate schools" is higher, namely the returnees' view of their greater competence in these aspects.

It is concluded in comparing the self-evaluation of the returnees with experts' evaluation that most of the returnees are currently professional with "great competence", while experts believe that it is more important to master the core technology; Most of the returnees currently have a foreign language advantage, and experts also believe that they need to have some advantage in a foreign language; Most returnees now have high "adaptability", but experts believe that "precisely self-positioning and seizing a chance" is more critical; Most of the returnees are now quite capable of teamwork, while experts think that "extensive working experience" is more critical; Most of the returnees currently have an advantage in "ranking of graduate schools", and experts believe that the ranking of schools

is as important as "family background and social relationships".

From the differences between the evaluation of experts and returnees in this empirical research, the gap between the self-evaluation of returnees and social expectations can be clearly. The returnees who master core technologies, accurately position themselves and grasp opportunities, possess extensive working experience, and bear foreign language advantages undoubtedly enjoy preponderance in the job market. On the one hand, the gap shows that overseas returnees need to adjust their psychological expectations in time when choosing a career, and it is necessary to make the necessary adjustments in employment and give guidance on career classification. On the other hand, the supporting policy for employment must be adjusted effectively, and the building of a career guidance staff team must be reinforced in response to the needs of overseas returnees. Only in this way can the employment competitiveness of them be improved.

5. Suggestions

In investigating the employment competitiveness of overseas students, we find the difference between social requirements and the returnees' expectations and capabilities; the talents may need help to meet the actual needs of employers. The difference also leads to the problem of difficult employment for overseas returnees to a certain degree. Both the number of overseas returnees and the cost of studying abroad increase. At the same time, recruitment tapers down, representing the imbalance between supply and demand, making the employment difficulties more prominent. Given the problems, we put forward the following four suggestions.

First, overseas returnees should focus on developing their professional competence and foreign language ability and make career planning early. Among the indexes surveyed, professional competence, core technology, foreign language advantage, and international perspective are still the trump card for the returnees in finding employment. They must grasp and study abroad the skill and competence to be competitive in the domestic job market. Many students who have yet to go abroad and those who are studying overseas need systematic and professional career planning guidance, and most of them have no working experience during their time abroad, which is also a shortcoming of the returnees in employment. Some students have problems in job selection and orientation and only regard studying abroad as a way of “gilding” with the ultimate goal of getting a degree certificate. Overseas returnees must be aware that companies attach great importance to employees' working ability rather than academic background; therefore, the students studying abroad should focus on improving their core competitiveness, such as professional competence, language skills, and innovative thinking when it comes to overseas club activities or internships.

Secondly, the overseas returnees should clarify the employment evaluation and take advantage of the resources in the job market. They should fill in as soon as possible the gap between social expectations and their professional, essential, self-developing, and practical competence as well as background and consider the combination of market demand and their interests and abilities. In the context of the national emphasis on science and technology innovation, the employment competitiveness of high-tech talents prevails over that of other specialists in parallel comparison, and overseas students must have a continuous accumulation of knowledge and skills when studying abroad. Compared with domestic graduates, overseas students have less knowledge of soft rules such as the domestic environment and culture, fail to adapt quickly to workplace culture and interpersonal relationships at home, and need more information about the specific requirements of domestic companies. Employment is a mutual selection between talents and employers. Only by identifying the needs of employers and their actual situation can overseas returnees get rid of the

information gap and stand in a favorable position in the job market.

Third, it is necessary at the government and market level to establish a database of overseas returnees and build an evaluation system for the returnees as soon as possible. Through big data and dynamic database updates, it can be facilitated to use the data of the returnees and share information resources. Another purpose of establishing the database is to improve the evaluation system of returnees and realize the practical assessment of the employment competitiveness of returned talents, which can help them set up targets in finding employment and adapt quickly to the domestic job market and environment to become commensurate with their jobs. The standardized assessment of returnees enables them to enjoy the same conditions as other domestic graduates in finding a job. Moreover, it makes the job market more open and transparent, ending “rent-seeking” and “alienation of employment”. Eliminating the habit of doing things through relationships and enhancing the confidence and determination of returnees in employment and entrepreneurship will effectively promote the high-quality development of China's workforce and economy.

Fourth, enhancing the formulation, promotion, and implementation of employment policies for overseas returnees is necessary. Regarding the formulation, attention should be paid to the demands of returnees at all levels. The policies should focus on career development, registration, old-age care services, and social security. Thus, we can create a suitable environment for returnees' employment and entrepreneurship at home to make the best use of their talents.

On policy promotion, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Front Work Department, the Western Returned Scholars Association, social organizations, and significant enterprises can offer lectures related to careers at home among groups of students abroad, covering matters such as employment policies, job alignment, domestic development, remuneration, development platform, and answer questions through effective interaction, so that the returnees can adapt to the domestic environment as soon as possible.

Moreover, we should strengthen the regulation and supervision of policy implementation and form an effective mechanism for feedback. On the one hand, employment and entrepreneurship services for overseas returnees should be included in the evaluation system. The other is about implementing the policy on studying abroad, employment, and entrepreneurship. The relevant departments and institutions should actively provide high-efficiency employment services and guidance of different categories and create a good business environment.

When bringing in talents, the local government should strengthen the introduction of talents studying abroad and emphasize providing development opportunities in formulating policies. Based on the development resources and industrial advantages, the local government can plan the direction and priority of

industrial development according to the specific situations. By linking local industrial development with the career development of overseas returnees, the government can provide more prospects for development. Moreover, the returnees should change their mindset, not only keeping eyes on developed cities but also aspiring to go to the local communities, places where the motherland needs, and to the industries and enterprises where they can bring their talents into play.

General Secretary Xi Jinping wrote back to the young returned scholars at Nanjing University and pointed out: "I hope that you comrades will carry forward the glorious tradition of studying abroad and serving the country, and consciously pursue the goal of serving the nation and the people. Let us strive for excellence in fostering virtue and cultivating talents, promoting self-reliance and self-improvement in science and technology, and setting an example in maintaining cultural self-confidence and telling China's story well." Moreover, provinces and cities also work together to bring in talent and improve services for them. Therefore, establishing a sound system of overseas returnees, improving their employment competitiveness, and sending more high-quality talents to the country aligns with the strategic needs of human resources for building a Chinese path to modernization and comprehensively advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. It is worth further analysis to explore a better way of building China into a powerful country with talent.

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