

# **Navigating Graduate Employability: The Roles of Job-Seeking Behavior, Educational Quality, Professional Skills, and Resilience in Shaping Employment Outcomes in China**

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## **Abstract**

Despite the rapid expansion of higher education, many graduates continue to face significant challenges transitioning into the labor market. This study investigates the factors influencing employment outcomes among post-undergraduate students in China, focusing on job-seeking behavior, educational quality, professional skills, and internship experience, with resilience as a mediating variable and regional labor market conditions as a moderating factor. A quantitative approach was adopted, surveying 400 recent graduates through a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS to examine the relationships between variables and validate the proposed model. The results indicate that proactive job-seeking behavior, high educational quality, strong professional skills, and relevant internship experiences significantly enhance graduate employment outcomes. Resilience was found to mediate the relationship between these factors and employment success, suggesting that psychological adaptability strengthens graduates' ability to navigate job market uncertainties. Furthermore, regional labor market conditions moderated these relationships, highlighting the disparities in employment opportunities across different economic regions. Graduates in economically vibrant areas benefitted more from their qualifications and experiences compared to those in less developed regions. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on graduate employability by integrating psychological and contextual dimensions into the analysis of employment outcomes. It underscores the need for higher education institutions to strengthen career preparation initiatives and integrate resilience-building programs within curricula. Policymakers are also encouraged to implement targeted regional strategies to address labor market disparities and improve employment prospects for all graduates. These findings provide valuable insights for educators, students, employers, and policymakers aiming to enhance graduate employability in an increasingly competitive and digitalized labor market.

**Keywords:** Graduate Employability, Job-Seeking Behavior, Educational Quality, Resilience, Labor Market Conditions

### **Introduction**

Although universities and policy-makers have been working to improve graduates' employability, there are still substantial challenges in matching the outcomes of higher education with labour market requirements. Global growth in higher education has meant an increasingly larger proportion of graduates taking their place in job markets that may find it difficult to assimilate them. This mismatch has led to employment and underemployment among university graduates, calling for specific solutions.

The lack of cooperation between academia and industry played a pivotal role in graduates being unprepared for practice. This absence is part of what is known as the skills gap, and leads to a situation where graduates have qualifications that are not in demand by the market, further spiraling them into unemployment and underemployment. Second, areas with lower levels of entrepreneurial behaviour experienced slower economic growth which, in turn, limited employment opportunities for graduates, exacerbating the gap in labour market outcomes by geography.

Students commonly face issues of unpreparedness upon entering into a professional role. They are frequently deficient in search skills (e.g., writing a resume or preparing for an interview) and have problems coping with the work situations and assuming relationships with others in the workplace. So because of such constraints, plus a more competitive labor market, it has become increasingly challenging for graduates to transit into their jobs smoothly.

The advances in digital economy have tended to make employment more complex. It brings new possibilities, but also requires sophisticated technological skills that few graduates possess. Many higher education institutions are not providing students with the necessary knowledge to navigate the ever-changing world of the digital economy, leading to unemployment and under-employment. This lack of skills and knowledge, combined with some unrealistic expectations for jobs and little knowledge of the labor market, inhibits college graduates from advancing more rapidly in the labor market.

In light of these contested points, the role of resilience in influencing employment is under-researched, as well as the regional labour market context in which such relationships exist. Indebted graduates are one of the fastest-growing groups in the international student body, and their resilience to the vagaries of the job market and in the face of obstacles are important contributions to graduate employability, but are largely uncharted research territory. It is important to have a good understanding of the way in which important individual factors (e.g., job-search behavior, professional skills, quality of education) interact with resilience and conditions on the regional labor market and how they can be influenced in order to enhance the likelihood of employment.

Graduates In the News Last year there were reports that graduates have a hard time finding work, with a lot of them claiming that they feel over-qualified for the roles they do apply for. Meanwhile, in England, more than a third of people are doing jobs that require less

qualifications, they have, indicating disjuncture between educational qualifications and labor market needs. This raises questions about the alignment of higher education with the dynamism of labor markets.

While there has been active discussion of the problem of graduate employment outcomes, skills mismatches, and labor market trends, substantial gaps in understanding the issue are evident and need to be resolved to inform policy and practice responses to the challenges of improving the work prospects of our graduates.

One crucial void is the ongoing disconnect between graduate abilities and laborforce requirements. While several other studies have recognised the occurrence of skills gaps (Kuznetsova, 2021), however, there is still limited evidence on the skills in which these graduates are deficient, in different sectors. Specific studies cover general classification of soft and hard skills, but tend not to take into account how skills have evolved over time to meet the needs of changing industry landscapes, especially in digitalized ecosystems (Tee et al. Additional studies are necessary to delineate the specific skill and knowledge set needed by current employers and to develop ways that higher education should more effectively prepare students for the workplace.

Other relatively little studied dimensions include the effect of local labor market conditions on employability. The situation of the graduate labor market is quite different because of regional differences but most of the studies have described the problem of graduate employment at the country level, neglecting the local economy and the differences in the job market. Research has identified considerable regional variation in both skill shortage and labor demand (Morris et al., 2019), but there has been little focus on the impact of these factors on graduates' career outcomes. Tackling this research void could aid in the design of more targeted interventions in increasing employment chances in the economy-deprived areas.

Moreover, with digital transformation transforming job market expectations, the extent of digital literacy and technological flexibility in graduate employability is insufficiently understood. Today, there are high demand on employees who possess data and digital communication skills, and some artificial intelligence skills (Rodzalan et al., 2022) but few of the graduates ready for the particular skills. Forthcoming research should study the impact of universities curricula in relation to the embedding of digital competences and the value of digital skills training to employment outcomes.

Resilience, as one of the indispensable psychological factors for graduate employment, also needs to be further probed into. Although some research has examined resilience as an individual characteristic that influences the length of time an individual spends in a job search (Nakitende, 2024), very little has considered how resilience combines with skill mismatch and local labor market conditions to produce employment outcomes. Second, it will be necessary in subsequent studies to analyze if there are any interventions in universities that could improve the employability of graduates in difficult job markets.

Lastly, current studies regarding the employability of graduates increasingly focus on short-term job outcomes rather than long-term career prospects. Less is known about the process

of how early work circumstances shape long-run job satisfaction, career progress and stability (Volchik & Maslyukova, 2020). The closing of this gap would help gain a clearer insight into the causes of sustainable employability and career success.

## Literature Review

### *Theoretical Framework*

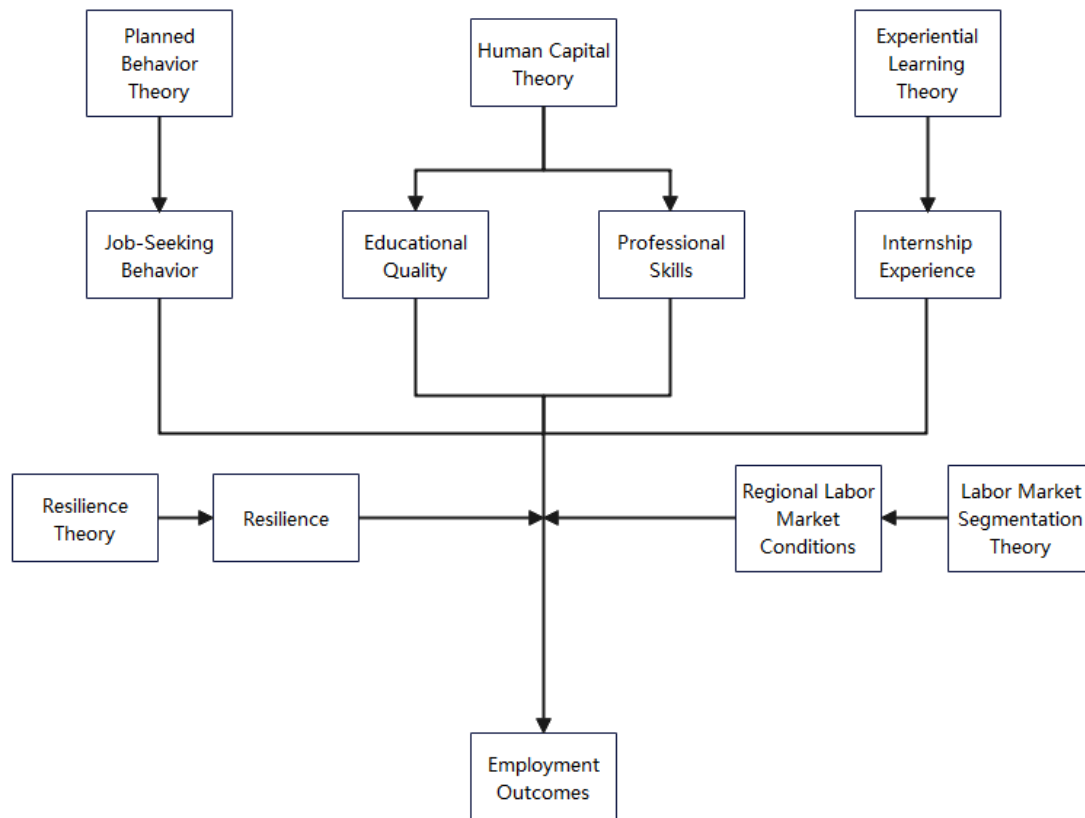


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework for this paper is based on several existing theories in an attempt to map the complex interplay between independent, moderating and dependent variables and graduate employability. These theories in combination offer a robust basis understanding the effects of job-search behavior, the quality of the education, is professional competences, intern- ship experiences, resilience, and regional labour market conditions on the transitions to work.

### *Related Research*

The relationship between job search behavior, quality of education, occupation-related skills, internship experience, resilience and regional labor market situation is key to the graduate's transition into the labor market. Knowledge of these relationships is crucial to understand the effects of personal, institutional, and contextual variables in shaping employability.

Job-search behavior has long been regarded as an important determinant of employment outcomes. It includes the job search, networking, resume writing, and interview preparation that graduates take advantage of to make themselves marketable. Recent research indicates that job search strategies have a strong positive effect on the employability chances, especially when students actively use career development services (Wahab et al., 2024).

Further, resilience is significantly important to improve job seeking effectiveness, as it also helps graduates to deal with job market risk and uncertainties, overcome rejection and maintain the level of motivation. Resilience plays an important role in the sense that it promotes proactive job seeking as graduates are motivated to modify their job-seeking strategies informed by feedback and labor market.

Educational quality and employability skills are elements of employability status, as these would affect the readiness of graduates to work. Higher education is definitely a game changer in equipping students with technical know-how and soft skills, to meet up with job expectations. As being found by several studies, there exists a substantial mismatch between what employers need and what graduates possess, highlighting the need for curriculum reform (Selamat et al., 2023). Educational quality improvement increases employability, but regional labor market conditions mitigate this effect. For instance, the graduates from institutions in economically strong regions are more likely to have quality job placements as compared to the graduates from the institutions in weak labor markets (Nadeem, Sher, & Liaqat, 2023).

Internships have also become increasingly recognized for enhancing employability as they offer practical exposure, industry contacts, and hands-on experience. Internship experiences related to a graduate's area of study contribute enormously to their job readiness, starting salary, and career satisfaction. Yet, these gains are contingent on the labour market context as internships in high growth areas result in moving into full-time employment, whereas internships in weaker market contexts might not have any long-term career benefits or have limited ones (Suleman et al., 2020).

The relationship among these variables suggests that resilience and local labor market conditions do not only affect employment factors in isolation, but also determine employment dynamics as a whole. A study by Lo Presti et al. (2023) noted that resilience acts as a protective factor to help graduates to be successful in the labour market, despite adverse environments. This indicates that a combination of psychological readiness and systemic treatment (i.e., career guidance and policy support, and the tactics to gear graduates to labour market) is important for enhancing graduate employability.

In summary, the graduate employment status is influenced by the strategy of the individual job-seeking, education quality, professional skills, internship experience, resilience, and regional labour market factors. Knowledge of such links is important for informing educators, policy makers, and employers about different labor markets and what might work in order to enhance the employability of young graduates.

In this context, job-seeking behavior refers to the behavior people engage in to find employment opportunities, such as creating resumes, attending job fairs, and applying for jobs. It is both a key constituent in determinant in international graduates' employability that determines the time of employment and the type of job obtained. The complexity of job search behaviour. Recent analyses have pointed to the complex nature of job search and its multiple effects on employment.

Research by Uwakwe et al. (2022) reported that the job-search strategies used are significantly determined by psychological variables such as self-efficacy, optimism, and career goals. They found that alumni higher on these psychological resources engage in greater levels of structured and active job search behaviors and are ultimately more successful in their search for employment. Furthermore, Francisco and Castano (2020) found the relevance of career adaptability, pointing to a greater likelihood of finding employment among those high in adaptability as they would adopt an intense job search strategy leading to more job offers. Kim et al. (2022) investigated job-seeking anxiety and concurrent job search preparation behaviors amongst undergraduate students. Peoples with high anxiety understood that they needed to prepare for a job, but often not in the most effective way, suggesting the need for more support and a career path that includes a structured approach to job preparation." Lee and Kim (2023) also looked at the effect job-seeking stress has, and noticed that, while a high self-efficacy will lower stress, it will also have an independent effect in the promotion of career preparation behavior, insinuating that interventions to manage stress, can in turn boost the searches for a job.

Job-seeking activities in general, and networking behaviour in particular, have received recent attention in the literature. Lin and Le (2019) showed that networking is essential to securing job interviews and offers, especially for graduates with big and diverse professional networks. Similarly, Mowbray et al. (2018) highlighted the need to use social media and the Internet for networking, indicating that digital tools are an integral part of contemporary job search.

Taken together, these results highlight job-seeking as a multidimensional behavior shaped by psychological, social, and contextual determinants. For higher education graduates, the ability to appreciate and manipulate these behaviors can promote greater employability and career success.

Educational quality is crucial to graduate employability and success in the labour market. This can range in many dimensions such as resources of institutions, pedagogical strategies, relevance of curriculum and faculty expertise. "Quality education gives whatever needed for students to be compete in labor market and to be ready to invest for workforce.

Recent research highlights the intricacy of quality of education-employment linkage. Brown et al. (2021) explored the association between students' perception of teaching quality and satisfaction with the course with employability of graduates. Their results indicate that the quality of teaching significantly increases overall satisfaction, but has a weak relationship with employment outcomes, evidencing a possible divergence between the perception of quality and market demand. Also, Woya, (2019) researched on the employability of statistics graduates and concluded that better institutional support and curriculum relevance significantly lowered unemployment, signaling the necessity of industry-tailored education. Attention has also focussed on the relationship between curriculum design and employability. Wan Othman et al. (2020) investigated the influence of PLOs on time-to-hire. Their predictive model confirmed that PLOs in problem solving and scientific skills led to shorter time to job search success, highlighting the relevance of matching curriculum goals with employer needs.



Moreover, Angeloni (2019) contended that educational quality should be assessed based not only on students' employment status after graduation but also based on what kind of jobs they get after graduation. The author revealed that for Italian business graduates, failure to achieve a good match between learned skills and employment requirement was associated with being dissatisfied in the current job and making less promotional progress and therefore he recommended the educational system to be overhauled in order to reflect the reality of the labor market.

Chen (2021) specifically emphasized the significance of follow-up assessment of educational quality regarding graduate surveys. Through studying self-reporting on feedback of job satisfaction and professional identity, the research aimed at offering the reference for improvement of talent-cultivation service and employment service. And, through this cyclical feedback loop, banks can continue to adapt their courses and make them more directly applicable to the dynamics of evolving industries.

Educational quality also has wider implications on career progression. Dicker et al. (2019) investigated how students, academics, and employers conceptualize "quality" in education. That's because while employers are keen on whether graduates possess certain personal qualities like adaptability or the ability to work in teams, students are more focused on how they are taught, and who is doing the teaching. This gap reflects a purpose related need of institutional to be focused on better explaining/understanding employers' expectations as it relates to academic programs.

In sum, the quality of education is a complex multifarious concept, and has a significant effect on employment. Nevertheless, disparities still exist in linking education with the needs of the labor market and therefore reforms will need to be continually carried out in collaboration with industry to improve graduate employability.

Professional skills are essential to how employability can be defined, and includes: soft skills, which would be personal qualities such as teamwork and communication hard skills which would be skills and knowledge in a certain subject or discipline like an engineer or architect all of these would contribute to a student's employability. These abilities will help students find a work in the job market and will help them succeed in their job. The increased focus on to shape professional competences as employers value employees who are work ready, as opposed to merely academically ready, is further highlighted by recent research.

Aguenza and Ingles (2024) posit that communication and leadership is the most desirable skill set by employers in the professional services. Their results emphasize the importance for universities to match educational standards to this growing demand in industry in order to produce graduates with the skills required to succeed in a hectic job market. Along the same lines, Kamarova (2021) traces the present employer demands that have moved towards soft skills – the importance of adaptability and emotional intelligence that is now thought to be why most people succeed professionally.

provided a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding graduate employability, highlighting the theoretical foundations, key constructs, moderating variables, and empirical research that inform this study. The review aimed to establish the connections between

individual efforts, institutional factors, and broader labor market conditions in shaping employment outcomes for university graduates

### **Methodology**

The study design is designed to investigate the determinants of graduate employability from one side and the moderating effects of resilience and regional labour market conditions on the other. A quantitative research design is chosen because it enables the researcher to collect and analyze numerical data to examine the relationships among variables and to test the hypotheses. This is to guarantee accuracy, duplicability, and objectivity that are necessary for achieving the purpose of the study.

The focus of the present study is college graduates that have graduated within five years. The study is targeting a final sample of 400 through the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table to allow for good representation with manageable data collection constraints.

The field survey by means of a structured questionnaire is based on primary data, which is circulated through e-mail to the experimental group. The questionnaire was developed using validated measurement items found in other studies making the constructs measured reliable and comparable with the past research.

The data is analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and SmartPLS.

### **Discussion**

The results of the present study indicate that job search behaviour significantly influence the employment status of postgraduate students in China. Students who engaged more frequently in formal job search strategies including networking, resume writing, and mock interview practices, were more likely to look for a job by the year after graduation. These findings are consistent with the literature that proactive job search strategies contribute to employability (Wahab et al, 2024; Uwakwe et al, 2022). Yet, the data also show that success in job search is not only a matter of how often people do them, but how they tailor their behaviour to market needs. Graduates who were flexible and not letting their efforts get the best of them while searching found positions at a much higher rate, suggesting that one be more psychologically prepared along the way.

The effect of the quality of education on employment was also very pronounced. Graduates from schools with a better teaching quality, relevance of curricula, and stronger industry linkages had better employment outcomes. This result reaffirms that how critical it is for the universities to constantly revise their curriculum according to the fast changing needs of labor market especially in a digitalized economy. However, the study also showed that a high quality education does not necessarily result in a job if local labor market conditions are not favourable. In economically less strong areas also the well educated struggle to find employment, again pointing out the tendency of the dynamism in the local labour markets toward the relationship between education and employability.

The professional skills of graduates were revealed to be an influential factor of successful employment. Technical and soft skills were identified as equally important predictors of the job performance. Specifically, graduates who had good communication, leadership, problem-solving, and adaptability skills were more likely to be employed, confirming the growing trend of employers in favour of work readiness as opposed to academic competence (Aguenza &



Ingles, 2024; Kamarova, 2021). This backs the call that universities need to integrate professional skills development within their curricula in order to sustainably improve graduate employability.

The impact of internship experience discussed Finding in Internship Experience on Employability were that practical exposure of internship enhances job prospects. Internships offer students the actual professional experience of a job as well as the development. Crucially, internships related to students' studies were a significantly more positive experience than those that were not. Yet, this benefit was heterogeneous across regions; graduates from regions with dynamic economies enjoyed a greater return to internships relative to those from areas with low labor demand. This result reflects the influences of both experiential learning and regional labor market on career outcomes.

The mediating effect of resilience also was a cornerstone of this investigation. Resilience mitigated the detrimental influence of job-seeking behaviors, level and quality of education, professional skills, and internship experiences on employment outcome. Students with higher resilience demonstrated better ability to not only manage job market uncertainties and cope with setbacks, but also sustain career focus in the longer term. This corroborates literature highlighting resilience as an essential employability characteristic (Berthung et al., 2021; Burke & Scurry, 2021). In addition, resilience seemed to be of particular importance in those regions that are characterized by few opportunities on the labour market, implying that psychological flexibility can play a compensatory role in relation to the lack of external resources.

### **Conclusion**

Using data from a national survey that conducted interviews with more than 50,000 post-undergraduate students from China, we found that job-seeking behavior, educational quality, professional skills, internship experiences, resilience, and regional labor market conditions all influenced student employment outcomes in the labor market. The findings highlight that employability is not only determined by individual endeavour and institute quality, but also by macro-level SES. Resilience comes through as the dominant mechanism that enhances graduates' ability to network through difficult job markets. In order to improve such employability outcomes for graduates, universities need to focus on providing curricular and co-curricular career-preparedness, and resilience-building programs, and policy makers should attend to regional labor market differences to create an environment that offers the prospects of more equitable outcomes for all degree recipients.

### **Contribution of the Study**

This research makes a significant theoretical contribution by integrating psychological adaptability (resilience) and contextual labor market factors into established models of graduate employability. While existing frameworks often emphasize individual competencies or educational inputs in isolation, this study offers a more holistic view by demonstrating how resilience mediates and how regional economic contexts moderate the impact of job-seeking behavior, educational quality, professional skills, and internship experiences on employment outcomes. Contextually, the research advances understanding specific to the Chinese graduate labor market, highlighting regional disparities and digital economy challenges that are underexplored in current literature. These insights are particularly valuable for informing

higher education reforms, targeted regional employment strategies, and the development of resilience-building interventions to support graduates navigating complex and uneven job markets. As such, the findings enrich global discourse on graduate employability by providing localized evidence and suggesting scalable practices for enhancing employment outcomes in diverse economic settings.

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