

Original Paper

A Review of Factors Influencing University Students’ Employment in Cities Based on CiteSpace

Linghan Liu^{1*}

¹Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou, Henan, China

*Linghan Liu, Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou, Henan, China

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Abstract

In recent years, the issue of college graduate employment has become a focal point of social concern. As higher education has entered a phase of massification, the number of college graduates has surged dramatically, while the social demand generated by economic development remains relatively limited, leading to an increasingly severe employment situation. Against this backdrop, various factors influencing college graduate employment in urban areas have gradually garnered widespread attention from the academic community. This study employs CiteSpace to conduct a visual analysis of literature on factors influencing college graduate employment in urban areas from the CNKI Chinese database. Through systematic review and analysis, the study identifies the primary factors influencing college graduate employment in urban areas, including wage levels, employment opportunities, family factors, public services, and urban culture and historical heritage. The findings of this study not only provide a theoretical reference for the government in formulating relevant policies but also offer valuable insights for universities and employers in talent recruitment and development.

Keywords

university graduate employment, influencing factors, CiteSpace

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized accelerating the construction of a world-class talent hub and innovation center, promoting the rational regional distribution and coordinated development of talent, and striving to establish a comparative advantage in international talent competition. As China’s higher education transitions from “elite education” to “mass education”, more young students have the opportunity to pursue higher education; however, the resulting employment challenges for college graduates have become increasingly prominent, and the employment

landscape has undergone significant changes. In particular, since 2022, the number of college graduates in China has surged, with a year-on-year increase of 1.67 million, creating a severe employment situation.

As key drivers of economic development, cities exert a profound influence on university graduates' employment through various factors, including their level of economic development, industrial structure, employment policies, and living environment. From January 1 to December 31, 2023, Beijing implemented a one-time employment subsidy policy. This policy effectively boosted enterprises' enthusiasm for hiring university graduates and other young people, reduced labor costs, helped broaden market-oriented employment channels, increased job openings, and promoted employment among university graduates and other youth groups. This demonstrates the powerful influence of urban employment policies on university graduate employment.

Currently, research on urban factors influencing college graduates' employment is increasing, with studies covering increasingly broad and in-depth topics. These studies explore the mechanisms through which urban economic, social, and cultural factors affect college graduates' employment from multiple perspectives and disciplines, and propose corresponding countermeasures and recommendations. However, current research still has certain shortcomings, such as a lack of systematic literature reviews, narrow research perspectives, and insufficient empirical data. Therefore, this paper aims to summarize the urban factors affecting college graduate employment through a review and analysis of relevant literature, with the goal of providing useful references for the formulation of college graduate employment policies and university career guidance, as well as enriching the research on factors influencing college graduates' employment choices.

2. Analysis of Research Hotspots on Urban Factors Affecting University Students' Employment

2.1 Data Sources and Research Methods

This study utilized the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database as the search platform. Using CNKI's subject search function, the keywords "city" and "university student employment" were employed, with the search scope covering all years. As of November 2024, a total of 317 relevant documents were retrieved. After manual screening to exclude non-academic literature published in conference proceedings, newspapers, and forums, as well as documents with incomplete information and other irrelevant entries, 240 valid documents were identified. These documents span the years 2003 to 2024.

This study utilized CiteSpace software for data collection and analysis. "This software is currently widely used in literature analysis. Based on a certain volume of data, it can identify relationships through information such as authors, keywords, journals, and publication years, construct network structures, and present them visually to illustrate the developmental process and structural relationships within a specific

Table 1. High-Frequency and High-Centrality Keywords in Research on Urban Factors Affecting University Graduates' Employment, and Their First Appearance Years

Rank	Frequency	Centrality	Year of First Appearance	Keyword
1	69	0.47	2006	College students
2	35	0.41	2006	Influencing Factors
3	13	0.32	2008	Employment
4	9	0.06	2008	City of Employment
5	6	0.2	2018	City Selection
6	6	0.09	2014	Economic Development
7	5	0.05	2015	Public Services
8	4	0.06	2018	Population Density
9	4	0.04	2014	Opportunities
10	4	0.01	2013	Talent Attraction
11	4	0.09	2010	Chengdu-Chongqing Region
12	4	0.29	2011	Tier-1 cities
13	4	0.1	2018	The War for Talent
14	4	0.06	2015	Transformation and Development
15	4	0.21	2007	Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen
16	4	0.1	2011	Employment Quality
17	4	0.03	2014	Higher Education

18	4	0.01	2010	Human Capital
19	4	0.07	2006	City of Employment
20	4	0.02	2007	Employment Issues

High-frequency keywords reflect the research popularity of corresponding topics. As shown in Table 1, aside from the three terms serving as research subjects—"college students", "employment", and "influencing factors"—the keywords ranking highest in frequency are "employment cities", "city selection", "economic development", and "public services", with occurrence frequencies of "9", "6", "6", and "5", respectively. The table indicates that research on factors influencing college students' choice of employment cities primarily focuses on "economic development", "public services", "population density", and "life opportunities". Additionally, the academic community is paying increasing attention to practical issues such as "higher education", "employment issues", and "cities of employment".

The frequency of keywords does not fully represent their importance; node centrality reflects a keyword's ability to generate other related keywords within the entire network analysis. Higher node centrality indicates a stronger ability to generate related keywords. Centrality values range from 0 to 1, and nodes with a centrality value exceeding 0.1 are considered key nodes. As shown in Table 1, the keywords with higher frequency and centrality in domestic research include "college students", "influencing factors", "employment", and "city selection"; these keywords indicate that research on college student employment places greater emphasis on the factors influencing employment and the selection of employment cities.

2.2.2 Research Evolution

A trend chart of research publications helps us understand the current state of research on factors influencing university graduates' employment in cities. As shown in Figure 3, the 2003 paper by Mo Rong and Liu Jun, "Analysis of the Current Employment Situation for University Graduates", was the earliest study related to university graduate employment. This paper analyzed the employment situation, challenges, and specific reform measures for university graduates based on real-world conditions. From 2003, when the first relevant study was published, until 2007, research in this area remained relatively scarce. Beginning in 2010, the volume of related research publications began to show a gradual upward trend. This was because 2011 marked the start of China's 12th Five-Year Plan, during which China's economy entered a growth phase. Additionally, as the domestic job market gradually recovered following the financial crisis, employment rates improved, leading to an increase in related research. The number of research publications began to grow rapidly in 2014. In both 2014 and 2019, there was a significant amount of research on the impact of urban factors on university graduates' employment,

primarily due to the rapid economic growth during this period. After 2020, the number of relevant studies decreased as the COVID-19 pandemic caused the economy to slow down, creating an unfavorable environment for employment. Although the number of relevant studies has decreased in the past two years, the overall trend remains upward.

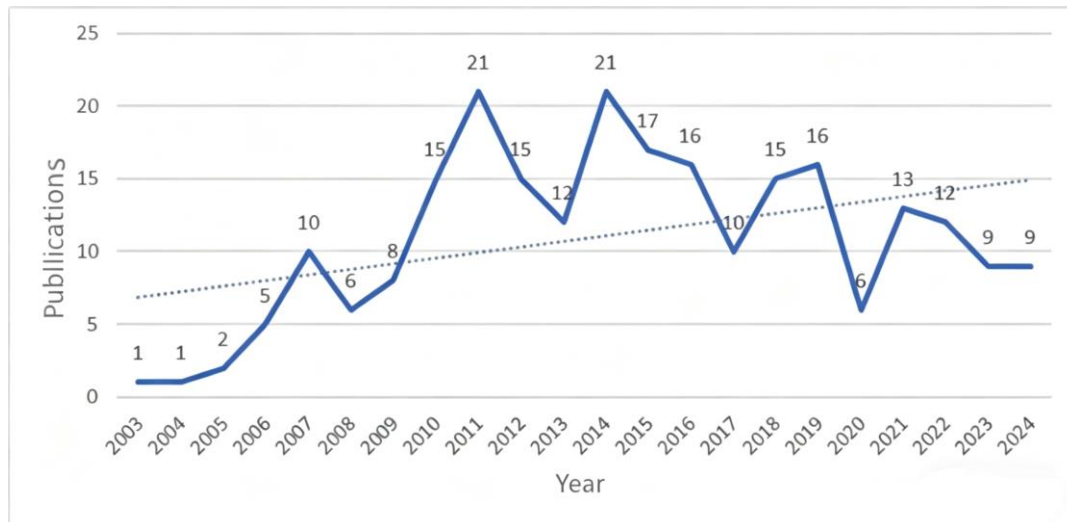


Figure 3. Trend Chart of Research Publications

3. Research on Factors Influencing University Graduates' Employment in Urban Areas

The academic literature referenced in this section is sourced from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Based on literature searches and reviews, these research findings can be broadly categorized into the following three types according to research themes: economic factors, urban environmental and individual factors, and urban employment policy factors. Economic factors primarily include wage levels; urban environmental factors include public services and healthcare standards. A city's sustainable development depends on employment. By analyzing the various factors influencing college graduates' employment in cities, we can, on the one hand, provide a theoretical basis for research on graduate employment, and on the other hand, offer targeted solutions for the healthy development of the urban economy.

3.1 Urban Economic Factors

Li Si et al. (2019) collected research data via questionnaires and, from a career perspective, found that employment opportunities, wage levels, and work pressure are key factors influencing university students' choice of employment cities. The study revealed a positive correlation between the variables of employment opportunities and salary compensation and the tendency to choose to remain in first- and second-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen; that is, higher wages and more employment opportunities attract a greater influx of talent (Li, Zhang H. Y., Zhang R. Y. et al., 2019, pp.

155-157). This conclusion reveals the market-driven nature of talent mobility—that is, higher salaries and more employment opportunities attract more talent to first-tier cities—and is of great significance for understanding current talent mobility trends and formulating relevant policies. Li Xiangrong (2018), based on existing survey data, points out that college graduates consider their choice of employment city by combining their professional needs. Among these factors, salary and compensation conditions rank first, followed by constraints related to the city's temporal and spatial distance. Individual preferences have a significant influence on the choice of employment city, while factors such as the geological environment rank at the bottom (Li, 2018, pp. 209-210, p. 214). This study emphasizes the importance of personal economic and professional needs in the selection of employment cities, highlighting the significance of alignment between urban industries and university majors.

The following two scholars both analyze university students' migration motives from the perspective of labor mobility and reach the same conclusion. Yue Changjun (2011) utilized survey data on the employment status of college graduates nationwide in 2009 and employed the mlogit regression analysis method to examine the issue of college graduates' choice of employment regions (Yue, 2011). The study reached two main conclusions: First, the primary trend in interprovincial migration among university students is from the central and western regions to the eastern coastal areas; second, economic motives are the primary driver of interprovincial migration, while demographic characteristics, individual educational capital, and socioeconomic background are also significant factors influencing university students' choice of employment region. Stukaliina et al. (2018), based on a survey of graduates from two universities in Latvia, found that graduates prioritize salary and career prospects when making employment mobility decisions; furthermore, access to quality training facilities and support from family and friends also influence their mobility choices. According to the empirical studies by the aforementioned scholars, economic factors such as wages are the primary determinants of university graduates' employment choices (Stukalina, Roskosa, & Pavlyuk, 2018, pp. 416-430).

3.2 Urban Environment and Individual Factors

As the employment needs of university students diversify, certain non-economic factors in cities are playing an increasingly significant role in their employment choices. Zhang Kangsi (2018) and other scholars used the Mincer equation to analyze regional differences in the returns to education, clearly concluding that the geographical mobility of university graduates is determined by both economic and non-economic factors, with non-economic factors such as living environment and natural environment also influencing their choice of employment location (Zhang & Zhou, 2018, pp. 69-78). This provides a new perspective for understanding the complexity of college students' regional employment choices. Maria Eliophotou Menon (2012) and others argue that, in addition to external factors, college graduates' choice of employment city is also influenced by individual-level factors, including gender and family background. These scholars' perspectives offer a new lens for understanding the complexity of college

students' urban employment choices (Tang, Rowe, Corcoran et al., 2014, pp. 66-76).

Luo Ruikui (2015), however, argues that a city's re-employment opportunities and sense of security significantly influence university students' willingness to choose a particular city for employment. She found that integration into the city is the primary motivation for university students to choose a particular city, while sustained employment and stable income directly influence their willingness to work and reside there (Luo, 2019, pp. 20-26). Huang Jing (2018) used statistical analysis to determine that the level of public services and relative income in a city are significant factors influencing the employment mobility of university students, with the level of public services in the destination city gradually becoming a key factor in this mobility (Huang, 2018, pp. 103-108). Tang AZR et al. (2014) analyzed the geographical mobility of Australian university graduates and found that regional healthcare standards and educational conditions are key factors university students consider when choosing a city for employment (Maria, Eliophotou, Menon, et al., 2012, pp. 805-813); Other scholars have pointed out that severe air pollution in a city can have a noticeable "crowding-out effect" on talent. In his study, Lu Ping (2012) noted that college graduates place excessive importance on their "first" job, primarily because the corporate level and nature of the position involved in this "first" job serve as a starting point for their personal professional reputation. The level and quality of this starting point will, to a considerable extent, influence their bargaining position and competitive advantage when seeking future employment (Lu, 2012, pp. 159-161).

3.3 Factors Related to Urban Employment Policies

Wang Qian et al. (2024) point out that the factors influencing college graduates' employment are multidimensional, involving not only macro-level factors such as the economy, policy systems, and sociocultural factors, but also micro-level factors such as family, campus, and individual factors. Using a combination of questionnaires and in-depth interviews, they analyzed the key factors limiting a city's attractiveness and ultimately found that, for undergraduate graduates, policy factors play a primary role in determining their choice of employment location (Wang, Feng, & Chen, 2024, pp. 69-74). Liu Jia and Fang Xing (2022) employed stepwise linear regression analysis and found that government policy support was the first variable included in the regression and contributed the most to the "willingness to seek employment in the city of study" among university graduates born in the 2000s (Liu & Fang, 2022, pp. 59-67). Together, they revealed the significant role of policy in guiding the employment flow of university students.

Zhu Mohan et al. (2023), based on survey results, concluded that policy is the most influential factor aside from economic considerations. They therefore proposed that the government implement relevant preferential policies—such as rental subsidies, home purchase subsidies, and living allowances—to alleviate employment pressures on college graduates (Zhu, Zhang, & Min, 2023, pp. 34-36). He Zhongyu and Zhai Guofang (2015) revealed that family factors are a key determinant of employment

location choices, and that second- and third-tier cities hold certain advantages in this regard. Therefore, these cities should further relax household registration policies to assist the parents and spouses of university graduates in settling, working, and obtaining residency locally, which would serve as an effective means of attracting high-caliber talent (He & Zhai, 2015, pp. 37-42, p. 102). Han Jing et al. (2008) pointed out from the perspective of higher education that universities must reform their disciplinary structures and curriculum systems based on society's immediate and long-term needs for talent. They emphasized strengthening career planning guidance, focusing on helping students establish realistic career expectations and fostering sound career selection concepts (Han & Yin, 2008, pp. 35-38). Lu Jiehua et al. (2022), based on various publicly available data, suggest that appropriately lowering the residency registration thresholds in first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen will encourage college students to undertake internships, seek employment, and start businesses in these cities. This will facilitate the actual influx and retention of college students in these first-tier cities or enable them to make career plans better suited to their individual needs (Lu & Cen, 2022, pp. 58-60). Sun Jiayi (2021) noted from another perspective that recruitment agencies serve as a vital bridge connecting employers with graduates. Improvements should be made to address issues arising during operations, fully leveraging their "intermediary" role to meet the needs of all parties. First, graduate job-seeking information and employer recruitment information must be updated promptly; second, the accuracy of information must be enhanced, such as improving the precision of job recommendations based on students' resumes (Sun, Liu, Zhou et al., 2021, pp. 182-185); Zhao Chongshan (2019), on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of educating college students on employment attitudes, advocating for a service-oriented mindset and the creation of social value as criteria for career selection. By shifting students' employment perspectives, this approach can foster the development of various industries and, in turn, drive national economic growth (Zhao, 2019. P. 111).

The scholars mentioned above propose measures to attract college graduates into the workforce from the perspective of government policy, offering a relatively comprehensive approach. However, some research remains insufficient, particularly regarding companies and enterprises that provide employment opportunities for college graduates.

4. Literature Review and Future Prospects

4.1 Research Review

A comprehensive review of existing research indicates that studies on factors influencing college graduates' employment in urban areas have shown a rapid growth trend in recent years. Such research has expanded from education to sociology, management, communication studies, and other fields, with research perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds becoming increasingly diverse.

In terms of academic focus, the factors influencing university graduates' employment in urban areas

remain the core issue. Current research on these factors primarily concentrates on the following aspects: positive factors that attract graduates, such as the urban economy, employment policies, and healthcare. Among these, economic factors are the primary driver, while the importance of other factors—such as urban public services and individual family circumstances—is also gradually increasing. At the same time, research on negative factors affecting employment in urban areas is increasingly drawing academic attention. For instance, some scholars have argued that factors limiting university students' employment choices include “the scarcity of grassroots information resources and the inadequacy of national coordination mechanisms”. Furthermore, the influx of non-local enterprises has led to structural changes in the labor market within urban clusters, forcing some workers to seek new employment. Coupled with the return of migrant workers to their hometowns in search of job opportunities, these factors collectively impose latent competitive pressures on the university student population.

From the perspective of theoretical frameworks, current research on factors influencing university students' employment primarily encompasses three dimensions: education, management, and sociology. Existing researchers generally agree that both objective conditions—such as urban economic conditions, wage levels, urban policies, public services, and healthcare standards—and subjective factors—including personal and family circumstances, as well as career perceptions—impact university students' employment. In the educational dimension, scholars primarily focus on how universities cultivate students' perceptions of employment and on the construction of students' preferences and influencing factors regarding urban employment. Management studies primarily examine employment from an urban governance perspective, considering the context of employment difficulties and the pandemic, and propose relevant policies. In the sociological dimension, scholars often focus on the impact of various urban factors on university students and how to optimize a city's ability to attract employment. Research from a communication studies perspective is relatively scarce, with scholars primarily examining the impact of urban communication and urban media on university students' employment. Some studies have confirmed that the use of urban new media can significantly and positively predict whether university students are willing to seek employment in that location.

The distinction in disciplinary perspectives lies primarily in how urban factors influencing university students' employment are conceptualized. Within the sociological framework, these factors are viewed as one component among many influencing variables; in educational and management frameworks, they are treated as positive dependent variables; whereas in the communication studies framework, they are regarded as key variables.

In terms of research methods, current academic studies on urban factors influencing university students' employment are predominantly empirical. Researchers typically employ methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and data analysis to obtain more accurate and comprehensive data support. These empirical studies not only help reveal the specific mechanisms through which urban factors influence university

students' employment but also provide a scientific basis for policy-making. However, this has led to a greater emphasis on macro-level research and a relative scarcity of micro-level studies. Since research is largely based on analyses of the objective and subjective environmental conditions of the college student population, regional and socioeconomic differences among the study subjects may influence the results, leading to variations in research conclusions. Therefore, researchers should integrate theoretical and empirical approaches in their studies, analyzing specific issues on a case-by-case basis to ensure that research is more targeted, refined, in-depth, and comprehensive. In summary, current research on the impact of urban factors on college students' employment requires not only empirical studies but also further exploration of their perceptions and psychological states.

From a disciplinary perspective, although the impact of urban factors on college graduates' employment has attracted increasing attention from scholars, existing research still primarily focuses on approaches from the fields of education, management, and sociology. Within the field of education, research investigating the factors by which urban environments influence college graduates' employment remains the most extensive and concentrated. However, a review of existing research reveals a high degree of duplication and a lack of focus on cutting-edge issues. It is also worth exploring how to promote university graduate employment in a targeted manner by integrating the specific characteristics of each city's development, thereby advancing solutions to employment challenges. Given the broad scope and diverse fields involved in university graduate employment, researchers can draw upon research methods from other disciplines and explore relevant theories applicable to this field within those disciplines to enrich and refine research in this area.

4.2 Shortcomings of Existing Research

First, existing literature on the factors influencing university graduates' employment in urban settings tends to focus primarily on economic analyses, such as a city's economic development level, employment opportunities, and wage levels. However, non-economic factors—including the city's sociocultural environment, the quality of public services, and the cost of living—also exert significant influence on graduates' employment choices. In particular, the impact of urban communication and media on graduate employment has been largely overlooked in current research, resulting in conclusions that are somewhat one-sided.

Second, regarding research methods, most studies employ quantitative approaches, using tools such as questionnaires and data analysis to explore the relationship between urban factors and university students' employment. However, this method often struggles to reveal in depth how urban factors specifically influence students' employment psychology and behavior. Qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and case studies, can more thoroughly examine the mechanisms through which urban factors affect students' employment, yet they are rarely utilized in the existing literature. Furthermore, when examining the factors through which cities influence university students'

employment, existing literature primarily focuses on analysis at the city-wide level, while paying less attention to differences among various districts and industries within the city. In reality, there are significant disparities in the employment environment and development potential across different districts and industries within a city, and these differences may have a significant impact on university students' employment choices. Therefore, future research should pay greater attention to the impact of intra-city differences on university students' employment (Gao, 2019).

4.3 Research Trends

With rapid economic and social development, research on the impact of urban factors on university graduates' employment has shown a marked growth trend and yielded substantial findings. Among these, the following cutting-edge trends have emerged.

The acceleration of digital transformation has had a profound impact on university students' employment. With the widespread application of technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing, digital transformation has become an inevitable path for corporate development. This trend has profoundly impacted the job market. Traditional industries require a large number of professionals with digital skills, such as data analysts and AI engineers; meanwhile, emerging sectors of the digital economy—including e-commerce, internet finance, and online education—have also provided abundant employment opportunities for job seekers. Consequently, mastering digital skills has become key to enhancing employment competitiveness.

Second is the competition and cooperation among cities in the job market. With the advancement of regional economic integration, competition and cooperation among cities are intensifying. On the one hand, cities attract talent by optimizing industrial structures and improving service quality; on the other hand, they achieve mutually beneficial development through regional cooperation and resource sharing. This trend requires college graduates to consider not only the development of individual cities but also the overall regional trends and opportunities for cooperation when making employment choices. Therefore, future research could focus more on the differences and connections between inter-city labor markets, exploring the complementary and competitive dynamics among different cities or regions within the labor market.

4.4 Future Outlook

As a key arena for university students' employment, cities exert a profound influence on their career choices and professional development through economic, social, and cultural factors. However, although a substantial body of literature has thoroughly examined the impact of urban factors on student employment, existing research still has certain shortcomings, while simultaneously offering broad scope for future studies.

To address these shortcomings, future research could explore the following areas in greater depth:

First, future research should establish a more comprehensive and refined analytical framework. This

framework must not only comprehensively consider the impact of various urban factors—including economic, social, and media-related elements—on university graduates’ employment but also refine the research framework to a higher level of complexity, particularly regarding the study of urban media. This approach will not only reveal the comprehensive mechanisms through which urban factors influence graduate employment but also provide theoretical support for the formulation of more precise employment policies. Future research should place greater emphasis on the application of interdisciplinary research methods, integrating methodologies from sociology, geography, education, and other disciplines to more comprehensively reveal the mechanisms through which urban factors influence university students’ employment.

Second, future research should place greater emphasis on the application of qualitative research methods, using in-depth interviews, case studies, and other approaches to explore how urban factors specifically influence university students’ employment psychology and behavior. This will facilitate a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which urban factors affect university students’ employment and provide theoretical support for the development of more precise employment guidance (Pan Yue, Lei, 2024, pp. 92-94). Furthermore, future research could place greater emphasis on the application of interdisciplinary research methods, integrating methodologies from sociology, geography, education, and other disciplines to more comprehensively reveal the mechanisms through which urban factors influence college students’ employment.

Furthermore, future research should pay greater attention to the impact of intra-urban disparities on university students’ employment. Sub-studies can be conducted across different regions and industries to examine how variations in local employment environments within cities influence students’ career choices. This will help provide theoretical support for the development of more tailored employment policies. Future research can strengthen policy evaluation and empirical studies by assessing the effectiveness of existing policies and using empirical methods to reveal the specific mechanisms through which urban factors influence university students’ employment. This will help provide a more scientific and accurate basis for policy formulation.

Finally, future research should place greater emphasis on university students’ own employment attitudes and the development of their skills. While urban factors exert a significant influence on university students’ employment, their own employment attitudes and skill levels are equally critical. Therefore, future research should focus more on cultivating students’ employment attitudes and skills, exploring how to enhance their employability through education, training, and other means.

In summary, the impact of urban factors on university students’ employment is a complex and significant research topic. Future research should establish a more comprehensive and refined analytical framework, emphasize the application of qualitative research methods, examine the influence of urban mediators on university students’ employment, conduct in-depth analyses using modern information technology, and

explore aspects such as students' own employment attitudes and competency development to provide more precise theoretical support and practical guidance.

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