



Influencing Factors of Employment Choices among College Students in Remote Island Areas: A Case Study of Zhoushan

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Abstract. The 20th National Congress report of China emphasizes that "talent is the primary resource." Since 2017, China has witnessed a fierce competition among regions to attract talents, recognizing nowadays talents are the most scarce resource for innovation and development. Due to the geographical factors and economic conditions of the Zhoushan Archipelago, the tasks of talent attraction and retention have been challenging. This study utilizes quantitative analysis to investigate the influence of urban factors and natural factors on the family factor and employment choices of college students in Zhoushan. Structural equation modeling is employed to identify the relationships between factors, thereby constructing a foundational model. Through the analysis of quantitative interview data, corresponding conclusions are drawn and comprehensive measures and feasible solutions to address this issue are proposed. Additionally, further interview research and discussions are conducted.

Keywords: Employment of College Students on Remote Islands, Talent Attraction, Factor Analysis, Structural Equation Modeling

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

In recent times, as population aging becomes increasingly severe, the demand for young individuals has surged in various cities. Under such a condition of supply falling short of demand, a "talent scramble" among cities has been triggered. ^[1] As potential-laden labor, college students' choice of location is also pivotal to regional economic development. The issue of regional development imbalance is exacerbated when talent is lost.

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The quality of material and spiritual support such as regional and urban infrastructural development, urbanization level, and modernization level, will also influence graduates' choice of employment location to some extent. How to retain young people, enhance the attractiveness and influence of one's employment location, thereby boosting vitality and developmental momentum, is a question that every city needs to consider. Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors influencing the employment location choices of college students on remote islands, against the backdrop of the "talent scramble" and the continuous influx of remote island talent resources into surrounding cities.

1.2 Problem Description

Currently, the cliff-like decline in China's natural population growth rate has become a significant issue and challenge affecting the country's destiny. The situation is particularly severe in Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province. According to data from the Zhejiang Provincial Bureau of Statistics, the natural growth rate in Zhejiang has been continuously decreasing. Over the past decade or more, the province's natural growth rate peaked at 6.36‰ in 2017, and has since continued to decline. In 2023, the number of births fell below that of deaths for the first time, with a natural growth rate of -0.86‰, and a natural population decrease of 57,000.

The natural population growth problem in Zhoushan City is the most severe, with a critical aging issue that urgently needs to be addressed. It is particularly noteworthy that Shengsi County of Zhoushan has experienced negative growth for 24 consecutive years. From a macro perspective, Zhoushan must gain an advantageous position in the issue of "graduates staying in Zhoushan" in order to alleviate the pressure and sense of urgency brought by the sharp decline in the natural growth rate. By doing so, Zhoushan can pave the way for future development with a vision for talent strengthening the nation's strategy.

In Table 1, it can be observed that among the 11 cities in Zhejiang Province in 2023, only Hangzhou and Jinhua had birth rates higher than death rates, with natural growth rates of 1.3‰ and 0.5‰ respectively. The natural population increase was negative for the other nine cities. Particularly in Zhoushan, the birth rate was as low as 3.5‰ while the death rate was as high as 8‰, resulting in a natural growth rate of -4.5‰, the worst in the entire province of Zhejiang.

Table 1. Birth Rate and Death Rate Situation of Cities in Zhejiang Province in 2023

Region	Birth Rate (‰)	Death Rate (‰)	Natural Growth Rate (‰)
Hangzhou	6.7	5.4	1.3
Jinhua	6.6	6.1	0.5
Jiaxing	5.9	6.8	-0.9
Ningbo	5.7	6.7	-1
Wenzhou	5.4	6.4	-1
Lishui	5.7	7.6	-1.9
Taizhou	5.5	7.6	-2.1
Huzhou	5.2	7.4	-2.2
Shaoxing	4.8	7.3	-2.5

Quzhou	5.3	8.6	-3.3
Zhoushan	3.5	8.0	-4.5
Provincewide	5.8	6.66	-0.86

This research investigates college students in Zhoushan as its primary research subjects, employing factor analysis to delve into the factors influencing their decisions on employment locations. The study aims to furnish insights and suggestions that could contribute to the development strategies of Zhoushan, a distant island city.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Urban Factors

Urban planning is one of the factors that college students take into consideration when choosing their employment locations. Gao Huijuan posits that the economic condition of society is a significant factor affecting the employment of college graduates ^[2]. Li Dazhi and Jiang Xinsheng argue that the level of economic development constrains the overall volume and development forms of employment. Additionally, Wang Hong points out the impact of the job market on employment, suggesting that to address the challenge of college graduates' employment difficulties, solutions must be crafted based on the interests of various stakeholders in the market ^[3]. Peter Berck, Sofia Tano, and Olle Westerlund propose that a region's population density could be a signal attracting people to seek employment there (possibly due to the convenience of infrastructure), which might appeal to more young people, benefiting the employment rate, at least for non-students ^[4].

In summary, the economic context of employment plays a certain role in influencing the employment location choices of college students.

2.2 Natural Factors

The natural environment is also considered an influential factor in college students' decisions regarding their employment locations. Factors such as work environment, living conditions, and local infrastructure can not only affect individual labor productivity, resulting in wage differentials, but also impact the future quality of life of university graduates ^[5]. Nesrin Ozdemir and Ozge Hacifazlioglu have found that the environment has a significant impact on students' career preferences ^[6].

2.3 Family Factors

The choice of employment location for college students is closely linked to their future lives, not only determining the work environment but also to some extent influencing the connection with their families due to the distance between the employment location and their hometown. Therefore, family emotions become an important factor for many students who tend to return to their hometowns for work.

Peter Berck, Sofia Tano, and Olle Westerlund suggest that young people have the highest migration rates, especially for students, and their location choices impact the regional distribution, growth, and local public sector budgets of human capital. Research evaluations show that students tend to prefer locations with lower proportions of elderly populations and confirm the importance of family networks in location choices. Despite advances in communication technology, distance remains a primary determinant of the cost of significant social interactions^[4]. College students, being potential labor force, directly influence the future economic vitality of the city with their choice of employment location. However, this research indicates to some extent the significant impact of family networks and family emotional attitudes on students' employment location choices. This suggests a relatively weak connection between the university's location and students' employment location choices. Due to their semi-socialized nature, the location of the university is merely a temporary preference during a certain period for students. As they approach graduation, with planning for future work and life, they may be more inclined to choose cities with better job opportunities and prospects for development, and due to emotional attachment, they may opt for the city where their family resides^[7].

Therefore, the distance between the family home and the workplace, students' emotional attachment, and parental attitudes and views towards the employment location are decisive factors affecting college students' choice of employment location.

3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, HYPOTHESES, AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Objectives

Based on the analysis of literature, this study, through categorization, filtering, and organization of previous analyses of employment influence factors, has ultimately summarized and distilled three typically representative and universally significant factors: urban factors, natural factors, and family factors.

This study has established four specific research objectives as follows:

1. To investigate the impact of urban factors on the employment location choices of college students and to examine whether there is a correlation between urban factors and other factors.
2. To explore whether natural factors influence the willingness of Zhoushan-based university graduates to remain in Zhoushan and to determine if there is a correlation between natural factors and other factors.
3. To study whether urban factors have an impact on family factors.
4. To examine whether natural factors affect family factors.

3.2 Research Hypotheses

The specific hypotheses provided by this study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Both urban factors and natural factors will significantly influence the willingness of Zhoushan university students to remain in Zhoushan.

Hypothesis 2: Urban factors and natural factors will significantly influence the family factors of Zhoushan university students.

Hypothesis 3: There exists a correlation between urban factors and natural factors. A detailed conceptual diagram illustrating these hypotheses is shown in Figure 1.

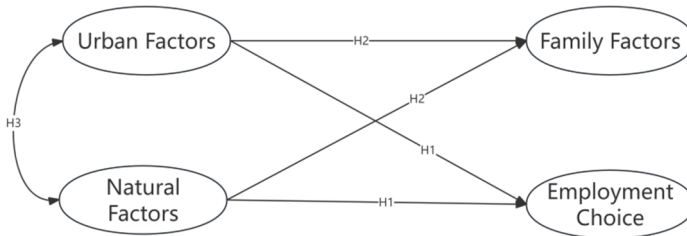


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model Diagram of Factor Relationships

3.3 Research Methods and Scale Selection

This study will employ the questionnaire survey method for research and analyze and test the results using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Specifically, based on the literature review, the scale for this study will adopt Zhao Chunxiao's "Factors Influencing Personal Willingness to Stay in Qingdao" [8]. The scale will undergo a pre-test study, after which the questionnaire will be revised to ensure the questions accurately reflect the meaning of the scale before data collection begins.

4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

4.1 Data Collection

The subjects of this study are college students currently enrolled in Zhoushan City. Given the limited number of higher education institutions in Zhoushan, and the geographical proximity of Zhejiang University (Zhoushan Campus), Zhejiang Ocean University, and Zhejiang International Maritime College of Vocational Technology, the sampling primarily focuses on these three institutions.

To account for potential impacts on the results due to differences in gender, major fields, and types of institutions, the first section of the questionnaire is designed as "Personal Basic Information," and the second section is "Personal Willingness to Stay in Zhoushan for Employment and Influencing Factors." Each question is scaled across five dimensions to reflect the degree of individual preference. This study distributed nearly 300 questionnaires through the Learning Access platform, and 262 were returned, yielding a retrieval rate of about 87.3%. After excluding invalid questionnaires that took less than 120 seconds to complete based on the time taken by respondents,

252 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effectiveness rate of approximately 84%.

4.2 Sample Descriptive Statistics

We can further analyze the sample data from aspects such as gender and household registration. The descriptive statistical table of the specific valid samples is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Valid Samples (Personal Basic Information) (N=252)

Name	Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Your gender?	Male	99	39.29
	Female	153	60.71
Your household registration?	Zhoushan native	9	3.57
	Non-Zhoushan native	243	96.43
Have you ever had an internship experience in Zhoushan?	Yes	40	15.87
	No	212	84.13
Do your parents hope you will stay in Zhoushan to work after graduation?	Hopeful	10	3.97
	Neutral	78	30.95
	Unhopeful	164	65.08
Are you willing to work in Zhoushan after graduation?	Unwilling	59	23.41
	No intention	75	29.76
	Undecided	98	38.89
	Intentional	13	5.16
	Willing	7	2.78
Total		252	100.0

It can be inferred that, from a gender perspective, among the 253 samples, the individuals encompass both males and females, with a slight disparity in proportions, where males account for 39.29% and females comprise 60.71%.

From the standpoint of household registration, 96.43% of the samples consist of university students with non-Zhoushan household registration. This factor attenuates the influence of students' origin on their choice of employment location to some extent. Additionally, it can be deduced that our research subjects primarily include university students from non-Zhoushan backgrounds who are pursuing their education in Zhoushan.

4.3 Analysis of Data Reliability and Validity

The analysis of data reliability and validity in this study is presented in Table 3 as follows:

Table 3. Analysis of Reliability and Validity of Valid Samples (N=252)

Factor	Measurement Item	Std. Estimate	z	p	Std. Estimate	Cronbach α	AVE	CR	KMO
Urban Factor	Do you believe Zhoushan has abundant entertainment and leisure venues, offering a rich recreational life	0.859	-	-	0.859	0.882	0.719	0.885	0.679
	Do you think Zhoushan is in line with international trends, able to meet your fashion tastes?	0.902	16.663	0.000	0.902				
	Do you think Zhoushan has a high city profile, able to meet your personal development needs?	0.779	14.381	0.000	0.779				
Natural Factor	Do you believe the air quality in Zhoushan is high, making you feel comfortable?	0.855	-	-	0.855	0.881	0.790	0.883	
	Do you think the greening conditions in Zhoushan are good, meeting your needs?	0.922	6.508	0.000	0.922				
Family Factor	Does your family support you staying in Zhoushan for employment?	0.621	-	-	0.621	0.740	0.642	0.775	
	How significant is your family's economic situation in influencing your decision to stay in Zhoushan for employment?	0.948	3.945	0.000	0.948				
Employment Choice	Are you willing to work in Zhoushan after graduation?	0.992	-	-	0.992	0.902	0.837	0.911	
	What is the likelihood of you working in Zhoushan after graduation?	0.831	10.521	0.000	0.831				

4.4 Discriminant Validity Assessment

For indicators of teaching quality, student learning satisfaction, and curriculum ideology and politics, their AVE (Average Variance Extracted) square root values are 0.848, 0.889, 0.801, and 0.915 respectively, all of which are greater than the maximum absolute values of the inter-factor correlation coefficients, indicating good discriminant validity. Detailed information is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity: Pearson Correlations and AVE Square Root Values (N=252)

Urban Factor	Natural Factor	Family Factor	Employment Choice
0.848			
0.199	0.889		
0.243	0.148	0.801	
0.351	0.281	0.210	0.915

4.5 Model Fit

In this study, Amos 24 was used for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, and the model fit of the scales is presented in Table 5 as follows: The χ^2/df ratio is 1.413,

which is less than 3; the GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index) value is 0.973, exceeding 0.9; the RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) value is 0.041, less than 0.10; the RMR (Root Mean Square Residual) value is 0.040, less than 0.05; and indicators such as CFI (Comparative Fit Index), NFI (Normed Fit Index), and NNFI (Non-Normed Fit Index) also meet the model fit requirements ^{[9][10]}.

Table 5. Model Fit Indices (N=252)

Common Metrics	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	χ^2/df	GFI	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	NFI	NNFI
Criteria for Evaluation	-	-	>0.05	<3	>0.9	<0.10	<0.05	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Values	31.097	22	0.094	1.413	0.973	0.041	0.040	0.992	0.973	0.987
Additional Metrics	TLI	AGFI	IFI	PNFI	PCFI	SRMR	RMSEA 90% CI			
Criteria for Evaluation	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.5	>0.5	<0.1	-			
Values	0.987	0.945	0.992	0.595	0.606	0.047	0.036 ~ 0.071			

4.6 Structural Equation Model Analysis

Table 6 presents the final test results of the structural equation model as well as the parameter test values before and after the modification of the hypothetical model. After the modification, the CR values of the influence relationships between all factors were greater than 2, and the P values were all significant at the 0.01 level. Specifically, urban

factors have a positive direct impact on employment selection, with a standardized regression coefficient of 0.380. Similarly, natural factors also exert a positive direct impact on employment selection, with a standardized regression coefficient of 0.174. Therefore, research hypothesis 1 is confirmed by the research results.

Urban factors have a positive direct impact on family factors, with a standardized regression coefficient of 0.301, and natural factors also have an indirect effect on family factors. Thus, research hypothesis 2 is confirmed by the research results. Table 7 shows that there is a correlation between natural and urban factors, with a correlation coefficient of 0.229, so research hypothesis 3 is confirmed by the research results.

Table 6. Summary Table of Model Regression Coefficients

X	→	Y	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	SE	z	p	Standardized Regression Coefficient
Urban Factor	→	Family Factor	0.248	0.083	3.002	0.003	0.301
Urban Factor	→	Employment Choice	0.496	0.083	5.969	0.000	0.380
Natural Factor	→	Employment Choice	0.218	0.080	2.739	0.006	0.174

Table 7. Covariance Matrix

X	Y	Coef	Std. Error	z	p	Std. Estimate
Natural Factor	Urban Factor	0.135	0.022	6.022	0.000	0.229

4.7 Analysis of Overall SEM Model Effects

Based on previous model revisions and validations, the final structural equation model obtained is shown in Figure 2 below.

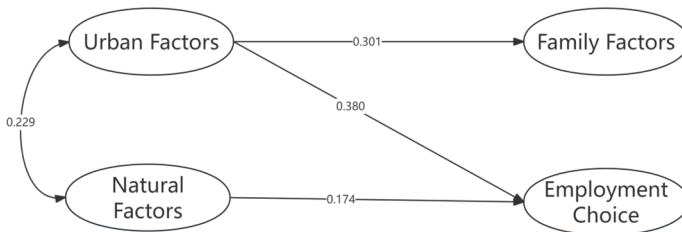


Fig. 2. Structural Equation Model

The direct effects have already been identified in the figure above. The effect value of urban factors on family factors is 0.301. Urban factors exert both direct and indirect influences on employment choices, with a total effect size of 0.4198. Natural factors

also have both direct and indirect effects on employment choices, with a total effect size of 0.261. Natural factors indirectly affect family factors, with a coefficient of 0.0689.

5 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analyses of equation models, questionnaire surveys, and empirical studies, this research proposes three effective and direct strategies for the Zhoushan Municipal Government to enhance its attractiveness and retain graduate talents: natural environment, employment economy, and family factors.

5.1 Urban Factors as Significant Determinants in College Students' Choice of Employment Location

This study demonstrates that urban factors not only directly influence students' choices of employment locations but also significantly impact families' support for students' employment location choices. The influence coefficient holds a substantial share in the model, serving as a decisive factor. Therefore, to address the current issue of population shrinkage, Zhoushan must focus on improving its employment environment and increasing job opportunities. Enhancing its supporting services is crucial to genuinely attract young people to Zhoushan and encourage them to stay.

5.2 The Favorable Natural Environment of Zhoushan Positively Affects College Students' Decision to Remain and Work

Natural environment is fundamental to everyone's livelihood and is also a key indicator of a city's attractiveness. As a city with significant advantages in air quality and natural environment, continuing to capitalize on this asset will be a vital strategy for Zhoushan to attract talents in the future.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

For college students studying in Zhoushan, it is imperative for government departments to capitalize on the golden period from enrollment to graduation, enhancing the recognition and identification of Zhoushan's higher education graduates with the city, and gradually increasing the retention rate of graduates in Zhoushan. In improving the quality of talents in Zhoushan, an equal emphasis should be placed on attracting and retaining talent, and a modest stance should be adopted without overly pursuing top-tier universities, focusing instead on individuals suitable for the industrial development of Zhoushan, leveraging the city's inherent advantages. Specific measures are as follows:

6.1 Implement Effective Publicity

1. Lay the Groundwork for the "Stay in Zhoushan Project" from the Students' Initial Entry into Zhoushan

It is advisable to directly provide employment attraction promotional videos of Zhoushan City or links to government websites detailing employment incentives on the enrollment and promotional websites of universities in Zhoushan. This would facilitate a win-win situation for both Zhoushan and its universities, enhancing the city's appeal and the enrollment effectiveness of its universities. Since both students and their families typically engage in the enrollment process, this could achieve a satisfactory promotional effect. Interviews with students reveal that the majority are unaware of Zhoushan's policies such as housing subsidies for young talents, necessitating further publicity and expanding the influence of WeChat public accounts like "Zhoushan New Area's New Youth" among young students in Zhoushan.

2. Overcome Stereotypical Perceptions of Zhoushan among Students' Parents

Provide accommodation vouchers to parents of university students in Zhoushan, which must be used at hotels within the city, expressing a welcome for them to visit Zhoushan. Additionally, issue some dining vouchers to encourage them to consume and gain a deeper understanding of Zhoushan.

3. Strengthen Student Publicity during the Career Selection Phase

At the end of the second semester of their junior year or the first semester of their senior year, distribute promotional literature on youth employment in Zhoushan to students, encouraging them to take these materials home to their parents. This may influence students' future employment choices and ensure the effective promotion of the series of talent attraction policies of the Zhoushan Municipal Government. It is known that the results of talent introduction for college graduates with a tertiary education or above in Zhoushan are impressive, with 10,764 people in 2019, 13,652 in 2020, 16,658 in 2021, and 20,659 in 2022, showing nearly a 100% increase over four years. This data, if known to students, could generate a "herd effect," guiding their employment choices.

4. Zhoushan's Favorable Natural Environment Positively Influences College Students' Decision to Stay and Work

The natural environment is fundamental to everyone's livelihood and is also a key indicator of a city's attractiveness. As a city with significant advantages in air quality and natural environment, Zhoushan can continue to focus on the strategic layout of the "marine garden city," emphasizing the construction of an ecological civilization, protecting the diversity of marine life, and strengthening the policies and measures to prevent natural disasters. Research indicates that the natural environment positively influences students' choices of employment locations. Leveraging this asset will be a crucial strategy for Zhoushan to attract talents and encourage students to stay.

6.2 Further Enhance Industry-Academia Integration

1. Increase Internship Opportunities for Various Majors in Zhoushan

Through questionnaire surveys, it was discovered that a significant number of university students have not participated in internships in Zhoushan, which may reduce their understanding of employment policies, economic conditions, and prospects in the city.

2. Expand Enrollment in Zhoushan's Advantaged Majors and Strengthen University-Enterprise Integration

Some engineering majors at Zhejiang Ocean University naturally find employment in Zhoushan. The government is encouraged to provide subsidies or direct government scholarships to these majors, support their expansion, and thereby increase the workforce in Zhoushan.

6.3 Employment and Entrepreneurship Support

1. Establish Some Free Public Skill Training Institutions

Research indicates that some students explicitly state they cannot find suitable jobs in Zhoushan. In addition to the government establishing employment platforms, it is also necessary to set up some free public training institutions that provide vocational training while emphasizing the language and cultural life of Zhoushan. This will enhance students' human capital and their identification with the city.

2. Provide Assistance for Local University Students in Entrepreneurship

In the early stages of local university students' entrepreneurship, helping to resolve issues with startup venues, or providing tax incentives, can contribute to the success of these students in entrepreneurship and their decision to stay in Zhoushan.

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