Challenges and Opportunities for Engineering and Management Graduates: A Case Study of H College

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Abstract

This study investigates the employment challenges faced by graduates of private colleges in Guangdong Province, specifically focusing on H College. Drawing on employment quality reports from 2013 to 2023, the research analyzes trends in graduate employment, highlights key issues, and proposes actionable recommendations to enhance employment outcomes. Key findings include persistent disparities between academic offerings and labor market demands, the impact of regional economic factors, and opportunities for institutional reforms. Recommendations emphasize curriculum alignment with industry needs, enhanced practical training, and expanded career services to improve graduate employability.

Index Terms-   Guangdong Province, private colleges, graduate employment, education quality, labor market alignment

INTRODUCTION

The employment of university graduates is a critical component of socio-economic development. Recent studies highlight their challenges and opportunities in an increasingly globalized and digitalized job market. International students often face difficulties securing employment in their host countries after graduation, with lower employment rates compared to local graduates [7]. Graduates returning to their home countries may experience job mismatches and reverse culture shock, although foreign degrees can be advantageous in certain market segments [25]. The rise of digital technologies and artificial intelligence is reshaping the labor market, creating both challenges and opportunities for graduates [9].

In Malaysia, the mismatch between graduate skills and job market demands remains a significant challenge, with many graduates unprepared for available positions [22]. To improve employability, universities should focus on developing skills that are applicable across different labor markets and contexts, including foreign language fluency, communication skills, and adaptability to technological changes [25].

In China, private colleges face unique challenges in bridging the gap between education and labor market demands for high-quality employment [31]. Their graduates in 2022 constituted 24.2% of the national graduate cohort, underscoring the significance of understanding their employment landscape.

This study focuses on H College, a multidisciplinary private undergraduate institution in Guangdong Province. It has played a significant role in supplying skilled graduates to the region over the past decade. This study assesses the employment status, quality, and challenges their graduates face and proposes actionable strategies for improving employment outcomes.

Studying the employment outcomes of their graduates is crucial for several reasons to help them improve graduate employability by identifying trends in employment rates, income levels, and job satisfaction. This understanding allows the college to implement targeted interventions, better-preparing students for the workforce and increasing their chances of securing meaningful employment. Analyzing these provides insight into how well the college's academic programs align with labor market needs to possess the skills and knowledge employers seek, enhancing their job prospects.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study informs the college's institutional strategy to help them identify areas of strength and weakness, a vital tool for decision-making on resource allocation, career services enhancement, and industry partnerships. This ultimately guides the college in adapting to an evolving job market and improving student satisfaction and retention. This provides an understanding behind declining job satisfaction enabling the college to offer better support services, leading to a more positive experience for students. This study is essential for

enhancing the success and well-being of graduates, strengthening the college's reputation, and contribution to regional and global economic development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1. What are the trends in graduate numbers and employment implementation rates at H College between 2013 and 2023?
2. How are H College graduates distributed across industries, and what shifts have occurred in these distributions over time?
3. What is the geographic distribution of H College graduates' employment, and to what extent are they concentrated in the Pearl River Delta and other regions?
4. What are the trends in average monthly income and job satisfaction levels among H College graduates over the past decade?
5. How do enrollment rates in various academic disciplines at H College correspond to employment implementation rates, and where are the mismatches?
6. What strategies can H College adopt to enhance graduate employability, income levels, and job satisfaction across all disciplines?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
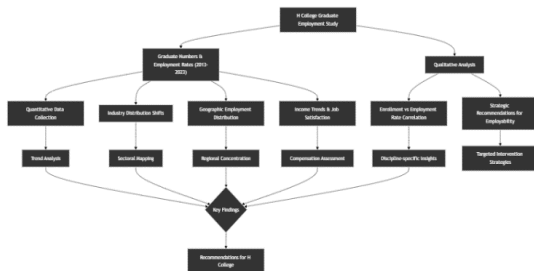
The study represents a comprehensive two-pronged approach to understanding graduate outcomes from 2013 to 2023. By integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, the framework systematically examines multiple dimensions of graduate employment: tracking graduate numbers and employment rates, mapping industry distributions, analyzing geographic employment patterns, and assessing income trends and job satisfaction. The quantitative component focuses on empirical data collection and trend analysis, while the qualitative aspect explores deeper insights such as the correlation between enrollment rates and employment outcomes across different academic disciplines. These parallel investigations converge to generate key findings, ultimately producing targeted strategic recommendations designed to enhance graduate employability, optimize academic program alignment with job market needs, and improve overall career outcomes for H College graduates. The framework's holistic approach ensures a complete understanding of the complex dynamics between higher education and employment,

providing actionable intelligence for institutional strategic planning.

RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

China faces significant employment challenges due to its large working-age population and regional disparities [5]. Urban areas experience increased pressure from rural migration, while inland regions struggle with insufficient job opportunities [6]. The aging population is creating demand in healthcare and elderly care sectors [5]. To address these challenges, China must implement a comprehensive strategy including promoting private sector growth, supporting small and medium enterprises, expanding the service sector, reforming state-owned enterprises, improving labor market flexibility, and establishing retraining programs [32]. Additionally, targeted policies for employment promotion, entrepreneurial support, and vocational training subsidies are necessary to improve employment levels and reduce unemployment rates [6].

In terms of opportunities for their graduate, their rapid expansion has led to challenges in employment. Graduates prefer larger organizations for better prospects [11] leaving the growing small business sector with skills shortages. This mismatch is exacerbated by gaps between university education and market demands, changing societal expectations, and differing perceptions of useful knowledge [12]. The contradiction between societal emphasis on "high scholarship" and actual job market requirements further complicates the situation [20]. While higher education massification has increased access, it has also led to doubts about equality in admissions and improved competitiveness in the job market [17]. These challenges highlight the need for better linkages between higher education institutions and SMEs, as well as a clarification of roles among strategic actors as the state's influence recedes [11][12][20].

The country must address urban-rural segmentation, regional disparities in job opportunities, and an aging population's impact on employment demands [6]. They must look into strategies in the global employment landscape like how to conduct Skill development programs to address employment gaps, [10].

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized quantitative methods to analyze employment trends, industry preferences, regional employment patterns, income levels, job satisfaction, and discipline-specific enrollment and employment outcomes based on data from H College Employment Quality Reports (2013–2023) [15]. The analysis incorporated descriptive statistics, percentage calculations, trend analysis, gap analysis, and comparative analysis to draw meaningful insights. The primary data source was the employment quality reports, which provided a decade's worth of data on graduate numbers, employment rates, industry, and regional employment distributions, income levels, job satisfaction, and the alignment between enrollment and employment outcomes across disciplines.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the total number of graduates and calculate employment implementation rates for each year. Percentage calculations determined the proportion of graduates employed in different industries, regions, and academic disciplines. Trend analysis was applied to observe patterns over time, including changes in graduate numbers, employment rates, income levels, and job satisfaction from 2013 to 2023. Gap analysis highlighted discrepancies between enrollment percentages and employment outcomes, particularly among disciplines, and examined the alignment between income levels and job satisfaction. Comparative analysis further evaluated differences in employment distributions across industries and regions.

To process and analyze the data, Microsoft Excel was used for organizing datasets, calculating percentages, and generating tables. SPSS was employed for statistical summaries and identifying trends. Visualization tools like Matplotlib and Seaborn were used to create detailed data for trends and comparisons, while Excel supplemented quick visual representations. These methods allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the data, providing actionable insights into employment outcomes for graduates of H College.

Despite the robustness of these methods, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, Nonetheless, the methods used effectively highlight key trends and challenges, offering practical implications for improving graduate employment outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Employment Trends and Implementation Rates

The analysis of Table 1 reveals significant trends in graduate numbers and employment implementation rates at H College from 2013 to 2023. The number of graduates steadily increased over the decade, growing from 3,564 in 2013 to 7,592 in 2023, nearly doubling in size. This consistent growth reflects H College's expanding capacity to produce graduates, aligning with the rising demand for higher education in Guangdong Province. Employment implementation rates were consistently high before 2020, ranging from 94% to 99%. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary decline, with rates dropping to 86.9% in 2020 before recovering to 97% in 2023. These fluctuations highlight the impact of external factors on the job market and demonstrate H College's ability to adapt and maintain strong outcomes despite challenges.

The alignment between the increasing number of graduates and sustained employment rates indicates effective institutional strategies in preparing students for the labor market. Nevertheless, the temporary decline during the pandemic underscores the importance of proactive measures, such as strengthening industry partnerships and enhancing career support services, to mitigate potential disruptions in the future. The steady growth in graduate numbers reflects H College's significant contribution to the regional talent pool,

while high employment rates showcase its success in equipping students with market-relevant skills. While wages rose across sectors from 1995 to 2015, a new era of polarization emerged in the mid-2010s, with increasing wages in high-skilled industries and declining growth in low-skilled sectors [21]. This trend is accompanied by a rise in informal, low-skilled service employment and a decline in manufacturing and construction jobs [30] [21]. Moving forward, the institution should continue to adapt its curriculum to evolving industry needs and reinforce resilience against external challenges to sustain these positive outcomes.

Table 1. Annual Graduate Numbers and Employment Implementation Rates (2013–2023)

Year	Number of Graduates	Employment Implementation Rate (%)
2013	3,564	99.3
2014	3,729	98.1
2015	3,930	96.3
2016	4,122	96.7
2017	4,665	95.5
2018	4,743	94.8
2019	4,921	93.8
2020	4,789	86.9
2021	5,093	96.8
2022	5,146	92.3
2023	7,592	97.0

3.2 Industry and Regional Distribution

The analysis of industry distribution data from 2013 to 2023 reveals a gradual shift in the employment sectors of H College graduates. Non-public enterprises have consistently been the largest employer, accounting for 79.4% of graduates in 2013 and 74.3% in 2023. However, this sector's dominance has declined over the decade, reflecting changing market dynamics or shifting graduate preferences. In contrast, employment in public enterprises grew from 14.6% in 2013 to 16.7% in 2023, while the share of graduates working in government agencies or other public institutions increased from 5.5% to 8.4% during the same period. These trends suggest that graduates increasingly value the stability and benefits associated with public-sector roles.

The declining proportion of graduates entering non-public enterprises, despite its continued dominance, highlights a potential gap in preparing students for private-sector roles or a preference for more secure employment options. This shift indicates a need for H College to enhance support for students pursuing careers in private enterprises through targeted partnerships, internships, and tailored training programs. The growth in public-sector employment, on the other hand, reflects a stronger alignment between graduate skills and the demands of public enterprises and government institutions.

Studies across different countries, including Jordan, Greece, and the United States, have identified significant gaps between academic programs and industry requirements [3][13]. .

The data shows an increasing diversification in employment opportunities, benefiting graduates with broader sectoral choices. To address these trends, H College should continue aligning its curriculum with labor market demands while fostering relationships with a diverse range of industries to ensure graduates are well-prepared for success across all employment sectors.

Table 2. Industry Distribution of Graduates (2013–2023)

Year	Non-Public Enterprises (%)	Public Enterprises (%)	Government/Other Public (%)
2013	79.4	14.6	5.5
2014	80.6	14.0	4.8
2015	83.0	12.7	3.8
2016	84.4	8.4	6.5
2017	87.6	9.1	2.8
2018	84.2	6.7	6.6
2019	85.6	7.0	5.3
2020	79.9	8.3	8.9
2021	76.4	15.4	7.2
2022	73.0	16.7	7.5
2023	74.3	16.7	8.4

3.3. Income and Job Satisfaction

The analysis of graduate income and job satisfaction from 2013 to 2023 highlights notable trends. Over the decade, average monthly income for H College graduates increased steadily, rising from 3,320 CNY in 2013 to 5,660.7 CNY in 2023, reflecting an overall growth of approximately 70% and an annual growth rate of 7.1%. This upward trajectory indicates improvements in the quality of employment opportunities and the alignment of the college's academic programs with market demands. However, job satisfaction exhibited a contrasting trend, declining from 88% in 2013 to 70% in 2023, with a noticeable drop beginning in 2018. Despite the financial growth, satisfaction levels failed to improve, suggesting that factors beyond income, such as career alignment, growth opportunities, or workplace dynamics, significantly influence graduates' perceptions of job quality. The divergence between income growth and declining satisfaction underscores a potential disconnect between what graduates' value in their careers and what their jobs offer. External factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, may have also contributed to lower satisfaction levels. To address this, H College should focus on enhancing job quality through better alignment with graduates' fields of study, meaningful job roles, and improved career growth

prospects [2]. Regular post-graduate surveys to identify and address dissatisfaction sources can further enhance outcomes, ensuring graduates benefit from both financial and non-financial aspects of employment.

Additionally, addressing non-monetary aspects of employment, such as mentorship programs, workplace culture, and career counseling, could help improve satisfaction. While monetary rewards are important, non-financial benefits can significantly impact job satisfaction, productivity, and overall employee well-being [16].

Table 3: Graduate Income and Job Satisfaction (2013–2023)

Year	Average Monthly Income (CNY)	Job Satisfaction (%)
2013	3,320	88
2014	3,340	87
2015	3,410	85
2016	4,107	84
2017	4,125	83
2018	5,571.6	81
2019	5,669.5	80
2020	5,047.8	78
2021	5,876.2	77
2022	5,942.7	75
2023	5,660.7	70

The analysis of Table 4 reveals significant disparities between enrollment percentages and employment implementation rates across various academic disciplines at H College from 2018 to 2023. Management and economics consistently accounted for the largest share of enrollments, at approximately 40% and 30%, respectively. However, their employment implementation rates were moderate, ranging from 72% to 78%, suggesting potential oversaturation in these fields or a lack of differentiation among graduates. In contrast, engineering disciplines, which represented only 20% of enrollments, achieved the highest employment implementation rates, ranging from 83% to 86%. This indicates strong demand for technical and applied skills and highlights the alignment of these programs with labor market needs.

Humanities and arts disciplines faced the greatest challenges, with the lowest enrollment rates (8% to 10%) and employment implementation rates (64% to 68%). These figures reflect persistent difficulties for graduates in securing employment, likely due to limited market demand or a lack of integration of practical and marketable skills into their education. Enrollment percentages for all disciplines remained stable over the five years, but the consistent trends in employment outcomes emphasize the need for strategic adjustments.

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To address these challenges, H College should expand its engineering programs to capitalize on their strong alignment with industry needs. Management and economics programs require closer collaboration with employers, enhanced internships, and practical training to improve graduates' employability. For humanities and arts, targeted reforms are necessary, including embedding transferable skills, specialized career counseling, and connecting graduates to niche markets where their skills are in demand. By tailoring its academic offerings and fostering stronger ties with industries, H College can better balance enrollment with employment outcomes and enhance the overall employability of its graduates.

Table 4. Enrollment vs. Employment Implementation Rates by Discipline (2018–2023) based on Percentage

Year	Management		Economics		Engineering		Humanities/Arts	
	Enrollment	Employment	Enrollment	Employment	Enrollment	Employment	Enrollment	Employment
2018	40	72	30	75	20	85	10	65
2019	42	74	28	76	22	86	8,	68
2020	38	70	32	78	20	83	10	66
2021	39	73	30	77	21	85	10	67
2022	40	74	30	76	20	84	10	65
2023	41	72	29	75	20	85	10	64

FINDINGS

1. Graduate numbers have steadily increased, peaking at 7,592 in 2023. Employment implementation rates were consistently high (94%–99%) before the pandemic but fluctuated during 2020–2022, dropping to 86% in 2020 before recovering to 97% in 2023. The data indicates a generally positive trend in graduate output and employment success over time.

2. Most graduates were employed in non-public enterprises (over 70%), followed by public enterprises and government agencies. However, the proportion of graduates in non-public enterprises declined from 79.4% in 2013 to 74.3% in 2023, while employment in public enterprises and government agencies grew, indicating a shift toward more stable and higher-quality employment sectors.

3. Over 90% of graduates consistently secured employment within Guangdong Province, particularly in the Pearl River Delta, which accounted for 91.5% of placements in 2023. Employment outside Guangdong and in other regions of the province remained low, reflecting a strong regional preference and contribution to local economic development.

4. Average monthly income increased from 3,320 CNY in 2013 to 5,660.7 CNY in 2023, reflecting a steady annual growth of 7.1%. However, job satisfaction declined from 88% in 2013 to 70% in 2023, suggesting that income growth alone does not fully address graduates' professional expectations or workplace satisfaction.

5. Engineering disciplines consistently had the highest employment implementation rates (83–86%) despite lower enrollment (20%). Conversely, management and economics, which had the largest enrollment shares (40–70%), achieved moderate employment rates (72–78%), indicating market saturation. Humanities and arts programs faced the greatest challenge, with low enrollment (8–10%) and the lowest employment rates (64–68%).

6. Humanities and arts graduates consistently showed the lowest employment rates (64–68%) and limited demand in the labor market. These challenges could stem from inadequate alignment between curriculum offerings and market needs, emphasizing the need for practical skill integration and career guidance to improve their employability.

7. H College should expand high-demand programs like engineering, enhance practical training and industry partnerships for management and economics graduates and reform humanities and arts curricula to include marketable skills. Strengthening career services, encouraging geographic diversification in employment, and addressing job satisfaction factors beyond income are also critical strategies.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Tables 1 to 5 provides a comprehensive overview of the employment outcomes of H College graduates from 2013 to 2023, highlighting trends, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Graduate numbers have grown significantly over the decade, reflecting H College's expanding role in higher education. Despite fluctuations during the COVID-19 pandemic, employment implementation rates have remained high, demonstrating the institution's ability to adapt to changing market conditions.

Sectoral analysis shows that non-public enterprises remain the primary employer, though their dominance has slightly declined as more graduates pursue stable opportunities in public enterprises and government agencies. Geographically, the Pearl River Delta continues to attract the majority of

graduates, emphasizing the region's economic appeal and opportunities. Income levels have steadily increased over time, showcasing improved employment quality; however, declining job satisfaction highlights the need for a more holistic approach to graduate support, focusing on workplace conditions, career alignment, and growth opportunities.

The discipline-specific analysis reveals a strong alignment between engineering programs and market demands, as evidenced by high employment implementation rates. Conversely, management and economics programs, despite their popularity, face challenges in maintaining high employability due to market saturation. Humanities and arts disciplines remain the most vulnerable, with low enrollment and the lowest employment outcomes, necessitating targeted reforms to improve graduate success.

To address these findings, H College should expand its high-demand engineering programs, enhance practical training and industry collaboration for management and economics graduates, and reform humanities and arts curricula to include transferable skills and career-specific training. Strengthening career services, fostering industry partnerships, and aligning academic programs with labor market needs will ensure that H College continues to produce graduates who are well-equipped to thrive in an evolving economic landscape. By addressing these strategic areas, H College can improve not only employment rates but also the overall quality and satisfaction of graduate outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. H College should prioritize expanding its engineering programs, given their consistently high employment implementation rates. This expansion should include increasing enrollment capacity, updating curricula to align with emerging technologies, and investing in state-of-the-art facilities. Additionally, H College should integrate advanced technical training into other disciplines to meet the growing demand for technology-related skills across industries.

2. H College should introduce more internships, co-op programs, and real-world projects in its management and economics disciplines to equip students with hands-on experience. Strengthening partnerships with employers in the management and economics sectors is crucial to ensure that graduates acquire the specific skills demanded by the job market. Furthermore, offering specialized tracks within these fields, such as digital marketing, fintech, or sustainable business management, could significantly enhance graduates' employability.

3. To improve employment outcomes for humanities and arts graduates, H College should embed transferable and practical skills, such as communication, digital content creation, and project management, into the curricula. Providing targeted career guidance to connect graduates with industries where humanities and arts degrees are valued, such

as education, media, and creative industries, will also help. Moreover, promoting entrepreneurial initiatives by offering support for self-employment and startups in creative fields could increase job opportunities for graduates.

4. H College should develop customized career counseling programs for each academic discipline to address specific employment challenges and opportunities. Strengthening alumni networks can provide current students with mentorship, job referrals, and valuable industry insights. Additionally, regularly updating students and faculty on labor market trends will help ensure that academic offerings remain relevant and aligned with industry demands.

5. To improve job satisfaction among graduates, H College should focus on enhancing non-monetary aspects of employment, such as work-life balance, career growth opportunities, and alignment with personal interests. Collaborating with employers to promote positive workplace cultures and professional development opportunities will also help increase graduate satisfaction.

6. H College should encourage graduates to explore job opportunities beyond the Pearl River Delta by emphasizing the benefits of working in other regions or grassroots programs. Establishing partnerships with international companies and organizations can provide global employment opportunities, expanding graduates' career prospects.

7. H College should regularly survey graduates to gather feedback on employment outcomes, job satisfaction, and challenges faced in the workplace. This feedback can be used to evaluate and improve academic programs and career services to better meet the needs of graduates and the labor market.

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