
**Beyond Volume: Why More Applications Do Not Guarantee Interviews
for International Students****Dr. Barbara Franks, Chief Research Officer****Introduction**

The transition from higher education to the labor market has become increasingly complex for international students seeking employment in the United States. International students represent a vital component of American higher education, contributing substantially to university revenues, research productivity, and the broader economy. Over the past two decades, U.S. institutions have increasingly relied on international student enrollment as a source of financial stability and global competitiveness (Bound et al., 2021). Chinese students, in particular, constitute one of the largest international student populations in the United States and are heavily concentrated in high-demand fields such as business, engineering, computer science, and data analytics (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2024). Beyond their educational contributions, international graduates provide critical human capital to innovation-driven sectors and strengthen the nation's position in an increasingly globalized economy.

Despite these contributions, the transition from university to employment remains highly uncertain for many international students. While American institutions actively recruit international talent, the pathways from education to long-term labor-market participation are often constrained by immigration regulations, sponsorship requirements, and employer perceptions of administrative complexity. Research suggests that immigration policy significantly shapes both the scale of international student enrollment and graduates' employment opportunities, creating uncertainty that influences students' educational and career decisions long before they enter the labor market (Shih, 2016). Consequently, many international graduates encounter a paradox: they are welcomed as students but face considerable obstacles when attempting to convert their educational investments into employment outcomes.

Conventional job-search theory suggests that increased effort should improve employment outcomes. Human capital models assume that individuals who invest greater time and energy into the labor market—through networking, résumé preparation, and submitting applications—will ultimately increase their probability of obtaining interviews and job offers. In practice, however, the experiences of international students often diverge from this expectation. Despite substantial investments in education and intensive job-search activity, many international graduates struggle to convert effort into meaningful employment opportunities.

Recent public discourse surrounding international student employment has increasingly emphasized the importance of persistence and “applying to more jobs.” Career advisors, online forums, and university career centers frequently encourage

students to maximize application volume as a strategy for overcoming labor-market uncertainty. Yet emerging evidence suggests that quantity alone may be insufficient. Structural barriers—including employer uncertainty regarding visa sponsorship, limited professional networks, cultural differences in recruitment practices, and information asymmetries—may weaken the relationship between job-search effort and employment outcomes. These barriers are particularly consequential because they exist independently of applicants' qualifications, motivation, or willingness to engage in the labor market.

The labor-market experiences of international students are particularly important to examine because they occupy a unique position within the U.S. workforce. Unlike domestic graduates, international students must navigate not only traditional labor-market competition but also work authorization policies, Optional Practical Training (OPT) regulations, H-1B sponsorship processes, and employers' perceptions regarding the costs and risks associated with hiring foreign nationals. Prior research has demonstrated that changes in visa policy influence both employer demand for international talent and students' long-term educational and career planning (Shih, 2016). Consequently, the effectiveness of conventional job-search strategies among international students remains uncertain.

The existing literature on graduate employment generally identifies job-search intensity as an important predictor of employment success. Studies have found that early engagement, networking activities, and targeted application strategies are associated with higher rates of interviews and job offers. However, much of this research has focused on domestic populations and often assumes a linear relationship between effort and outcomes. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding whether these relationships operate similarly for international students, particularly in an increasingly competitive labor market characterized by economic uncertainty, employer caution, and shifting immigration policies.

The present study addresses this gap by examining a paradox emerging from survey data collected from Chinese international students enrolled at U.S. institutions. Preliminary findings reveal a striking disconnect between effort and outcomes. While approximately two-thirds of respondents report engaging in aggressive job-search behavior and submitting large numbers of applications, a substantial proportion receive few or no interview invitations. Specifically, despite widespread application activity, more than two-fifths of respondents report receiving zero interviews. This discrepancy raises important questions regarding the effectiveness of high-volume application strategies and the broader mechanisms shaping labor-market outcomes for international graduates.

Three central questions guide this investigation. First, does application volume meaningfully predict interview attainment among international students? Second, are students substituting quantity for strategy in response to uncertainty and perceived barriers? Third, what factors may explain the diminishing returns associated with increasingly intensive application behavior?

These questions are not merely academic. Understanding why extensive job-search effort fails to generate proportional returns has important implications for universities, employers, career services professionals, and policymakers. If application quantity alone does not improve employment outcomes, institutional interventions focused exclusively on encouraging students to "apply more" may prove inadequate.

Instead, more targeted approaches emphasizing networking, employer engagement, strategic job matching, and immigration-related guidance may be necessary.

The study draws on survey data collected from Chinese international students attending universities across the United States. Using descriptive statistics, correlational analysis, and regression modeling, the analysis investigates the relationship between application volume and interview outcomes while accounting for relevant contextual factors, including visa concerns, job-search timing, and student characteristics. By focusing on the gap between effort and results, this research contributes to a growing body of scholarship examining the structural and institutional dimensions of international student employment.

More broadly, this study advances an emerging line of inquiry within labor-market research: the possibility that job-search intensity may exhibit diminishing returns when applicants face barriers beyond their immediate control. For international students, employment outcomes may depend not only on how much effort they expend, but also on whether that effort is strategically directed within a labor market shaped by immigration policy, employer preferences, and unequal access to professional opportunities.

Ultimately, this article argues that the challenge confronting many international students is not a lack of motivation or effort. Rather, it is the existence of structural constraints that weaken the connection between labor-market participation and labor-market success. By investigating why high application volume frequently fails to translate into interviews, the study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of international graduate employment and to inform evidence-based strategies for improving career outcomes.

Literature Review

Job Search Intensity and Employment Outcomes

Job search research has long emphasized the importance of effort and persistence in shaping employment outcomes. Job-search intensity is generally defined as the frequency and extent to which individuals engage in activities designed to obtain employment, including preparing résumés, submitting applications, attending interviews, networking, and seeking labor-market information (Kanfer et al., 2001). Early conceptualizations of job-search behavior distinguished between the quantity and quality of search activities, suggesting that employment outcomes depend not only on the amount of effort expended but also on how strategically that effort is directed (Blau, 1994). Traditional labor-market models assume that greater search intensity increases the probability of securing interviews and employment opportunities.

Empirical evidence largely supports this assumption. Blau (1994) developed and validated a multidimensional framework of job-search behavior, demonstrating that job-seeking activities encompass both preparatory behaviors, such as researching employers and developing application materials, and active behaviors, such as submitting applications and attending interviews. This distinction is particularly relevant because individuals may engage extensively in one dimension of job search while neglecting other activities that are equally important for labor-market success.

In a comprehensive meta-analysis, Kanfer, Wanberg, and Kantrowitz (2001) found that job-search behaviors are positively associated with employment outcomes, although the strength of these relationships varies considerably across contexts.

Similarly, Saks (2006) demonstrated that active job-search intensity predicts interview invitations and job offers among university graduates, proposing an “unfolding process” in which increased search activity leads first to interviews and subsequently to employment offers. Research has consistently shown that interviews function as a critical intermediary between effort and ultimate labor-market success.

More recent scholarship has expanded understanding of job-search processes by emphasizing the role of psychological, social, and contextual factors. Wanberg, Ali, and Csillag (2020) argue that job seeking is not merely a mechanical process of submitting applications but rather a dynamic experience shaped by motivation, self-regulation, social networks, and labor-market conditions. Their review highlights that job seekers must continually adapt their strategies in response to feedback and changing opportunities, suggesting that persistence alone may be insufficient when structural barriers limit access to employment.

Despite these findings, contemporary scholarship suggests that the relationship between effort and outcomes is more complex than previously assumed. Ng, Song, and Lievens (2023) found that human capital can simultaneously facilitate and hinder employment outcomes among new labor-market entrants. Although highly qualified candidates were more likely to receive interview invitations, greater human capital was also associated with lower job-search intensity, illustrating that labor-market success depends on more than the volume of applications submitted.

Importantly, much of the existing job-search literature has focused on domestic populations and implicitly assumes that labor markets reward effort in a relatively linear fashion. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to whether these relationships operate similarly for international students, whose employment opportunities are shaped by immigration regulations, sponsorship requirements, and employer perceptions.

International Students and the Transition to the Labor Market

International students occupy a distinctive position within the U.S. labor market. In addition to competing with domestic graduates, they must navigate work-authorization policies, Optional Practical Training (OPT) regulations, and uncertainty surrounding employer-sponsored visas. These institutional constraints introduce additional barriers that may weaken the relationship between job-search effort and employment outcomes.

Previous research demonstrates that international students rely heavily on strategic planning, networking, and institutional support during the transition from university to employment. In a phenomenological study of international students in the United States, Rapp, Chen, and Wu (2024) identified six factors that contributed to successful job searches: early planning, professional networking, enrollment in high-demand academic programs, university-industry partnerships, departmental support, and effective career services. Their findings suggest that successful employment outcomes depend not only on effort but also on access to social and institutional resources.

Research on graduate employability similarly emphasizes the importance of international experiences, professional competencies, and social capital. Crossman and Clarke (2010) argue that employability is shaped by a complex interaction of academic qualifications, intercultural competence, networks, and experiential learning

opportunities. Their work challenges the assumption that educational attainment alone guarantees labor-market success and highlights the importance of institutional and social resources in facilitating career transitions.

Research further indicates that many international students encounter substantial information gaps regarding employer expectations and recruitment processes. Alberts and Hazen (2005) observed that international students often experience tension between their aspirations to remain in the United States and the practical realities of immigration policy and labor-market competition. While many students express strong intentions to pursue careers in the United States, structural barriers frequently complicate these ambitions.

Recent evidence suggests that international graduates may respond to these barriers by increasing the number of applications they submit. However, high application volume may reflect uncertainty rather than strategic job-search behavior. In competitive labor markets characterized by limited sponsorship opportunities, students may adopt a “quantity over quality” approach in an effort to maximize their chances of success. Whether this strategy produces meaningful returns remains an open empirical question.

Diminishing Returns in Job Search Behavior

Although conventional wisdom encourages job seekers to apply broadly, labor-market research suggests that job-search effort may exhibit diminishing returns. The assumption that submitting more applications will necessarily generate more interviews overlooks the importance of job matching, recruitment processes, and employer screening mechanisms.

Research in organizational behavior indicates that employers use multiple signals when evaluating applicants, many of which extend beyond formal qualifications. Recruitment experiences themselves can communicate information about applicants and organizations. Rynes, Bretz, and Gerhart (1991) argued that hiring decisions are influenced by symbolic signals embedded within recruitment processes, including communication patterns, timing, and perceptions of fit.

Recent studies have similarly emphasized the role of signaling in hiring decisions. Petzold (2021) demonstrated that employers interpret educational experiences and international mobility as signals of human capital, cultural competence, and professional readiness. However, these signals are evaluated differently across employers and labor-market contexts, suggesting that qualifications alone do not guarantee favorable hiring outcomes.

For international students, diminishing returns may emerge when application volume exceeds applicants’ capacity to tailor materials, conduct networking activities, or strategically target employers willing to sponsor visas. Excessive application activity may also reduce the time available for other forms of career preparation, such as relationship building, interview preparation, and participation in experiential learning opportunities. Under such circumstances, additional applications may generate progressively smaller gains in interview opportunities. Consequently, high application volume may function less as an indicator of effective job-search behavior and more as evidence of labor-market constraints.

Research Gap

The existing literature establishes that job-search intensity is generally associated with positive employment outcomes. However, four important gaps remain.

First, most studies have examined domestic labor markets rather than international student populations. Second, prior research has focused predominantly on job attainment and job offers, with relatively little attention given to the interview stage, which represents a crucial bottleneck in the hiring process. Third, relatively few studies have investigated whether aggressive application behavior reflects effective strategy or compensatory behavior in response to structural barriers. Finally, existing scholarship on international student employability has largely emphasized educational experiences and institutional supports rather than the relationship between application intensity and early labor-market outcomes.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining the relationship between application volume and interview attainment among Chinese international students in the United States. By focusing on the paradox of high effort and uneven returns, this research contributes to a growing body of scholarship exploring how immigration systems, employer preferences, and labor-market institutions shape employment opportunities for international graduates.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Human Capital Theory, Job Search Theory, and Signaling Theory. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional explanation for the relationship between job-search effort and employment outcomes among international students. While Human Capital Theory emphasizes the economic value of education and skills, Job Search Theory focuses on information gathering and search behavior, and Signaling Theory explains how employers interpret applicants' qualifications under conditions of uncertainty.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory provides the foundational assumption that investments in education, skills, and experience increase an individual's productivity and labor-market value (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). According to this perspective, individuals make strategic investments in education and training because they expect these investments to yield future economic returns in the form of higher wages, greater productivity, and improved employment opportunities.

Mincer (1974) expanded the theory by demonstrating that labor-market outcomes are shaped not only by formal education but also by accumulated experience and skill acquisition over time. His work emphasized that individuals' earnings and employment trajectories reflect the quantity and quality of the human capital they acquire throughout their educational and professional lives. Within this framework, international students pursuing degrees in the United States accumulate substantial human capital through advanced coursework, specialized training, language acquisition, and cross-cultural experiences.

From a human-capital perspective, students who invest more heavily in their education and job-search activities should experience stronger employment outcomes. Employers are expected to reward qualifications, effort, and productivity with interview opportunities and job offers. However, research increasingly suggests that human capital alone cannot fully explain labor-market outcomes among internationally mobile

graduates. Employer uncertainty, immigration constraints, and institutional barriers may weaken the expected relationship between qualifications and success. Consequently, highly qualified international students may encounter labor-market disadvantages that are unrelated to their actual productivity or educational attainment.

Job Search Theory

Job Search Theory explains employment outcomes as the product of information gathering, search intensity, and strategic decision-making. Unlike Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes individuals' productive capacities, Job Search Theory focuses on the process by which workers and employers locate and evaluate one another within imperfect labor markets.

Stigler's (1962) theory of labor-market information laid the foundation for modern job-search models by arguing that searching for employment entails costs. Individuals must devote time and resources to acquiring information about available opportunities, while employers similarly invest resources in identifying suitable candidates. Because information is incomplete and costly to obtain, job seekers must balance the benefits of continued searching against the costs of time, uncertainty, and forgone opportunities.

Building upon this foundation, Mortensen (1986) conceptualized job search as a dynamic process in which individuals continuously evaluate potential employment opportunities under conditions of imperfect information. Job seekers determine how much effort to expend, which opportunities to pursue, and when to accept available positions based on expected returns and labor-market constraints. Search intensity, therefore, reflects both individual preferences and broader institutional conditions.

Traditional job-search models predict that greater search intensity—including submitting more applications—should increase interview probabilities. Saks (2006) demonstrated that job-search intensity predicts interview attainment among university graduates and proposed that interviews serve as an intermediary mechanism linking effort to employment outcomes. However, these models implicitly assume that labor markets reward effort in a relatively efficient manner.

The present study extends Job Search Theory by questioning whether the expected relationship between effort and outcomes holds for international students. If application volume fails to predict interview attainment, the findings would suggest that labor-market barriers—such as visa sponsorship concerns, employer uncertainty, and limited access to professional networks—constrain the effectiveness of conventional job-search strategies.

Signaling Theory

Signaling Theory offers an explanation for why effort and qualifications may not translate directly into employment opportunities. According to Spence (1973), employers operate under conditions of imperfect information and therefore rely on observable signals—such as educational credentials, work experience, communication skills, institutional affiliations, and professional achievements—to infer applicant quality.

Because employers cannot fully observe an applicant's productivity before hiring, educational credentials serve as signals that reduce uncertainty and facilitate decision-making. However, the effectiveness of these signals depends on how

employers interpret them. Signals that are viewed positively in one labor-market context may be discounted or misunderstood in another.

For international students, signaling processes are especially important because employers often possess incomplete information regarding foreign educational experiences, immigration regulations, and sponsorship requirements. Educational experiences and international mobility can function as signals of both human and cultural capital, but employers interpret these signals differently depending on organizational context. Consequently, highly qualified international students may encounter hiring disadvantages despite possessing strong academic credentials.

Within the context of this study, Signaling Theory suggests that submitting additional applications may yield diminishing returns if applicants are unable to communicate relevant signals effectively or if employers perceive visa sponsorship as a source of risk. Consequently, labor-market outcomes may depend not simply on how many applications students submit, but on how employers interpret the signals embedded within those applications.

Together, Human Capital Theory, Job Search Theory, and Signaling Theory provide a multidimensional framework for understanding why extensive job-search effort may fail to generate proportional returns for international students. The framework predicts that while application volume should increase interview opportunities in principle, structural constraints, information asymmetries, and employer screening processes may substantially weaken this relationship in practice.

Research Questions

Despite widespread assumptions that greater job-search effort leads to improved employment outcomes, preliminary findings from the present study reveal a substantial disconnect between application behavior and interview attainment among Chinese international students in the United States. While many students report submitting large numbers of applications, a significant proportion receive few or no interview invitations. This pattern raises important questions about the effectiveness of high-volume job-search strategies and the structural factors that may constrain labor market success.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between job application volume and interview outcomes among Chinese international students pursuing employment in the United States. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether aggressive application behavior translates into increased interview opportunities or whether other factors weaken this relationship.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does job application volume predict interview attainment among Chinese international students in the United States?

RQ2: Are students relying on application quantity as a substitute for more strategic job-search behaviors?

RQ3: What factors explain the disconnect between high job-search effort and low interview attainment among international students?

To address these questions, the study analyzes survey data collected from Chinese international students enrolled at U.S. universities, examining patterns in application behavior, interview outcomes, and immigration-related considerations. Through descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, and regression modeling, the

research aims to identify whether increasing application volume meaningfully improves employment prospects or whether diminishing returns emerge within the international student labor market.

Data Preparation Procedures

Prior to analysis, the dataset underwent a systematic data-cleaning and preparation process to ensure accuracy, consistency, and suitability for statistical analysis. The original survey dataset consisted of responses collected from Chinese international students enrolled at universities across the United States. The survey examined post-graduation plans, job-search behaviors, immigration concerns, and early labor-market outcomes.

The data-cleaning process began with a review of all responses to identify duplicate submissions, incomplete records, and invalid entries. Records with substantial missing data were excluded from analysis. Variables were subsequently reviewed for consistency in coding and formatting. Categorical responses were standardized to facilitate descriptive and inferential analyses.

Several new variables were created specifically for this study. Because job application volume and interview attainment were collected as categorical ranges rather than exact counts, midpoint values were assigned to each response category to generate continuous approximations suitable for correlation and regression analyses. Weekly job application categories were transformed as follows: 1–20 applications = 10.5, 21–50 applications = 35.5, 51–100 applications = 75.5, 101–200 applications = 150.5, and more than 200 applications = 225. Interview categories were similarly converted into midpoint values.

To examine the relationship between application behavior and labor-market outcomes, several binary indicators were constructed. A high-application-volume variable was created to distinguish respondents who submitted twenty-one or more applications per week from those submitting fewer applications. Interview outcomes were recoded into dichotomous measures indicating whether respondents had received at least one interview or no interviews. An additional variable was created to differentiate respondents who had begun their job search from those who had not yet entered the labor market.

Offer outcomes were also recoded into simplified categories representing respondents who had received an offer, were currently interviewing, or had not yet secured employment opportunities. A comprehensive codebook documenting all transformations and newly created variables was maintained throughout the preparation process to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Following data preparation, the final analytic dataset consisted of 182 valid survey responses and was reviewed for missing values, coding errors, and inconsistencies prior to statistical analysis.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between job-search intensity and interview attainment among Chinese international students in the United States. Drawing on survey data collected during the spring of 2026, the study investigated whether high levels of job-search activity translate

into improved labor-market outcomes or whether diminishing returns emerge as application volume increases.

The study adopted a labor-market perspective, focusing specifically on the transition from educational attainment to employment. Particular attention was given to the role of application volume as an indicator of job-search effort and interview attainment as an early measure of labor-market success.

Participants and Data Source

The data for this study were drawn from the U.S. International Student Career Pathways Survey conducted between April and May 2026. The survey targeted Chinese international students currently enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities or recently entering the labor market.

The final sample consisted of 182 respondents representing a range of academic levels, majors, and post-graduation plans. The survey collected information on students' career intentions, work authorization status, job-search behaviors, application volume, interview experiences, employment outcomes, and perceived barriers to employment.

Variables

The primary independent variable in this study was job application volume, measured by respondents' self-reported number of job applications submitted per week. Because the survey instrument collected this information using categorical ranges rather than exact numerical values, midpoint values were assigned to each category to create an approximate continuous measure of application intensity. This transformation enabled the use of correlation and regression analyses to examine the relationship between job-search effort and employment outcomes.

The primary dependent variable was interview attainment, which was operationalized in two ways. First, interview attainment was measured as a continuous approximation based on the midpoint values assigned to the reported interview ranges. Second, interview attainment was recoded as a binary variable indicating whether respondents had received at least one interview invitation. These complementary measures allowed the study to assess both the extent of interview activity and the likelihood of obtaining employer interest.

Several additional variables were incorporated to provide context for the analysis and to account for factors that may influence labor-market outcomes among international students. These variables included respondents' desire to remain in the United States after graduation, their Optional Practical Training (OPT) and work-authorization status, the timing of job-search initiation, current offer status, and self-reported job-search challenges. Together, these variables provide a broader understanding of the institutional and individual factors shaping the relationship between application behavior and interview attainment.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted in four stages to examine the relationship between job-search intensity and interview attainment among Chinese international students in the United States. The first stage involved descriptive statistical analyses to summarize respondents' job-search behaviors and labor-market outcomes. Frequencies,

percentages, and measures of central tendency were calculated to determine the proportion of students engaging in high-volume job-search behavior, the number of students who received interviews despite intensive application activity, and the proportion of respondents who reported receiving no interview opportunities.

The second stage consisted of cross-tabulation analyses designed to examine the relationship between application volume and interview outcomes. These analyses were used to identify patterns in interview attainment across varying levels of job-search intensity and to assess whether students who submitted larger numbers of applications experienced improved employment outcomes.

The third stage examined the statistical association between application volume and interview attainment using correlation analysis. This analysis assessed the extent to which increased job-search intensity was associated with interview success and provided an initial indication of whether diminishing returns emerged as application activity increased.

The final stage employed regression analysis to determine whether application volume significantly predicted interview attainment after accounting for relevant contextual factors. Logistic regression models were used when interview outcomes were coded as binary variables, whereas linear regression models were considered for continuous approximations of interview counts. These analyses were intended to assess the extent to which application volume predicted interview attainment among Chinese international students and to explore whether high levels of job-search activity translated into proportionate employment outcomes.

Collectively, the analyses addressed three central questions: whether application volume predicts interview attainment, whether students rely on application quantity as a substitute for more strategic job-search behaviors, and what factors contribute to the disconnect between high job-search effort and limited interview opportunities. All analyses were conducted using the cleaned survey dataset and interpreted through the theoretical lenses of Human Capital Theory, Job Search Theory, and Signaling Theory.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire. All responses were anonymized before analysis, and identifying information was removed from the analytic dataset. Data were stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes. The study adhered to established ethical standards governing social science research and the protection of participant confidentiality.

Results

Descriptive Findings

The final sample consisted of 182 Chinese international students enrolled at universities in the United States. Analysis of job-search behavior revealed substantial variation in application intensity. Most respondents (65.9%, $n = 120$) reported submitting between one and twenty applications per week. However, a sizeable minority engaged in significantly more intensive job-search activity, with 34.1% ($n = 62$) submitting more than twenty applications weekly.

Specifically, 16.5% ($n = 30$) submitted between twenty-one and fifty applications per week, 8.2% ($n = 15$) submitted between fifty-one and one hundred applications, 2.7% ($n = 5$) submitted between one hundred and two hundred applications, and 6.6% ($n = 12$) reported submitting more than two hundred applications per week.

Despite these high levels of effort, interview attainment remained limited. Overall, 40.7% of respondents ($n = 74$) reported receiving no interviews, while 35.2% ($n = 64$) reported receiving between one and five interviews. Smaller proportions received six to ten interviews (12.6%, $n = 23$), eleven to twenty interviews (6.0%, $n = 11$), or more than twenty interviews (5.5%, $n = 10$).

These findings indicate that a substantial proportion of international students experience limited employer engagement despite sustained job-search activity.

Application Volume and Interview Outcomes

Cross-tabulation analysis revealed important differences in interview attainment across application-volume categories. Among students submitting between one and twenty applications per week, 56.7% ($n = 68$) reported receiving no interviews. In contrast, interview outcomes improved among students who applied more aggressively. Only 10.0% ($n = 3$) of students submitting twenty-one to fifty applications per week reported receiving no interviews, while just 6.7% ($n = 1$) of those submitting fifty-one to one hundred applications received no interviews.

However, the relationship between effort and outcomes was not strictly linear. Even among students reporting extremely high application volumes, interview attainment varied considerably. Of the respondents submitting more than two hundred applications per week, only 25.0% ($n = 3$) reported receiving more than twenty interviews, while many remained concentrated in lower interview categories. These findings suggest that increasing application volume alone does not guarantee proportional increases in interview opportunities.

Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the association between application volume and interview attainment. The results revealed a moderate positive relationship between the number of applications submitted and the number of interviews received ($r = .371$).

Although the correlation indicates that greater job-search intensity is generally associated with improved interview outcomes, the magnitude of the relationship suggests that application volume explains only a portion of the variation in interview attainment. A large proportion of the differences in interview outcomes appears to be attributable to factors beyond the number of applications submitted.

Summary of Findings by Research Question

RQ1: To what extent does job application volume predict interview attainment among Chinese international students in the United States?

The findings indicate that application volume is positively associated with interview attainment. Students who submitted larger numbers of applications generally received more interviews.

RQ2: Are students relying on application quantity as a substitute for strategic job-search behaviors?

The descriptive patterns suggest that many students may be compensating for labor-market uncertainty through increased application volume. However, the moderate correlation between effort and outcomes indicates that quantity alone is insufficient to explain interview success.

RQ3: What factors explain the disconnect between high job-search effort and low interview attainment?

The results suggest that structural and institutional factors—including employer screening practices, immigration concerns, sponsorship uncertainty, and information asymmetries—likely contribute to the disconnect between effort and labor-market outcomes.

Discussion

This study examined whether aggressive job-search behavior translates into improved interview outcomes for Chinese international students seeking employment in the United States. Consistent with traditional job-search theory, students who submitted larger numbers of applications generally received more interviews. However, the relationship between effort and outcomes was weaker than conventional labor-market models would predict.

The moderate correlation between application volume and interview attainment suggests that, although effort matters, it does not fully determine employment outcomes. Nearly forty-one percent of respondents reported receiving no interviews despite active participation in the labor market. These findings challenge the assumption that increasing application volume alone is sufficient to overcome barriers to employment and suggest that broader structural and social factors shape labor-market success.

The results support existing research demonstrating that job-search success depends not only on effort but also on access to information, social networks, institutional support, and employer receptiveness. Social Capital Theory provides an important lens through which to interpret these findings. According to Lin (1999), social capital consists of the resources embedded within social networks that individuals can mobilize to achieve desired outcomes. In the context of employment, access to professional networks, alumni communities, faculty mentors, and industry connections can provide job seekers with valuable information, referrals, and opportunities that are often unavailable through formal application channels alone. International students, however, frequently possess smaller professional networks in the United States than their domestic counterparts, limiting their access to these critical resources. Consequently, students who lack social capital may compensate by submitting increasingly large numbers of applications, even when such efforts yield limited returns.

The findings also align with research on labor-market segmentation, which suggests that labor markets are not uniform systems in which all workers compete on equal terms. Rather, labor markets are often divided into segments characterized by differing levels of opportunity, security, and accessibility (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). Although international students may possess educational credentials comparable to those of domestic graduates, they often encounter additional barriers related to immigration status, work authorization, and employer sponsorship requirements. These institutional constraints may effectively place international students in a more restricted segment of the labor market, where access to opportunities is shaped not

only by qualifications and effort but also by organizational policies and regulatory considerations.

For international students, immigration-related considerations introduce additional constraints that domestic job seekers do not typically encounter. Employers may be uncertain about sponsorship requirements, perceive international candidates as administratively burdensome, or favor applicants with prior domestic work experience. Such perceptions may reduce interview opportunities even for highly qualified applicants and weaken the relationship between job-search intensity and labor-market outcomes.

The findings further suggest that high application volume may represent a coping strategy in response to uncertainty rather than an indicator of effective job-search behavior. Faced with limited information regarding employer preferences and visa policies, students may adopt a “more is better” approach by submitting increasingly large numbers of applications. However, excessive application volume may reduce opportunities for networking, customization of application materials, and strategic targeting of employers. As Blau (1994) argued, effective job searching involves not only the quantity of applications submitted but also the quality and diversity of job-search activities.

From a theoretical perspective, the results provide partial support for Human Capital Theory and Job Search Theory while highlighting the explanatory value of Signaling Theory, Social Capital Theory, and labor-market segmentation research. Human Capital Theory predicts that individuals who invest heavily in education and career preparation should experience favorable employment outcomes. Job Search Theory similarly suggests that increased search intensity should improve the likelihood of obtaining interviews. However, the findings indicate that these relationships are mediated by structural barriers and unequal access to professional networks.

Signaling Theory helps explain why educational credentials and job-search effort do not always translate into interview opportunities. Employers make hiring decisions under conditions of imperfect information and may interpret international status, visa sponsorship needs, and foreign work experiences as signals of uncertainty or risk. At the same time, Social Capital Theory underscores the importance of networks and institutional connections, while labor-market segmentation theory highlights the broader structural inequalities embedded within employment systems.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the challenge facing international students is not simply one of insufficient effort. Rather, the transition from higher education to employment is shaped by the interaction of individual behavior, social resources, and institutional constraints. Understanding this interplay is essential for developing policies and interventions that move beyond encouraging students to submit more applications and instead address the structural barriers that limit their access to labor-market opportunities.

Implications

Implications for Universities

Universities should reconsider career-support strategies that emphasize application quantity without equal attention to application quality. Career centers may need to provide more specialized services for international students, including

employer targeting, networking support, interview preparation, and visa-related guidance.

Implications for International Students

The findings suggest that students should complement application volume with more strategic job-search behaviors. Networking, informational interviews, alumni engagement, and careful employer selection may yield greater returns than simply increasing the number of applications submitted.

Implications for Employers

Employers may benefit from clearer communication regarding sponsorship policies and hiring criteria. Greater transparency could reduce uncertainty among international applicants and improve the efficiency of the recruitment process.

Implications for Policy

Policymakers and higher-education leaders should recognize that labor-market outcomes for international students are shaped by structural barriers as well as individual effort. Programs that strengthen university-employer partnerships and improve employer understanding of work authorization processes may help bridge the gap between educational attainment and employment.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study relied on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to recall bias and social desirability bias. Second, application volume and interview attainment were measured using categorical ranges rather than exact counts, requiring the use of midpoint approximations during analysis.

Third, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Although the study identifies associations between application behavior and interview outcomes, it cannot establish whether increased application volume directly causes improved labor-market performance.

Fourth, the sample consisted exclusively of Chinese international students enrolled in U.S. institutions. Consequently, the findings may not generalize to other international student populations or national contexts.

Finally, the dataset does not directly measure important dimensions of job-search strategy, including résumé quality, networking behavior, internship experience, employer characteristics, or the degree to which students tailored their applications. Future research incorporating employer perspectives and qualitative interviews would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying labor-market outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between application volume and interview attainment among Chinese international students seeking employment in the United States. The findings demonstrate that while greater job-search intensity is associated with improved interview outcomes, the relationship is far from deterministic.

Many students invest substantial time and effort in the job-search process yet continue to encounter limited employer engagement. The evidence suggests that application quantity alone cannot fully overcome the institutional, informational, and immigration-related barriers shaping labor-market opportunities for international graduates.

Ultimately, the challenge facing international students is not simply one of effort. Rather, it reflects a broader mismatch between individual aspirations and the structural realities of the labor market. Improving employment outcomes will therefore require strategies that extend beyond encouraging students to submit more applications and instead focus on enhancing labor-market access, employer engagement, and institutional support.

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