

## *Original Research Article*

# Exploring the Perceptions of College Students Returning Hometown to Start Businesses: Challenges and Suggestions

### Abstract

In the past three years, the number of college graduates has increased, and the employment situation is grim. The entrepreneurship of returning hometown college students has become a solution to alleviate the employment problem. At the same time, college students returning hometown to start businesses can also empower the manpower and technology needed for rural revitalization, which can be described as killing two birds with one stone. The purpose of this paper is to explore the problems of college students' perception of returning hometown to start a business, and put forward relevant suggestions. This study obtained data through interviewing 14 applied university students. The results of text analysis show that the entrepreneurial issues perceived by respondents cover market supply and demand, policy, capital and technology, etc., and the awareness and perception of entrepreneurship are relatively weak. Finally, the research suggests that policy-making units should be combined with the actual situation, closely contact with schools or relevant management personnel, and strengthen the policy publicity of college students returning hometown to start businesses. Secondly, when designing the entrepreneurship course, the universities should consider the course activities and cases from the two aspects of the course design in combination with the students' learning situation and the actual market situation. Moreover, in terms of entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial activities, universities can consider introducing relevant measures to set up incubators to encourage students to start businesses or join school-enterprise cooperation.

Key words: entrepreneurship, rural revitalization, entrepreneurial spirit

### I. Introduction

The number of college graduates in 2023 is 11.58 million, and it is expected to reach 11.79 million in 2024, an increase of 210,000 students was met (Yang , Wang, and Zhao, 2024). The employment problem of college graduates is relatively severe. In the case of such a large gap between the number of jobs and the number of people employed, we need to solve the employment problem through other ways. Entrepreneurship may be one of the solutions to youth employment. On October 12, 2021, The General Office of the State Council issued the Guiding Opinions on Further Supporting Innovation and Entrepreneurship of College Students to provide policy

guidance for college students returning home to start businesses ([General Office of the State Council, 2021](#)). With the support of policies at the national level, college students choose to return to their hometown to start businesses and contribute youth power to the development of their hometown, which is worthy of encouragement.

Secondly, entrepreneurship is an entrepreneurial activity carried out by individuals who invest capital, technology, labor force and related equipment to combine their own creative ideas with opportunities in the external environment to form the result of interaction between individuals and the external environment ([Matos & Hall, 2020](#)). The result of this interaction includes that entrepreneurs invest capital in technology, and the products after entrepreneurship must be consumed by someone, which covers both the investment sector of economics and the consumption sector. Therefore, in the process of economic development, entrepreneurship is considered to be one of the important engines for a region to promote economic development ([Sendra-Pons et al., 2022](#)). Because entrepreneurship needs to invest capital and manpower as well as technology, entrepreneurs must have entrepreneurial spirit, and there are many conditions for the success of entrepreneurship. While policies support college students' entrepreneurship, what are their perceptions of returning hometown to start a business? What links should entrepreneurship education further strengthen? All questions need to be clarified.

Moreover, in response to the above questions, existing research has shown that entrepreneurship education (EE) can promote economic growth by improving entrepreneurial activity (EA), which is reflected in a growing body of research on the link between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial activity ([Abodohoui & Su, 2020](#); [Abreu, Demirel, Grinevich, & karatatak-Ozkan, 2016](#); [Audretsch, 2014](#); [Cohen, Hsu, & Shinnar, 2021](#)). This shows that good entrepreneurship education may lead to better entrepreneurial activities. Research also confirms that entrepreneurship education can enhance overall early-stage entrepreneurial activity (both nascent and new entrepreneurial activity) ([Berrill, O'Hagan-Luff, and van Stel, 2020](#)). Therefore, if the country wants to solve the employment problem of some college students through college students returning hometown to start businesses, the university side should think about how to improve the entrepreneurial education mechanism, especially applied undergraduate universities. After all, the entrepreneurial education of college students will affect their entrepreneurial activities.

In summary, the purpose of this study is to clarify the perception of applied undergraduate students on entrepreneurial activities, and then put forward some

suggestions for entrepreneurial education. Based on this, this study chooses a private applied university in Guizhou Province as the research object, which aims at serving the local ethnic economy and meets the research requirements.

## 2. Research methods

The purpose of this study is to explore the students' perception of entrepreneurial activities, and then put forward some suggestions for entrepreneurial education. Based on the nature of the research topic, the qualitative research method was used in this study. In terms of the selection of research objects, this study chooses a private applied university in Guizhou Province as the research object, and the students of the school of Management as the investigation object. The selection of research objects meets the research requirements and the selection of investigation objects is representative to a certain extent.

In terms of data acquisition, this study solicited information through the student work office, seeking to cooperate with the interview of 14 students, including business administration, human resource management and administration management majors. Secondly, the interview questions for this study are mainly designed for the purpose of the research, including asking you to talk about the possible problems of college students returning hometown to start a business, and your views on solving these problems. The data were collected between March 15, 2024 and March 24, 2024. The interview was held in Office 113, Erudite Building (see photo 1). The office has an independent space where interviewees can speak freely. In terms of data recording, after the interview, respondents were asked to write a written manuscript as a confirmation document with the researcher's notes. A total of 8,253 words of text were obtained by 14 respondents for subsequent analysis.

Furthermore, in terms of data analysis and interpretation, this study adopts context analysis, taking words as the analysis unit. The analysis steps include coding, term classification, generalization, and interpretation. The purpose of qualitative research is to explain and interpret social phenomena and to explore the heterogeneity of research topics or subjects (Zhang, 2006). Maykut and Morehouse(1994) proposed that in qualitative research, samples are selected by researchers according to research needs, rather than random sampling. In terms of trustworthiness, as long as the in-depth interview can find people who meet the research purpose and research object through intentional sampling and other methods, and can be carried out in accordance with the in-depth interview procedures, it has credibility and willfulness. Therefore, the data collected in this study are reliable.

Secondly, this study obtains data according to the research purpose and research steps, and the research process has a certain stability and the obtained data is reliable.

In the process of data acquisition, researchers used different questions for the same question and asked respondents to write written manuscripts for comparison, and the obtained data also had high reliability.

Finally, in terms of data interpretation, the researcher does not add personal subjective opinions when obtaining data, and the recorded data is relatively objective. When interpreting data, this study tries to objectively analyze and interpret the obtained data without adding personal subjective consciousness. In this context, the data obtained in this study can indeed reflect the research purpose and have high validity.



Figure 1 Interviews of college students returning home to start businesses

### 3. Empirical results

This study recruited students from an applied undergraduate university in Guizhou, and a total of 14 students accepted the invitation for follow-up data collection. The basic data of the interviewed students are summarized in Table 1. In terms of gender, there are 5 males and 9 females, which basically accords with the gender ratio of students. In terms of levels, the 2023 level has 10 people and the 2022 level has 4 people. In terms of majors, 2 students majoring in business administration, 5 students majoring in human resource management and 7 students majoring in administration management are all from the same college. On the whole, the respondents are representative.

Table 1 Basic information of respondents

NO.	Gender	Level	Major
A1	M	2023	Business management
A2	F	2023	HRM
A3	F	2023	Business management
A4	F	2023	Administrative management
A5	F	2022	Administrative management
A6	F	2023	Administrative management
A7	F	2023	Administrative management
A8	M	2022	Administrative management
A9	M	2022	Administrative management

A10	F	2023	HRM
A11	F	2023	Administrative management
A12	M	2023	HRM
A13	M	2023	HRM
A14	F	2022	HRM

Next, the researchers asked the possible questions about college students returning hometown to start businesses, and asked the respondents to answer one by one. With the consent of the respondents, the researchers recorded their answers and made text files for subsequent analysis. The answers of the respondents are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Problems of college students returning home to start businesses

No.	Capital	Technology	Manpower	Facilities	Experience	Policy	Market
A1	2	2	4	2		2	5
A2		1	2	1	1	1	1
A3	2	1			1	2	
A4	1	2	1		2	3	3
A5		1	1		1	2	2
A6					1	1	
A7			1				1
A8	2		5			9	3
A9	6	3	1		2		1
A10	2				2		
A11	1	3				1	4
A12					2		
A13	1				1	1	
A14	3	2	3		2	6	9
Total	20	15	18	3	14	28	29

First of all, it can be seen from Table 2 that respondents answered market supply and demand questions (29 times) and policy questions (28 times) more frequently. These two questions are also the focus of college students' attention when they return home to start their own businesses. Examples of original interviews on market supply and demand issues are as follows:

*"Rural markets are different from urban markets and require in-depth understanding of local market needs and the development of products or services that suit local consumption habits (A1)".*

*"Did not accurately grasp the market environment, did not open up production and*

*marketing channels." In the early stage of entrepreneurship, I knew nothing about the market environment, did not understand the needs of the market, but just kept working hard and failed to open up sales channels, making the product unsalable. At this time, the government is needed as a bridge to help it open up external sales channels. (A8)"*

*"College students return home to start a business, and the choice of entrepreneurial projects is crucial, considering the resource conditions and market demand in rural areas." For example, we can consider the development of agricultural processing, rural tourism (especially with red culture), e-commerce, etc., which have more development prospects and can better promote the local economy. (A11)"*

In terms of policies, respondents may lack or misinterpret their understanding of college students' entrepreneurship policies. The feedback of some questions also explained the difficulties of college students' entrepreneurship to a considerable extent, such as the cumbersome bidding process. Examples of original interviews on policy issues are as follows:

*"Relevant policies have been introduced at the national level, but after being specific to the local, the actual situation of the local may conflict with the spirit of the relevant documents of the central government, so that the local government has hesitated in the process of implementing the policy, resulting in the implementation of the policy is not strong." For this problem, local governments should boldly try to break the routine, to innovate constantly, to optimize the existing problems, and not choose to escape from problems. (A8)"*

*"Although the government has introduced a series of policies to support entrepreneurship, there are still many problems in the actual implementation process. Such as policy implementation is not in place, the application process is cumbersome. (A4)"*

*"There are few social resources and few financing channels, leading to problems such as difficult project promotion and fund chain break on the way to entrepreneurship; Although the government has issued a series of policy support, in reality, it takes a long time to apply for some support, and there will be a series of problems such as complicated application procedures and asymmetric information. (A14)"*

Secondly, the number of capital (20 times) and talent (18 times) is the second, indicating that college students returning home to start businesses have financing problems and face management manpower problems. In terms of capital, a total of nine respondents mentioned (a total of 20 times) that capital is the blood of enterprises,

and enterprises will be difficult to survive without capital. Examples of funding interviews are as follows:

*"We must be aware that returning home to start a business will face many difficulties. For example, a newly graduated rural college student has no source of funds, and funds will become the first big difficulty he faces. Entrepreneurship is a tug of war, the start-up capital and the initial maintenance of capital problems should not be underestimated. (A9)"*

*"In the process of returning home to start a business, I think we should first give priority to choosing light assets, like planting, breeding and so on." You can invest in a smaller scale, give yourself some opportunities to tolerate mistakes, but also a good solution to the problem of some college students returning home to start a business. When their own small-scale industry is stable, they can steadily increase investment in large-scale industries. (A3)"*

*"What should be experienced in the early stage of entrepreneurship, how should college students as entrepreneurs face problems, solve problems, let the business start smoothly, and how should they consider the capital before starting a business?" Does the business meet the needs of people in the current society? All these need college students to explore and explore constantly. (A12)"*

Talent and manpower is another important issue for college students to return home and start a business. College students returning home to start a business can not only rely on college students themselves, their own time ability is limited, often need to carry out professional division of labor with the growth of business. However, rural areas are mostly for the elderly and children, and there are limitations in entrepreneurial manpower, such as high-tech talents. Examples of manpower issues given by respondents are as follows:

*"Rural areas may lack highly skilled talent and need to find ways to attract and retain talent, including providing training, a good working environment and competitive pay." (A1)"*

*"With the implementation of labor cooperation between the east and the west, more and more western population outflow, coupled with the serious aging of rural areas, most of them are left-behind elderly, resulting in a shortage of labor." Solving this problem requires the government to introduce policies to attract migrant workers to return home. (A8)"*

*"College students are also facing some challenges and difficulties when they return home to start a business. For example, infrastructure in rural areas is relatively weak, and policy support needs to be strengthened. At the same time, college students lack experience and resources in the process of entrepreneurship, and*

*need more guidance and help. (A2)”*

*"I think college students return home to start a business, have their own team is also very important, in the bottleneck we can discuss together, find a breakthrough point, entrepreneurship is not a person's battle, but the need for team cooperation and joint efforts." (A11)”*

In addition, technology (15 times) and experience (14 times) were the third priorities cited by respondents. Obviously, before college students want to return home to start a business, they must have the necessary skills and even relevant experience to start a business. Examples of technical and experience interview transcripts are as follows:

*"In addition to the financial problem, there are technical problems. Although college students have learned a lot of theoretical knowledge in school, they have relatively little practical experience, which will increase the risk of starting a business. Theory and practical operation are not necessarily consistent, so there must be corresponding technical support in the early stage of entrepreneurship. (A9)”*

*"It is necessary to take into account their own actual situation, their own cultural knowledge reserves and the ability and experience of self-employment." College students lack social experience in self-employment, and are easily affected by some successful cases in the early stage of self-employment, and do not have a deep understanding of the efforts and hardships behind the success of entrepreneurship. Blindly optimistic passion for entrepreneurship can easily frustrate college students' weak will and self-confidence. (A10)”*

*"We must have the ability to learn and discipline ourselves. As college students, we should not copy things from books to life, but be flexible, transform the knowledge learned into practical ability and experience, and have a mental state of hard work. (A13)”*

*"In addition to the lack of talent in rural areas, there is also a lack of new technology, and the return of college students can bring new technology, new management concepts, and new market experience to the countryside, thereby breaking the old concept, promoting rural economic development, and narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas." (A14)”*

#### 4. Discussion

Based on the above analysis, the research finds that the problems of college students returning hometown to start businesses perceived by the respondents. Such as capital, manpower, policies, market supply and demand, are generally consistent with the literature (Matos & Hall, 2020; Sendra-Pons et al., 2022). However, the



entrepreneurial part, as A13 respondents put it," College students returning hometown to start businesses should have a sense of innovation. Because only continuous innovation, change some original business models, or new products, new services, so as to continuously attract and retain customers. so that the public has a steady stream of attraction to the product, and stand out in the county ". Fewer respondents mentioned this point. This shows that the entrepreneurial spirit consciousness of the surveyed college students is weak, and the entrepreneurial spirit should be strengthened in the entrepreneurship education of application-oriented colleges and universities.

Secondly, 71% of respondents (10/14) believe that the policy support is not in place, indicating that the national policy support for college students returning hometown to start businesses still has space for improvement in implementation. However, there are also some policy distortions that are worth thinking about for college students who want to return hometown to start their own businesses. For example, Guizhou Province's support for college students to start businesses back home includes not only funds, but also rent and reduction. Guizhou Province's policy support for college students returning hometown to start businesses ([Guizhou Provincial People's Government, 2022](#)) is illustrated as follows:

#### (1) Applying for subsidies for self-employment

For small and micro enterprises or engaged in individual business for the first time, and the enterprises or individual industrial and commercial enterprises have operated normally for more than 1 year from the date of registration, a one-time start-up subsidy of 5,000 yuan shall be granted according to regulations. Among them, college graduates to 12 agricultural characteristics and advantages of the industry lead, entrepreneurial agricultural enterprises, the development of e-commerce, cultivate a new professional farmer team, focusing on rural brokers, agricultural products circulation, agricultural breeding, scientific research and deep processing and other fields of entrepreneurship, according to the regulations to give a one-time 10,000 yuan start-up subsidies. The channels are public employment service agencies at the county level and above.

#### (2) Subsidies for finding jobs and starting businesses

For ordinary colleges and universities in the province, secondary vocational schools, technical colleges and universities in the graduation year have employment and entrepreneurship intention and actively job hunting and entrepreneurship of employment difficulties graduates, a one-time grant of 1,000 yuan per person. College graduates with employment difficulties include urban zero-employment families, families enjoying the minimum living security, and college graduates from poor

families with file registration. College graduates who enjoy the benefits of assistance and support for people in extreme poverty; College graduates who have applied for and obtained state student loans while in school; College graduates whose parents (unilaterally) hold the Certificate of Disabled Persons and are completely or partially disabled or who hold the Certificate of Disabled Persons themselves, college graduates from other provinces who have applied for and obtained national student loans while in school, and college graduates from families enjoying the minimum living guarantee for urban and rural residents. The channels are public employment service agencies at the county level and above.

### (3) Subsidies for the rental of business premises

For college graduates, people with employment difficulties, migrant workers and demobilized veterans who rent business sites that meet the requirements of planning, safety and environmental protection and do not enjoy the reduction or exemption of site rental fees, a monthly rental subsidy of 500 yuan will be given. For those whose actual rent is less than 500 yuan, the subsidy term will not exceed 3 years. The channels are public employment service agencies at the county level and above.

### (4) Guaranteed loans for entrepreneurship

For college graduates who start their own businesses, they can apply for a guarantee loan of up to 200,000 yuan for starting a business, and for college graduates who start a business in partnership, the loan amount can be appropriately increased according to the number of partnership businesses, and the maximum is not more than 10% of the total amount of qualified personal loans. The maximum term of the loan shall not exceed 3 years. The part of the loan interest below LPR-150BP shall be borne by the borrower, and the remaining part shall be subsidized by the finance department.

Finally, respondents' perception of entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial activities still has room for improvement. The 14 respondents only mentioned access to education and training issues, such as "education and training resources may be limited in rural areas, and college entrepreneurs can consider how to use their knowledge and skills to provide education and training services to the local community." (A1) ". Respondents rarely mentioned that entrepreneurship education should be strengthened at the university level, which is also a part of entrepreneurs and needs and a part that should be strengthened at the university level. In addition, some respondents' thinking is more limited, and only thinking about a part of the entrepreneurial activities of returning hometown. The cognition of entrepreneurial activities of returning hometown is still extremely limited. For example, "college

students returning hometown to start businesses can promote the transformation and upgrading of the rural economy." College students usually have a high cultural quality and innovation ability, they can introduce advanced ideas and technologies into the countryside, promote the upgrading of traditional industries, cultivate new industries, and inject new impetus into the development of rural economy. "(A2)" college students have a good intention to return hometown to start a business, but the assessment of entrepreneurial activities needs to be strengthened. Such as the current situation of market supply and demand, market opportunities, products and technologies, financial risks and feasibility assessment should be concerned. The evaluation required for these entrepreneurial activities still needs to be provided by the corresponding courses and training at the university end.

## 5. Conclusions and Suggestions

The purpose of this study is to explore the problem of entrepreneurship perceived by college students. Through interviews and analysis, it is found that college students returning hometown to start businesses can indeed alleviate the employment problem. Moreover, it is also conducive to promoting the upgrading and transformation of rural industries and injecting new economic vitality into rural areas. In short, college students returning hometown to start businesses in terms of manpower and technology can indeed enable rural revitalization, promote rural industrial transformation, and drive industrial revitalization. Based on the above analysis and discussion, this paper draws the following conclusions:

- The surveyed college students believe that the main problems faced by college students returning hometown to start a business are market supply and demand and policy support; Secondly, the problem of capital and talents; Third, for technology and experience being the third priority mentioned by respondents. The findings are broadly consistent with the literature.
- The surveyed college students have a weak understanding of entrepreneurial spirit, which may be related to their lack of entrepreneurship education and experience. And it needs to be addressed by the education authorities.
- The surveyed college students' cognition of entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial activities is relatively weak. The university side needs to seriously consider the improvement of all aspects of entrepreneurship education.

Based on the above conclusions, this study makes the following recommendations:

- In the discussion, it was found that the existing subsidy policy for college students to return hometown to start a business is basically complete, but there may be insufficient publicity. Therefore, policy-making units should be

combined with the actual situation, close contact with schools or relevant managers, and strengthen the policy publicity of college students returning hometown to start businesses. In this way, more college students can understand that the existing college students return hometown entrepreneurship policy is basically complete, and those who have individual needs can also find what units and departments to negotiate.

- When designing entrepreneurship courses, universities should consider course activities and cases from the two aspects of course design in combination with students' learning situation and the actual situation of the market. If students can conduct environmental analysis and find out possible opportunities for returning hometown to start businesses based on the environmental background of their hometown, it will be more conducive for them to return hometown to carry out entrepreneurial activities in the future. Moreover, in the course design of entrepreneurship, the university should strengthen the spirit of entrepreneurship and find some real cases of college students to explain. In this way, it is easier for college students to understand the essence and connotation of entrepreneurial spirit.
- In terms of entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial activities, universities can consider introducing relevant measures to set up incubators to encourage students to start businesses or join school-enterprise cooperation. In addition, entrepreneurship courses can consider strengthening off-campus startup visits to strengthen students' understanding of startup creation, financing, talent recruitment and operation.

Suggestions for future research are summarized as follows:

- This study has identified the problems of college students returning hometown to start businesses, and future research can be based on these problems for development questionnaires and quantitative research.
- Secondly, this study sorts out relevant issues from the perspective of college students, and future studies can compare several perspectives. For example, parents, villagers, existing entrepreneurs, and government departments. In this way, it can be discussed more objectively.

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