

# Research on Strategies to Enhance Undergraduates' Willingness to Pursue Postgraduate Studies in the Context of Employment Pressure

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**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of employment pressure, pursuing graduate studies has become a crucial pathway for undergraduate students to enhance employment competitiveness and alleviate employment challenges. However, the recent downward trend in graduate school applicants has rendered the improvement of undergraduates' willingness to pursue advanced degrees an urgent practical issue. This study employs a questionnaire survey method to empirically investigate the influencing factors of undergraduates' intention to pursue graduate studies. The findings reveal that at the individual level, preparation difficulty, preparation pressure, clarity of goals, and academic planning significantly affect students' willingness to pursue graduate studies. At the family level, preparation costs and family atmosphere exert substantial influence on this decision-making process. Accordingly, this paper proposes enhancement strategies from both individual and family perspectives to improve enrollment rates. Students should establish clear academic objectives and strengthen psychological adjustment, while families ought to provide robust financial support and foster harmonious environments. These recommendations aim to effectively boost undergraduates' motivation for graduate education.

**Keywords:** Willingness to pursue graduate studies; Undergraduate students; Employment pressure

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## 1. Introduction

With the continuous improvement of higher education popularization and teaching quality in China, the number of high-quality talents has been increasing, intensifying competition in the job market. Currently, society's rigid demands for higher education and better-qualified graduates have significantly increased the employment pressure and created a challenging job market for undergraduates. In this context, pursuing postgraduate studies has become an important way for many undergraduates to enhance their employability and alleviate employment difficulties. However, data shows that the number of applicants for master's degree programs in China was 4.38 million in 2024, a decrease of 360,000 compared to 2023<sup>[1]</sup>, and further declined to 3.88 million in 2025<sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, enhancing undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance exam (known as *kaoyan* in China) has become an urgent issue to address in the face of employment pressure.

Scholars from various fields have interpreted the phenomenon of *kaoyan* based on different theoretical perspectives. From a sociological perspective, *kaoyan* is seen as a means for individuals to acquire higher social status and cultural capital <sup>[3]</sup>. From an economic perspective, *kaoyan* behavior can be viewed as an educational investment based on cost-benefit analysis <sup>[4]</sup>. From a psychological perspective, it represents a learning motivation for students to satisfy their inherent needs and achieve self-actualization <sup>[5]</sup>. In summary, the *kaoyan* phenomenon is a complex multi-dimensional issue, reflecting students' survival, economic, or social choices driven by self-improvement, employment needs, conformity, or familial pressure <sup>[6,7]</sup>. Additionally, scholars have conducted valuable explorations into the factors influencing undergraduates' willingness to take the *kaoyan* and their success rate. Gender differences, grade distribution, major background <sup>[8]</sup>, and employment situation <sup>[9]</sup> are key factors affecting *kaoyan* decisions. However, candidates' study plans, target universities, physical condition <sup>[10]</sup>, and preparation methods <sup>[11]</sup> significantly impact the success rate of *kaoyan*. In conclusion, most existing studies are qualitative, and only a few scholars have conducted descriptive statistical analyses based on survey data. This paper aims to address the gaps in current research by focusing on undergraduates' willingness to take the *kaoyan*. Through questionnaire surveys and data collection, descriptive statistics, and logistic regression analysis, the study proposes countermeasures and suggestions to enhance undergraduates' willingness to take the *kaoyan*, with the goal of improving the enrollment rate.

## **2. Analysis of the current situation of undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination**

This paper adopts the questionnaire survey method to collect data on undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination across the country. Through online distribution of questionnaires, a total of 379 valid questionnaires were collected. The basic information of the samples and their willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination are analyzed as follows.

### **2.1. Basic information statistics of the samples**

From the perspective of gender, males account for 43.8% and females account for 56.2% of the survey samples. In terms of grade, freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and alumni account for 14.25%, 16.62%, 20.32%, 23.48%, and 25.33%, respectively. From the perspective of major, normal education accounts for 15.83%, art accounts for 22.43%, humanities and social sciences account for 29.82%, and science and engineering account for 31.93%. In terms of school level, students from vocational colleges account for 15.57%, students from ordinary undergraduate schools account for 47.49%, students from 211 universities account for 26.12%, and students from 985 universities account for 10.82%. From the perspective of academic performance, those with excellent performance account for 24%, those with medium performance account for 56%, and those with poor performance account for 20%.

### **2.2. Analysis of characteristics of undergraduates' willingness to take postgraduate entrance examination**

The survey data shows that undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination presents the following five characteristics: Firstly, nearly half of the students are willing to take the postgraduate entrance examination. Among the 379 respondents who participated in this survey, 42.48% expressed a willingness to apply for postgraduate studies, while 57.52% indicated their unwillingness. The data shows that students who

are willing to take the postgraduate entrance examination are in the minority, indicating that most students prefer direct employment rather than continuing their studies. Secondly, students tend to apply to external universities. Among the respondents who are willing to take the postgraduate entrance examination, 47% chose to apply for their own university, while 53% chose to apply for external universities. This indicates that students are more inclined to choose external universities for various reasons, including pursuing better academic resources, exploring new learning environments, and matching target employment markets. Thirdly, students tend to apply for lower-level universities. The data shows that 22.98% chose to apply for universities of the same level as their undergraduate institution, 35.4% chose to apply for higher-level universities, and 41.61% chose to apply for lower-level universities. This suggests that students are more inclined to apply for lower-level universities, primarily to avoid competition and increase their chances of success in the postgraduate entrance examination. Fourthly, students tend to apply for cross-major studies. Among the respondents who are willing to take the postgraduate entrance examination, 35% chose to apply for their own major, while 65% chose to apply for a different major. This indicates that students are more inclined to choose cross-major studies for various reasons, including career development orientation, personal interest drive, and reducing the difficulty of the postgraduate entrance examination. Lastly, students tend to apply for professional master's programs. According to the survey data, the proportion of students applying for academic master's programs is 40.37%, while the proportion of students applying for professional master's programs is 59.63%. This suggests that students are more inclined to apply for professional master's programs. The reasons include the lower difficulty of public course examinations for professional masters, higher enrollment rates compared to academic masters, the practical and applied focus of professional master's education, shorter durations compared to academic masters, and lower requirements for thesis publication.

### **3. Analysis of factors influencing undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination**

To explore the specific factors influencing undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination, this paper employs regression analysis, with the willingness to take the exam as the dependent variable and the difficulty of preparation, cost of preparation, clarity of goals, educational planning, pressure of preparation, and family atmosphere as independent variables. Using SPSS software for binary logistic regression analysis, the influencing factors of undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination are obtained. The data analysis results show that all six factors have a significant impact on undergraduates' willingness to take the exam. This paper categorizes and analyzes these six influencing factors from both personal and family perspectives as follows.

#### **3.1. Personal-level influencing factors**

At the personal level, the difficulty of preparation, pressure of preparation, clarity of goals, and educational planning are important factors that affect undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. Firstly, the difficulty of the exam can have a negative impact on undergraduates' willingness to take it. The process of preparing for the exam requires a significant amount of time and energy to review various courses, organize a large amount of study materials, and learn more challenging subjects, which can be daunting for students. Secondly, the pressure of preparing for the exam can reduce undergraduates' enthusiasm for taking it. During the preparation period, students face heavy academic pressure, and prolonged study in a tense and high-pressure environment can leave them feeling exhausted, affecting their preparation efficiency and forcing

them to abandon their exam plans. Additionally, the clarity of goals plays a crucial role in undergraduates' willingness to take the exam. When students have a clear understanding of their career plans, taking the postgraduate entrance examination often becomes a significant pathway to achieving their personal goals, thereby enhancing their willingness to take the exam. Conversely, if their goals are unclear, they may hesitate to take the exam due to a lack of direction. Finally, educational planning is also an important factor influencing undergraduates' willingness to take the exam. Some students do not consider pursuing further graduate studies because their educational planning only extends to the undergraduate level, and thus they do not have the willingness to take the exam.

### **3.2. Family-level influencing factors**

At the family level, both the cost of preparation and family atmosphere can greatly influence undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. Regarding the cost of preparation, firstly, the high cost of taking the exam can be a burden for students. Preparing for the exam requires purchasing a large amount of study materials and paying registration fees, which can be a considerable expense for families with average economic conditions. Secondly, the various costs associated with graduate studies can also be daunting for some students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, ultimately discouraging them from pursuing further education. In terms of family atmosphere, a poor family relationship can lead to emotional instability among candidates, making it difficult for them to focus on exam preparation and efficient learning. On the other hand, a warm and supportive family atmosphere can provide comfort and a strong source of psychological support for candidates, and a positive and motivated mental state can greatly enhance their willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination.

## **4. Countermeasures to enhance the willingness of undergraduates to take the postgraduate entrance examination based on the orientation of advancing to higher education**

Based on the analysis of the influencing factors of undergraduates' willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination, this article proposes countermeasures and suggestions from both individual and family perspectives, with the goal of increasing the advancement rate to higher education.

### **4.1. Individual level: Clarifying goal planning and strengthening psychological adjustment**

Firstly, it is recommended that undergraduate students clarify their career directions as early as possible and conduct practice and research in various career fields, so as to develop appropriate plans for their career paths. For instance, undergraduates can gain a deeper understanding of the daily work and life of different career groups by participating in career planning courses, reading popular magazines related to different career groups, and engaging in career assessments or internship experiences. This will help them to more clearly understand their interests, skills, and career directions. At the same time, students can also choose to consult career planning experts in the industry to plan a suitable career path based on their professional characteristics and market demands, rather than blindly following the trend to continue their studies under pressure. Furthermore, during the process of preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination, learning pressure and anxiety are common issues. It is suggested that undergraduates learn how to effectively manage emotions and cope with stress. On one hand, schools can provide mental health education courses and psychological counseling services



to undergraduates, assisting them in mastering various stress management skills, including but not limited to time management, emotion regulation, and relaxation training. On the other hand, students preparing for the examination should also strive to cultivate a positive and optimistic attitude, learn how to draw lessons from failures, improve their self-confidence, and maintain a healthy mindset during their preparation.

#### **4.2. Family level: Strengthening economic security and creating a harmonious atmosphere**

First and foremost, parents should provide solid economic support and security for students preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination. Based on the family's economic situation, parents can provide necessary study expenses such as purchasing learning materials and paying for tutoring fees. For students from families with economic difficulties, parents can also encourage them to apply for grants or scholarships, or reduce economic pressure through part-time jobs. Meanwhile, good home-school communication can help improve students' study efficiency, cultivate good study attitudes, and enhance their self-confidence. During the students' preparation process, parents should provide a deep understanding and full support to ensure minimal impact on their studies and daily lives. Secondly, family members should understand and support each other, jointly creating a high-quality environment conducive to students' preparation, allowing them to focus on their studies. Finally, parents need to provide emotional support and encouragement to students preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination, and conduct psychological counseling when necessary to eliminate psychological pressure, improve psychological quality, and achieve good study results. This emotional support not only alleviates students' stress but also boosts their confidence, helping them better prepare for the examination.

### **5. Conclusion**

In summary, in recent years, the willingness of undergraduates to take the postgraduate entrance examination has been declining year by year. The difficulty of preparation, pressure of preparation, clarity of goals, academic planning, cost of preparation, and family atmosphere all significantly affect undergraduates' willingness to take the examination. Therefore, students should clarify their goal planning, strengthen psychological adjustment, and families should strengthen economic security and create a harmonious atmosphere, in order to effectively enhance the willingness of undergraduates to take the postgraduate entrance examination.

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