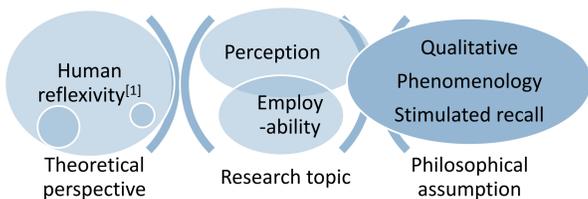


Background

Employability is becoming an integral part of higher education in public policy in this decade, and it has been a concept of interest for researchers in recent years.

There is lack of consistency in terms of the definition of employability. Some definitions have emphasized generic skills, others knowledge related to the subject area and attitude. Rothwell and Arnold (2007) subsequently proposed a theoretical framework which distinguished self-perceived employability from subjective career success and professional commitment.

Most research data concerning students' self-perceived employability were collected using large-scale surveys and analysed quantitatively focusing on factors relating to students' perceptions of employability. Research on employability with undergraduate and postgraduate Chinese students has been the main focus of Chinese research, focusing on labour market demand or considering employment itself. There has been a lack of attention paid to Chinese students' self-perceived employability in UK during their postgraduate study.



Introduction

Adopting a qualitative approach, this paper focuses on developing a nuanced understanding of the decision-making processes, expected outcomes and self-perceived employability of postgraduate Chinese international students attending an English university. Two key issues are explored as part of this study:

1. how employability is embedded in an English university;
2. Chinese domiciled international students' perceptions of employability.

A phenomenological methodology is applied to investigate these issues, using document analysis concerning the emerging agenda of employability in English higher education policy and the relevant policies of the institution where this research is conducted. Additionally, Stimulated Recall (SR) interview method is used to explore students' intentions for study and their current perceptions of employability. Participants for this study are Chinese domiciled international students who are current students studying on master-level programmes in an English university. The main contribution of this paper is to generate the perspective of Chinese international postgraduate students studying at an English university concerning how they perceive their employability prospects during their master-level study in the UK. This perspective is currently underrepresented.

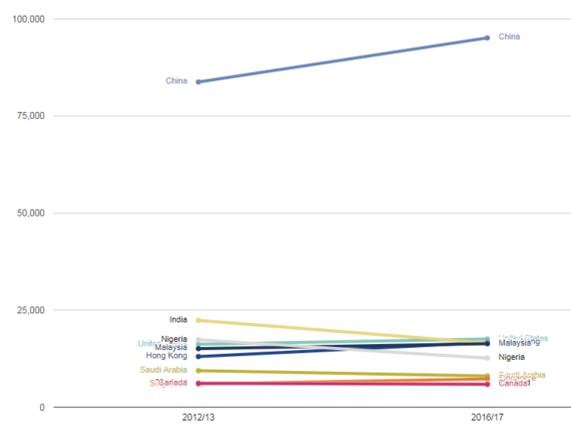


Chart 1. Top ten non-European Union countries of domicile for HE student enrolments in 2012/13 and 2016/17. Source: extracted from Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017

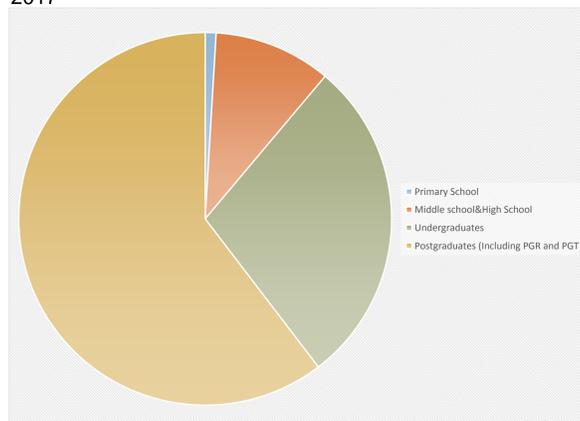


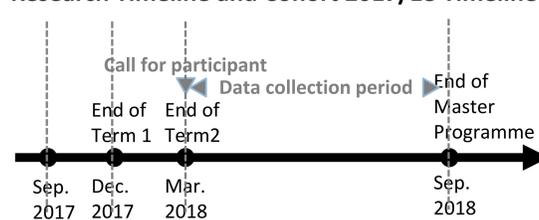
Chart 2. Chinese students in UK by level of study 2016/2017 academic year. Source: extracted from Report on Chinese Students' Oversea Study

Methodology

Participant

Cohort 2017/2018 Chinese domiciled international master-level postgraduates at the University of Exeter

Research Timeline and Cohort 2017/18 Timeline



Stimulated recall approach

Approach: retrospective remedy for previous experience; introspective process and reflection

Photo as elicitation: Retrieving long-term memory [2]

Theoretical support: Verbal data, long-term/short-term memory [1]

Data collection

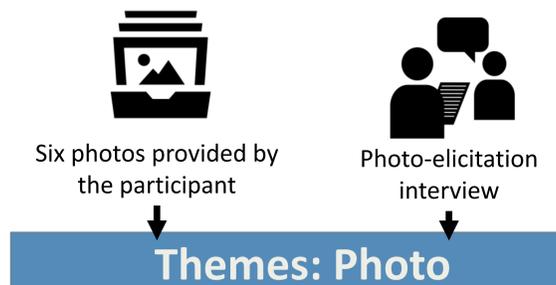


Figure 1. Peer connections.



Figure 2. Networking.



Figure 3. Local engagement.



Figure 4. Travel.

Themes: Interview

Theme 1: Value of their experience in the UK, a master degree has little contribution to their employability

Theme 2: Compare with more experienced or more knowledgeable peers, participants, who has no previous working experience, believe they could bring creativity to their potential employer.

Themes 3: Be professional, by appearance, by the professional ways of working

Conclusions

I present a method to gathering how students make sense of their international study experience. Initially, semi-structured interview is proposed to solve the research question. An outcome of the study with original methodology indicates that there is something to be improved. Problems occurred in original methodology is that, it is not sufficient to recall the experience and investigate participants' reflection about their experience. Extra resources are required for previous experience elicitation. Based on this, stimulated recall approach is proposed. I, therefore, demonstrate a practical way to investigate how students "making [their] way through the world". To do this, participants are invited to share six photos taken since they first time arrived in the UK for their master degree. These photos are used as retrospective remedy for previous experience. My current work includes continue on data collection and try to recruit participants from different discipline. This study can contribute to providing the international perspective to University of Exeter education strategy and postgraduate attributes.

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