

“Promoting digital employment intention among students of Chinese higher education institutions”

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PROMOTING DIGITAL EMPLOYMENT INTENTION AMONG STUDENTS OF CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Abstract

Digital employment is one of the critical concepts of the digital economy for sustainable development. Promoting digital employment intention of potential employees is indispensable for developing the digital economy. The study aims to explore how digital employment policies predict digital employment intentions and to construct a structural equation model. Based on an online survey of 470 students with digital work experience from Chinese higher education institutions, the data were processed using SPSS 26.0 and Amos 26.0. The results uncover that digital employment policies have a positive impact on digital employability ($\beta = 0.538$, $p < 0.001$), digital employment capital ($\beta = 0.524$, $p < 0.001$), and digital employment intentions ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < 0.001$). At the same time, digital employability ($\beta = 0.216$, $p < 0.001$) and digital employment capital ($\beta = 0.505$, $p < 0.001$) also have a positive impact on digital employment intentions. The structural equation model emphasizes the significant mediating effect of digital employability (0.116) and digital employment capital (0.265). Therefore, the government should actively promote digital policies to encourage and enhance digital employment capabilities, promoting digital employment intentions and behaviors. The support and development of digital employability by the entire society, especially schools, and families, is also significant.

Keywords

digital economy, digital employment, employment policies, employment capital, structural equation model, employability

JEL Classification

I28, I31, J15, J38

INTRODUCTION

Industry 4.0 and artificial intelligence have significantly changed the employment landscape, creating new opportunities and challenges, particularly for college students (Krasna et al., 2021). The digital economy, characterized by digitization, networking, and artificial intelligence, has given rise to new formats and employment models, transforming various industries (Bertolini et al., 2021).

This shift toward digital employment has prompted governments worldwide to seek ways to seize the opportunities presented by the digital economy and address its associated challenges (Frennert, 2019). It is essential to ensure that this transition toward a digital economy is inclusive and equitable, leaving no one behind. In this context, the employment of college students becomes a critical concern, encompassing aspects of education, management, markets, and economics (Zaboski et al., 2019).

Digital employment can eliminate time and space barriers and provide a global worker market (Scheer et al., 2023). In the era of digital

intelligence, breakthroughs are taking place in all walks of life (Luo et al., 2023). Youths need digital skills to find decent jobs (López Peláez et al., 2020). Digital innovation for sustainable development networks promoting digital entrepreneurship and innovation is also crucial (ElMassah & Mohieldin, 2020). Thus, most governments create an enabling environment for digital employment by adopting policies that promote investment in digital infrastructure, provide incentives for digital businesses, and protect the rights of digital workers (Nguimkeu & Okou, 2021).

It is vital to build a more equitable, inclusive, and upwardly mobile society from the “digital divide” to “digital inclusion” and ensure that disadvantaged groups overcome obstacles; thus, digital employment policies and digital employment capabilities have great potential (Morze et al., 2021).

The current research on digital employment has achieved some results, mainly the definition of digital employment (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020; Cetindamar Kozanoglu & Abedin, 2021), the skills required (Ciarli et al., 2021), and the opportunities and challenges it faces (Saura et al., 2022). Despite some progress in understanding digital employment, there is still a knowledge gap regarding the factors influencing college students’ intentions toward digital employment. Although research has examined employment intentions among higher education students, factors specific to digital employment intentions remain relatively unexplored (Boldureanu et al., 2020). Understanding these factors is crucial for policymakers, educators, and employers to develop effective strategies to foster a workforce prepared for the digital economy.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory of planned behavior emphasizes the predictive significance of policies on behavior (Razali et al., 2020). Employment research discusses attitudes, subjective norms, intentions, and behaviors and develops many external variables (Farrukh et al., 2019). In addition, supporting coalition theory is used to explain the impact of policy factors on employment intentions (Hussaini et al., 2018). This theory suggests that the level of support or opposition to a policy will depend on the extent to which different coalitions or groups with shared interests are either for or against the policy (Agnier et al., 2020; Sotirov et al., 2021). In addition, the social capital theory emphasizes that the employment capital brought by family, education, and society to college students can positively predict employment intentions in studying employee behavior (Bowen et al., 2022).

Using these theories, the study aims to interpret the relationship between digital employment policy, digital employability, digital employment capital, and digital employment intention to inspire the government, college students, employees, and schools to promote digital employment in today’s economy.

Digital employment policies aim to effectively address the challenges and seize the opportunities presented by the ongoing digitization of the economy and the workforce (Hosan et al., 2022). These policies make workers acquire knowledge and skills to thrive in the digital age while fostering the equitable distribution of benefits derived from digital transformation across society (Jones et al., 2021). Digital employment policies ensure workers succeed in an increasingly digitized economy (Chen et al., 2021).

Digital employability refers to the skills, knowledge, and attitudes employers need in the competitive environment (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020). It encompasses a range of digital skills, including technical skills such as coding and data analysis, and broader digital competencies such as digital literacy, digital citizenship, and digital creativity (Milenkova & Lendzhova, 2021). Digital employability is increasingly essential in sustainable economic development, where digital technologies transform work and create new job opportunities (Lyu & Liu, 2021). In order to succeed in this rapidly changing environment, workers must adapt to new technologies and ways of working and demonstrate the ability to collaborate, communicate, and think critically in digital contexts.

Employment policies that promote skill development through training and education programs can increase the employability of workers (M et al., 2022). Hence, they improve the overall employability of the workforce, particularly in regions or industries where jobs are scarce (Hutchings et al., 2020). Policies supporting entrepreneurship and small businesses can also create new job opportunities and encourage innovation, ultimately improving employability in the long run (Dvouletý et al., 2021).

Employment policies address barriers to employment, such as discrimination, lack of access to childcare, or inadequate transportation. More and more people enter the workforce and increase their employability (Huot et al., 2021). Moreover, policies provide job security, such as minimum wage laws or employment protections, which give workers more stability and confidence in their employment prospects, improving their employability and encouraging them to invest in their skills and training (Straub et al., 2022).

Digital employment intention refers to a person's desire or willingness to seek or pursue employment opportunities that involve digital technologies, such as working in the tech industry or a job that requires advanced digital skills (Bartolomé et al., 2022). As the world increasingly digitizes, many individuals recognize the importance of acquiring digital skills and seeking job opportunities (Allmann & Blank, 2021). Thus, digital employment intention is essential in shaping the future of work and the digital economy (Litvinenko, 2020).

Digital employability ensures that workers have and maintain job opportunities that require digital skills and knowledge (Mahajan et al., 2022). Individuals who have developed digital employability skills, such as proficiency in using software, data analytics, and programming languages, tend to be more successful in the digital economy (Smaldone et al., 2022).

Developing digital employability skills also increases individuals' confidence in performing well in a digital job (Toth et al., 2020). Considering the growing use of technology in many industries, possessing digital employability skills expands

an individual's job opportunities, making them more attractive to employers (Duggan et al., 2022). Digital employability skills can also lead to career advancement opportunities, such as promotions or new job opportunities in the digital field (Di Gregorio et al., 2019).

Employment policy promotes skill development programs that enhance individuals' employability. Such programs include education and training programs that provide individuals with the necessary skills to succeed (Okolie et al., 2020). Employment policies provide access to employment opportunities by promoting job creation and incentivizing businesses to hire individuals with employability skills (Aitken & Singh, 2023). Furthermore, the policies that support employability can increase individuals' confidence in their ability to obtain employment opportunities in the labor market, which leads to greater employment intention (Schettino et al., 2022).

Digital employment capital refers to the collection of digital skills, knowledge, and experiences that can be used to secure and succeed in digital employment opportunities (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020). Digital employment capital is vital in the digital economy, as employers seek skilled individuals to operate in a digital environment (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020). Individuals with excellent digital employment capital tend to successfully obtain and maintain employment in the digital field. They are more likely to be considered for promotions and career advancement opportunities (Reddick et al., 2020). Digital employment capital can be developed through education and training programs focusing on digital technologies and work experience in digital jobs (Deng et al., 2023).

Employment policies that advocate for education and training programs play a vital role in assisting individuals in developing the essential skills and knowledge required to excel in the dynamic job market (Boeren, 2019). Such programs include vocational training, apprenticeships, and other initiatives that provide individuals with practical, hands-on experience in the digital field (Andersen & Pitkänen, 2019).

Employment policies incentivize organizations to invest in employee training and develop a skilled

workforce (Stachová et al., 2019). By encouraging organizations to invest in their employees, employment policies can build employment capital (Lenihan et al., 2019). Furthermore, the policies that promote access to employment opportunities, such as digital job boards and other initiatives that connect job seekers with potential employers, increase the likelihood that individuals with high employment capital will successfully obtain employment (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020).

Employment capital encompasses the valuable resources, skills, and experiences individuals possess and can leverage to elevate their employability and career prospects (Baluku et al., 2021). Networking is vital for career development, and having substantial employment capital makes it easier to connect with professionals and organizations (Ruparel et al., 2020). Employment capital enhances job satisfaction since competent and skilled individuals will be engaged and fulfilled in their work (Ali & Mehreen, 2020). Thus, in the digital economy era, employment capital is valuable for individuals seeking employment (Shibata, 2020).

Employment policies such as training and education programs can improve an individual's employment capital (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020). Employment policies always provide support and resources to job seekers, such as job placement services and career counseling, which is a benefit for individuals to build their employment capital and access new job opportunities (Autin et al., 2020). A supportive and inclusive work environment can increase an individual's employment capital by boosting their confidence and motivation to succeed (Szulc et al., 2021). Employment policies that facilitate networking opportunities can also help individuals build their employment capital by allowing them to connect with professionals in their field (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021).

Overall, organizations and governments prioritizing employment policies that support the development of employment capital are more likely to see positive outcomes in terms of employment intention and job market outcomes (Daraba et al., 2021).

This study aims to analyze the factors that motivate individuals to succeed in the digital environ-

ment. It proposes a structural equation model to promote digital employment. Thus, the paper develops the following hypotheses:

- H1: *Digital employment policy has a positive effect on digital employment intention.*
- H2: *Digital employment policy has a positive effect on digital employability.*
- H3: *Digital employability has a positive effect on digital employment intention.*
- H4: *Digital employability mediates the relationship between digital employment policy and digital employment intention.*
- H5: *Digital employment policy has a positive effect on digital employment capital.*
- H6: *Digital employment capital has a positive effect on digital employment intention.*
- H7: *Digital employment capital mediates the relationship between digital employment policy and digital employment intention.*

2. METHOD

An online questionnaire acquired 470 valid responses from Chinese participants with digital work experience. These participants were chosen through random sampling, leading to a non-uniform demographic distribution. This disparity, however, can offer insights into the influence of demographic variables on employees' digital employment intentions.

The questionnaire, designed through discussions on pertinent subjects, is divided into four sections. The first part collects basic demographic information. Subsequently, the second part gauges digital employment policies through a 7-question survey from Rhodes (2015). The third section assesses digital employability, borrowing six items from Smaldone et al. (2022). The fourth part measures digital employment capital using a 7-question set from Shah et al. (2019). The last part determines digital employment intention utilizing seven items from Shah et al. (2019).

The original scale underwent adaptation and modification to align with the study’s emphasis on digital employment intention. All questions were evaluated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7. This scale signified different levels of agreement, spanning from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

The data were analyzed using SPSS 26 (for descriptive statistics and data reliability) and Amos 26 (for aggregation and discrimination validity, and confirmatory factor, model fit and path analyses). Ultimately, the study developed the structural equation model, illustrating digital employment intention among Chinese higher education students.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 provides demographic information. The majority are over 26 years old, indicating that this age group is a crucial demographic for digital employment, though few are over 36. Most participants come from families with an annual income below \$30,000; however, those above \$10,000 constitute an average of 372 individuals. Urban respondents (286) outnumbered those from rural areas (184). 218 respondents have a bachelor’s degree, suggesting that digital work in the digital economy era is not exclusive to those with ad-

Table 1. Demographic information

Characteristics	Frequency	Valid Percent (%)
Gender	Male	50.9
	Female	49.1
Age	<20	8.5
	20-25	19.8
	26-30	34.3
	31-35	20.0
	36-40	8.3
	>40	9.1
	Annual Family income	<10000\$
	10000\$-20000\$	24.3
	20000\$-25000\$	29.8
	25000\$-30000\$	25.1
	>30000\$	11.5
Location	Rural area	39.1
	Urban area	60.9
Education level	Under bachelor	20.0
	Bachelor	46.4
	Master	19.1
	Doctor	14.5

vanced degrees. There are not many of those with master’s or doctor’s degrees, reflecting the national educational landscape where advanced degree holders constitute a smaller demographic.

Next, the study checks the data for reliability, i.e., stability and consistency, to measure the intended variables (Griffin et al., 2022). The Cronbach’s α value, a commonly used reliability coefficient, is generally considered acceptable if greater than 0.7, with values over 0.9 indicating good validity (Griffin et al., 2022). As per Table 2, the 27-question scale used in this study has a Cronbach’s α of 0.971, indicating excellent validity.

Table 2. Reliability statistics

Cronbach’s Alpha	Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.971	.971	27

Validity assesses whether measuring tools or methods accurately gauge the intended variables or phenomena, i.e., the extent to which the measurement represents what it aims to measure. Generally, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy greater than 0.6 indicates correlation, and a significance level (Sig) less than 0.05 is statistically significant, implying that the scale is suitable for factor analysis (Griffin et al., 2022). The questionnaire data indicate good internal consistency if KMO is greater than 0.9 and Sig

equals 0.000, suggesting a sound dimensional division and question selection. According to Table 3, KMO equals 0.988, exceeding 0.9, and Sig is 0.000, demonstrating that the questionnaire data are valid.

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett’s test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.988
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	8765.352
	df	351
	Sig.	.000

Aggregation validity refers to the similarity of results when measuring the same characteristic using varied measurement methods. An acceptable Composite Reliability (CR) value is greater than 0.7. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) measures the latent variables’ average explanatory power; the higher the AVE, the better the convergent validity. An AVE value should typically exceed 0.5, with a threshold of 0.36-0.50 considered acceptable (Mueller & Hancock, 2018).

This study employed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), using CR and AVE as convergence validity evaluation criteria. The convergent validity is deemed good if each factor’s CR value is above 0.7 and the AVE exceeds 0.50. Discriminant validity is established when the square root of each factor’s AVE is greater than its correlation coefficient with other factors (Mueller & Hancock, 2018). Tables 4 and 5 show the results of the respective tests. Figure 1 presents the CFA results.

Table 4. Aggregate validity test

Latent variables	Items	Factor loading	CR	AVE
DEP	DEP1	0.807	0.906	0.586
	DEP2	0.783		
	DEP3	0.834		
	DEP4	0.466		
	DEP5	0.742		
	DEP6	0.824		
	DEP7	0.833		
DEA	DEA1	0.756	0.877	0.549
	DEA2	0.770		
	DEA3	0.789		
	DEA4	0.816		
	DEA5	0.785		
	DEA6	0.475		

Latent variables	Items	Factor loading	CR	AVE
DEC	DEC1	0.756	0.859	0.481
	DEC2	0.351		
	DEC3	0.810		
	DEC4	0.806		
	DEC5	0.723		
	DEC6	0.787		
	DEC7	0.476		
DEI	DEI1	0.798	0.884	0.526
	DEI2	0.737		
	DEI3	0.479		
	DEI4	0.735		
	DEI5	0.668		
	DEI6	0.780		
	DEI7	0.823		

Note: DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

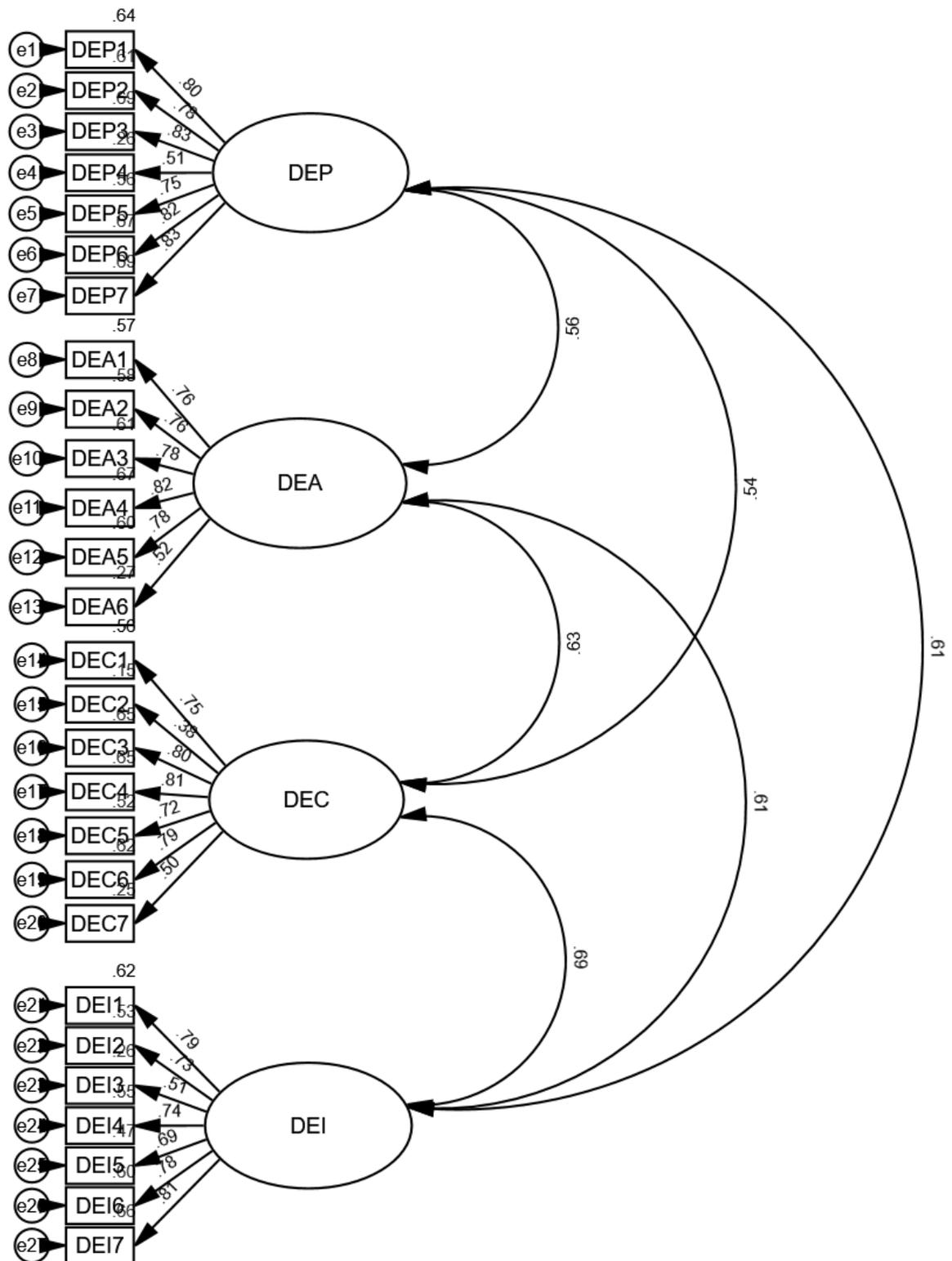
Table 5. Differentiation validity test

Latent variable	1	2	3	4
DEP	0.766			
DEA	0.563	0.741		
DEC	0.536	0.629	0.694	
DEI	0.612	0.605	0.688	0.725

Note: The diagonal line is the square root of the corresponding dimension AVE. DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

Tables 4 and 5 illustrate convergent validity and discriminant validity, respectively, among which AVE = 0.481 (< 0.5) of digital employment capital may be unqualified, and CR index meets the standard. However, it can be seen from the fitting index that X²/df, GFI, AGFI, and NFI did not reach the standard. The study checked the modification output, sorted the MI values from large to small, and found the residuals corresponding to items DEP4, DEA6, DEC2, DEC7, and DEI3. Differences e4, e13, e15, e20, e23, and other latent variables have higher MI values, so these five items are deleted for optimal fitting.

After deleting the items, the fitting index of the confirmatory factor has been improved, X²/df = 2.175(< 3), RMSEA = 0.050(< 0.08), GFI = 0.923 (> 0.9), AGFI = 0.904(> 0.85), NFI = 0.933 (> 0.9), TLI = 0.957 (> 0.9), and CFI = 0.962 (> 0.9), indicating that the fitting index reached the reference standard, as shown in Table 7.



Note: DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis

Table 6. Modification indices

Model Adjustment Suggestions			M.I.	Par Change
e20	↔	DEC	8.009	-0.147
e20	↔	DEP	9.191	0.207
e21	↔	DEP	4.247	-0.106
e22	↔	DEA	6.595	-0.081
e23	↔	DEI	25.821	-0.277
e23	↔	DEC	14.048	0.188
e23	↔	DEP	8.441	0.191
e23	↔	e22	5.105	-0.148
e24	↔	e14	8.939	-0.149
e25	↔	DEI	7.570	-0.134
e25	↔	DEC	5.899	0.110
e25	↔	e14	14.174	0.207
e27	↔	e23	11.247	-0.191
e15	↔	DEI	9.502	0.191
e15	↔	DEC	20.615	-0.258
e15	↔	DEA	5.777	0.099
e16	↔	DEI	11.294	-0.139
e16	↔	e22	6.201	-0.124
e16	↔	e26	5.513	-0.108
e17	↔	DEP	5.340	-0.114
e17	↔	e14	6.019	0.110
e18	↔	DEP	6.534	0.145
e18	↔	e21	6.590	-0.130
e18	↔	e25	7.450	0.159
e18	↔	e26	6.521	-0.133
e18	↔	e16	4.725	0.105
e19	↔	DEP	4.314	-0.111
e19	↔	e21	10.250	0.153
e19	↔	e25	13.517	-0.201
e19	↔	e26	7.444	0.134
e19	↔	e27	5.373	-0.107
e8	↔	e22	6.145	-0.134
e8	↔	e26	5.976	0.122
e8	↔	e16	6.840	0.123
e8	↔	e17	4.502	-0.098
e9	↔	e25	5.747	0.136
e9	↔	e8	6.712	-0.133
e10	↔	e16	4.957	0.100
e10	↔	e19	6.765	-0.124
e11	↔	e16	8.483	-0.120
e12	↔	DEC	4.780	-0.087
e12	↔	e27	5.376	0.105
e12	↔	e9	12.468	0.174
e13	↔	DEI	38.790	0.344
e13	↔	DEC	7.586	0.139
e13	↔	DEA	38.484	-0.226
e13	↔	e21	8.581	0.174
e13	↔	e23	17.139	0.314
e13	↔	e24	7.295	0.167
e13	↔	e9	10.856	-0.209
e13	↔	e12	6.542	-0.153
e1	↔	DEI	6.234	-0.106
e1	↔	DEP	4.442	0.107
e1	↔	e26	5.649	-0.112
e2	↔	DEC	9.819	0.124

Table 6 (cont.). Modification indices

	Model Adjustment Suggestions		M.I.	Par Change
e2	↔	DEA	7.783	-0.080
e2	↔	e21	4.560	-0.100
e2	↔	e22	10.876	0.171
e3	↔	DEI	6.195	0.099
e3	↔	e27	12.748	0.148
e3	↔	e16	8.684	-0.122
e3	↔	e1	5.456	0.098
e4	↔	DEI	24.492	0.245
e4	↔	DEC	5.839	0.110
e4	↔	DEA	64.961	0.265
e4	↔	DEP	84.983	-0.547
e4	↔	e26	4.921	0.122
e4	↔	e15	77.798	0.678
e4	↔	e9	11.210	0.191
e4	↔	e1	7.267	-0.142
e4	↔	e3	9.684	-0.153
e5	↔	e14	5.281	0.116
e5	↔	e18	8.277	-0.153
e5	↔	e9	4.750	0.113
e6	↔	DEI	4.992	-0.092
e6	↔	e14	8.416	-0.134
e6	↔	e5	9.907	-0.145
e7	↔	e3	7.253	-0.114
e7	↔	e4	4.100	-0.108
e7	↔	e6	12.048	0.152

Note: DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

Table 7. Confirmatory factor analysis model fitting index after deletion and correction

	Index	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
	Standard index	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.85	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Results	Before correlation	3.570	0.074	0.862	0.836	0.855	0.879	0.891
	After correlation	2.175	0.050	0.923	0.904	0.933	0.957	0.962

After model fitness analysis and adjustment, Table 8 emphasizes that the AVE value of each variable in terms of convergent validity is between 0.575-0.648, exceeding the standard of 0.5, and the CR value of 0.884-0.917 exceeds 0.7. It shows that the convergent validity is reliable.

Table 9 presents the results of the discriminant validity analysis after excluding the topic. The absolute values of the correlation coefficients between two factors are smaller than the square root of the corresponding factor's average variance extracted (AVE). This indicates a sufficient level of discrimination among the four factors under study. Consequently, the removed topic demonstrates reliable discriminant validity for the remaining scale.

At the same time, Figure 2 shows the results of another confirmatory factor analysis after deleting the topic, and all the indicators are more appropriate.

Following the reliability and validity analyses and verification of factor analysis results, the study proceeded with path analysis. Software was used for model fitting after constructing the structural equation model (SEM). This provided the estimated detection path values, standardized path coefficients, standard errors (S.E.), composite reliability (C.R.) values, and significance (P) values.

Amos software was used to calculate the estimated value of the detection path, standardized path coefficient, standard error (S.E.), composite re-

Table 8. Aggregate validity test (after deletion and correction)

Latent variables	Items	Factor loading	CR	AVE
DEP	DEP1	0.804	0.917	0.648
	DEP2	0.781		
	DEP3	0.839		
	DEP5	0.750		
	DEP6	0.819		
	DEP7	0.832		
	DEA	DEA1		
DEA2		0.774		
DEA3		0.784		
DEA4		0.817		
DEA5		0.785		
DEC	DEC1	0.757	0.884	0.605
	DEC3	0.809		
	DEC4	0.805		
	DEC5	0.718		
	DEC6	0.795		
DEI	DEI1	0.787	0.890	0.575
	DEI2	0.732		
	DEI4	0.737		
	DEI5	0.685		
	DEI6	0.780		
	DEI7	0.823		

Note: DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

Table 9. Differentiation validity test (after correction)

Latent variables	1	2	3	4
DEP	0.805			
DEA	0.520	0.784		
DEC	0.492	0.589	0.778	
DEI	0.576	0.564	0.653	0.758

Note: The diagonal line is the square root of the corresponding dimension AVE. DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

Table 10. SEM path test

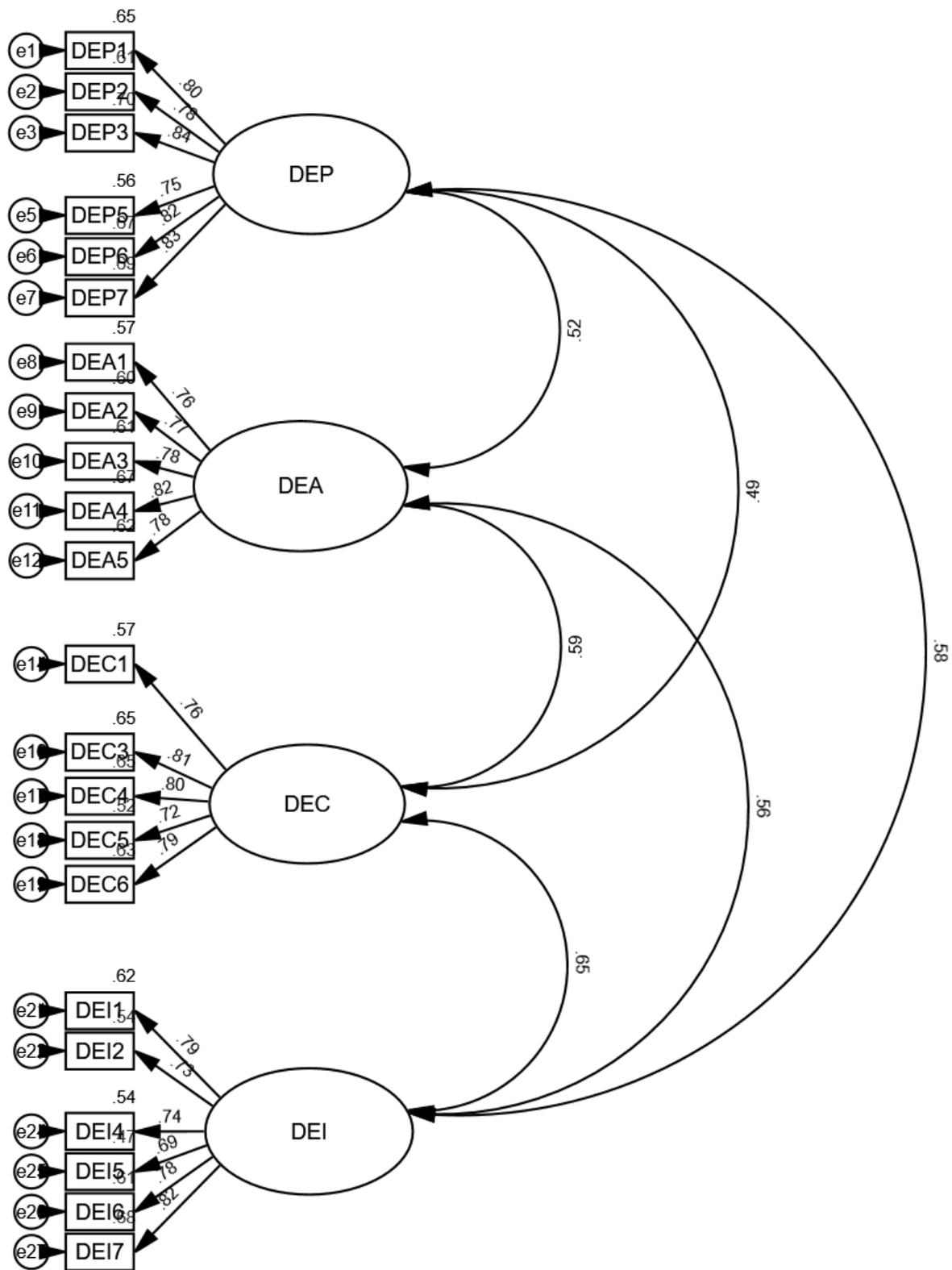
Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	β	S.E.	C.R.	P
H2	DEP→DEA	0.446	0.538	0.043	10.288	***
H5	DEP→DEC	0.286	0.524	0.037	7.786	***
H1	DEP→DEI	0.211	0.257	0.043	4.954	***
H3	DEA→DEI	0.214	0.216	0.052	4.154	***
H6	DEC→DEI	0.758	0.505	0.104	7.264	***

Note: *** - $P < 0.001$, the effect is dominant; DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

liability (C.R.) value, and significance (P) value. Conventionally, if the decision value C.R. exceeds 1.96 and the P value is below 0.05, the path coefficient is considered to pass the significance test within a 95% confidence interval. This implies that the corresponding path assumption of the pre-set model is validated. If these conditions are not met,

the assumption is considered unverified. The test results are as follows:

- The positive effect of digital employment policy on digital employment intention is significant ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H1 is supported.



Note: DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

Figure 2. Confirmatory factor analysis after model fitting

- The positive effect of digital employment policy on digital employability is significant ($\beta = 0.538, p < 0.001$). Therefore, H2 is supported.
- The positive effect of digital employability on digital employment intention is significant ($\beta = 0.216, p < 0.001$). Therefore, H3 is supported.
- The positive effect of digital employment policy on digital employment capital is significant ($\beta = 0.524, p < 0.001$). Therefore, H5 is supported.
- The positive effect of digital employment capital on digital employment intention is significant ($\beta = 0.505, p < 0.001$). Therefore, H6 is supported.

ty between digital employment policy and digital employment intention with a value of 0.116, supporting H4.

Similarly, the 95% confidence interval for the mediation path from digital employment policy to digital employment capital to digital employment intention is [0.162,0.283], excluding 0. This indicates a significant mediating role for digital employment capital between digital employment policy and digital employment intention with a value of 0.265, thereby supporting H7.

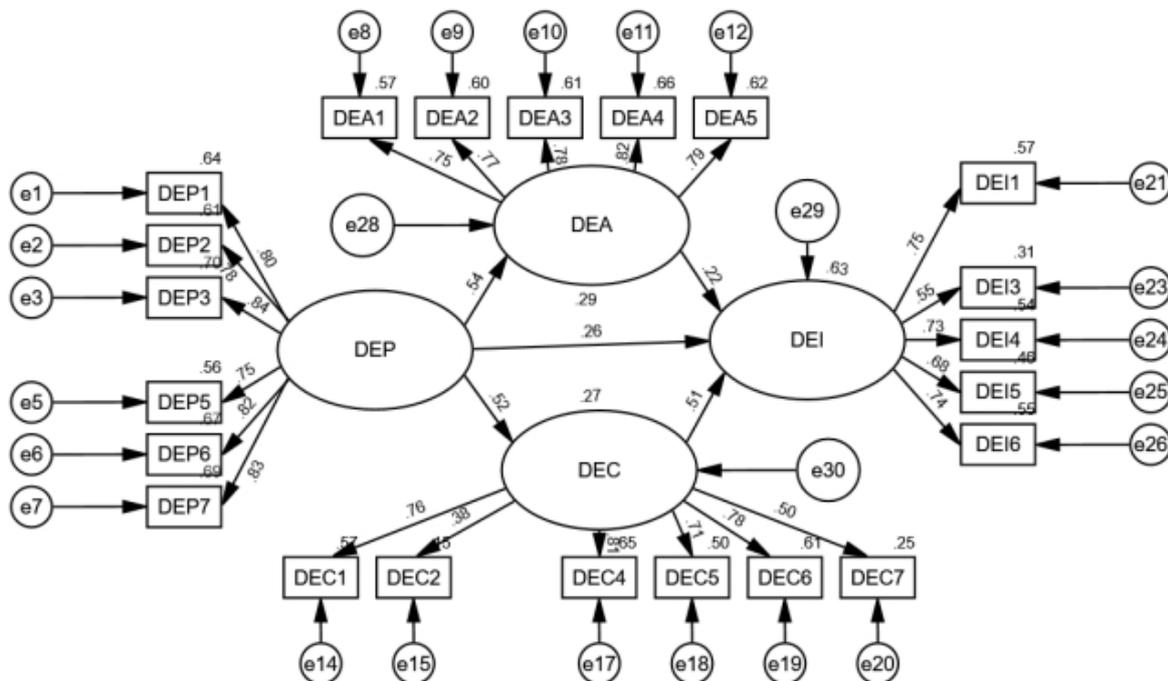
Table 11. Mediation effect bootstrap test

Indirect path	Effects	S.E.	Bias-Corrected 95%CI	
			Lower	Upper
DEP→DEA→DEI	0.116	0.028	0.045	0.153
DEP→DEC→DEI	0.265	0.031	0.162	0.283

Note: DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

After the direct effect analysis, the study conducted the mediation effect analysis (Table 11). It is shown that the 95% confidence interval for the mediation path from digital employment policy to digital employability to digital employment intention is [0.045,0.153], excluding 0. This suggests a significant mediating role for digital employability

Figure 3 shows a constructed model of the relationships between digital employability, digital employment capital, digital employment policy, and digital employment intention.



Note: DEP – digital employment policy; DEA – digital employability; DEC – digital employment capital; DEI – digital employment intention.

Figure 3. Structural equation model of digital employment intention

4. DISCUSSION

Digitalization has changed the traditional employment model, and digital employment is vital for economic development (Pu et al., 2022). Policies, education, and skills should have innovations in the digital era to meet the potential for future development (Jiang & Pu, 2022). This study discusses the online survey conducted by higher education students from China, verifying the role of digital employment policies on digital employment intentions and emphasizing the mediating role of digital employability and digital employment capital in the model.

Earlier research demonstrated the relationship between employment policy (Alshareef et al., 2020; Galvin et al., 2020; Monareng et al., 2019; Oh & Kim, 2019), employability (Deng et al., 2022; Hulsegge et al., 2022), employment capital (Grebe, 2020; Lloyd et al., 2019), and employment intention. Applying these findings to the context of digital employment has enriched employment theory and provided more clues for digital employment research. And this paper emphasizes the positive impact of digital employment on economic and social development.

Some studies discuss opportunities and challenges in digital employment, but most are qualitative (Jiang & Pu, 2022). In addition, although the predictive effects of employability and employment capital on employment intention have been discussed in some specific contexts (Grebe, 2020; Lloyd et al., 2019), the model in this paper regards them as intermediary factors, innovating their roles. In addition, the study integrates social support theory, employability theory, and social capital theory to create a digital employment intention model, promoting the research of employment intention.

Following the research findings, the government should promote digital employment policies. The purpose of government and relevant departments

in formulating policies should address digital skills and knowledge to promote their employability, enhance employment capital, and cultivate positive digital employment intentions. Secondly, digital employability positively affects employment intentions, inspiring practitioners to integrate into the digital era actively, strive to learn digital knowledge, master relevant skills, and understand digital employment trends, to make more sharing for the digital economy.

Digital employment capital has inspired the possible contributions that schools and families can make to promoting digital employment. Specifically, schools should actively develop digital courses, emphasizing the importance of digital practice and learning. Families should encourage their children to learn digital content and let more of the next generation understand the opportunities and capabilities of digital creation. Schools and families provide students with digital support, including emotional and knowledge skills support.

Although the study integrates multiple theories to interpret employment intention from the perspective of policy, ability, and capital, however, the participants in the study are all from the internet. They need to be more targeted and accurate, which cannot reflect the current situation of digital employment in China as a whole. Therefore, future research needs to refine the research object further. Secondly, the paper mainly discusses the digital employment intention model from the perspective of policy, psychology, and behavior. Therefore, technical, economic, and educational discussions may be more in-depth. Subsequent research may focus on these perspectives and address this issue from more dimensions. Finally, digital employment is not only a challenge facing China, but almost the world is striving for the opportunities the digital economy brings. Therefore, there will be more new progress in studying digital employment through cross-border comparisons or in the context of other countries.

CONCLUSION

Using quantitative methods, the aim of the study was to predict digital employment intentions and to propose a structural equation model for understanding digital employment policies affecting digital employment intentions. The study reveals that digital employment policies, digital employment, and

employment capital significantly influence digital employment intentions. Notably, the role of employability and capital is not just direct but also intermediary in impacting these intentions. This suggests that comprehensive strategies for digital employment are needed, involving policy design and development of employability and capital. This conclusion illuminates several areas for all stakeholders. For governments, it underscores the necessity of designing robust digital employment policies and creating an environment conducive to building digital skills and capital. Clearly, such measures could foster higher digital employment intentions, thus boosting the digital economy. The results imply the importance of embracing digital literacy to families, fostering employability, and accumulating employment capital, as these factors can significantly influence one's intention to engage in digital employment. Therefore, home education plays a crucial role in preparing individuals for the digital workforce. Society could benefit from the widespread dissemination of digital skills and resources. Social institutions, including educational and non-profit organizations, can contribute by offering training programs and resources to help individuals improve their digital employability and build their digital capital. The collective effort could lead to a more digitally adept and economically robust society.

This study provides more clues for research on digital employment and encourages other countries to engage in relevant research actively. Promoting digital employment takes years of effort to forge a grand occasion. Concepts such as online education, artificial intelligence, the metaverse, and modern family concepts and life should contribute to advocating digital employment intentions.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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