

# Research on the Implementation Effect of College Student Conscription Policy in Nanjing - Based on the Revised Smith Model

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## Abstract

College student conscription serves as a critical measure to improve the quality of military personnel and optimize the troop structure under the goal of strengthening the military in the new era. Nanjing has implemented a series of national and provincial conscription policies for college students and rolled out local supporting incentive measures to steadily promote conscription work in local universities. Based on Smith's policy implementation model, this paper constructs a revised Smith analytical framework to address the original model's insufficient attention to individual implementers. From four dimensions, namely idealized policy, policy implementers, target groups, and policy environment, combined with questionnaire surveys and interview data. This paper analyzes the achievements of Nanjing's college student conscription policy, sorts out practical difficulties in policy delivery, explores the underlying causes, and puts forward countermeasures to optimize policy implementation. It aims to further unleash the effectiveness of the college student conscription policy and provide references for conscription practice in local universities.

## Keywords

Conscription policy, Smith model, College students, Policy implementation

## Introduction

Universities are important positions for national defense education and talent cultivation. Encouraging high-quality college students to enlist in military service is an important way to implement the strategy of strengthening the military through talent and science-technology. It bears great significance for improving the quality of military recruits and realizing the modernization of national defense and the armed forces. Since China launched the pilot conscription program for full-time college students in 2001, the central government, Jiangsu Province, and Nanjing Municipality have successively issued a set of preferential incentive policies. These policies cover economic subsidies, tuition compensation, further-education support, and employment guarantee, which have continuously stimulated college students' enthusiasm for enlistment.

Nevertheless, the expected effects of policy design are not fully realized in grassroots implementation. In the actual operation of college-student conscription work in Nanjing, there remain prominent practical dilemmas.

Firstly, there are deviations in policy transmission:

Multi-level policy texts are updated frequently, and some clauses are relatively principled, leading to inconsistent understanding among college students and grassroots implementers.

Secondly, the coordination of implementing subjects needs to be strengthened. Conscription involves multiple departments including conscription offices, education authorities, human-resources departments, finance departments, and universities. Information silos still exist between different entities, and the burden of university conscription work falls excessively on armed-forces department staff and part-time counselors. Thirdly, the cognition of target groups is differentiated. Some college students obtain conscription information merely from short-term concentrated publicity, with fragmented understanding of preferential policies, and their enlistment motivation is mixed [1]. Fourthly, the construction of the external policy environment is insufficient.

The integration of national-defense education and conscription mobilization on campus needs to be deepened. Some families still hold traditional prejudices

against college students' military service, forming restraining factors for students' enlistment choices.

Thomas B. Smith's classic policy-implementation model provides a systematic analytical perspective for evaluating public-policy effects. However, the original model focuses more on organizational institutions while neglecting the capacity, attitudes and status of individual front-line implementers. Against this background, this study revises the Smith model by adding the dimension of individual implementers within implementing subjects. This study collected data through questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews conducted among university students in Nanjing.

Drawing on these empirical materials, the paper systematically examines the implementation of Nanjing's college-student conscription policy. It summarizes the policy's outcomes, practical challenges, and underlying causes across four dimensions: idealized policy design, implementing subjects, policy target groups, and policy environment. Corresponding optimization countermeasures are put forward. This research is expected to promote the docking between conscription policy texts and grassroots practice, and provides empirical support for improving university conscription work and national-defense education governance in the new era.

### **Current implementation of college student conscription policy in Nanjing**

#### ***Overview of college student conscription policy documents in Nanjing***

At the national level, the Conscription Work Regulations set up a series of supporting systems for enlisted college students. These systems include multiple types of supportive benefits. They cover tuition compensation and reimbursement, bonus points and special admission quotas for postgraduate programs, targeted recruitment opportunities in civil service and public institutions, and academic benefits for students who resume their studies after discharge [2]. On this basis, Jiangsu Province has raised the economic allowance standard for conscripts and improved supporting policies on household registration and employment support.

In consideration of urban characteristics, Nanjing has further refined supporting policies: raising the allowance standard for college student conscripts and setting

differentiated subsidies by academic background. Authorities allocate targeted vacancies in public institutions and state-owned enterprises for college student veterans. They optimize household registration policies tailored to these veteran students. They also require universities to deliver internal supportive benefits, including major transfer eligibility and scholarship opportunities for students returning to campus after military service.

A multi-level conscription policy system covering the state, province, city, and universities has taken shape. The policy instruments fall into three categories: economic incentives, educational preferences, and employment guarantees. Their core goals are to expand the scale of college student recruitment and improve the quality of recruits. Overall, Nanjing's college student conscription policy is characterized by broad coverage, a well-structured hierarchical design, and diversified incentive tools. These features establish a solid institutional foundation for policy implementation.

#### ***Achievements of policy implementation***

First, the scale of recruited college students has steadily expanded, and the proportion of highly educated recruits keeps rising. Superimposed preferential policies have significantly boosted college students' enthusiasm for enlistment. An increasing number of undergraduates, junior college students and recent graduates are applying for military service. This trend optimizes the educational composition of recruits and helps achieve the policy objective of supplying high-quality young talent to the military.

Second, the university conscription work system has basically taken shape. Universities in Nanjing have established military affairs offices. These offices collaborate with student affairs departments, Communist Youth League committees, and faculty advisors to conduct policy publicity, complete preliminary registration reviews, and provide support for veteran students returning to study [3]. A university-local conscription office linkage mechanism has been initially established. This mechanism forms a collaborative implementation network between universities and military service authorities and consolidating the organizational foundation for policy execution.

Third, the delivery of preferential policies has achieved initial results. Core policies such as tuition compensation,

allowance payment and special postgraduate admission plans have been implemented. Demobilized college students have benefited from preferential treatment in further education and employment. The positive incentive effect of military service on college students' personal development gradually emerges, and a favorable social atmosphere of college students answering the call to serve the country is developing.

However, questionnaire and interview data of this project also reveal a gap between current implementation and the ideal state [4]. The completeness of policy texts does not automatically bring satisfactory implementation results. Bottlenecks still exist in policy transmission and resource conversion in certain areas, which deserve in-depth exploration.

### **Problems and cause analysis based on the revised Smith model**

#### ***Idealized policy: Inadequate coordination of policy texts and ambiguous detailed provisions***

An idealized policy refers to a scientific, clear and operable policy text. At present, there are numerous conscription policies issued at the national, provincial and municipal levels with frequent updates.

First, some clauses remain principled, and supporting detailed rules across provinces, cities, and universities lack unified coordination. For instance, the enforcement standards for employment preferences and major transfer policies vary across universities. Second, frequent policy iteration leads to alternation between old and new provisions [5]. The applicable scope of some preferential treatments is vaguely defined, which causing confusion among college students and grassroots implementers. Third, policy instruments are biased toward material incentives. Supporting policies for career development during service and long-term development after discharge are insufficient. The policies mainly focus on "encouraging enlistment" lacking systematic design for long-term guarantees after service. Deficiencies in systematic policy design objectively increase implementation difficulty at the grassroots level and destabilize expectation among target groups.

#### ***Implementing subjects: Insufficient inter-agency coordination and competence deficiencies among frontline staff***

In accordance with the revised Smith model, implementing subjects include both institutions and

individual implementers. From the perspective of institutional coordination, college student conscription engages multiple stakeholders. These stakeholders include local conscription offices, education bureaus, human resources and social security bureaus, finance departments, university military affairs offices, and faculty members.

The information-sharing mechanism between universities and local governments as well as among different government departments remains imperfect. For example, the disbursement of allowances and delivery of employment preferences requires multi-department approval, which involves cumbersome procedures and information barriers and tends to prolong processing cycles. Within universities, military affairs offices are understaffed, and conscription work largely relies on part-time faculty advisors. The linkage between faculties and military affairs offices is superficial.

From the perspective of individual implementers: On the one hand, many conscription operators in universities work part-time and experience high turnover. They cannot fully master rapidly updated conscription policies and fail to provide accurate responses to complicated student inquiries [6]. On the other hand, grassroots conscription teams face heavy recruitment pressure. Some work prioritizes "meeting recruitment quotas" over full-cycle policy services. More attention is paid to mobilization and registration, while follow-up support during service and post-discharge assistance are under-resourced, which directly undermines students' perception of policy benefits. The interplay of weak inter-agency coordination and limited staff competence forms a key constraint on policy delivery.

#### ***Target groups: Diversified policy awareness and biased perceptions of military service***

The target groups of this policy are full-time college students in Nanjing. Surveys show that college students differ greatly in their awareness of conscription policies. Some students obtain conscription information only from short-term concentrated publicity. Their understanding of core policies, such as tuition compensation, postgraduate preferences, and resettlement after discharge is fragmented and accompanied by misunderstandings [7]. In terms of enlistment motivation, some students volunteer to join the military out of patriotism and national defense awareness. Nevertheless, quite a few students are mainly attracted by financial subsidies and

postgraduate bonus points without sufficient psychological preparation for military life and service responsibilities. Meanwhile, influenced by employment anxiety, family attitudes, and personal career plans, many students hold low enlistment willingness even if they know the preferential policies. Veteran students also report that internal university preferential policies enjoy low visibility, and many only learn about relevant rights and interests after returning to campus. Cognitive biases among target groups weaken implementation effects and hinder the transformation of policy benefits into enlistment willingness and actual enlistment behavior.

#### ***Policy environment: Room for improvement in social, family, and university educational contexts***

Policy environment covers external conditions including social culture, family values, campus atmosphere and the broader employment and economic context [8]. From the social and family dimensions, although national defense awareness has improved nationwide, some families still hold traditional stereotypes that “studying comes first” and “military service is arduous”. Parental opposition becomes an important factor restricting college students’ enlistment.

In terms of university environment, most universities conduct concentrated publicity only in spring and autumn recruitment windows. Regular national defense education and popularization of conscription policies are inadequate, and the integration of national defense education and conscription mobilization is superficial. Besides, amid intense employment pressure, college students focus more on internships, postgraduate entrance examinations and job hunting. Time conflicts to some extent reduce the likelihood of choosing military service. Moreover, obvious gaps in willingness exist among different types of universities in Nanjing, including science and engineering universities, liberal arts universities, undergraduate colleges and vocational colleges. Such uneven external environmental conditions require differentiated implementation while maintaining unified policy frameworks.

#### **Countermeasures to improve the implementation effect of college student conscription policy in Nanjing**

Based on the revised Smith model, this section proposes improvement paths from four dimensions: idealized policy, implementing subjects, target groups and policy

environment, to break bottlenecks in policy delivery and align policy goals with implementation outcomes.

#### ***Optimizing idealized policy: Clarifying detailed rules and building full-cycle policy support***

First, integrate multi-level conscription policy texts. Nanjing military service authorities, together with education departments, shall compile unified and concise policy interpretation handbooks that summarize preferential provisions issued by the state, province and city [9]. The handbook should specify eligible recipients, application procedures, and timelines for each benefit. It aims to reduce confusion between old and new policies, unify enforcement standards, and narrow implementation gaps across universities.

Second, improve full-cycle policy design. Policies should not only include pre-enlistment incentives, but also care arrangements during service and long-term development guarantees after discharge. Detailed rules covering major transfer, innovation and entrepreneurship support and job placement for demobilized students should be refined to remedy deficiencies in long-term development policies. Meanwhile, a dynamic policy evaluation mechanism shall be established to adjust clauses according to annual conscription feedback and enhance policy adaptability.

#### ***Strengthening implementing subjects: Improving coordination mechanisms and team building***

First, build a cross-department and university-local collaborative linkage mechanism. Regular communication channels should be built between conscription offices, finance bureaus, human resources and social security bureaus, education bureaus, and universities. These channels help break down information barriers, streamline application procedures for allowance disbursement and employment preferences, and shorten relevant processing cycles. Within universities, responsibilities of military affairs offices, faculties and student affairs departments shall be clarified [10]. Faculty advisors shall fulfill their obligations so that conscription work shifts from the exclusive responsibility of military affairs offices to university-wide collaborative work.

Second, organize training for frontline implementers. Relevant staff from university military affairs offices and advisors should receive regular professional training. Such training helps them keep abreast of newly revised policies and enhance their ability to provide high-quality

consultations. Post incentives should be optimized to ease the workload of part-time staff and avoid service disruption caused by frequent turnover. The work orientation of “valuing recruitment while neglecting follow-up services” should be changed, and full-cycle services covering mobilization, follow-up during service and support for resumption of study after discharge shall be guaranteed.

***Target groups: Innovating publicity and raising college students’ policy awareness***

First, transform conscription publicity from campaign-style promotion to regular communication. Apart from concentrated lectures in recruitment windows, conscription policy education shall be integrated into freshman orientation and routine national defense courses. Diversified channels such as short videos, official WeChat accounts, campus lectures and sharing sessions by veteran students should be adopted to interpret policies in accessible language and eliminate information asymmetry. Information shall be delivered by categories for students of different grades and academic backgrounds to improve publicity precision.

Second, leverage the demonstration effect of veteran students. Veteran student lecture groups can share authentic military experiences. They shall introduce both policy benefits and real conditions in the military, helping undergraduates form rational perceptions of enlistment. Students shall be guided to balance personal development with national responsibility and build proper enlistment motivation. Support files for veteran students should be established to ensure they are fully informed of all internal preferential rights available at universities.

***Improving external policy environment: Fostering national defense culture and mitigating environmental constraints***

First, deepen national defense education and conduct outreach for families. Joint publicity activities shall be carried out by communities and universities to reverse biased family perceptions of college student enlistment. The role of families in students’ enlistment decisions should be valued. Policy briefings through parent meetings and home visits help win family understanding and support.

Second, universities shall deeply integrate national defense education with talent cultivation. National defense awareness shall be embedded in campus culture

to build an atmosphere that honors military service. Meanwhile, guidance shall be offered on balancing further study, job hunting and military service. Career planning support helps students reconcile conflicts between military service, academics and employment. Targeted conscription implementation plans shall be formulated for different types of universities to realize categorized governance.

**Conclusion**

The implementation of college student conscription policy is a complicated systematic project. Its effect is jointly shaped by interactions among policy texts, implementing institutions and staff, college student target groups and external policy environment. As an output of the General Project of Philosophy and Social Sciences Research in Jiangsu Universities, this paper adopts the revised Smith model to empirically analyze Nanjing’s college student conscription policy.

The research finds that a conscription policy system has been established in Nanjing and achieved certain outcomes. However, problems including inconsistent detailed provisions, weak multi-stakeholder coordination, uneven policy awareness among college students and underdeveloped national defense atmosphere still persist. To bridge the “last mile” between policy texts and on-the-ground delivery, we need to optimize policy design, strengthen the capacity of implementing subjects, increase policy awareness among target groups, and steadily improve the external policy environment. Such measures can fully unleash the potential of the conscription policy and attract more outstanding college students to serve national defense. Improving policy implementation cannot be achieved overnight. It requires long-term coordinated efforts in institutional design, organizational guarantee, publicity and education, and cultural cultivation.

This study is empirical research based on the sample of Nanjing and subject to limitations of sample size. Future research can expand investigation scope to conduct comparative studies across cities, track implementation effects after policy updates, and deepen research on college student conscription policy implementation.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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