

A Preliminary Exploration of Guidance Strategies for College Students Job-seeking Positioning from the Perspective of Employment Education

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Abstract: The employment of college graduates is closely related to the well-being of numerous households and the overall welfare. In the perspective of Employment Education, universities attach great significance to and strengthen the guidance on college students' job-seeking positioning. Addressing the issues of irrational job rejection, unreasonable job barriers, and unpreparedness for employment disparities caused by college graduates' blind pessimism, inadequate job awareness, and overly high job expectations, universities should enhance the cultivation of students' job-seeking link awareness, employer perspectives, and gradient strategies. By effectively improving college students' scientific job-seeking positioning abilities, the efficacy of employment-oriented education can be continuously strengthened.

1. Introduction

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly stated that employment is the most fundamental livelihood issue. Strengthening the policy of employment priority, improving the employment promotion mechanism, and promoting high-quality and full employment are emphasized. College graduates are valuable human resources for the nation and an important group in promoting employment. In recent years, the scale of graduates from ordinary universities in China has continued to increase. It is estimated that there will be 11.58 million college graduates in 2023, an increase of 820,000 compared to the previous year. Moreover, due to the complex international situation, arduous domestic reform and development tasks, and the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, college graduates are facing unprecedented employment pressure. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council attach great importance to the employment of college graduates. In response, the Ministry of Education has strengthened top-level design, enhanced decision-making arrangements, and innovated approaches to facilitate college graduates' employment and entrepreneurship through various channels.

2. The significant importance of strengthening job-seeking positioning guidance in universities from the perspective of employment education

2.1 Responding to policy calls and emphasizing job-seeking positioning education

In November 2020, the Ministry of Education introduced the concept of "employment education" in its notice on employment and entrepreneurship for the 2021 graduates of national ordinary universities. It emphasized the significance of employment education as an integral part of character and talent cultivation and an integral element of the 'three-wide education'. Subsequently, for three consecutive years, the Ministry of Education continuously emphasized the promotion of employment-oriented education, establishing a supportive system, and enhancing employment guidance services in its Department's Annual Work Plan and annual notice on employment and entrepreneurship for the graduates of national ordinary universities.

It is worth mentioning that in the notice released in November last year regarding the work of employment and entrepreneurship for the 2023 graduates of national ordinary universities, the Ministry of Education particularly emphasized the importance of employment education and guidance as an essential part of the 'three-wide education'. They stressed the need to carry out thematic education on employment and guide college graduates to maintain a down-to-earth attitude, objectively consider personal conditions and social demands, and choose careers and job positions based on practical considerations^[1]. Therefore, from the perspective of employment education, it is essential for universities to attach importance to college students' job-seeking positioning education, which is crucial for strengthening their employment guidance work.

2.2 Adhering to problem-oriented approaches and strengthening job-seeking positioning education

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the employment situation for college graduates has become increasingly severe, leading to a gradual increase in the proportion of "slow job seekers" among them. According to the "College Students' Employment Power Survey Report" by Zhaopin over the past three years, the proportion of college graduates facing "slow job search" has increased from 12.80% in 2021 to 15.90% in 2022, and further to 18.9% in 2023, surpassing the 2021 figure by more than 6 percentage points. These "slow job seekers" among college graduates mainly exhibit the following characteristics: (1) Some graduates opt for a second attempt at postgraduate entrance exams or civil service exams after initial failure, thereby avoiding immediate employment; (2) They deliberately delay graduation to avoid job searching; (3) They have overly high job expectations^[2]. It is evident that apart from some graduates choosing to pursue further studies, some of those seeking job positions become part of the "slow job seeker" group due to their high job expectations or limited career choices. In interviews with nearly 20 employment guidance teachers from different regions and universities, the conclusion was consistent: "Mismatch between students' job expectations and reality" and "lack of clear job-seeking positioning" are the most frequent attributions when analyzing the individual job-seeking concepts of "slow job seekers." Therefore, to better address the issue of "slow job seekers" among college graduates, universities must strengthen employment guidance and enhance job-seeking positioning education for college students.

2.3 Responding to students' needs and reinforcing job-seeking positioning education

According to the "Blue Book of College Students' Career Counseling Report" released by the North Forest Career Research Institute in December 2022, based on 1693 cases of career counseling involving college students during the 2020-2022 academic years, 46.62% of the students encountered

issues with career positioning. Common difficulties included lack of clarity about their future development direction, unclear career goals, feelings of confusion, and uncertainty when faced with multiple career options^[3]. At the same time, the current recipients of university employment guidance were generally born after the year 2000, growing up in the era of seamless integration with the digital age. They have been significantly influenced by digital information technology, instant communication devices, and smartphone products, exhibiting unique traits of the "Generation Z" youth group. These traits include a "Buddha-like" attitude, "stay-at-home" culture, dual-chamber logic, and a focus on experience. These characteristics present a certain degree of difficulty in conducting university employment guidance work. Consequently, it is essential to respect the unique traits of the Generation Z students while effectively responding to their career counseling needs and actively guiding them to make scientifically-based job-seeking positioning decisions. Strengthening job-seeking positioning education is a critical aspect of current university employment guidance work.

3. Analysis of the job-seeking positioning of Current College Graduates

In recent years, various regions and universities have continuously strengthened career education and employment guidance for college graduates to promote more comprehensive and higher-quality employment. They have enriched educational resources and expanded diverse forms to provide students with more engaging and experiential career education services, aiming to enhance their self-awareness, career awareness, and job interview skills. However, at the same time, some issues have been exposed in the field of university career education. These include a tendency for career development courses to be overly theoretical, some career development activities becoming too gamified, and limited effectiveness in improving students' career awareness. Among these problems, the inadequate cultivation of college students' career awareness stands out, with almost half of the students facing career-related confusion primarily in "career exploration" and "career positioning." The most prominent obstacle, affecting 45.43% of the students, is the lack of understanding of various career options. These issues become evident during the job hunting and employment phase, mainly presenting as the "inaccurate job-seeking positioning" problem for college graduates. This issue can be categorized into the following three types.

3.1 Blind and pessimistic job-seeking, irrational job rejection

In the past three years, due to multiple factors such as the pandemic and economic downturn, the employment situation for college graduates has become complex and severe. The pressure faced by university students about to graduate and enter the job market is unprecedented. According to the "2023 College Graduates' Employment Ability Research Report" by Zhaopin, 74.6% of college students listed "employment pressure" as a significant factor influencing their job choices, a 27 percentage point increase from 2022. Meanwhile, the "2022 National Postgraduate Enrollment Survey Report" released by China Education Online provides interesting data. Nearly 60% of candidates choose to pursue postgraduate studies to enhance their employability due to significant job pressures, while 35% of candidates opt for postgraduate studies to cherish their campus life^[4]. Moreover, some college graduates exhibit job-seeking retreat or avoidance mentality, becoming blindly pessimistic and irrationally rejecting employment opportunities. They lack confidence in job seeking and erroneously believe that there are no good job prospects. Consequently, some follow the trend of taking postgraduate entrance exams, or they simply rely on their families instead of seeking employment.

3.2 Insufficient job-seeking awareness and unreasonable job-seeking obstacles

Among the various factors influencing graduates' job-seeking positioning and choices, "lack of understanding of careers" and "lack of self-awareness of personal traits" rank as the top two critical obstacles for college students. This lack of job-seeking awareness is evident in students' limited understanding of their own characteristics and inadequate knowledge about diverse career options and specific professions. During the job-seeking process after graduation, some students believe that their major only qualifies them for civil service exams or specific types of jobs. Others think that their lack of relevant internship or practical experience makes it impossible for them to apply for certain positions. Some graduates have limited knowledge of their own strengths and the job responsibilities of their desired positions. This lack of self-awareness or job awareness leads to college students setting unreasonable conditions for themselves during job seeking, creating unnecessary barriers that affect their job search and placement.

3.3 Overly high job-seeking expectations and unprepared for employment disparities

Currently, job-seeking expectations among graduates remain generally high, which contrasts significantly with the realities of the talent market. For instance, according to a survey on the job intentions of a certain university's 2023 graduates, a clear trend of "seeking stability" is observed, with more than half of the graduates still expecting to work in "government institutions," "state-owned enterprises," or "public sectors" even in the later stages of the spring recruitment for fresh graduates. Additionally, 45.91% of graduates are aiming for positions in "large enterprises (10,000 employees or more)" or "medium-sized enterprises (500-9999 employees)," and nearly half of them expect a starting monthly salary of 8000 yuan or more. These high job-seeking expectations do not align well with the available campus recruitment positions. According to the "2023 Fresh Graduates Recruitment and Compensation Management, and Internship Survey Report" by Zhongzhi Consulting, 65% of companies believe that fresh graduates' expectations are too high and that it is difficult to attract and retain them. The disparity between college students' high job-seeking expectations and the actual demands of the job market results in increased job-seeking difficulties for graduates. Furthermore, due to the lack of backup job-seeking plans for some students, they end up in the predicament of facing the challenge of "difficult employment."

4. Guidance Strategies for College Graduates' job-seeking positioning

4.1 Enhancing students' job-seeking link awareness

In the post-pandemic era, the uncertainty of employment has increased, and structural contradictions in the job market still exist. To better guide graduates in objectively assessing their personal qualifications and aligning them with social needs when choosing careers and job positions, university career guidance departments and student counselors should focus on enhancing students' job-seeking link awareness. This means guiding students to link their past successful experiences to job opportunities in the workplace. These experiences can come from academic studies, on-campus practical activities, research projects, off-campus internships, volunteering experiences, etc. The definition of "success" is based on students' subjective evaluations, including the satisfaction they feel when engaging in certain activities or the sense of pride they experience due to the outcomes achieved.

By making these connections, students can explore job opportunities that align with their academic majors or expand their potential career paths based on their internship experiences. Furthermore, in the process of reflecting on their past successful experiences, students can recognize their abilities to

achieve various tasks, which can help them overcome unnecessary psychological barriers. This approach encourages students to actively seek employment^[5] and gradually build self-confidence in their job search, thereby enhancing their sense of personal efficacy in job-seeking.

4.2 Cultivating students' employer perspectives

During the job-seeking process, many graduates tend to adopt a job-seeker perspective, mainly focusing on economic rewards, career development, welfare benefits, and stability when evaluating job opportunities. Their job-seeking logic often revolves around sending out resumes indiscriminately and pursuing high-paying job offers. This job-seeker mindset may lead to inadequate job-seeking awareness or unrealistic job-seeking expectations.

To address this, university career guidance departments should effectively use both the formal curriculum ("University Students' Career Development and Employment Guidance") and extracurricular activities to cultivate students' employer mindset. This involves guiding students to identify the demands of potential employers and align their individual strengths with those requirements. Specifically, they can invite HR representatives from external companies to interpret recruitment advertisements and teach students how to extract keywords from these ads to understand the real recruitment or staffing needs of employers. Subsequently, students can be guided to explore and present their unique abilities to effectively respond to the employers' needs, if they have an interest in the job opening. Furthermore, organizing job-seeking training camps or similar activities can enable students to have direct experiences in real workplaces and gain insights into employers' demands and corporate culture.

4.3 Facilitating a gradient job-seeking strategy

The most satisfying career choices come not only from the realization of career ideals but also from meeting the needs of the recruiting companies. Every job seeker hopes to find a job they love, excel at, and consider highly valuable, which we refer to as their "ideal career." However, reality may not always align perfectly with one's wishes, especially for fresh graduates entering the job market.

To address this, career counselors should help students enhance their job-seeking skills while guiding them to rationally assess the gap between their job-seeking ideals and reality. They should encourage students to construct a personal gradient job-seeking strategy, represented by a "job opportunity pyramid." The pyramid consists of three layers: (1) the top represents students' "ideal career"; (2) the second layer represents job opportunities that students find reasonably satisfying, but may still leave them with some regrets due to factors like salary or career prospects; (3) the bottom layer represents safety net job opportunities that students can easily obtain and are well-suited for their abilities. By guiding college students to identify the types and specific composition of job opportunities in three different gradients, college career guidance teachers help students build their own "job opportunities pyramid". At the same time, it is necessary to remind students that this "job opportunity pyramid" is not static, and they can dynamically adjust their job-seeking strategies based on their progress in the job-seeking process.

In conclusion, to address the current challenges in college graduates' job-seeking positioning, universities should actively guide students to make connections between their past successful experiences and job opportunities, align their strengths with job demands, and adopt a rational job-seeking approach through consolidating the first classroom, enriching the second classroom and strengthening precise services, ultimately strengthening the effectiveness of employment education.

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