

Research on Employment Assistance for Economically Disadvantaged Students from the Perspective of PDCA— A Case Analysis of Counselor's Work

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Abstract: Employment is closely related to the harmony and stability of every individual "family" and the prosperity and development of the broader "community". Especially since the 18th National Congress, the country has placed employment at the center of university education. In recent years, influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant increase in the number of university graduates, the employment situation has become very challenging. In order to effectively assist graduating students in finding employment and promote their employment with greater fullness and higher quality, this paper takes guidance from the PDCA concept in management and explores new methods for providing employment assistance to economically disadvantaged students. This ultimately results in a viable working approach, offering insights for university counselors to address similar issues.

The 19th National Congress report clearly states that employment is of paramount importance for the people's livelihood, and university graduates, as the mainstay of the job market, play a crucial role in stabilizing employment and ensuring people's well-being. In recent years, the expansion of university admissions and the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have posed significant challenges to the employment of university graduates. In July 2020, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the Ministry of Education, the State Council Poverty Alleviation Office, and other departments jointly issued the "Notice on Further Strengthening Employment Assistance for Graduates from Impoverished Families in Universities and Colleges". This notice highlighted the need to focus on, recommend, and provide services to economically disadvantaged students, implementing targeted assistance with a "tailored strategy" for this group. As the "guardians" of the entire university learning process, university counselors should steer students' "thoughts," guide their "capabilities," and elevate their "confidence." They should diagnose employment difficulties, help students identify their own "pain points," and facilitate the smooth employment of economically disadvantaged student groups.

1. Case Introduction

Li, a female student majoring in Calligraphy, is currently in her third year of university. She was born in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province. Her father has a hearing disability, resulting in a meager income.

The family's main source of income comes from her mother's monthly income of less than 2000 yuan from odd jobs.[1] Thus, Li belongs to the category of economically disadvantaged students. During her time at the university, Li maintains a diligent attitude towards her studies, completing all tasks on time. Her academic performance falls within the mid-range of her class. In her personal life, Li is known for her honesty, friendliness, and integrity. However, she tends to be shy and lacks effective self-expression and communication skills. During the "golden September and silver October" job hunting season, Li actively participated in various recruitment activities organized by the university, submitted numerous resumes, and even secured a few interview opportunities. Despite undergoing multiple interview rounds, Li faced numerous setbacks and was unable to secure her desired job. As the "autumn recruitment" period was coming to an end and job opportunities were dwindling, Li began to experience low self-esteem and anxiety. She stopped actively seeking employment and instead spent most of her time in her dormitory playing games. Consequently, she became a classic example of a "job difficulty" student. Subsequently, Li became a focus of the college's employment assistance efforts.

2. Qualitative Analysis of the Case

Li's experience of "employment difficulties" in this case is not uncommon among economically disadvantaged students. Employment education is a comprehensive effort that requires the involvement of various parties, including the school, family, and society. Economically disadvantaged students often lack strong family support, leading to issues such as low self-acknowledgment, a lack of social connections, and discrepancies between career expectations and personal abilities. Additionally, the psychological imbalances resulting from economic difficulties and repeated job rejections contribute to economically disadvantaged students becoming prone to "employment difficulties."

3. Key Points of the Issues

How to identify the underlying causes of Li's "employment difficulties" and accurately pinpoint the "pain points."

How to carry out employment assistance work, particularly in terms of implementing effective assistance that is acceptable to Li.

How to apply similar strategies to explore a systematic, standardized, yet targeted employment assistance mechanism tailored to economically disadvantaged students' unique backgrounds, opening up new avenues for employment assistance.

4. Solution

4.1. Combining Addressing Psychological Issues with Practical Solutions

Li's unusual behavior caught the attention of the counselor. By conversing with Li's roommates and class leaders, the counselor gained insight into Li's recent academic and personal life. Based on this information, the counselor proactively engaged with Li, seeking to understand her challenges and listen to her concerns. During the conversation, it was revealed that Li was troubled by the sudden reduction in her living expenses due to her mother's illness, as well as the travel and food costs associated with job hunting. The counselor referred to the "National Student Aid Evaluation Notification" for the academic year and determined that Li met the criteria for student aid. The counselor informed Li about assistance policies such as "Graduate Job-seeking and Entrepreneurship Subsidy" and "Graduate Employment Subsidy." Through Li's active application, class evaluation, and

school review, Li successfully received a 4400 yuan student aid grant and a 1500 yuan job-seeking and entrepreneurship subsidy. This significantly alleviated Li's financial pressures during her job search. Additionally, the counselor secured a part-time on-campus job as an office assistant for Li, which involved handling visitor needs and categorizing inquiries. This job provided a monthly wage of 400 yuan, allowing Li to establish her self-worth through labor, psychologically preparing her for job hunting, and relieving her mental stress.

4.2. Combining Addressing Psychological Issues with Skill Enhancement

At the age of 20, Li is in a stage of emerging adulthood. According to Erikson's theory, individuals at this stage often face identity crisis and role confusion. Economically disadvantaged students like Li tend to struggle with self-identity and role identification due to weak family support. This can lead to a heightened sense of poverty identification, reduced social integration, decreased interpersonal initiative, and feelings of isolation, sensitivity, and inferiority. In the job search process, this can result in heightened sensitivity to interpersonal relations, leading to depression, anxiety, and other psychological issues. The office assistant role offered by the counselor serves to improve Li's communication and coordination skills while nurturing transferable abilities such as critical thinking, resilience, and adaptability. By achieving tangible results through her abilities, Li can develop rational self-assessment and objective self-awareness. This encourages her to face challenges bravely, cultivate a positive attitude, engage in effective communication with peers and teachers, and ultimately enhance her sense of self-efficacy.[2]

4.3. Combining Addressing Individual Issues with Addressing General Issues

The PDCA model, known for its scientific process in achieving comprehensive quality management, consists of Plan, Do, Check, and Action stages. In the planning phase, Li's job search objectives were considered, taking into account family factors and preferences for nearby positions within the system. The counselor provided an overview of various subsidy policies to assist Li in making informed decisions. Li's unsuccessful interviews and job-seeking challenges were then summarized and analyzed in the Check phase. This analysis highlighted the following issues:

4.3.1. Unclear Job Objectives and Excessive Target Units

Having multiple diverse job objectives that correspond to various positions' requirements creates a lack of focus in Li's job search strategy. Casting a wide net with job objectives makes it difficult to achieve a proper "fit" between individuals and positions, hindering effective job preparation and career planning.

4.3.2. Inaccurate Self-Positioning and Unrealistic Employment Expectations

It's noted that 57.18% of graduates in the year before Li's graduation signed agreements or labor contracts for employment. However, only 12.74% of total employed graduates secured positions in governmental institutions.[3] Considering these statistics, Li should analyze the ratio of job openings to her competitive competence. Her choice to apply for positions at institutions like schools without obtaining a teaching qualification certificate reflects a disconnect between her employment expectations and practical considerations.

4.3.3. Insufficient Job-Seeking Abilities and Immature Employment Perspective

Confronting various interview formats such as structured interviews, leaderless group interviews,

and one-on-one interviews, Li struggles to adapt due to her underlying "social anxiety." She hesitates to initiate communication with others and believes that only jobs in provincial cities or urban areas would be considered "respectable" by her family. Her limited perspective fails to recognize the intrinsic value of work in personal growth and development, causing her to unnecessarily limit her range of potential job options.[4]

Having identified these issues, the counselor instructed Li to undergo a career reevaluation (Action). This involved utilizing SWOT analysis to clarify her strengths, weaknesses, external opportunities, and threats. Additionally, Li underwent personality categorization testing using the IBTM method and a Holland vocational assessment, enabling her to define her personality traits and match them with compatible industries or positions. This comprehensive assessment facilitated Li's preparation for job-seeking while also addressing any future issues that may arise (Check) and finding appropriate solutions (Action). Furthermore, the counselor introduced Li to various policy initiatives, such as the "College Student Volunteer Service Western Plan," "Three Supports and One Assistance Plan," and preferential policies for military personnel transitioning to civilian life or further education. The counselor shared exemplary cases of past graduates who contributed to grassroots development, encouraging Li to consider offering her youth to places in the country that are in need. This not only aids in national development but also cultivates Li's personal abilities and enriches her life experience.

5. Work Achievements

Following the implementation of relevant employment assistance measures, Li obtained cumulative assistance exceeding 5000 yuan. She assisted in receiving more than 200 visiting students, participated in 2 public lectures on entrepreneurship guidance and excellent alumni job-seeking experiences. These experiences greatly alleviated Li's financial and psychological stress, nurtured her self-confidence, enhanced her job-seeking abilities, and helped her develop a correct perspective on employment. Consequently, Li maintained a relaxed, optimistic, and self-assured mental state throughout her job search. Ultimately, Li successfully secured a position at a county experimental primary school in Xuzhou city, Jiangsu province.

6. Lessons and Insights

6.1. Strengthening Guidance on Employment Views for Students in Financial Difficulties

Universities should establish a normalized, long-term, year-by-year, and category-specific assistance mechanism for economically disadvantaged students, taking into account annual employment trends and changes in the employment needs of graduates. Assistance plans should be initiated when students are identified as economically disadvantaged, creating a normalized assistance mechanism. It is essential to ensure effective coordination and deep integration of professional courses, internships, practical experiences, and career guidance, thus forming a long-term management mechanism. Combining students' grade levels, universities should reasonably establish a personalized dynamic assistance database, focusing on cultivating occupational values, enhancing employability, fostering comprehensive qualities, and devising career action plans. This will lead to a year-by-year guidance mechanism. Moreover, integrating ideological and political education into career guidance, universities should actively guide economically disadvantaged students to enhance their proactive employment awareness and foster the right perspectives on personal achievement, career, and employment. Tailored thematic career guidance activities should be conducted to meet the specific needs of economically disadvantaged students, thereby establishing a categorized educational mechanism.

6.2. Enhancing the Structure of Employment Assistance for Students in Financial Difficulties

Employment guidance encompasses various aspects. It serves not only students' future employment but also their long-term development. This is a comprehensive, long-term, and intricate educational endeavor that necessitates guiding financially disadvantaged students to establish accurate employment perspectives. Therefore, to enhance the effectiveness of university counselors' employment guidance, it is crucial to establish an improved, enduring employment guidance mechanism that allows counselors' guidance to permeate class management and teaching activities throughout a student's university journey. The focus should be on transforming employment guidance from being periodic, intensive, and temporary to becoming a routine, comprehensive teaching activity, thereby promoting efficient execution of counselors' employment guidance. To achieve this, schools need to formulate comprehensive teaching plans for counselor-guided employment guidance for students of different academic levels. A student-centered employment guidance system should be established, addressing not only students' employment knowledge but also their actual needs. It should be based on students' psychological and developmental characteristics at different stages, resulting in targeted educational courses. For instance, at the beginning of enrollment, employment education for freshmen could emphasize constructing self-awareness. Counselors could achieve this by conducting ideological education and subject-specific knowledge activities, guiding students to form initial career perceptions. In the sophomore year, counselors can introduce basic vocational guidance knowledge, fostering students' employment awareness, and guiding them to set employment goals matching their abilities. In the junior year, diverse practical activities should be integrated, guiding students into actual work positions, helping them identify shortcomings, and strengthening these areas during subsequent studies, thus enhancing comprehensive employability skills. In the senior year, emphasis should be on mastering job-seeking skills and comprehensively understanding employment policies, guiding students to broaden their employment horizons, and continually improving the employment success rate of financially disadvantaged students.

6.3. Innovating Personalized Employment Guidance Measures for Students in Financial Difficulties

Counselors hold a significant position in students' lives and are involved in their daily management tasks. In the context of daily counseling work at universities, counselors should consider group counseling initiatives. Firstly, they need to analyze the psychological dynamics and characteristics of this student group, identify commonalities among students, and promptly initiate group counseling activities, allowing students to find their place within the group. Additionally, when addressing shared issues among students, it is essential to focus on individual differences. For financially disadvantaged students, timely communication is necessary. Counselors should gather information about students' family and difficulties, proactively offer psychological counseling services and academic assistance, and better address students' concerns.

6.4. Expanding Employment Guidance Methods for Students in Financial Difficulties

While counselors effectively utilize offline counseling methods, they should also prioritize the establishment of information exchange platforms and foster diversified communication forms with students. Firstly, counselors should guide students to leverage employment information platforms to access more details about potential employers and search for job-related information based on their needs. Secondly, counselors should utilize these communication platforms to establish a mechanism for interacting with students. This allows them to timely understand students' employment situations, analyze their current job-seeking status, promptly identify emotional fluctuations in students facing

job obstacles, and provide targeted guidance. Thirdly, counselors should emphasize personalized educational guidance for students, creating opportunities and platforms for showcasing talents and continuously enhancing their comprehensive professional qualities. For instance, addressing the lack of practical skills, a practice training platform could be developed for financially disadvantaged students within the campus. This might involve creating self-managed student teams and offering intellectually-oriented work-study positions to balance economic needs with practical training. Beyond the campus, effective coordination of societal resources could be employed to uncover internship positions with businesses. Establishing platforms like a "Talent Connection Hub" and employing "Campus Ambassadors" could offer students off-campus practical experiences, enhancing their abilities in problem-solving, organization, and coordination. Addressing groups with relatively lower comprehensive qualities, a "Three-Stage Career Navigation" course series could be designed. This series encompasses the entire process of student development and includes: "Career Orientation" focusing on intrinsic motivation for employment and practical career planning; "Job Search Initiation" concentrating on job-seeking techniques, public speaking, and communication skills; and "Foundational Exploration" centered on policy explanations. Addressing groups with low self-confidence in job seeking, an "Employment Psychology System" could be established. This system addresses common psychological issues such as self-esteem and sensitivity in financially disadvantaged students through topic-based career psychological group counseling, tailored and individualized psychological counseling, and career guidance. By effectively integrating the employment-related challenges faced by financially disadvantaged students, it aims to enhance their job-seeking and career decision-making abilities.

6.5. Integrating Market Information for Students in Financial Difficulties

In order to comprehensively enhance the quality and efficiency of employment guidance by university counselors, they also need to strengthen their comprehensive understanding of market information. This involves conducting thorough investigations into the market overview related to student employment, thereby providing referenceable information for guiding graduates' career choices. On one hand, counselors need to utilize diverse approaches to grasp the current employment trends and the latest job market conditions relevant to their respective fields. They should gain insights into the main directions of employment for their specific majors and key information for various sectors within the job market. On the other hand, counselors can conduct comprehensive analyses based on the current employment status of graduates, combining the relevant information they've gathered. Additionally, they should conduct surveys on graduates' career intentions, thus furnishing relatable real-life cases for guidance purposes. Building on this foundation, counselors should also strengthen their connections with employers. This involves understanding employers' overall evaluations of their school's students in the workplace. By aligning these insights with graduates' strengths and weaknesses, counselors can adjust their guidance content to continuously enhance students' comprehensive professional qualities. This aids students in rapidly adapting to job demands in their future employment. In summary, counselors should adopt a multifaceted approach to comprehensively understand the current job market landscape. They should then organize and summarize this information, sharing it with students. This process helps guide students in making intention-based career choices that match their individual circumstances. Moreover, counselors should offer targeted career guidance to help students address any weaknesses in their job-seeking strategies and continuously reinforce their professional abilities and enhance their professional qualities. Through these efforts, the effectiveness of employment guidance can be consistently improved.

6.6. Cultivating New Forms of Precise Assistance for Students in Financial Difficulties

Universities should accurately grasp the new historical positioning and mission of online ideological and political education and utilize the internet as a key entry point to promote students' employment in the new era. They can encourage career guidance teachers to use the internet for career counseling and values guidance. Universities should establish a group of renowned online career and ideological and political education experts, nurture high-quality online career guidance brands, and create a series of online courses focusing on students' inner drive, employability skills, and the cultivation of professional values. This will ensure seamless integration of online and offline career services. Leveraging the "24365" employment platform by the Ministry of Education, universities should actively explore the "Internet + Employment" model, aligning it with students' development needs and the direction of the job market. By adjusting their work strategies and optimizing methodologies, universities can significantly enhance support for economically disadvantaged students, ensuring precise delivery of job information, prioritizing job recommendations, and providing abundant employment opportunities. Universities should establish a grid-based employment mechanism, forming a new model that integrates online and offline guidance services at multiple levels. Collaborative efforts of various employment agencies should be harnessed to facilitate precise connections for economically disadvantaged students, achieving grid-based management and fine-tuned services. Moreover, universities should establish a database of employment information for economically disadvantaged students, strengthening dynamic management of their job-seeking and career choices, and providing real-time service guarantees. These measures will contribute to better support economically disadvantaged students in achieving success in their employment endeavors.

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