Research on the Employment Dilemmas and Countermeasures for College Students in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract. Under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economy has undergone profound changes, presenting unprecedented challenges to the job market for college graduates. This paper focuses on students in the field of economics and management, employing methods such as surveys, forums, and in-depth interviews to analyze the employment dilemmas and their causes in the post-pandemic era for college students. The study finds that students face a series of issues in aspects like employment information access, work skills, job-seeking conditions, professional qualities, social cognition, and career development. To address these challenges, the paper proposes six countermeasures and work plans, including improving employment services, strengthening school-enterprise cooperation, using data for guidance, conducting quality development, enhancing cognitive internship management, and statistical analysis of historical data. The aim is to enhance students' employability and professional qualities, better adapting them to the job market in the post-pandemic era.

1. Introduction

The outbreak and ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have had profound effects on the global economy. Many industries have faced instability, leading to layoffs by businesses[1]. This global economic crisis has further intensified the competition for university graduates in the job market, presenting them with increasingly complex challenges in terms of employment. In addition to the fluctuations in the global economy, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered other issues, such as disruptions in international supply chains, reduced cross-border trade, and financial difficulties for businesses, all of which pose challenges to the employment prospects of university students. Simultaneously, this situation has exposed some of the problems and dilemmas faced by university students in terms of employment, including accessing job information, enhancing job skills, meeting job requirements, improving professional competence, deepening social awareness, and planning career development.

Therefore, conducting an in-depth study of the employment issues facing university students in the post-pandemic era is not only beneficial for understanding the employment landscape and challenges of this era but also for finding suitable strategies and solutions to address these issues[2]. This is significant not only for the individual development of university students but also for the economic recovery and sustainable development of society[3].

To this end, this research aims to delve into the challenges and underlying reasons for the employment of university students in the post-pandemic era and to propose corresponding measures and recommendations. We employ research methods such as questionnaire surveys, interviews, and qualitative analysis to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the employment issues faced by university students[4]. It is our hope that through this research, we can provide better career guidance and support for university students while also offering insights for educational reform and teaching improvements.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on the Employment Challenges of University Students

There has been extensive research on the employment challenges faced by university students, primarily focusing on the following areas:

(1) Oversupply of Education and Insufficient Job Opportunities: With the widespread expansion of higher education, the number of university graduates continues to increase, leading to intensifying competition in the job market. This has been mentioned in numerous studies[5-6].

(2) Occupational Skills and Qualifications: Students' occupational skills and qualifications are crucial factors influencing their employment. Some studies have indicated that university graduates lack sufficient vocational skills and practical experience, limiting their career development. Additionally, qualities such as professionalism, communication skills, and ethical conduct also affect the employment prospects of university students[5].
(3) Market Volatility and Uncertainty: Market volatility and uncertainty are also contributing factors to the employment challenges faced by university students. During periods of economic instability, business recruitment plans may be affected, reducing job opportunities. Furthermore, demand in different industries may fluctuate, influencing the career choices of university students[6].

(4) Social Awareness and Perceptions: Social awareness and perceptions also play a role in the employment decisions of university students. Some students may excessively prioritize stability in government sectors or state-owned enterprises while neglecting opportunities in other industries. The irrationality of such employment perceptions can also lead to employment difficulties[6].

2.2. University Students’ Employment Challenges in the Post-Pandemic Era

The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented new challenges to the employment market for university students, primarily manifesting in the following ways:

Impact of the Pandemic on the Global Job Market: The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an unprecedented global health crisis, which has been shown to have profound effects on the global job market[7]. Issues such as massive business closures[8], supply chain disruptions[9], and decreased demand have contributed to rising global unemployment rates[10], placing greater competitive pressure on university students[11].

Application of Information Technology: Since the pandemic, remote work and online recruitment have become more prevalent, demanding new skills from university students in terms of information technology applications[12].

In summary, the employment challenges faced by university students in the post-pandemic era are more complex and severe, necessitating the implementation of additional measures for resolution.

3. Research Methods

To conduct an in-depth study of the employment dilemmas of college students in the post-pandemic era, this research employed various methods, including questionnaires, interviews, and qualitative analysis.

3.1. Questionnaire Survey

The research began with a questionnaire survey. The subjects were students from a secondary college at a local university in China, including students graduating from 2020 to 2023. The college offers five undergraduate programs with over 2500 students. A total of 390 questionnaires were collected, with 366 valid responses and 21 invalid, making for a 95% response validity rate. The distribution of valid questionnaires included 111 from lower grade students and 255 from graduating students. The questionnaire covered topics related to employment intentions, job-seeking capabilities, work capabilities, job-seeking conditions, professional qualities, and career development.

3.2. Interviews

To gain a deeper understanding of the causes and details of college students' employment dilemmas, a series of interviews were conducted. Interviewees included heads of partner companies, student employment guidance teachers, employment counselors, and counselors of graduating classes. These interviews provided information from different perspectives, from corporate demands to students' actual performance, offering detailed feedback. The main purpose of the interviews was to gather information about the job market, understand what companies expect from graduates, and learn about schools' training plans for students.

The selection of interviewees was purposeful, aimed at gathering multidimensional information. Heads of partner companies could provide information on what companies need and expect from graduates. Student employment guidance teachers and employment counselors had insights into students' job-seeking situations and issues, and could offer information on the school's employment guidance. Counselors of graduating classes had a deeper understanding of the situations of graduates, providing class-level information.

The content of the interviews included understanding companies' job demands for graduates, students' employment situations and issues, and schools' employment guidance policies and plans. Through open-ended questions and in-depth interviews, detailed information was collected.

3.3. Qualitative Analysis

To thoroughly analyze the interview data, qualitative analysis methods were used. Qualitative analysis transforms qualitative data into quantifiable information, helping to uncover patterns and trends in the data and reveal the root causes of issues. Systematic categorization, coding, and interpretation of the data led to a deep understanding of the complexity of college students' employment dilemmas and drew out important conclusions. Qualitative analysis also helped integrate qualitative data with quantitative data for more comprehensive research results.

The interview and questionnaire data were categorized and coded for subsequent analysis. By categorizing and coding the data by theme, a better understanding of the connections and correlations between different pieces of information was achieved. Key steps in qualitative analysis included interpreting and analyzing the coded data, identifying patterns and trends, and extracting important findings related to employment dilemmas. These findings will provide a solid basis for formulating countermeasures.
4. Research Findings

4.1. Job-seeking Abilities

According to survey results, several key issues were identified in students' job-seeking abilities. 40.5% of students believe that employment information is relatively limited, relying mainly on social recruitment websites, government employment information sites, and job fairs. However, on-campus job fairs, special recruitment sessions, and social recruitment websites are the preferred channels for current students. This indicates a limitation in students’ access to job-seeking information, relying mostly on traditional methods and lacking awareness of emerging channels. Additionally, less than 20% of students actively follow employment information and industry trends, suggesting that many struggle to answer relevant questions during interviews, lacking a deep understanding of the current job market.

4.2. Work Capabilities

Regarding the reasons for not being employed in their field of study post-graduation, 60.36% of students attribute it to limited demand for talent by companies and a lack of work experience or skills. This highlights a general feeling among students of being uncompetitive and unqualified for jobs in their fields of study. Additionally, 55.86% of students acknowledge a lack of understanding of corporate job roles, a significant factor affecting employment prospects. This indicates that students are inadequately prepared before graduation to meet corporate demands, leading to employment difficulties.

4.3. Job-seeking Conditions

Regarding preferred work locations and salary expectations, 60.78% of the 2023 graduates expect a monthly salary between 3,000 to 4,000 RMB or higher. However, based on historical data on internships and graduate employment, the average salary is around 2,500 RMB, with actual salaries below 2,000 RMB accounting for 49.9% of cases, a significant gap from students’ expectations. Additionally, 52.94% of students prefer to work within their province, and less than 30% prioritize working in economically developed areas, reflecting certain limitations in their job location preferences, potentially restricting their employment opportunities.

4.4. Professional Qualities

Interviews with companies, employment guidance teachers, and counselors revealed issues in students' professional qualities. Students often exhibit self-centered perspectives, poor stress tolerance, lack of work responsibility, disrespect towards managers, and low credibility. These issues lower companies' willingness to hire fresh graduates, as they require more time and effort for training. This puts students at a disadvantage in the competitive job market.

4.5. Social Cognition

Students show deficiencies in social cognition, such as unclear self-positioning and misconceptions about low wages. These incorrect social perceptions may lead to irrational employment decisions, affecting their job prospects. Additionally, some students resist school-recommended companies or positions, preferring to find jobs independently, which may further limit their employment options.

4.6. Career Development

Similar to other scholars' findings, the survey reveals that some students prefer stable employment options like full-time postgraduate studies, but lack a clear understanding of the competition, assuming effort alone will suffice, a significant deviation from reality. These issues indicate confusion and misconceptions among students regarding career development.

In summary, the research findings reveal multiple aspects of the employment challenges faced by college students in the post-pandemic era. These issues require comprehensive measures to help students better meet employment challenges.

5. Research Conclusion

The study concludes with the following findings and corresponding countermeasures:

Improve Job-seeking Abilities: Schools and employment staff should enhance employment information education for students, guiding them to access recruitment information through multiple channels. Students also need to actively follow employment information and industry trends to improve their job-seeking abilities. This requires schools to provide more career guidance and resources, and students to actively participate in relevant training and activities.

Enhance Work Capabilities: Schools should focus more on practical skills in course design, providing students with more hands-on work experience and skill training. Students should also actively engage in internships and practical activities to accumulate relevant work experience and improve their competitiveness.

Adjust Job-seeking Expectations: Schools and society should convey the actual situation of the current job market to students through data and information, helping them have realistic expectations regarding work locations and salaries, reducing disappointment and frustration.

Strengthen Professional Qualities Training: Schools should cultivate students' professional qualities through various activities and courses, including teamwork, stress tolerance, responsibility, respect for management, and honesty. This will enhance students' performance and adaptability in the workplace.

Improve Social Cognition: Schools and society should strengthen social cognition education for students, helping them better understand social realities, establish
correct career concepts, and avoid misunderstandings and biases affecting their career decisions.

Encourage Active Employment: Schools and society should encourage students to seek employment first and then choose the right development direction based on personal circumstances. Full-time postgraduate studies should not be a means to avoid employment but a continuation of learning and development after employment.

Strengthen School-Enterprise Cooperation: Schools should establish more school-enterprise cooperation projects, providing students with more practical opportunities and job training to better adapt to workplace demands.

In conclusion, addressing the employment challenges of college students in the post-pandemic era requires a joint effort from schools, society, and students. Comprehensive measures are needed to enhance students' employability and adaptability, creating more employment opportunities.

6. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

Despite the in-depth study of the employment dilemmas of college students in the post-pandemic era and the proposal of a series of countermeasures, there are still some limitations in this research that need to be addressed in future studies and work. The limitations and future prospects of this study are as follows:

6.1. Research Limitations

Sample Limitations: The sample of this study mainly comes from students of a secondary college in a local university, so it cannot represent the employment situation of all college students. Future research could expand the sample range to include students from different majors and institutions for more comprehensive data.

Time Limitations: The data collection period of this study is limited, making it difficult to capture long-term employment trends. As the job market may change over time, longer-term studies are necessary.

Data Sources: This study relies mainly on questionnaire surveys and interview data, which are subject to self-reporting and subjective factors. Future studies might consider using more objective data sources, such as official employment statistics.

6.2. Future Prospects

Interdisciplinary Research: Future research could adopt an interdisciplinary approach, combining knowledge from economics, sociology, psychology, and other fields to explore the root causes and solutions of college students' employment dilemmas more deeply.

Data Analysis Tools: With the development of big data and artificial intelligence technology, future research could make more use of data analysis tools to explore potential rules and trends in the job market.

Policy Research: Future research could focus on the impact of government policies on college students' employment, assess the effectiveness of policies, and propose suggestions for improvement to better support the employment of college students.

International Comparison: International comparative studies could be conducted to explore the similarities and differences in the employment dilemmas of college students in different countries and regions, drawing lessons from them.

In conclusion, although there are some limitations in this study, the research on the employment dilemmas of college students in the post-pandemic era is still of great significance. Future research can further refine methods and expand the scope of study to provide stronger support and suggestions for solving the employment dilemmas of college students.

References


