

Study on Employment Pressure on Chinese College Students and Constructing Higher Education Strategies in The Post—Epidemic Era

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Abstract: During the post epidemic era, Chinese university students are confronted with multiple pressures regarding employment, including unprecedented competition, significantly elevated employment thresholds, a pronounced tendency towards limited job options, and a growing number of students with inadequate employability skills. This paper aims to analyze the current employment situation of university graduates and its underlying causes, while proposing corresponding solutions, in an effort to provide a reference for higher education institutions in enhancing their graduate employment education initiatives.

1 Introduction

In early 2020, an unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 rapidly spread across the globe, resulting in significant shifts in overall social supply and demand. The decline in social demand and the corresponding drop in supply were mutually reinforcing, leading to severe impacts on both the financial and real sectors. From a macroeconomic perspective, the decrease in social demand levels has disrupted the stability of the supply side of the macro economy, intensifying the pace of industry restructuring. Analyzing from a microeconomic standpoint, the challenges to business survival have escalated, coinciding with the emergence of employment issues. The prolonged impact of the pandemic on China's socio-economic landscape, coupled with the complexities of the international situation and the adverse effects of localized conflicts worldwide, has contributed to a downturn in the Chinese economy and an overall contraction in labor demand. Compared to previous times, the employment landscape for university graduates in the post-pandemic era has become increasingly complex. Addressing how to enhance employment initiatives for university students and ensuring high-quality job placements for graduates has emerged as a pressing challenge for Chinese higher education institutions.

Many scholars have also paid attention to the employment pressure faced by college students and have

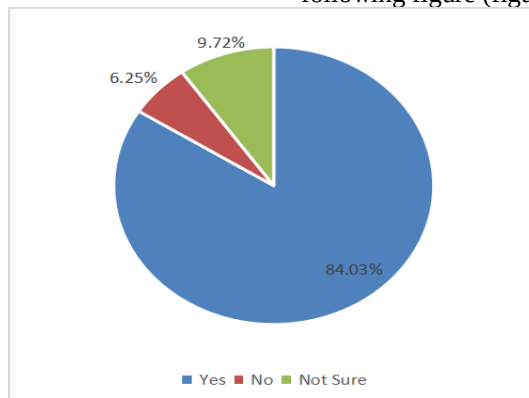
made some explorations on the issue. Xu Haifeng, Yang Shiyan, Yang Guanhua, and others' papers discussed the employment pressure faced by college students in China and analyzed the influencing factors. Xu Haifeng believed that the reform of China's higher education system and the expansion of the scale of college student enrollment were the main factors leading to the difficulties of college students finding jobs (Xu Haifeng, 2024). Yang Shiyan showed through the results of a survey questionnaire that the primary source of employment pressure for college students was family pressure, and that the student's gender, major, whether they came from a town or a rural area, would all affect the size of the employment pressure. Yang Guanhua believed that "university students generally have employment pressure, which is mainly related to their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and psychological resilience" (Yang Guanhua, Xiaoyan Li, JinYing Du, 2024). Some scholars also proposed countermeasures for how colleges should adjust their teaching in the current employment situation faced by college students. Lu Juanjuan and Sun Lijuan believed that Chinese colleges should "explore new paths for innovation and entrepreneurship education and provide real help for college students' future innovation and entrepreneurship" (Lu Juanjuan, Sun Lijuan, 2022). Liu Hong also put forward requirements for college employment and entrepreneurship guidance (Liu Hong, 2022). Most of the papers consider the issue from a

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general perspective, and I believe that college student employment pressure has been around for a long time, but the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more special. Therefore, this paper tries to start from the post-epidemic era and analyze the current employment situation and causes of college graduates, and propose effective solutions, which are beneficial for providing reference basis for college employment education work in the post-epidemic era.

2 The employment situation of university students in the post epidemic era: Challenges amidst intertwined pressures.

In 2024, I randomly distributed 144 questionnaires and conducted an employment pressure test on 144 students at Yichun University. The test results for the question "Do you feel employment pressure?" are shown in the following figure (figure 1):



(Figure 1: The proportion of college students feeling employment pressure)

The survey results show that 84% of the students felt the pressure of employment, while only 6.29% of the students did not feel the pressure, and 9.72% of the students felt it in a vague state. Most students are still anxious about employment. The survey shows that the main sources of employment pressure are as follows, ranking in the top three: fierce employment competition (88.19% of students chose), lack of social experience/internship experience (72.22% of students chose), and unclear future career planning (65.97% of students chose). Based on the students' choices, combined with the employment market situation in post-epidemic China, we have summarized the following current situation of the employment dilemma faced by college students in the post-epidemic era:

2.1The intensification of employment competition has led to a tightening of job supply.

The annual increase in the number of job seekers juxtaposed with the reduction in available employment opportunities presents a significant contradiction that is likely to persist for an extended period following the pandemic. The global economy has entered a downturn due to the pandemic's impact, prompting many companies to cut costs, resulting in widespread layoffs and hiring freezes. The number of available job positions is severely limited, and even those who previously created jobs are now competing for the few openings. Concurrently, the number of job seekers has surged; in China, for instance, the number of university graduates exceeded 10 million for the first time in 2022 and is approaching 12 million in 2023. If we consider that a 1% increase in GDP can accommodate 2 million jobs, accommodating these graduates alone would require a

5% growth in the Chinese economy, while the expected growth for 2022 was only around 3%. This illustrates the considerable challenge faced by such a large number of graduates in securing employment in an environment where economic growth is insufficient. Furthermore, they must compete with 136 million young migrant workers, veterans, and returning expatriates, highlighting the formidable obstacles they encounter in the job market.

2.2 The employment threshold has increased, with stringent skill requirements.

As employment opportunities diminish and the educational qualifications of job seekers rise, some organizations have unrealistically elevated their educational requirements during the recruitment process. This trend extends even to fundamental positions such as community workers, urban management roles, and elementary school teachers, where candidates with master's or doctoral degrees are being sought. This absurd and aggressive pursuit of higher educational credentials has directly prompted a significant number of graduates to embark on the path of pursuing further studies. In 2023, the number of candidates registering for the graduate entrance examination in China reached 5.84 million, while the number of university students enrolled in 2020 was 9.67 million. Although many of the 5.84 million candidates are former graduates or individuals who have been in the workforce for several years, the primary demographic remains current university students. Among the 9.67 million enrolled students, 4.43 million are undergraduates and 5.24 million are from vocational colleges, with the latter group participating in the graduate entrance examination at a lower rate, particularly since many graduate programs require a

bachelor's degree. Therefore, analyzing the overall data reveals that nearly all university students taking the graduate entrance examination are undergraduates, with many institutions reporting a nearly 70% examination rate among this group. Prior to the release of examination results, many graduates adopt a wait-and-see approach regarding employment opportunities. During the prime recruitment seasons of autumn and spring, these students are preoccupied with various preparations for the graduate entrance examination, often overlooking available job opportunities, which leaves many university career services personnel feeling anxious and powerless on their behalf.

Undoubtedly, the post-pandemic industrial upgrade and transformation have indeed posed employment challenges for university graduates. The pandemic has accelerated the decline of certain traditional sectors, such as tourism, hospitality, and retail, which previously provided a substantial number of job opportunities for graduates. However, in the wake of the pandemic, the demand for positions in these industries has significantly decreased, making it difficult for many graduates to secure suitable employment in these fields. Concurrently, emerging industries represented by information technology, artificial intelligence, and biomedicine have demonstrated robust growth during the pandemic. Nevertheless, these new sectors have high talent requirements, necessitating not only solid professional knowledge but also a degree of innovative capability and practical experience. This has resulted in some graduates facing challenges in entering these industries due to a mismatch in skills.

2.3 Employment options are becoming increasingly limited, with a clear differentiation among industries.

Due to the prolonged impact of the pandemic, future economic expectations are bleak, and job uncertainty has intensified. Coupled with the increasing emphasis on individual identity among job seekers, many university students have significantly deviated in their employment perceptions and choices. They tend to pursue stable positions within public service institutions that offer guaranteed income and higher social status, such as state-owned enterprises, educational institutions, and public service units, while largely overlooking the vast array of small and medium-sized private enterprises. This has resulted in a significant recruitment challenge for many private companies, as a large number of graduates are competing for relatively stable jobs. The phenomenon of "three highs" is particularly pronounced: graduates from prestigious institutions (985 and 211) are eager to secure positions within the public sector, the participation of highly educated individuals is increasing, and competition for entry-level positions among high-caliber talent is fierce. Consequently, even graduates who opt for delayed or gradual employment are compelled to enter the public sector, leading to severe industry competition and making it exceedingly difficult to facilitate employment opportunities for this group of graduates.

2.4 The number of students with inadequate employability skills is steadily increasing, resulting in a lack of competitiveness.

The low employability of graduates represents the most significant barrier to employment initiatives within higher education institutions. Employment advisors primarily serve as intermediaries, facilitating the transition of graduates into the workforce at appropriate times and through suitable methods. However, the crux of the issue lies in the graduates' proactive efforts to seek employment. Their acceptance by various societal organizations largely depends on whether these students can generate corresponding value for these entities. If graduates possess only their academic credentials without the requisite employment skills and value, the advancement of their job prospects becomes exceedingly passive.

Generally, students with low employability stem from three main categories. Firstly, many higher education institutions adopt a lax approach to student management, akin to free-range practices, resulting in students with poor self-directed learning and self-discipline lacking a proper understanding of their academic fields. During the pandemic, online education became the norm, yet the quality and effectiveness of instruction varied significantly. Coupled with inadequate self-management skills among some students, this has hindered the development of essential professional skills, teamwork capabilities, and social adaptability. Even those who manage to obtain their diplomas often find themselves ill-prepared for job interviews, frequently unable to answer basic questions, which drastically reduces their chances of being selected. This demographic constitutes a substantial portion of the cohort facing employment challenges, accounting for nearly 60% of students struggling to secure jobs. Secondly, many students who enter university after the college entrance examination initially believe that they will no longer be burdened by exam-oriented assessments. However, due to the relentless influx of employment information and the overwhelming pressure from senior students to prepare for various standardized tests, they find themselves compelled to engage in exam preparation once again starting from their freshman year. This leaves them with little time to focus on their major studies and practical experiences. Over the years, their test-taking skills have improved, but the impact of the pandemic has restricted their opportunities for practical engagement, thereby hindering the development of their practical skills and social adaptability.

3 Analysis of the factors contributing to employment pressure among university students

In the epidemic era era, the employment landscape for university students is particularly challenging, a situation arising from the prolonged structural contradictions compounded by the short-term impacts of the pandemic. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the characteristics of

the current employment situation for university students and its underlying causes, followed by the proposal of effective solutions, is crucial for addressing the difficulties faced by graduates in securing employment. The primary factors contributing to the characteristics of the current employment situation for university students are as follows:

3.1 Decline in labor market allocation efficiency caused by the epidemic

In the post-epidemic era, multiple unstable factors have had a great impact on the global economy, leading to an unstable global economic situation. The domestic economy is also facing great pressure. Most companies have been hit, and their risk resistance needs to be improved urgently. Their operating capacity has declined, resulting in fewer job opportunities and fierce competition for employment. Some companies have chosen to cut wages, lay off employees, or even go bankrupt under the impact, resulting in an increase in the number of unemployed people. In addition, since 2020, due to the impact of epidemic prevention and control, more than 20 cities or regions across the country have adopted full-area static management, which has led to a decrease in the matching efficiency of supply and demand entities in the labor market and a longer employment time. During the closed management period, campus publicity and on-site recruitment activities were negatively affected, and graduates' internship behavior was also negatively affected, with a lack of professional identity and a decrease in employment matching. Although some universities can use "cloud recruitment" to achieve supply and demand matching, due to epidemic prevention and control requirements, students' daily activity areas are also restricted. The interview efficiency of cloud recruitment is lower than that of on-site interviews. This makes it more difficult to obtain employment opportunities, and companies face greater challenges in talent reserves. Starting from 2023, we will enter the post-epidemic era and economic recovery period, and the accumulated job-seeking pressure will burst out. A large number of job seekers affected by the epidemic will enter the job market, intensifying job competition and making the employment situation of college graduates more severe.

3.2 Talent cultivation in universities is not in line with the needs of enterprises

There is a mismatch between the talent cultivation of colleges and universities and the needs of enterprises. Graduates have difficulty finding jobs while enterprises have difficulty recruiting workers. In recent years, with the development of science and technology in the fields of smart production, artificial intelligence, life medicine, and education, China has seen a decrease in the demand for low-skilled labor such as cashiers and porters, and an increase in the demand for high-skilled labor such as programmers. At the same time, due to the rapid development of financial technology, the demand for

low-end financial talents in the financial industry is decreasing, but some ordinary colleges and universities still recruit a large number of economic and management majors, while the ability of colleges and universities to cultivate talents in the fields of smart production and artificial intelligence is limited. This has led to more prominent problems of employment difficulties for graduates and difficulty in recruiting in some industries, and the structural contradictions in the labor market have become more serious. With the development of the Internet and the digital economy, college students' employment concepts have become more flexible and diverse, and employment methods such as self-employment and flexible employment have gradually increased. The society should comprehensively consider the actual situation of enterprises and students, give full play to the ability advantages of college students, and actively guide college graduates to shine in the fields of medical care, agricultural technology, and grassroots education.

3.3 Insufficient employment guidance and targeted assistance capabilities of colleges and universities

The employment guidance work of colleges and universities still needs to be optimized, and the ability to provide precise employment assistance is insufficient. First, the curriculum system lacks practicality and practicability. At present, the employment guidance of schools still stays in classroom theoretical teaching, the employment guidance method is not systematic enough, and the ability level of graduates trained cannot meet the employment requirements of enterprises. Second, there is a lack of professional employment guidance teachers. Most schools' employment guidance teachers are newly graduated counselors who lack sufficient job-hunting experience and skills accumulation. Teachers rely too much on theoretical knowledge in the teaching process of employment guidance courses and lack practical teaching ability for employment guidance. Therefore, in the employment guidance teaching, attention is not paid to improving students' employment ability and job-hunting skills, which makes it difficult to meet the recruitment needs of enterprises.

3.4 Insufficient job-hunting awareness and preparation among college students

Facing with the current complex and severe employment situation, college graduates often have too high expectations for positions and lack awareness of their own abilities, making it difficult to find satisfactory jobs. First, there is a lack of rational cognition of employment concepts. Compared with the graduates born in the 1990s and 1995s, the graduates born in the 2000s generally have higher job-seeking expectations and have high requirements for work location, work environment and salary. Many young people have a weak sense of hardship and are not good enough. Compared with the harsh environment of first-line factories and laboratories,

most young people prefer "office" positions. In addition, some graduates have a strong willingness to wait and see, and their mentality of seeking stability has increased significantly. In the post-epidemic era, many graduates prefer stable institutions, state-owned enterprises, or study abroad, spend a lot of time on civil service examinations, postgraduate examinations, or related training abroad, resulting in missing the best time for college graduates to recruit. Second, students' job-seeking ability cannot match the requirements of enterprises. Most students do not have a clear understanding of their majors and jobs. When they graduate and look for jobs, they lack the corresponding professional ability and are unable to be competent for professional-related jobs. In addition, due to the repeated impact of the epidemic, most college students have not experienced corporate internships and lack practical experience. Graduates cannot immediately adapt to the change in environment from school to the workplace, which leads to employment anxiety and increased employment pressure.

4 Constructing a multi-dimensional response strategy

4.1 Strengthen career planning education and enhance students' employment competitiveness

Colleges and universities should offer career planning courses and invite industry experts to give lectures to help students understand industry trends, clarify career goals, and develop reasonable learning and development plans. At the same time, career planning assessment tools can be introduced to help students understand their own personality, interests, and abilities, so as to more accurately determine their career direction.

Deepening measures:

Establish a career planning education system: Build a complete career planning education system, including career planning courses, career planning assessment, career planning consultation and other links.

Strengthen school-enterprise cooperation: Cooperate with enterprises to carry out career planning lectures, internships and other activities, so that students can have a deeper understanding of industry trends and job requirements.

Introduce career planning assessment tools: Use career planning assessment tools to help students understand their personality, interests and abilities, so as to more accurately determine their career direction. 2. Strengthen practical experience. In order to increase the employment competitiveness of college students, schools can provide more practical opportunities, such as internships, practical training projects and school-enterprise cooperation projects. These experiences can help students develop the skills needed in actual work and lay a solid foundation for their future careers.

4.2 Deepen school-enterprise cooperation and improve students' practical ability

Establish a school-enterprise cooperation mechanism, carry out internships, project cooperation and other activities, so that students can learn in practice and practice in learning. This can not only improve students' practical ability, but also help students better understand the needs of enterprises and lay a solid foundation for future employment.

Deepening measures:

Establish a school-enterprise cooperation platform: Build a school-enterprise cooperation platform to provide a bridge and link for cooperation between colleges and enterprises.

Carry out internship and training activities: Cooperate with enterprises to carry out internship and training activities, so that students can learn and practice in a real working environment.

Promote project cooperation: Cooperate with enterprises to carry out project cooperation, let students participate in the development and implementation of actual projects, and improve their practical ability and teamwork ability.

4.3 Improving the employment service system and provide all-round support for students

Build an employment service platform that combines online and offline services, and provide services such as recruitment information, resume preparation, and interview skills training. At the same time, strengthen targeted assistance work and effectively identify and assist students in need.

Deepening measures:

Establish an employment service platform: Build an employment service platform that combines online and offline services, and provide services such as recruitment information, resume preparation, and interview skills training.

Strengthen targeted assistance work: Establish files for students in need, effectively identify and assist students in need, and provide personalized employment guidance and support.

Integrate resources inside and outside the school: Integrate resources inside and outside the school to provide students with more employment opportunities and internship opportunities, such as holding job fairs and organizing internship projects.

4.4 Strengthen mental health education and improve coping ability

Carry out mental health education activities, provide psychological counseling services, help students build a positive mindset and cope with employment pressure. At the same time, vocational psychological assessment tools can be introduced to help students understand their mental state and coping ability, so as to better cope with employment pressure.

Deepening measures:

Carry out mental health education activities: Regularly hold mental health education lectures, salons and other activities to help students understand mental health knowledge and improve their coping ability.

Provide psychological counseling services: Establish a psychological counseling room to provide students with professional psychological counseling services to help them solve psychological problems in the employment process.

Introduce vocational psychological assessment tools: Use vocational psychological assessment tools to help students understand their mental state and coping ability, so as to better cope with employment pressure.

4.5 Encourage students to innovate and start businesses to broaden employment channels

Colleges and universities should set up entrepreneurship funds, hold entrepreneurship competitions, provide entrepreneurship incubation services, and stimulate students' innovative spirit and entrepreneurial enthusiasm. At the same time, they can cooperate with enterprises to carry out innovative entrepreneurship projects to provide students with more innovative and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Deepening measures:

Set up entrepreneurship funds: Colleges and universities can set up entrepreneurship funds to provide financial support for entrepreneurial students.

Hold entrepreneurship competitions: Regularly hold entrepreneurship competitions to stimulate students' enthusiasm for innovation and entrepreneurship, and provide them with a platform for display and communication.

Provide entrepreneurship incubation services: Establish an entrepreneurship incubation center to provide entrepreneurial students with all-round support and services such as venues, equipment, and legal advice.

Carry out innovative entrepreneurship projects: Cooperate with enterprises to carry out innovative entrepreneurship projects to provide students with more innovative entrepreneurship opportunities and practical experience.

5 Conclusion

This paper comprehensively analyzes the current situation of college students' employment pressure, its causes, and its impact on their mental and health, and puts forward corresponding countermeasures and suggestions. The study found that the generation of college students' employment pressure is the result of the interaction of various, including intensified employment competition, rising employment thresholds, "narrowing" of employment choices, and insufficient competitiveness of students. These factors are analyzed as follows: epidemic has led to a decrease in the efficiency of labor market allocation, a mismatch between college talent training and corporate needs, insufficient employment guidance and precise assistance capabilities of and universities, and insufficient job hunting awareness and

preparation of students. These factors intertwine with each other, jointly restricting the employment choices and career development of college students. In terms of countermeasures, this paper suggests that colleges and universities should start from four aspects: doing a good job in career planning, strengthening school-enterprise, improving the employment service system, and strengthening mental health education, to build a multi-dimensional response strategy to alleviate the employment pressure of college students. In summary alleviating the employment pressure of college students requires the joint efforts of all sectors of society and the coordination of various strategies. Through comprehensive measures, we can effectively reduce employment pressure of college students, promote their smooth transition to the workplace, and achieve a win-win situation for personal value and social needs

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