

Research on Promoting the Employment Level of University Students Under the Background of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The new crown epidemic has an impact on the job market of college students in China. Solving the employment problem of college students and energizing various industries are crucial for college student, enterprises and the country. From the perspective of promoting the employment of college students, this paper summarizes the employment problems under the epidemic, summarizes the relevant employment policies and measures, and focuses on the transformation of employment mode. Finally, we put forward our own views and suggestions to promote the employment of college students. The mismatch between college majors and social needs should be gradually eliminated and the development of sunrise majors should be emphasized. Employment services are not yet complete and should be improved by strengthening the education of comprehensive vocational ability of college students and promoting the construction of authoritative employment consultation platform.

Keywords: COVID-19, employment problems, college students.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background and Motivation

The number of college graduates in China is increasing year by year, and with it comes the problem of college student employment. The outbreak of the New Crown pneumonia epidemic at the end of 2019 has affected almost all types of companies, and the severe employment situation cannot be ignored. Since 2019, stabilizing employment has become the primary objective of macroeconomic regulation. Stabilizing employment addresses the employment needs of college graduates. At the executive meeting of the State Council, it was stressed that "the primary task of the 'six stable' is to focus on stabilizing employment"[1]. The central and local governments have introduced a large number of measures to stabilize employment, including load shedding, job stabilization, social insurance fee reductions, unemployment insurance rebates, employment subsidies, employment assistance, etc. [2].

Stable employment ensures people's living conditions. Stable operation of enterprises creates favourable conditions for sustainable economic development. Employment is the basis of people's livelihood and is closely related to the vital interests of individuals and families. Unstable employment inevitably affects the normal operation of enterprises, and stable employment also ensures the long-term development of enterprises. A low unemployment rate indicates that the country's economy is thriving and that social stability is guaranteed. Stable employment enables the country to reduce its financial burden.

1.2. Literature Review

Yue Changjun (2020) points out that the epidemic has not only delayed the start of schools and enterprises, but has also had a significant negative impact on the already severe employment situation of college graduates [3]. Li Chunling (2020) suggests that the expansion of university enrollment will cause the value of high-end talent in society to be increasingly diluted,

and negative psychological conditions such as self-perception bias and self-doubt among university students after seeking employment will be magnified during the epidemic [4]. Jiang Liping (2020) argues that superior family conditions and structural problems under the refinement of social division of labour have led to the prevalence of "slow employment" among young groups [5]. Thus, it is clear that the difficulty in employment of university students is not only a problem in the field of education, but also a cross-cutting problem in multiple fields such as economy and society (Sha, 2021) [6]. As early as in 2017, Zhang W proposed that the government should actively assume the responsibility of organization and coordination, regulation and supervision, support and protection, planning and regulation, and job creation on the way to solve the employment problem of college students [7]. It can be seen that stabilizing the employment of university students during the epidemic cannot be achieved without the joint participation of the four main bodies: university students themselves, the government, universities and enterprises. In the UK, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) and the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) are two professional associations of higher education practitioners that provide guidance for students. When learning from foreign research results, it is necessary to take into account the realities of China's university student employment market, combine foreign experience, learn from others and bring into play Chinese characteristics. University students are the backbone of future social development and a potential force for social progress [8]. Only by stabilising the employment of this group can we ensure the stable development of the job market. Although scholars at home and abroad have put forward different insights on the employment of university students under the outbreak of the new crown epidemic, the research on the normalized prevention and control period and the preventive measures for future emergencies is not deep enough. This is mainly reflected in the fact that the data is not new enough, the perspective is not comprehensive enough, and the target needs are not grasped precisely enough. This paper focuses on the following two major issues: Firstly, how to stabilize university students' employment in the face of public health emergencies. Secondly, how to improve university students' employment literacy from multiple perspectives to counteract the negative effects of future public health emergencies.

1.3. Research Content and Framework

The article mainly adopts the literature research method, and summarizes and analyzes the latest relevant literature by consulting professional websites such as China Knowledge Network and Chinese Government

Network. The article is developed in the following parts. Part I: The importance of stable employment for college students during the epidemic period Part II: The combing of college students' employment problems under the epidemic. Part III: Collecting relevant information to sort out employment measures. Part IV: In summary, the suggestions to further promote the employment of university students are pointed out.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

2.1. The Employment Pattern of University Students During the COVID-19

In order to improve the employment quality of graduates and change the employment mode, the "Internet + employment" mode is promoted [9]. The widespread use of artificial intelligence and big data has given rise to a new employment model and a new ecology of vocational education, which can help meet the high quality and effective match between the career expectations of college graduates and job demands [10]. It is also the most effective mode to solve the employment problem of college students during the epidemic period.

2.2. Employment Choices of College Students During the COVID-19

Data from the Ministry of Education show that the number of fresh graduates from colleges and universities in 2020 is as high as 8.74 million, an increase of 4.8% compared to 2019. the total size of the 2021 class of ordinary college graduates nationwide is 9.09 million, an increase of 4% year-on-year. This year, against the backdrop of the normalization of epidemic prevention and control, the task of doing a good job for college graduates remains daunting. University students can feel confused about the direction of employment after graduation, and lack authoritative employment consultation platforms and guidance advice from professionals. With an incomplete understanding of the types of employment and limited recruitment resources, it is difficult for them to find employment in their preferred sector of the company upon graduation, and many of them choose to "choose employment first before choosing a career".

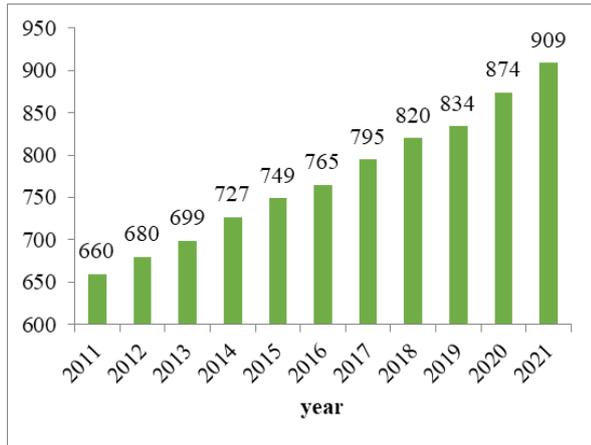


Figure1. Number of general college graduates nationwide (Unit:10,000)

Data source: Zhaopin

2.3. The Employment Mentality of University Students during the COVID-19

During the epidemic period, in order to comply with the epidemic prevention and control work, enterprises suspended offline written tests and interviews, and online recruitment mode became the main form of recruiting employees. Approximately 62% of companies conducted online recruitment operations. Graduates need help from career guidance staff, and the enormous psychological pressure needs even more help from career guidance staff to defuse it. There is no window of opportunity for career guidance work, and students need to be given the necessary psychological support and counselling, as well as skills training and job information matching according to their needs [11]. In addition to the three key influencing factors in traditional perception, good psychological quality is an important factor influencing university students' employment [12]. Graduates who have not planned their employment direction before graduation are bound to feel confused. Under the influence of the epidemic, the planned direction is disrupted, and it is difficult to get a suitable position in the short term, making them prone to anxiety and low mood. It is possible to maintain a good mindset to prepare for online recruitment.

3. ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS UNDER THE COVID-19

3.1. Limited Offline Recruitment

On January 27, 2020, the Ministry of Education issued a notice that the national universities should delay the start of school, and the spring recruitment of colleges

and universities is delayed and shortened. Considering the safety of epidemic prevention, the state suspended the gathering activities in large-sized places, and spring recruitment will no longer be conducted in the form of offline lectures and interviews. Although enterprises such as Zhaopin and 51Job have taken the lead in transforming into "cloud recruitment" to provide convenience for college students, the new recruitment method is always a new challenge for them, and the inability to dock offline will lead to a certain degree of information distortion. In addition, video conference interviews will also intensify college students' anxiety and exert negative influence on their job search.

3.2. Homeward Bound Tide Intensifies the Employment Competition

Under the influence of the epidemic, the international entry and exit management and visa audit system have become increasingly strict. Therefore, many Chinese students have been forced to delay or cancel their study plans and choose domestic further studies or employment, which quantitatively intensifies the competition in the domestic labor market. On the other hand, the aggravation of global epidemic increases the enthusiasm of international students to return home, and the number of returnees surged in 2020. Additionally, returnees optimize the talent structure and intensify the competition in the domestic labor market in terms of quality. Master's degree is the backbone of returnees seeking domestic jobs, expanding to 72.4% of the overall in 2020; PhD accounts for 1.7%, basically the same as the previous year; and the undergraduate group accounts for 25.9%, contracting 1.9 percentage points from the previous year [13].

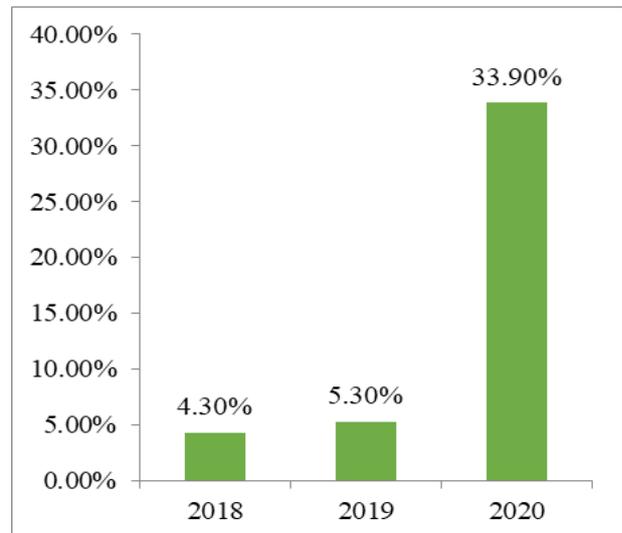


Figure2. Growth rate of the number of returnees seeking jobs in China

Data source: Zhaopin

3.3. Slowing Economic Growth and Changing Industrial Structure

The New Crown epidemic hit the market economy, with severe contraction in some industries and consequent changes in the industrial structure. In this epidemic, services such as aviation, entertainment, catering, and tourism were hit hard to varying degrees [14]. The international form of the epidemic is still severe, with the spread of the mutated virus and the recurrence of the epidemic in the northeast area, Guangdong, Jiangsu and other regions in turn, which affected the development of the real economy. Meanwhile, the Internet economy is booming, and industries such as Internet healthcare, online education, video software, and online games are all making breakthroughs in the market. For college students, it is not wise to look for a job solely based on their majors.

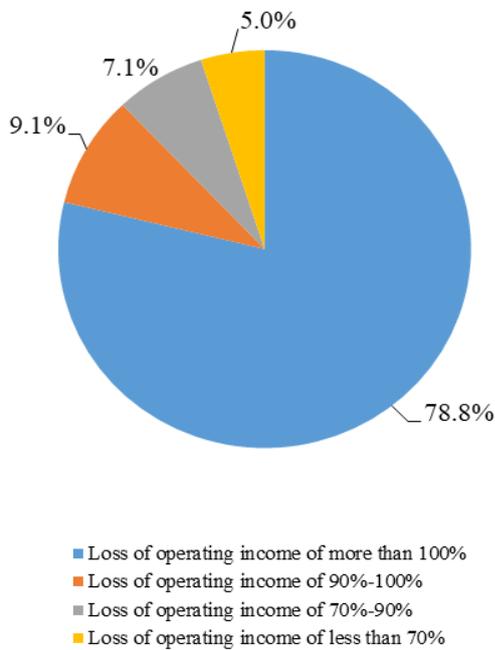


Figure3. Revenue loss of Chinese catering enterprises during the COVID-19

Data source: China Cuisine Association

3.4. The Phenomenon of Slow Employment is Increasing

Slow employment refers to the phenomenon that some graduates do not intend neither to be employed immediately after graduation nor to pursue further studies, but choose to explore their life path slowly by temporary study tours or part-time jobs [15]. Due to the economic downturn in the epidemic, many companies have reduced the scale of recruitment, which has reduced the students' motivation for employment. For public health safety reasons, selection examinations such as

postgraduate retests, civil service examinations were delayed, increasing students' anxiety and delaying their job search. Not only that, after the epidemic period, many college students took "stability" as the first factor in choosing a job, and despite the increase in the number of positions in the national system, the supply of employer still exceeded the demand. In addition, some students who have chosen less popular majors and are not clear about their career planning will choose to give themselves a buffer period in a relatively poor employment environment.

4. EMPLOYMENT MEASURES

4.1. Expand the Scale of Graduate

According to official China education website relevant data, the admission ratio for graduate students from 2018 to 2020 is 3.1:1, 3.6:1 and 3.2:1, respectively, which shows its fierce competition. In order to meet the demand of the majority of graduates for further education and stabilize the job market, the State Council introduced measures to increase the number of graduate student admissions. In 2020, the number of master's degree students will increase by 189,000. The expansion concentrated in the northeastern and northwestern regions where economic development still has potential, and the quota will also focus on high-level professional degrees such as clinical medicine, public health, integrated circuits, artificial intelligence.

4.2. Conduct online recruitment

In order to reduce the risk of infection, job fairs around the country were cancelled one after another, and employers mostly chose to post job information and conduct interviews online, and the provincial ministries of education also launched similar services, making online recruitment the main means in this special times. Subsequently, state departments and companies strengthen cooperation, focusing on market demand, and held 30 large-scale recruitment activities for the 2020 college graduates. The "Thousands of Schools and Ten Thousand Jobs" job fair in Yunnan Province and the "Spring Breeze Action" in Sichuan and Anhui Provinces were organized by the Communist Youth League and the Ministry of Education to widely recruit jobs and build online employment platforms. In addition to online employment platform services, Jiangxi Provincial Department of Education also strives to simplify employment procedures, allowing employers or universities to sign employment agreements with graduates by letter, fax, internet and other means, which is more convenient for fresh graduates to find employment.

4.3. Promoting new employment models

There are traditional employment models and new employment models. The traditional employment models include enterprise recruitment, government recruitment and social sector recruitment, etc. The new employment models mainly refer to various employment methods under flexible employment, which mainly refer to the employment models of enterprises through labour dispatch, part-time employment, recruitment of interns and part-time workers to reduce the employment cost of enterprises and improve the efficiency of enterprises while providing college students with more jobs for students. Under the influence of the epidemic, resuming work and production has become a challenge. Under the guidance of the government, various new employment models based on the Internet and guaranteed by the sharing economy have emerged. According to the statistics of China Flexible Employment Development Report 2021, the proportion of flexible employment has reached 55.68%. They have become one of the important ways to solve the employment problem of university students at this stage.

4.3.1. Entrepreneurial employment

Since the State Council issued the Notice on Opinions on Further Deepening the Reform of the Graduation System of Ordinary Colleges and Universities (No. 19 [2002] of the State Council) in March 2003, which was first clearly proposed, entrepreneurship among college students has been attracting more and more attention. College students' entrepreneurship can not only improve their business ability, expand their knowledge reserve and make more like-minded friends, but also solve their own employment problems to reduce the employment pressure for the society and add bricks to the development of social innovation atmosphere. According to the China College Student Employment and Entrepreneurship Development Report-2017-2018, graduate entrepreneurs have strong abilities in terms of academic performance and comprehensive quality [16].

Table1. Background Factors of Class of 2018 Graduate Entrepreneurs

Top 30% of academic performance	63.71%
Experience working with students	82.64%
Social practice experience	92.36%

Under the epidemic, university students can choose from a variety of entrepreneurial models. One is to start an innovative business directly upon graduation based on the professional knowledge and skills learned by college students with the support of several government policies,

with students of various majors applying their respective strengths and innovating on the basis of practice. However, due to the lack of social and management experience and unclear market positioning of college students upon graduation, the failure rate of direct entrepreneurship among college students is high. The other is the new model of employment before starting a business after graduation, in which college students have problems such as insufficient work experience and social experience when they first graduate, so they first engage in employment to accumulate work experience and at the same time accumulate funds for starting a business. After accumulating enough work experience, social experience and business funds, they can start their own business, which can significantly increase the success rate of college students' business. The welfare policies provided by the government under the epidemic not only include policies such as free incubation bases and business start-up subsidies and loan concessions for college students, but also simplify the process of establishing a company for college students and reduce the obstacles to starting a business. Recently the Ministry of Education issued a notice on the 7th "Internet+" Entrepreneurship and Innovation Competition carried out as the largest national innovation and entrepreneurship event, the state promotes innovation and entrepreneurship by means of competitions, encourages college students to actively engage in the cause of entrepreneurship and innovation, and strives to form a new situation of entrepreneurship and employment.

4.3.2. Freelancing

In the period of rising consumption power and diversifying consumption demand, freelancing and entrepreneurial employment have become the best channels for college students to realize their self-worth while not being bound to the traditional employment model and solving their own employment problems. Freelancing can provide diverse and personalized services to consumers. During the epidemic, when resumption of work and production faced a variety of problems, web-based freelancing sprang up. From live-streaming with goods to financial analysis to online education, all corners were covered with freelancers. The rise of freelancing is both an opportunity and a challenge for college students, who need to abandon the previous concept that only those who are employed are employed, and insist on improving their own knowledge and professional ability; because the salary of freelancing is unstable, it also requires college students to improve their own innovation ability and the competitiveness of their own products, so that they can stand out from the many freelancers and get Due to the unequal market information and the lack of product awareness, the situation of "even the wine is afraid of the alley" requires college students to broaden marketing channels and improve product awareness and recognition to attract more consumers to consume. The rise of freelancing also

requires society to be more supportive and understanding of freelancers and not to be bound by traditional employment thinking. Cracking down and inhibiting the development of freelancing will not only dampen the enthusiasm of freelancers, but also affect the creative atmosphere of society.

4.3.3. Shared Staff

Shared staff, as a newly emerged employment model in recent years, fully integrates Internet + employment and provides more options to solve the employment problem of college students. Shared staff as a new model of flexible employment, to meet the deployment of human resources in a short period of time, to improve the efficiency of the use of social resources, enterprises rely on the Internet can reduce the cost of recruitment and other aspects, while there are government policies to support the development of the sharing economy, to promote the emergence and development of new business models [17]. Since February 3, 2020, when Boxcar first recruited employees in other companies for temporary work and achieved remarkable results, the advantages of shared employees have been continuously amplified and gradually recognized by enterprises and society. According to a survey by CCTV, recruiting full-time employees is no longer the most preferred option for companies, with 53.2% of companies willing to recruit part-time and other shared employees, and 25.3% of companies wishing to temporarily borrow employees from other companies. In the face of uncertainty when resuming work and production, shared employees have become the best choice for companies to recruit. A university in Nanjing carried out research and discussion on the new employment model of shared employees among college students, and after the college students experienced the shared employees themselves, most of them said they could accept this new employment model of shared employees, one-half of them thought the shared employees could be recognized and valued by the society, and the other half expressed certain doubts and worries about the prospect of shared employees [18].

Although college students have mixed opinions about the new employment model of shared staff, it cannot affect the increase of social recognition of shared staff. According to the statistics of CCTV, the number of shared staff recruitment has increased by 76.4% year-on-year this year, while the traditional recruitment mode has dropped by 13.8% year-on-year. This is both an opportunity and a challenge for college students, who can have more part-time opportunities and receive more wages and salaries, but at the same time, it undoubtedly raises the examination and requirements for the ability of college students applying for jobs, intensifying the employment pressure of college students.

5. CONCLUSION

Focusing on the employment difficulties of college students during the epidemic period in China, this paper summarizes previous theories and presents its ideas through literature review and data collection methods, and draws the following conclusions: The new crown epidemic that began in 2020 and continues to this day has made the employment situation of Chinese college students more severe. The contradiction between the supply and demand of jobs is aggravated by various reasons, such as the reduction of jobs, the return of international students, and the limitation of traditional recruitment channels. However, at the same time, the epidemic has given rise to new model innovations. Diversified employment models such as shared staff and temporary employment meet part of the current demand for college students' employment and effectively relieve the pressure of the job market.

In addition, the exploration about college students' employment continues, and the multiple efforts of the government, universities and college students themselves can promote the development of employment. This paper intends to put forward three suggestions that can help improve the employment level of college students. Firstly, major universities should optimize the setting of college majors: eliminate the backward majors and focus on the development of sunrise majors. Secondly, improve the employment guidance courses for college students and strengthen the guidance of students' employment values. Thirdly, promote the construction of authoritative employment consultation platform and improve the credibility and understandability of employment information on the network platform.

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