

Innovating Employment Services for Graduates from Key Universities against the Backdrop of Employment Challenges

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Abstract: With the expansion of the scale of China's higher education, the employment situation of university graduates is becoming increasingly severe, and the employment challenges faced by university graduates are receiving more and more attention from society and academia. However, existing research on the difficulty of university students in job seeking generally shares a commonality, that is, they take graduates from universities across the country as a research object for overall discussion, which neglects the fact that graduates from different levels of universities face different employment challenges. This paper focuses on the graduates from key universities and believes that the essence of the difficulty in job seeking for graduates from key universities is not that they cannot find job opportunities, but that they cannot find jobs that they consider suitable. This paper employs labor market segmentation theory and screening theory to offer reasonable explanations for the phenomenon of employment difficulties faced by graduates from key universities from both the perspectives of university graduates and employers. Based on this analysis, it is proposed that career-planning concepts should be applied to reshape graduates' employment attitudes, and "interventional" services should be provided to reconstruct information communication with employers, thereby assisting graduates in finding suitable jobs.

Keywords: Employment Services for University Graduates; Employment Difficulties; Labor Market Segmentation; Screening Theory

1. Introduction

In recent years, numerous articles have been written on university student employment, which can be broadly categorized into four research directions: (1) comparative studies of employment service system and approach at home and abroad; (2) analysis of the causes of employment difficulties for university students; (3) innovation research in university employment services; (4) innovation research in university career education.

Regardless of the direction, these studies have varying degrees of insight into the underlying reasons behind the employment difficulties faced by Chinese university students and have provided targeted suggestions from their respective perspectives. For example, from the perspective of comparative studies, domestic universities lack the autonomy enjoyed by foreign universities in adjusting their majors according to the market's demand for graduates' quantity and abilities, resulting in a mismatch between university education and social needs, ultimately leading to unemployment [1]. The corresponding suggestion is to further relax the autonomy of universities, establish a linkage mechanism between enrollment and employment, and ensure that universities' talent cultivation plans are truly market-oriented. Starting from an analysis of the causes of university student employment difficulties, various arguments have been made, such as the dual economic background [2], labor market segmentation [3], and industry monopolies [4], all of which provide valuable insights and corresponding suggestions such as adjusting the unequal economic landscape among different regions and industries in China, eliminating unfair household registration restrictions, liberalizing access to monopoly industries, and reducing administrative intervention. From the perspective of innovation in university

employment services and career education, issues such as university students' inability to adapt to the social environment, university students' societal mindset that seeks stability and their dependency, the negative impact of family human capital, and insufficient work refinement have been analyzed [5-7]. Corresponding suggestions include adjusting students' employment attitudes, establishing a high-quality employment services team with a professional background in career planning, and continuously improving the professionalization and personalization of employment guidance services. These existing outstanding studies serve as the starting point for this paper.

2. The Complexity of University Student Employment Difficulties

Existing studies on university student employment difficulties tend to treat all university graduates nationwide as a single research object, neglecting the fact that graduates from different levels of universities face distinct employment challenges. Graduates from universities with a long history, high social reputation, and strong teaching and research capabilities encounter significantly different difficulties in job seeking compared to those from universities with shorter histories, lower-quality student enrollment, and insufficient investment in teaching and research. This paper focuses on key universities and argues that the essence of their graduates' employment difficulties lies in "holding job offers but not taking them" [8,9]. In other words, graduates are not unable to find job opportunities but rather unable to find ones they consider suitable.

3. Causes of Employment Difficulties for Graduates from Key Universities

While existing literature has provided profound insights into the employment difficulties faced by university graduates, this paper focuses on graduates from key universities and offers explanations from both the student and employer perspectives.

3.1 From the Perspective of University Graduates

Peter B. Doeringer and Michael J. Piore, American economists, proposed the labor market segmentation theory in the late 1960s.

This theory posits that the labor market is divided into two segments: the primary labor market, characterized by high wages, superior working conditions, job stability, and opportunities for training and advancement; and the secondary labor market, featuring low wages, poor working conditions, job instability, and limited promotion opportunities. Because looking for a job in certain market serves as a form of signaling, employers assume that workers who prefer to remain unemployed in the primary labor market rather than seeking work in the secondary market are more productive. Consequently, highly skilled workers who cannot find work in the primary market often choose to remain unemployed [10].

Within the domestic context, the segmentation of labor market is more pronounced, for key university graduates who choose their first job, entering which level of the labor market has a decisive impact on their lifetime earnings. Compared with graduates of ordinary universities, key university graduates have higher valuations of their cost inputs before graduation and higher expectations for future careers. Therefore, when choosing a job, they show a more obvious preference for the attributes of the employment region and unit, and it is very common for them to target only first-tier cities or eastern regions and institutional units for job seeking. This explains the employment pressure felt by key university graduates due to over-competition in the primary labor market and the phenomenon of voluntary unemployment when they fail to find a job in the primary labor market.

3.2 Analysis from the Perspective of Employers

According to the screening theory, there is information asymmetry in the job market, meaning that employers do not know the productivity of job seekers. The recruitment process determines that the time for communication between employers and job seekers is very limited, and employers need to identify whether applicants possess the key attributes required for the job within a very short period of time. Therefore, as a solution, employers can only use information that can be quickly obtained from applicants as indicators to infer information that requires long-term observation to assess the productivity of job

seekers. In this case, education level, major name, CET-4 and CET-6 scores, computer scores, etc., as the most easily identifiable screening information, have become the most commonly used indicators for employers to select talents. When employers select talents, the investigation of applicants' diverse abilities should be given priority, but it is replaced by universal and rigid indicator evaluation [11,12]. In the domestic situation, due to the aforementioned dual labor market segmentation, institutional units in the primary labor market have an advantage in the job market, and often a single job vacancy attracts hundreds of applicants. In such cases, employers have a stronger demand for a simple set of screening indicators. The design of the recruitment process for employers not only needs to meet the needs of talent selection but also, to a large extent, needs to meet the needs of screening out candidates. Therefore, indicator evaluation has gradually deviated from the original intention of assessing whether applicants possess the required abilities for the position, and the criteria of indicator formulating is becoming increasingly stringent. In reality, there have been a large number of cases of over-consumption of talents. This explains why even though key university graduates come from prestigious backgrounds, they still encounter rejection and feel immense pressure during the job-seeking process.

4. The Recommendation for Innovating Student Employment Services

Since the difficulty of graduate employment stems from a combination of two aspects, the employment services for students in key universities should also be approached from both the student and employer perspectives. From the student's perspective, it is essential to help them establish a rational employment concept, recognizing that there is no "best" job, but only the one that is "most suitable" for them. This involves assisting students in clarifying their job-seeking goals early on in their academic careers and motivating them to continuously improve themselves, ultimately enabling them to smoothly enter their ideal organizations. For employers, student employment services should not merely involve posting job information; instead, it should reconstruct information communication

channels with employers and provide more "interventional" graduate recommendation services to help employers select suitable graduates with a rational perspective.

4.1 From the Student Perspective

Compared with graduates from ordinary universities, graduates from key universities also face difficulties in employment due to their higher expectations for employment units. The employment counselors in universities can actively use the concept of career planning to help students delve into their own career preferences and values, by interviewing alumni, help students gain an early understanding of the real job market, and motivate them through study and internships, accumulate their own employment advantages.

4.1.1 Help students identify their career preferences and values

The concept of career planning advocates that there is no universally "good" job, but only a job that is "suitable" for oneself. Career planning requires job seekers to first conduct self-exploration, reflecting on their personality, interests, skills, and values, and then finding a career that aligns with their career preferences and values based on the results of this self-exploration. One reason why key university graduates often encounter obstacles in their job seeking is due to flawed employment concepts, with many blindly following the trend of targeting only institutional units in first-tier cities or eastern developed regions, leading to over-competition. While it is reasonable for rational individuals to seek a job that can recoup their previous investment in education, does the lifestyle offered by big cities truly suit everyone? Most graduates probably haven't seriously considered this. Therefore, university employment workers should proactively apply the concept of career planning in their work, guiding students to consciously use professional career planning tools to identify their career preferences and values as early as possible, thereby avoiding blindly following the crowd during job hunting.

4.1.2 Help students understand the real employment environment

In addition to fostering a career planning mindset and fostering a correct self-awareness among students, universities should also proactively provide authentic information about the working world to help students

objectively view the employment environment they will face. Currently, almost all universities have established independent employment information platforms that can easily track the real-time employment rates of various majors and trace the employment destinations of each graduating cohort. Unfortunately, most employment staff only use these platforms to simply track the overall one-time employment rate of graduates.

Ideally, universities can utilize these employment information platforms to compile statistics on the employment rates of various majors and the employment rates of male and female students within each major, enabling students to have a clear understanding of the employment pressure in their respective majors. Furthermore, universities can compile the employment destinations of students from various majors over the years, counting the number of graduates employed in each province, cross-referencing the number of student applicants from each province, identifying hotspots for employment, and analyzing typical recruiting units. This will give students a general understanding of their future job-seeking regions and organizations. Based on this, universities can also organize students to contact alumni from typical recruiting units for career interviews, allowing them to learn about the job-seeking experiences of previous graduates who entered these organizations, the actual working environment, benefits, and promotion paths after joining, thereby helping students dispel incorrect stereotypes about careers and identify their own shortcomings from alumni experiences. During their academic years, students can continuously improve themselves to prepare for job hunting after graduation.

4.1.3 Help students identify and ultimately achieve suitable job goals

After helping students correctly understand themselves and objectively analyze the employment environment, universities should also guide them to determine their job-seeking goals as early as possible. The setting of career goals should adhere to the SMART principle, which stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Rewarding, and Time-bound. Universities should guide students in breaking down their long-term goal of successfully entering their target organization into intermediate goals for each semester and

further refining them into short-term goals for each month, facilitating students' step-by-step achievement. In urging students to pursue their career goals, coaching techniques from career planning can be employed, believing that each student already possesses the resources to achieve their goals and fully trusting their ability to make self-improvements. The key lies in stimulating their subjective initiative and encouraging them to take the first brave step.

4.2 From the Employer's Perspective

Due to factors such as information asymmetry and time costs, employers often adopt simplified criteria in the process of recruiting graduates. University employment counselors can help graduates find better jobs by publishing real-time student information, selecting graduate representatives to provide one-on-one services to employers, and conducting in-depth promotion for students with employment difficulties.

4.2.1 Promptly publishing real-time student recruitment information

Universities typically release the graduation statistics and majors' student pool information on their employment information portals prior to the graduation season. However, these data often lack real-time updates and detailed information. To improve, universities should continuously tally the number of students remaining in each major seeking employment, dynamically updating the count of available job seekers across disciplines. Additionally, providing insights into students' actual research areas, core coursework during their studies, and their pre-enrollment household registration information would empower employers to make more informed decisions regarding gender, major, and domicile requirements in their recruitment criteria.

4.2.2 Appointing student representatives for one-on-one services with traditional employers

As mentioned earlier, universities can leverage their employment information platforms to identify traditional employers who regularly visit during graduation seasons, barring exceptional economic downturns. To enhance engagement, universities could select and appoint student representatives from the graduating cohort to establish one-on-one connections with these employers beforehand. This arrangement not only streamlines the

reception process for employers, reducing the cost of recruitment presentations, but also enables students to promote themselves more effectively, ultimately boosting overall employment rates.

4.2.3 Intensive promotion for students facing employment challenges

Every graduating cohort includes students who encounter difficulties in securing employment. Universities should delve into the root causes of these challenges for each individual student. For instance, some students may not meet employers' major requirements but possess the coursework necessary for open positions; others might be disqualified due to gender bias where the job posting itself does not strictly enforce gender preferences; still, others might have inadequate English proficiency for positions that do not frequently require English usage. In such cases, university career services personnel should engage in in-depth discussions with employers, advocating for reasonable adjustments to recruitment plans and facilitating the successful employment of these students.

5. Conclusion

The issue of employment difficulties faced by university graduates is highly complex, involving various aspects such as the overall economic structure, the management system of higher education, the talent cultivation model of universities, students' accumulation of human capital and their employment values. This paper focuses on the group of graduates from key universities, suggesting that compared to graduates from ordinary universities, those from key universities encounter difficulties in finding suitable jobs. Drawing on the labor market segmentation theory and screening theory, this paper analyzes the reasons for the employment difficulties faced by graduates from key universities from the perspectives of both graduates and employers. Based on this analysis, we propose the following suggestions: help students understand their own career preferences and values, provide them with a realistic understanding of the job market, assist them in identifying and ultimately achieving their suitable job goals, promptly release real-time employment information, select graduate representatives to provide one-on-one services for employers, and provide intensive

promotion for students who have difficulties in finding employment. The next step of research can focus on the group of graduates from key universities, investigate the actual employment situation of graduates from different academic levels and majors, and put forward more personalized suggestions.

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