Practical Research by School Social Work in Addressing College Students' Employment Challenges: A Study Based on Employment Conditions of Graduates from Y University

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Abstract: This paper investigates the current employment status of the 2023 graduates from Y University to accurately understand the distribution of graduates' destinations and optimize employment services. Based on descriptive analysis of sample survey data, the study examines the quality of employment of university graduates from multiple perspectives, including their current basic situation, employment intentions, development plans, destination distribution, and satisfaction levels. Guided by the professional values and service techniques of social work, this paper seeks effective methods to alleviate college students' employment difficulties. It emphasizes attention to group differences and individual characteristics of students, utilizing specific social work methods. From the perspective of ecosystem theory, it proposes multidimensional interventions and targeted cross-grade and category-specific interventions, aiming to establish a comprehensive view of the employment process for college students. The study advocates for multi-party collaboration to collectively promote high-quality employment among college students, thereby enhancing the implementation rate of high-quality employment and overall satisfaction.

1. Research Background

1.1 Policy Background

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China[1] clearly stated that talent is the foremost resource. It emphasized implementing a strategy of prioritizing employment, strengthening employment-first policies, improving employment promotion mechanisms, and promoting high-quality, full employment. By 2035, the overall goals for China's development include significant advancements in economic strength, technological capability, and comprehensive national power, with per capita GDP reaching the level of moderately developed countries. Additionally, the goals encompass achieving high-level technological self-reliance, becoming a leading innovative nation, and building a strong nation in education, science and

technology, talent, culture, sports, and health, with significantly enhanced national cultural soft power. It is evident that university graduates, as the main force in knowledge transmission and innovation practice, play an irreplaceable role in promoting employment and driving social and economic development. They are not only active participants in achieving the national development goals but also key forces in leading future development.

Recently, the Ministry of Education issued the *Notice on Employment and Entrepreneurship Work for the 2024 Graduates of National Regular Higher Education Institutions* (hereinafter referred to as the *Notice*)[2], deploying all regions and higher education institutions to thoroughly implement the decisions and arrangements of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council. The *Notice* outlines the "2024 National College Graduates Employment and Entrepreneurship Promotion Action", adopting multiple measures to promote the employment of college graduates. The *Notice* emphasizes placing a higher priority on the employment work of college graduates and proposes 26 specific measures to improve the employment promotion mechanism, strengthen the coordination and linkage between various levels of government and higher education institutions, and ensure that all of society works together to promote employment. These measures cover various aspects from policy support to service guarantees, aiming to develop employment opportunities through multiple channels, enhance continuous employment services, streamline and optimize job-seeking procedures, strengthen youth employment support, and ensure the accountability of the relevant entities.

Social work, as a bridge connecting the government, universities, and society, plays an irreplaceable role. Social workers should actively assume social responsibility, utilizing their professional knowledge and skills to provide career guidance, employment consultation, and psychological support to college graduates, helping them better adapt to societal needs and enhance their employment competitiveness. Additionally, social work organizations can facilitate communication between schools and enterprises, promoting effective talent matching. Social work should also focus on college graduates facing employment difficulties, such as those from economically disadvantaged families or with physical disabilities, providing them with more precise and personalized assistance to ensure equal participation in the job market and realization of their potential. In conclusion, social work has significant potential in promoting the employment of college graduates. By leveraging professional advantages and actively integrating social resources, social work can contribute to alleviating the employment difficulties of college students, promote social fairness and justice, and enhance social harmony and stability.

On March 5, 2024, Premier Li Qiang, on behalf of the State Council, delivered the *Government Work Report*[3] at the Second Session of the 14th National People's Congress. The report highlighted that this year's college graduates are expected to exceed 11.7 million. Compared to 2023, which was dubbed the "most challenging job-hunting season in history", the employment situation in 2024 appears even more daunting, with the number of college graduates anticipated to reach 11.79 million—an increase of 210,000 over 2023, setting a new record high. The frequent mention of "employment" in the 2024 *Government Work Report* underscores the nation's deep concern and firm commitment to addressing employment issues. The term "employment" appeared more than 20 times in the report, reflecting its central role in the national development agenda and the government's clear commitment to securing jobs for youth, including college graduates. Overall, the core theme regarding employment is "stabilizing employment", with "promoting employment" being of utmost importance. Additionally, during the 14th collective study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on May 27, 2024, focused on promoting high-quality, full employment, President Xi emphasized, "Promoting high-quality, full employment is the new positioning and new mission of employment work in the new era and new journey."[4] Ensuring employment is foundational for people's livelihoods, public sentiment, and social stability. The

national government has clearly outlined a series of guiding principles and action plans. These policies and measures provide clear action guidelines for governments at all levels, educational institutions, enterprises, and all sectors of society to collectively advance this significant social endeavor of promoting employment.

1.2 Social Background

Employment is the greatest livelihood issue, connecting the macroeconomy on one end and the well-being of countless households on the other. Thus, addressing the challenge of employment is crucial for enhancing public welfare and advancing national development. Employment statistics serve as a barometer for a nation's economic performance and social progress, akin to indicators of national economic fluctuations. As societal standards improve and quality of life enhances, China's higher education has entered the stage of universalization. According to authoritative data from the Ministry of Education, China has established the largest higher education system globally, with total enrollment reaching 44.3 million students. Additionally, the gross enrollment rate in higher education has significantly increased from 30% in 2012 to 57.8% in 2021, marking a leap that signifies China's achievement of universally recognized levels of higher education. In recent years, the number of college graduates in China has repeatedly hit new highs. According to relevant documents from the Ministry of Education[5], the number of graduates surpassed 10 million for the first time in 2022, reaching 10.76 million. This figure increased to 11.58 million in 2023 and is expected to reach 11.79 million in 2024, an increase of 210,000 from 2023, setting another record high. Each year is referred to as the "most challenging graduation season", and data indicates that the difficulty increases year by year.

Moreover, the employment challenge is neither a sudden recent issue nor a unique problem faced by China alone.

This is a historical challenge. During the Republican era, the number of college students in China was extremely low. For instance, in the 1930s, only about 8,000 college graduates (university/college students) graduated each year. These graduates were considered top-tier scarce talents and should have had an absolute advantage in the job market. However, they also faced employment difficulties and high unemployment rates. In 1934, scholar Fu Sinian published an article titled *The Youth Unemployment Problem* in the Ta Kung Pao[6], highlighting that youth unemployment was not a new phenomenon but had been gradually emerging and intensifying over the past few years. According to relevant statistics, youth unemployment has been rising continuously in recent years. For college graduates, in particular, the economic downturn in the job market has affected their career development and life planning, with last year being especially tough and this year proving to be even worse. Between 1933 and 1934, only 15,216 university (and college) students graduated, a number that pales in comparison to today's soaring graduate numbers. Even with such a small cohort of modern higher-educated talent, China still struggled to provide adequate employment opportunities. The unemployment rate among college graduates at that time was 13.1%, with the unemployment rate for humanities graduates reaching 16.6%. Admittedly, the high unemployment rate of college graduates during the Republican era cannot be directly compared to today's situation. Back then, the issue stemmed from relatively underdeveloped socio-economic conditions and a lack of sufficient job opportunities for college graduates. Today, the employment situation is grim due to a complex interplay of various factors. When did college graduate employment become difficult? How did it become difficult? Why did it become difficult? These questions have been repeatedly discussed but remain more than just casual conversation. They are fundamental to people's livelihoods and the nation's grand strategy. The expansion wave that began in the late 1990s and early 2000s aimed to achieve "universal higher

education". Each year, the supply of college graduates has significantly outstripped the demand for jobs, leading to a severe labor surplus. Yet, is it truly a case of "no jobs available" or "unwillingness to take available jobs"? Is it a matter of "difficulty in finding any job" or "difficulty in finding a high-quality job"? This paper will systematically explore the underlying causes of these employment challenges.

This is a global issue. The International Labour Organization's report *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023*[7] points out that the global labor market is at a critical turning point, facing unprecedented challenges. It is projected that the global employment growth rate in 2023 will be only 1%, less than half of that in 2022. The number of unemployed people worldwide will increase to 208 million, with the global unemployment rate reaching 5.8%. This indicates that youth employment issues, including those of college graduates, are not unique to China but are common global challenges. The International Labour Organization defines unemployment as individuals above a certain age who are without work during the reference period, are capable of working, are willing to work, and are actively seeking work. In China, unemployed individuals are defined as those aged 16 to 60 for men and 16 to 55 for women who are capable of working, seeking employment, but unable to find a job. Thus, college graduates who are not yet employed are also considered part of the unemployed population. Considering the complex international political landscape and the uneven economic development structure in the post-pandemic era, multiple factors are hindering the development of the labor market, pushing it into a bottleneck period. Globally, youth unemployment is not only a typical issue between the Global North and South but also a developmental issue. Youth unemployment rates are lower in developed countries (the North) and higher in developing countries (the South), inversely correlated with the level of development. In conclusion, the employment challenges faced by college graduates are common both domestically and internationally, urgently requiring a concerted effort from society to develop and implement effective solutions.

1.3 Advantages of Social Work Intervention

The severe practical issues of college graduates struggling with employment, career choices, and life challenges have, in essence, placed this group among the genuinely disadvantaged. In reality, graduates face various difficulties and numerous challenges during their job search, accompanied by psychological issues such as anxiety and confusion. Both materially and mentally, they urgently need attention and support. Career guidance and services for college students have traditionally been classified under psychology and ideological-political education, and this has been the norm for many years. Social work, as a newer field and emerging profession, has only recently begun to gain public attention. However, the perspective of social work intervention offers unique advantages and holds significant promise in this area.

1.3.1 Uniqueness of the Discipline

Compared to other professional fields, social work has distinct disciplinary characteristics and boundary advantages. There is a stereotype that social work is broad but not deep, and generalized but not practical. This perception contributes to doubts about the social work profession—particularly regarding its replaceability. What exactly is social work? Is the field of intervention highly replaceable? Does it have sufficiently precise and scientific theoretical support? These questions partly explain the slow progress and awkward position of social work. In reality, the situation is not entirely as perceived. As the saying goes, "every profession has its specialization", and "existence is rational". Currently, career services available to college students within their institutions are often provided by psychological counselors or ideological-political education

teachers. These services primarily offer mental comfort and guidance through counseling and ideological-political education, but employment services encompass a wide range of issues. They are not limited to psychological, educational, or social aspects alone but are instead comprehensive and systematic structural issues. The most notable characteristic of social work is its ability to link social resources and expand social support networks. Social work can comprehensively understand needs and provide assistance from multiple perspectives, dimensions, and levels. Compared to other fields, social work has distinct advantages in this regard.

In practical scenarios, social work is often confused with psychology. Psychological counseling focuses on treatment and primarily serves individuals with psychological disorders and conditions. A significant disadvantage of psychological counseling is that it may lead clients to doubt themselves and develop the mental stigma of being "problematic patients". In contrast, social work adheres to humanistic principles and a person-centered approach, defining the issues individuals face as common life challenges rather than attributing them to personal behavioral abnormalities or moral failings. For clients, this approach is more humane and empathetic, helping to liberate them from societal prejudices and stereotypes and thereby alleviate the mental stress caused by stigmatization. Furthermore, social work can integrate resources and optimize environments. Unlike the case-based consultation approach commonly used in psychology, social work can adopt a more macro perspective, breaking boundaries and constructing social support networks for a more comprehensive and in-depth investigation of root causes. Compared to ideological-political education, social work's stronger focus on targeted intervention and respect for client autonomy offers more personalized and practical assistance than the more indoctrinatory and collective principles of ideological education. Additionally, social work has distinct disciplinary characteristics embedded in its practice. It doesn't merely impart employment policies and concepts passively but leverages strength-based perspectives and social support theories to fully utilize the subjective initiative of college students. Social workers take an encouraging and supportive attitude, believing in the client's unlimited capacity for self-change. They provide students with more choices and opportunities, aiming to develop their value and potential. The philosophy of "teaching a man to fish rather than giving him a fish" underpins this approach. Rather than directly solving problems, social work emphasizes helping clients achieve cognitive and behavioral changes, enhancing their self-problem-solving abilities. This approach is relatively gentle and integrates various methods, including casework, group work, community work, and social administration, making it diverse, flexible, and adaptable.

1.3.2 Professionalism in Social Work Intervention

From the perspective of social work itself, this discipline has certain advantages in terms of professional philosophy, methods and techniques, fields of application, and scope of influence. Peng Zhen[8]proposes using a social work perspective to study the employment difficulties faced by college students, and he bases his approach on ecological systems theory, suggesting intervention strategies at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

As for professional philosophy, social work is fundamentally guided by altruistic values, relying on scientific knowledge and professional methods to assist disadvantaged groups in overcoming their life challenges and helping individuals better adapt to their social environments. According to Wang Sibin (1998), social work is institutionalized altruism, and Tong Min (2009) highlights that providing caring professional services is the core essence of social work. The discipline is essentially about delivering scientifically effective services to those in need, especially to vulnerable groups, with its core value being altruism. Social work adheres to the principle of helping others to help themselves, learning scientific methods and helping techniques to support individuals and their social environments in better adapting to each other [9].

Social work, as a highly practical social science, employs a set of methods that vary according to the context and specific circumstances under theoretical guidance. It encompasses direct practice methods like casework, group work, and community work, as well as indirect methods like social administration. In practice, social workers can use targeted interventions tailored to the individual needs and characteristics of their clients, offering various types of employment guidance and services. The use of these methods allows social workers to adapt to the specific needs of the service recipients. For instance, casework focuses on one-on-one support, while group work leverages the dynamics of peer support, and community work addresses broader societal issues. Social administration involves policy-making and organizational management to improve service delivery. This multifaceted approach enables social workers to effectively address the diverse and complex issues surrounding college graduate employment, providing holistic support that is both personalized and comprehensive.

In terms of fields of application, social work can intervene in a wide range of social aspects, no matter how detailed. The service areas of social work refer to the fields of social life where social workers provide professional services. These include children, adolescents, the elderly, women, people with disabilities, the judiciary, preferential treatment and resettlement, social assistance, family, school, community, medical, and corporate sectors. When addressing college student employment issues, social work falls within these domains. Emphasizing the integrated development of social work, related fields such as school social work, youth social work, family social work, corporate social work, and community social work can merge for development, featuring precise, targeted characteristics beneficial for conducting relevant service activities.

With its unique system and ecological practice model, social work emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their environments. It focuses on the dual changes in both the person and the environmental system, transitioning from "personal troubles" to "public issues". The intervention targets not only the micro-level, which involves individuals and families, but also the mezzo-level, which includes communities and social organizations, and the macro-level, which encompasses institutions and culture. This multi-perspective, multi-faceted approach allows for comprehensive intervention in the employment difficulties faced by college graduates.

1.3.3 Local Professional Value

Considering China's basic national conditions and the development of social work, the key lies in following a development path that aligns with the country's characteristics. Although social work is often regarded as an imported concept from the West, it does have roots in traditional Chinese philosophy. The "helping others to help themselves" principle of social work can be traced back to the Confucian ideals of universal harmony and benevolence, as recorded in the *Book of Rites*. This aligns closely with the concept of a "Great Community" or "Datong Society". Under the influence of the long-standing Chinese values of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith, the gentle and kind national ethos provides an ideal foundation for the development of social work principles. In fact, China embraced the spirit of social work long before it became a recognized field worldwide. However, it is in the theoretical and methodological aspects where there is a perceived gap. Under the banner of developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, constructing a social work system unique to China involves developing practice within theory and enriching theory through practice. This integrative development is embedded in all aspects of contemporary society, making it equally applicable to addressing the employment difficulties faced by college students.

2. Descriptive Statistics of College Graduates' Employment Status

2.1 Survey Explanation

Y University, located in a historically significant red revolutionary base, is a provincially and ministerially co-established institution situated in the central-western region of China. Due to various constraints such as geographical environment, socio-economic development, and local policies, the employment landscape here exhibits distinct characteristics and challenges. Therefore, researching the employment status of college graduates can provide valuable insights for employment guidance in universities within central and western regions. A sample survey of the employment status of the 2023 graduates was conducted, involving 17 subordinate colleges and collecting a total of 466 questionnaires (invalid data was excluded in the descriptive statistics).

2.2 Data Descriptive Statistics

Based on this survey data, we analyze the employment status and overall satisfaction of the 2023 graduates of Y University. The questionnaire included both single and multiple-choice questions, combining subjective and objective items. The topics covered include post-graduation plans, career choices, preferred regions, expected salaries, challenges faced, and guidance needs, providing a multi-dimensional and multi-angle analysis of the graduates' employment status. The broad distribution of the questionnaire ensures a solid foundation in terms of quantity and quality, with a certain degree of reliability and validity.

2.2.1 Rising Trend of "Delayed Employment"

Table 1: Postponed Employment Destinations

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Preparing for public service exams (e.g., civil service, public institutions)	66	39.29%
Reviewing for next year's graduate school entrance exams	26	15.48%
Preparing to study abroad, including relevant training or processing paperwork	4	2.38%
Preparing for industry qualification exams, seeking employment after passing	11	6.55%
Undecided on career direction, temporarily not seeking employment	22	13.1%
No financial pressure, temporarily not seeking employment	2	1.19%
Preparing for entrepreneurship, temporarily not seeking employment	6	3.57%
Planning to enlist in the fall	0	0
Other	28	16.67%
Blank	3	1.79%
Total valid responses	168	

Table 1 presents the survey results on the "postponed employment destinations" of the sample. The analysis reveals that the majority of students, 39.29%, chose to "prepare for exams for civil

service, public institutions, and other government positions". Some students opted to "review for next year's graduate school entrance exams", "remain undecided and not seek employment temporarily", or "pursue other paths". A smaller portion chose to "prepare for industry qualification exams and seek employment afterward", and a very few selected "prepare for studying abroad and undergo related training or procedures", "no financial pressure, not seeking employment temporarily", or "plan to start their own business, not seeking employment temporarily".

Except for those who chose to take civil service exams or start their own business, other students opted for "slow employment" or "delayed employment," reflecting a significant contemporary trend. "Slow employment" usually refers to a temporary state of unemployment among recent college graduates who choose to delay entering the job market by traveling, preparing for further studies, taking exams, or starting a business. In this survey, "slow employment" refers to recent graduates who have not yet entered the job market. Therefore, the concept of "slow employment" in this survey includes both "employment after further studies" and "delayed employment." Research data[10] indicate an increase from 15.9% in 2015 to 38.0% in 2023, a rise of 22.1 percentage points over eight years. The proportion choosing further studies increased by 17.3 percentage points over the same period. The proportion of those opting for delayed employment has accelerated in the past two years, rising from 2.8% in 2021 to 6.0% in 2023, an increase of 3.2 percentage points. Compared to 2015, the proportion of delayed employment has nearly quadrupled.

According to the survey data, the proportion of graduates opting for "slow employment" is substantial. The survey results on the "reasons for pursuing graduate studies" further confirm the overall trend of increasing delayed employment, indicating that this study on the employment situation of college students is of practical significance.

Table 2: Reasons for Pursuing Graduate Studies

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Interest in the field, desire for further study	68	27.98%
Increase career opportunities, aim for higher starting point in job search	82	33.74%
High employment pressure, delay employment	32	13.17%
Reapply to alma mater, build a higher-level network	17	7%
Change of major, seek broader development opportunities	18	7.41%
Influence from parents or peers	10	4.12%
other	13	5.35%
Blank	3	1.23%
Total valid responses	243	

Table 2 presents the survey results on the "reasons for pursuing graduate studies". The analysis reveals that a significant portion of students are motivated by the goal of securing better quality employment. Graduates aiming to "increase career opportunities and achieve a higher starting point in the job market" account for 33.74%, while those choosing to "delay employment due to high employment pressure" make up 13.17%. Whether it is "building a higher-level network" or "seeking broader development opportunities", these reasons are all aimed at planning and

strategizing for future entry into the workforce and career development. Moreover, with the increasingly competitive job market, educational background is becoming a dominant factor, similar to trends in the economic market. The phenomenon of "educational credential inflation" is leading to rapid devaluation of degrees. Many graduates recognize the severe conditions and stringent requirements of the current job market and seek to enhance their competitiveness by improving their educational qualifications. On the other hand, a small portion of students genuinely desire to pursue academic research, while most opt for further studies to temporarily escape reality. Additionally, there is a minority who follow trends blindly, lacking a clear understanding of themselves and a personal career plan.

2.2.2 Employment Preferences

Table 3 presents the survey results on the "factors considered important when choosing an employer". The analysis reveals that "nature of the organization or job stability", "location of the job", and "salary" are the dominant factors influencing graduates' employment choices. The majority of graduates consider "nature of the organization or job stability", "location of the job", and "salary", with these factors being prioritized by more than half of the respondents. Additionally, 40.34% of graduates consider "career development prospects" important. Other factors include "personal interests", "reputation and status of the organization", "industry prospects", and "work environment or intensity". "Relevance to one's major" is a relatively minor consideration, and there are other influencing factors not covered in the survey. The following analysis will explore the three dominant factors in detail.

Table 3: Factors considered important when choosing an employer

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
location of the job	284	60.94%
nature of the organization or job stability	290	62.23%
reputation and status of the organization	78	16.74%
salary and benefits	302	64.81%
personal interests	98	21.03%
career development prospects	188	40.34%
industry prospects	52	11.16%
work environment or intensity	68	10.52%
relevance to one's major	36	7.73%
other	12	2.58%
total valid responses	466	

Table 4: Expected salary and benefits

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
2000-4000	11	2.36%
4001-6000	128	27.47%
6001-8000	158	33.91%
8001-10000	81	17.38%
Over 10000	88	18.88%
Total valid responses	466	

Table 4 presents the survey results on the "expected salary and benefits". The analysis reveals that the vast majority of graduates expect a salary in the range of "4001–8000". A significant portion of graduates hope for salaries "8001 and above", while almost no graduates chose the "2000–4000" range. This indicates that graduates' starting salary expectations are generally high. Many students have a skewed perception of societal realities and a limited understanding of the current job market and economic environment. Additionally, they tend to have high personal expectations and unclear self-positioning.

Table 5: Preferred Employers

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Party and government organizations	179	38.41%
Higher education institutions	147	31.55%
Primary and secondary education institutions	133	28.54%
Other public institutions	112	24.03%
Medical and health institutions	19	4.08%
State-owned enterprises	162	34.76%
Joint ventures	22	4.72%
Other enterprises	49	10.52%
Rural administrative villages	5	1.07%
Urban communities	15	3.22%
Military (including enlistment)	6	1.29%
Self-employment	27	5.79%
Other	51	10.94%
Total valid responses	466	

Table 6: Factors considered important when choosing an employer

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
location of the job	284	60.94%
nature of the organization or job stability	290	62.23%
reputation and status of the organization	78	16.74%
salary and benefits	302	64.81%
personal interests	98	21.03%
career development prospects	188	40.34%
industry prospects	52	11.16%
work environment or intensity	68	10.52%
relevance to one's major	36	7.73%
Other	12	2.58%
Total valid responses	466	

About Table 5 and 6, the survey results on "preferred employers" and "factors considered important when choosing an employer" reveal a clear trend among graduates towards "patriotic and career-oriented" choices[11]. Government and administrative institutions are consistently the top preference. A significant majority of graduates show a strong preference for party and government organizations, as well as educational institutions, indicating a higher popularity for jobs within the public sector. This trend is reflected in the increasing number of applicants for civil service and graduate school exams in recent years. Conversely, the proportion of graduates willing to work in "rural administrative villages", "urban communities", or the "military (including enlistment)" is relatively low. Geographically, there is a notable inclination towards the southeastern coastal regions, a trend often referred to as "Peacocks flying southeast"[12], with less enthusiasm for positions in the remote western regions. Overall, the analysis suggests that there are still significant gaps in grassroots and western region development that need to be addressed.

2.2.3 Needs on Employment Guidance

Table 7: Major problems and difficulties encountered in employment

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
inadequate methods and techniques	153	32.83%
insufficient professional skills	169	36.27%
lack of practical experience	252	54.08%
lack of social connections	117	25.11%
high entry barriers set by employers	91	19.53%
narrow employment channels	122	26.18%
low salary	72	15.45%
other	62	13.3%
total valid responses	466	

Table 8: Personal needs for employment guidance services

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
career planning guidance	232	49.79%
resume writing and job interview coaching	214	45.92%
employment policy interpretation	132	28.33%
recruitment information dissemination	174	37.34%
employment situation analysis and judgment	102	21.89%
employment counseling	47	10.09%
entrepreneurship guidance and training	45	9.66%
employment internships and practical experience	126	27.04%
campus recruitment fairs	93	19.96%

assistance for students facing employment difficulties	47	10.09%
Further education (or study abroad) guidance	35	7.51%
other	27	5.79%
total valid responses	466	

In Table 7 and 8, the survey results on "major problems and difficulties encountered in employment" and "personal needs for employment guidance services" reveal that graduates commonly face subjective issues such as lack of practical experience, insufficient professional skills, and inadequate methods and techniques. The vast majority of graduates report experiencing common problems like "lack of practical experience", "insufficient professional skills", and "inadequate methods and techniques". In terms of personal guidance needs, graduates show a strong preference for "career planning guidance" and "resume writing and job interview coaching". Additionally, there is significant demand for "recruitment information dissemination", "employment policy interpretation", and "employment internships and practical experience".

From an objective perspective, narrow employment channels and increasingly high entry barriers are also critical factors hindering the employment of today's graduates.

3. Analysis of the Reasons

The ecological perspective is an open system that integrates individual development within a series of interrelated environmental systems. It combines various theoretical concepts, supported by a rich theoretical framework and a profound historical evolution. The historical roots of this perspective can be traced back to Darwin's theory of evolution, which creatively introduced the concept of "survival of the fittest", emphasizing the dynamic adaptation between organisms and their environments. In the field of social work, the earliest reference can be found in Mary Ellen Richmond's book *Social Diagnosis*, which discussed understanding behavior within its context. Subsequently, various scholars have enriched and refined the theoretical framework of systems theory. In 1979, Urie Bronfenbrenner proposed the ecological systems theory, which encompasses individual-process-context, categorizing the environment into four levels: microsystem, including face-to-face groups; mesosystem; exosystem; and macrosystem, which includes larger cultural and social systems such as ideologies, belief systems, customs, and laws. Bronfenbrenner's insights into person-environment practice highlight that the match between individuals and their environments occurs at different levels, with complex exchanges between the individual and the environment[13].

This article focuses on an in-depth analysis of the reasons behind the employment difficulties faced by university graduates from the perspective of the social work ecological systems theory. The discussion will unfold across the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem levels.

3.1 Microsystem Level

First, there is insufficient professional competence. University students often overlook the fundamental gap between academic knowledge and real-life application. This results in a heavy focus on theory over practice, leading to a lack of skills in knowledge conversion, integration, and practical application. Consequently, their professional competencies are misaligned with societal and employer needs, rendering them less capable of fulfilling job responsibilities.

Second, they are lack of cognitive awareness. Many students lack self-assessment regarding their fundamental abilities and an objective understanding of the professional world. From choosing a major to selecting a career path, students often remain unclear about their strengths and essential

needs. This lack of self-awareness and basic understanding of their situation impedes the development of long-term, proactive career planning. Additionally, high employment expectations are common, with many holding unrealistic views about their prospects. This mismatch between expectations and reality, coupled with unclear self-positioning and inadequate understanding of the current job market, results in a deficiency in crisis awareness.

Third, there is homogeneity in employment intentions. Recent years have seen significant societal and industrial restructuring, leading to new employment characteristics among university graduates, such as delayed employment, slow employment, and flexible employment. Trends like the "hot pursuit of graduate studies" and the "rush for civil service exams" reflect a tendency to follow the crowd blindly, influenced by traditional societal norms. This has also given rise to utilitarian and materialistic values, exacerbating structural unemployment issues, where job vacancies and unemployed individuals coexist[14].

3.2 Mesosystem Level

First, there is mismatch between university programs and societal needs. Many universities face a significant disconnect between their academic offerings and the actual demands of the job market. There is often a lack of mechanisms to link curriculum development with societal needs, resulting in insufficient preemptive analysis of employment rates and integrated "major-employment-career" training programs. This leads to outdated program structures that fail to keep pace with societal changes, lacking effectiveness and scientific rigor. Consequently, there are issues with obsolete training programs, weak educational systems, and ineffective information dissemination.

There are inadequate employment guidance programs in universities. While most universities have dedicated employment guidance centers and offer a range of employment services, there is a notable deficiency in programs that foster employment awareness and long-term career planning among students. Common issues include one-dimensional guidance methods, lack of continuous involvement, insufficient specialized staff, and an overemphasis on achieving high employment rates. This often leads to encouraging students to pursue further education, such as graduate or doctoral studies, without considering their individual characteristics. This lack of accountability can cause students to miss optimal employment opportunities, resulting in significant time and economic costs, and ultimately leading to a waste of talent resources.

3.3 Macrosystem Level

First, there are hidden drawbacks of university enrollment expansion.

The number of university graduates keeps increasing. Since the expansion of university enrollment in 1999, the number of graduates in China has surged, and this trend continues to accelerate. The unique advantage previously held by university graduates has diminished, as they no longer benefit from earlier advantages like "green channels" and preferential treatment. The intensifying competition has led to phenomena such as "degree inflation" and an "employment arms race". The proportion of master's and doctoral degree holders has also been increasing annually. In this context of degree devaluation, the metaphorical "Kong Yiji's long gown" has become yet another obstacle for contemporary university graduates in their employment and career choices.

Meanwhile, the quality of university graduates declines. The beneficiaries of the enrollment expansion policy are often students with relatively lower college entrance examination scores. Generally, there is a positive correlation between entrance exam scores and overall abilities. Therefore, objectively speaking, these students may lack the skills and competencies that typically correlate with higher performance, thus lowering the average capability level of university students and, consequently, their employability. Moreover, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has

significantly disrupted education, with many institutions resorting to online classes, which have affected teaching quality to some extent.

Second, there is reduction in social employment market demand. The labor market has undergone structural adjustments, compounded by the global pandemic's economic impact, resulting in sluggish economic growth and a downward economic trend. Additionally, the rapid pace of scientific and technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence, has highlighted the substitution effect of technology on labor. These combined factors have tightened the labor market demand, leading to an imbalance between supply and demand, posing increasingly severe challenges for university graduates seeking employment.

4. Practical Intervention of Social work

Based on the survey and follow-up feedback, it is evident that graduates are experiencing significant pressure related to employment and career choices, facing a series of real-world challenges. They have provided some constructive suggestions and recommendations for institutional management and employment counseling, while also expressing a pressing need for assistance in resolving psychological dilemmas. The intervention of social work, with its specific value principles and service techniques, is both feasible and effective.

4.1 Responding to Student Needs with Targeted Services

As the primary agents in resolving the employment difficulties they face, university students themselves are central and crucial. Therefore, using a microsystem perspective is the focus of the intervention. Social workers can employ a variety of methods and techniques to provide personalized services to different groups of students, helping to alleviate psychological stress, guide them toward a scientific and reasonable view of employment, and comprehensively improve their employability.

First, use casework methods. Implementing "one-on-one", "point-to-point", and "face-to-face" assistance allows for specific analysis and tailored solutions based on individual circumstances. This approach respects and accepts each student, attentively listening to their current struggles, and uses unique skills and enthusiasm to alleviate their negative emotions, such as tension, anxiety, and confusion. This helps correct psychological behavior deviations and assists students in overcoming psychological difficulties. Additionally, employing empowerment theory, strengths perspective theory, and social support theory during counseling sessions can guide students to fully understand their strengths and available resources, amplifying their advantages and potential. Social workers can help students gather employment information, connect them with resource networks and support systems, and provide essential employment guidance.

Second, use group work methods. Conducting group activities among students facing common employment difficulties can be highly effective. Integrating models like the social goals model, treatment model, and interaction model helps establish self-identity among group members, improve interpersonal relationships, and build new social support networks. Through experience sharing and communication within the group, members can expand employment opportunities, reduce information asymmetry, leverage collective strength, and enhance individual employability.

Third, use community work methods. Aiming to solve practical problems, social workers can integrate and mobilize community resources to promote school-community collaboration. This helps students develop a sense of belonging and identification with the community. Organizing and planning student participation in community activities can improve their practical skills and accumulate grassroots experience, creating conditions for future employment. Moreover, one function of community services is to create job opportunities. Community-based services can

provide some job positions for students, temporarily alleviating employment pressure.

4.2 Leveraging Multi-Role Functions to Link Various Resources

The peripheral environment plays a crucial role in influencing individuals, and social workers, with their multifaceted roles, can mobilize and link external resources to address clients' real-world issues. From a mesosystem and exosystem perspective, social workers can engage families, schools, employers, and the broader society to collectively support university students in achieving high-quality employment.

As a supporter, a social worker can encourage and support students and their families in building confidence in achieving high-quality employment. This involves enhancing self-identification, alleviating job search and employment pressure, and improving employability, ultimately achieving the service goal of "helping people help themselves".

As a mediator, when conflicts arise between students and their families or other members regarding employment perspectives, the social worker can maintain a neutral stance, help clarify issues, provide relevant information, and guide rational decision-making.

Acting as bridges, social workers can coordinate resources from various sectors, including government, non-governmental organizations, and enterprises. By promoting school-community and school-enterprise collaborations, social workers can enhance the support services available to students for better employment outcomes.

As a service provider, a social worker can offer both material and psychological support to students and their families. This includes providing material and labor services, psychological counseling, collecting and disseminating employment information, expanding employment channels, and offering both material and spiritual support.

Social workers can take the advocate role as well. Using social administrative techniques, social workers can help construct a collaborative mechanism encompassing "admission—training—employment". As policy advisors, they can offer suggestions to university employment guidance centers, such as organizing job fairs, inviting expert lectures, and creating multi-level employment service platforms. They can also propose improvements to academic management departments to timely adjust training programs and professional setups, thereby enhancing student competitiveness to match market demands. Furthermore, they can advise relevant government and employer departments on institutional construction and employment service system reforms, providing specific recommendations on policy and recruitment details.

4.3 Adhering to Life Cycle Principles and Respecting Individual Differences

University students often lack basic understanding in both professional choices and career planning before entering university. Employment issues are neither temporary nor limited to specific groups; they should span across the entire personal development cycle and every academic stage. Drawing on prior experiences with foresight and anticipatory planning can benefit all students. Employment guidance should transition from last-minute preparations to well-organized readiness, from assembly-line "product packaging" to "innovative design", ensuring that when students graduate, they can fully utilize their talents and find meaningful careers. Establishing a sense of urgency and promoting a continuous employment guidance model, integrated throughout the training program, is essential[15].The application of life cycle theory and longitudinal systems allows for systematically addressing the needs and characteristics of students at different academic stages, facilitating distinctive and differentiated employment services.

For freshmen who have just entered campus and may not yet be accustomed to the school environment or have a strong sense of professional identity, the focus of career guidance is to

cultivate awareness of career development planning and lay the groundwork during this foundational stage. This can be achieved through assessments using scales to evaluate students' personality traits and mental health. Activities such as organizing experience-sharing sessions with outstanding alumni representatives from the same major, conducting courses on professional cognition by faculty members, and inviting authoritative figures to give lectures on career planning are crucial. Additionally, community-based methods can be utilized to arrange field visits and engage in public service activities, enhancing social participation and practical experience, thereby providing students with a basic understanding and exposure to future career planning.

Sophomores, after a year of studying professional knowledge and adapting to campus life, have gradually integrated into campus life and have a basic understanding of themselves and their professions. However, their career alignment and specific planning may still be unclear. The emphasis of career guidance is to increase students' self-identification, establish goals and directions, and establish a match between personal circumstances and desired careers. Activities such as organizing career planning competitions and resume competitions can enhance students' awareness of career positioning. Furthermore, through group activities, students with similar career planning directions can form groups to share experiences, exchange professional information, establish social support networks, and strengthen professional skills training.

As juniors prepare to enter the workforce and face the preparation before graduation, they often experience a period of confusion and anxiety. They are confronted with choices and trade-offs in terms of employment, further study, and career selection. Therefore, career guidance becomes particularly crucial, focusing on providing various practical opportunities and cutting-edge information. Regular surveys and individual case studies can be conducted to understand students' inner needs and assist in managing anxiety. Initiatives like "Five Societies Collaboration", "School-Enterprise Collaboration", and "School-Society Collaboration" can be implemented to cultivate and incubate employment and entrepreneurship bases for university students, expanding resource networks. Inviting human resources directors from various employers to organize special lectures and simulated recruitment competitions can bridge the gap between students and the workplace, enhancing their social adaptability.

Seniors nearing graduation, after three years of study and accumulation, have acquired theoretical knowledge and practical experience. However, as they prepare to enter the job market, they may face setbacks and unexpected crises. Case studies can be used to assist them, applying strengths-based and social support theories to boost students' confidence and alleviate job-related anxiety and tension. Actively connecting resources and leveraging personal, family, and societal support can enhance their employability. Group activities can facilitate peer interaction and experience sharing, providing assistance in gathering employment information and exploring job opportunities.

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