

# Employment Willingness and Suggestions for Normal College Students in the Post-pandemic Era

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**Abstract:** This article aims to investigate the employment willingness of normal school students through questionnaires and interviews. Focusing on the school and the students, it explores methods to enhance the employment management level of normal school graduates, thereby helping the school achieve the strategic goal of stable employment for graduates. The research results show that the employment willingness of normal school students is strong, accompanied by anxiety. Their employment willingness is influenced by various factors, exhibiting instability, with competitive pressure being the primary influencing factor during the employment process. Moreover, the employment willingness is closely related to the school's employment courses and employment management services. In conclusion, the employment willingness of normal school students in the post-pandemic era is characterized by strong desire and instability. Formulating corresponding recommendations and measures for their employment willingness is of great significance for the school's employment management work in the post-pandemic era, and provides a certain reference value for employment research and practice at normal schools in the region.

**Keywords:** Post-pandemic Era, Employment of Normal College Students, Employment Willingness.

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## 1. Introduction

The post-epidemic era refers to the period after the Covid-19 epidemic. This past epidemic has had a significant impact on various sectors worldwide, including the economy and job market. Economic recovery is a key focus for countries in the post-epidemic era and economic development requires the advancement of productivity, with employment playing a leading role in productivity development. Graduates, as the backbone of labor in the new era, face significant challenges regarding employment. The current issues facing graduates include a "supply-demand dilemma" in the job market and the difficulty of pursuing further studies through postgraduate exams [1]. Faced with such a severe job market, contemporary university students' willingness towards employment has changed, subsequently affecting their job stability. Additionally, the employment intentions of university students are closely related to the actual employment rates of graduates from universities. Therefore, researching and exploring the employment intentions of university students can help improve the employment management level of various universities, optimize and adjust employment management during the epidemic era, and ultimately assist educational institutions in achieving the strategic goal of stable employment for graduates.

## 2. Quantitative Analysis

The authors conducted the quantitative research by distributing the online questionnaire to undergraduate and graduated normal college students in Zhejiang. The platform of Wenjuanxing was used. Due to various limitations, the author employed a random sampling method and distributed the survey on social media platforms such as QQ, WeChat, and Xiaohongshu. The survey participants included 44.5% second-year students, 24% first-year students, 23% fourth-year students, 6% third-year undergraduates, and 2.5% undergraduate graduates, with most majors being in the field

of literary education. The survey comprised 28 questions, divided into four parts: basic information, the impact of dual reduction policies, current employment intentions and reasons, school's employment courses and management services, and factors affecting employment in the post-pandemic era. The authors conducted comparative and quantitative analysis of the survey data, combined with preliminary research on the employment intentions of normal college students in the area based on existing literature.

According to the survey data, the employment intentions of teacher candidates in the sample of this study are as follows: the employment intentions of teacher candidates are strong and accompanied by anxiety. Firstly, among the sample of them who participated in the online survey, 83% have started paying attention to employment. Among them, 41% of students started paying attention to employment in their freshman year, 14.5% in the sophomore year, 19% in the junior year, and 10% in the senior year. In the sample of those who have not started paying attention to employment, the statistical results of the planned time to start paying attention to employment are similar to the above results. It can be seen that the majority of the students start paying attention to employment mainly in their freshman and junior years. In addition, the author analyzed the survey data through cross-analysis: the senior undergraduates in the sample predominantly started paying attention to employment in their junior and senior years, while the freshman and sophomore undergraduates focused on employment in their freshman year. Through comparative analysis, there is a clear trend of earlier attention to employment, indicating that teacher candidates in the post-pandemic era attach more importance to future employment and have strong employment intentions. Secondly, among the sample of the students who participated in the online survey, facing various factors affecting stable employment in the post-pandemic era, 29.5% of them expressed being very worried about future employment, 48% expressed some worries, 13.5% expressed acceptance, and 9% expressed no worries. It can be seen that more than half of

them are worried about their future employment, reflecting a common phenomenon of anxiety among teacher candidates regarding employment in the post-pandemic era.

Most normal university students' employment intentions are limited to the options of taking postgraduate entrance exams or civil service exams, with a single employment intention. Research data shows that 49.5% of normal university students plan to pursue further studies after graduation (with 92% choosing to take the postgraduate entrance exam as the mode of further studies), 45% plan to take civil service exams, and 29% plan to take public service exams. However, only 27% consider other occupations, including 79.2% intending to enter business units, 8.9% planning to start their own businesses, and 5.9% planning to engage in social media. From the data, it is evident that pursuing postgraduate studies and civil service exams are the top choices for most university students after graduation, with fewer considerations for other professions, indicating a relatively limited range of employment intentions.

Furthermore, facing the severe situation in the teaching job market, a phenomenon is observed where normal university students confine themselves to the idea that they can only become teachers. In the sample of this survey, 67% of teacher trainees plan to "continue to choose to be a teacher, study hard, and improve their professional level" (with around 80% of normal university students willing to take civil service exams in small towns or rural areas), 16% plan to "go with the flow and leave it to fate," while the rest plan to "give up on being a teacher, seek other jobs," or "follow the work arrangements made by their families." This phenomenon is highly unfavorable for the employment of normal university students: on the one hand, it may lead to intensified competition within the teaching industry, making it even harder for normal university students to find jobs; on the other hand, it may lead to the phenomenon of normal education graduates engaging in "passive slow employment" (Slow employment refers to some college students who are not in a hurry to find a job or continue their studies after graduation). Instead, they choose to have a gap time or year to temporarily travel, engage in voluntary teaching, stay at home to accompany their parents, or conduct business investigations to slowly consider their life path. Passive slow employment may evolve into job evasion and waste of time.

In conclusion, it can be inferred that most students still prefer to choose jobs that are directly related to their majors, regardless of the working environment and conditions. They are not willing to step out of their comfort zones to switch to other professions.

### 3. Qualitative Analysis

The authors conducted a qualitative analysis on the employment intentions of normal college students using the method of interviews. Interview method refers to interviewing personnel on a specific topic with the interviewee, engaging in face-to-face communication and discussion based on a predetermined interview outline to collect relevant information. The information collected through personal interviews is obtained through direct conversations between the researcher and the interviewee, showcasing good flexibility and adaptability, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the interviewee's viewpoints on a particular topic.

In order to have a better understanding of the current employment situation, the author conducted interviews with

six senior undergraduate students and undergraduate teacher education graduates via online WeChat. The interviewees included senior undergraduate students, a Japanese major graduate (working in a media-related industry), and four English major graduates (two working as teaching staff member, one as a civil servant, and one as an institutional teacher). The main interview topics included the impact of university experience on successful employment, opinions and suggestions on university employment courses, challenges faced and solutions during the transition from teacher education to successful employment, sharing of experiences during university and in the job market, post-graduation views on employment as a teacher education graduate, pressures faced during employment, and disparities between post-employment work and expectations.

Through these interviews, the authors gained a deeper understanding of the employment intentions of teacher education graduates in the post-pandemic era. The analysis of the interview results for the six interviewees is as the following: First, the employment aspirations of the six interviewees differ. Their different university experiences and social practices determine their employment directions, with five choosing to take the civil service exam. Two of them considered pursuing postgraduate studies before taking the civil service exam but eventually gave up. This further illustrates that the majority of teacher candidates have aspirations for future employment between pursuing postgraduate studies and taking the civil service exam. Second, all six interviewees faced certain pressures in their employment paths, with competition being the main pressure that, to some extent, influenced their employment aspirations. Third, discrepancies between graduates' current employment situations and their expectations will to some extent affect the current teacher candidates' employment aspirations. Fourth, based on their feedback on university employment courses—generally indicating that undergraduate employment courses did not substantially help their own employment—it reflects issues with the cultivation program for current teacher candidates: employment courses are too singular in form, lack practical courses, lack targeted teaching methods, and have outdated, broad, and lacking innovative and contemporary employment course content. Fifth, all interviewees stated that the school's employment management services were closely linked to their successful employment and provided them with diverse employment opportunities. Sixth, the problems faced by graduates in their work and the discrepancies in their attitudes towards work before and after employment reflect that teacher candidates need to possess certain social skills during their university years and have a thorough understanding of the industry; otherwise, it will significantly reduce their job satisfaction and happiness and may even lead to frequent job changes after employment, which is not conducive to the stable employment of teacher candidates.

In summary, based on the analysis of data from questionnaire surveys and results from interviews: firstly, in the post-pandemic era, there is a strong willingness among normal university students for employment, accompanied by anxiety [2]. Secondly, there are issues with the choices of employment destinations for normal university students: the majority of them limit their employment intentions to options such as taking exams for further studies or civil service positions, showing a singular focus in their employment intentions. Additionally, normal university students are influenced by various factors, leading to a common

phenomenon of unstable employment intentions where their job preferences continuously change. Among these factors, competition pressure stands out as the main obstacle in their career paths, to some extent hindering their employment prospects and affecting their willingness to work. Lastly, the employment intentions of normal university students are closely related to the employment courses and management services provided by their schools.

## **4. Suggestions and Measures**

From the research findings above, the employment willingness of normal school students is related to various factors. In order to help normal school students succeed in their employment and thereby improve the employment rate of graduates from normal schools, the authors has compiled the following recommendations and measures based on the research results and relevant academic literature.

### **4.1. University Level**

#### **4.1.1. Transforming the Form of Employment Courses for Teacher Trainees and Providing Diversified Career Guidance**

Transforming the form of employment courses for normal school students, providing diversified employment guidance According to the research findings, employment-related courses offered by universities include "Career Development and Employment Guidance for Normal School Students," "Teacher Employment Guide," and "Fundamentals of Innovation and Entrepreneurship." These courses mainly consist of offline classroom teaching, along with some online tests and games to help normal school students understand existing employment forms and cultivate students' innovative thinking. However, this form of employment courses, which mainly rely on offline classroom teaching, simple online tests, and games, cannot meet the employment needs of normal school students in today's society, especially in the face of the current issue of the "difficulty in employment" for normal school students.

The authors believes that the employment courses offered by universities should be aligned with the times, increase more practical activities, and reduce formalistic courses. For example, organizing student visits to different types of companies (media, entertainment, etc.), holding employment-related seminars and lectures (inviting employment guidance experts or successful employed graduates), etc. These practical activities can effectively provide students with more employment directions, help students achieve cross-disciplinary employment. At the same time, the teaching method of "teaching students in accordance with their aptitude" should also be applied to employment and innovation courses, as supplementary courses based on student needs, allowing students to fully understand their employment direction.

#### **4.1.2. Keeping up with the Times, Continuously Improving the Teacher Training Program and Enhancing the Skills of Teacher Training**

The training program for normal school students should be continuously improved and adjusted in line with the times. The adjustment plan should focus on enhancing the skills of normal school students, increasing the competitiveness of our school's normal school students in the job market, thus better assisting students in successful employment and achieving the goal of improving the graduation employment rate of

normal colleges and universities.

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#### **4.1.3. Organizing Diverse Competitions and Activities to Motivate Teacher Trainees to Improve Their Skills Actively**

In response to the educational bureau's objectives, schools should organize diverse competitions and activities to motivate teacher trainees to improve their skills actively, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the job market. Competitions and activities can be of a professional nature to strengthen the professional abilities of teacher trainees, or they can be skill-related to facilitate mutual learning among teacher trainees, while also inspiring them to actively enhance their teaching skills.

#### **4.1.4. Improving the Level of Employment Management Services to Build a "Bridge" for Normal University Students' Employment**

According to the research findings above, normal universities in the Huzhou area provide employment services such as expert lectures, job fairs, consultations with professionals, career counseling, employment training, employment guidance, and employment internships. Among these services, 74% of normal university students are satisfied with the services provided by the school, 22% find them average, and 4% are dissatisfied. It can be seen that there is still room for improvement in the level of employment management services provided by schools. The main purpose of employment management services is to provide employment assistance to normal university students, which to some extent affects their employment, including the transmission of employment information and professional career guidance. A high level of employment management services can effectively help each normal university student, provide them with as many job opportunities as possible, offer high-quality employment services to them, and ultimately improve the school's post-graduation employment rate. Therefore, schools should constantly improve their own employment management services and build a "bridge" connecting teacher candidates and employment.

## **4.2. Individual Student level**

### **4.2.1. improving Their Own Employability to Lay a Good Foundation for Achieving Employment**

According to the above research analysis, teacher education students who possess a high level of employability can better achieve employment. The structure of student employability is defined by the following four constituent elements: professional knowledge and skills, general skills, personal qualities, and career planning ability. There is a correlation between these constituent elements of it, and the improvement of each element within the structure can enhance the employability of university students [3]. Teacher education students should actively cultivate their employability during their university years, which can be achieved through the following methods:

First, study hard to improve your professional knowledge and skills. Second, develop your general skills. Participating

in a variety of campus activities, including literary and technological innovation competitions, helps cultivate the expressive abilities and creativity of teacher candidates. Choosing to join the student council can develop a teacher candidate's abilities to handle tasks and manage oneself and others. Engaging in social activities and joining different circles to make new friends can enhance a teacher candidate's social skills.

Third, cultivate good personal qualities, including learning to regulate one's emotions, developing a high emotional quotient (EQ), and fostering positive emotional values among teacher candidates. Fourth, establish a career plan early to pave the way for successful employment in the future. Statistics show that this year, there are 4.74 million people taking the postgraduate entrance exam, nearly 2.6 million people passing the national civil service exam, over 15 million applicants, and a record number of people taking the teacher qualification exam. Therefore, teacher candidates will face immense pressure in terms of employment and further studies upon graduation. In such circumstances, early career planning is an important step for current teacher candidates to address the challenges of the tough job market and the current situation of postgraduate studies.

When creating a career plan, teacher candidates should adhere to three principles: the principles of objectivity and scientific accuracy, the emphasis on rationality and personalization, and the importance of applicability and feasibility. This includes seven key components: self-assessment, professional choices, interest cultivation, career selection, goal setting, strategies for goal achievement, and feedback and adjustments [4].

#### **4.2.2. Cultivating One's Social Skills, Making Sufficient Preparations for Entering Society**

Possessing a certain level of social skills are prerequisites for normal university students to establish themselves in society. Social skills include confidence, reciprocity and reinforcement, non-verbal communication skills, language communication skills, empathy, cooperation, caring for others, etc. Social skills are of significant importance, as individuals live within certain social environments and relationships. Social skills have a crucial impact on individuals, as they directly determine an individual's quality of life through social support, physical and mental health, work efficiency, and more [5]. In the job application process, interviewers value social skills over professional abilities, especially confidence, language, and non-verbal communication skills. Based on the interviews conducted, it was found that normal university students can enhance their language expression skills through tutoring, and understanding the characteristics of the education subjects in advance can help them obtain teaching qualifications and pass the teacher recruitment exams. Therefore, it is evident that normal university students need to cultivate their social skills before entering society and make sufficient preparations for their transition.

#### **4.2.3. Changing Traditional Employment Concepts and Choosing Multi-directional Employment**

Employment paths for normal university students are not limited to taking civil service exams, there are other employment directions as well. Taking English majors as an example: in the author's interviews, out of four English department graduates, only two chose the teaching profession, while the others respectively worked in township units and training institutions in English-related positions. This shows that graduates of normal universities can engage in various

types of work, not limited to the teaching industry. Research has shown: from the perspective of professional requirements, the diversified development of the job market blurs the boundaries between different industries and professions. Therefore, normal university students also need to possess the ability to learn and adapt across disciplines, as well as sensitivity and exploratory skills towards emerging industries and professions.[6] Some normal university students are not willing to enter the teaching profession but have not found a more suitable employment direction. For these normal students, expanding their employment horizons, actively participating in extracurricular practical activities, and seeking their preferred career direction are important methods to solve their employment.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study delved into the employment willingness of normal school students through a combination of questionnaires and interviews. It revealed that while these students exhibit a strong desire for employment, they also face accompanying anxiety, leading to a somewhat unstable stance on the matter. Competitive pressure emerged as the primary influence affecting their employment decisions. The research highlighted the crucial role of the school's employment courses and management services in shaping the students' employment aspirations. In the post-pandemic era, understanding and addressing the multifaceted factors impacting students' employment willingness is paramount for enhancing the school's management strategies and aiding graduates in securing stable employment. To ensure successful outcomes, formulating tailored recommendations and implementing relevant measures to support normal school students in their employment pursuits becomes imperative. This effort not only benefits the school's employment management practices but also offers valuable insights for similar institutions in the region looking to optimize their employment opportunities.

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