

Investigation on Reasons for Normal University Students' Willingness to Enter Teaching Employment in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the global economy and society, both during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic era. Against this background, normal university students, as the main force in cultivating educational talents, have attracted attention regarding their employment intentions. This study focuses on normal university students from a university in Zhejiang province. By investigating and collecting relevant data through interviews and questionnaires, the study explores the reasons for the employment intentions of students under the influence of the pandemic, aiming to discuss methods to enhance the employment management level of normal graduates. The survey results indicate that due to the pandemic, the employment opportunities for normal university students are limited. However, their enthusiasm for the education sector remains undiminished, and a sense of social responsibility persists. They also demonstrate a strong interest in education reform and innovation. Therefore, various measures should be taken to increase the employment opportunities and satisfaction of normal university students, thereby promoting the development of the education sector.

Keywords: Post-pandemic Era; Normal University Student Employment; Reasons for Entering Teaching Profession; Education Reform.

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the global economy and society, posing significant challenges to various industries, including the education sector. Currently, approximately 825 million students have been affected, with over 100 countries/regions implementing nationwide school closures, affecting nearly 90% of students globally [1]. In recent years, the positioning of the word "employment" for college graduates has become clearer. According to the "Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Education on Further Improving the Employment Statistics and Verification Work of Ordinary College Graduates," starting from the class of 2021, the term "employment rate" will be changed to "rate of post-graduation status implementation" to more accurately reflect the post-graduation situations such as further education and employment for college graduates [2]. The rate of post-graduation status implementation includes rates of employment under agreements or contracts, entrepreneurship, flexible employment, and further education. As the main force in cultivating education talents, the employment willingness of normal college students in the post-pandemic era of 2023 has attracted much attention. This article aims to analyze the reasons behind the employment willingness of normal college students in the post-pandemic era, to understand the impact of the pandemic on their employment attitudes and choices, and to provide relevant suggestions to promote the employment of normal college students and the development of the education sector.

2. Research Method and Results

From October 2023 to January 2024, the author conducted an online questionnaire survey on undergraduate students and

graduates from a normal university in Zhejiang. The distribution of participants was as follows: freshmen accounted for 21.29%, sophomores 22.28%, juniors 21.78%, seniors 21.29%, and undergraduate graduates 13.37%. According to the survey data on the multiple-choice question "Factors affecting employment," the percentages of selecting "Facing competition from graduates of prestigious universities, high competitive pressure," "Decrease in birth rate, surplus of teachers," "Rapid development of online learning technology, reduced demand for offline teachers," "Inadequate connection of employment recruitment information," "Unstable job market," and "Increased requirements for job recruitment positions" were 75.5%, 66.5%, 46.5%, 38%, 54%, and 61.5% respectively. Additionally, the author conducted personal interviews with five normal college graduates and one senior undergraduate student. Through quantitative, qualitative, and comparative analysis of the above data, the author investigated the employment aspirations of undergraduate students in the post-pandemic era: the majority of employment aspirations are limited to pursuing further studies or taking civil service exams. As pointed out by other researchers, employment intentions are relatively singular and accompanied by phenomena of anxiety [3]. Simultaneously, employment aspirations exhibit instability influenced by various factors [4].

3. Discussion

3.1. Factors Affecting the Willingness of Normal College Students to Teach

3.1.1. High Competition Pressure of Education Employment

Based on the analysis of the above results and related literature, this study explores the reasons for the employment

willingness of normal college students in a certain area of Zhejiang. The specific situation is as follows: Due to a decrease in population, the demand for teaching positions has decreased, leading to significant competition pressure for normal college students.

Firstly, there is a decrease in the demand for teachers. In recent years, China's birth rate has been declining, resulting in a decrease in the school-age population, which in turn affects the demand for the education industry. It is predicted that by 2025, China's school-age population will decrease by about 50 million, equivalent to the population of a medium-sized country. This poses a huge challenge for the education industry and will also impact the job market for normal college students. Additionally, during the pandemic, the rapid development of online learning technologies has led to a decrease in the demand for offline teachers due to the advantages of online teaching—providing a more diverse range of course choices and flexible scheduling opportunities.

Secondly, there is an increase in the supply of normal college students nationwide. The number of graduates from Chinese universities is on the rise, leading to an increase in the supply of reserve personnel in the education industry, thereby intensifying the employment competition pressure for normal college students. Statistics show that in 2019, the number of graduates from Chinese universities was 8.74 million, which increased by 140,000 compared to 2018. In 2020, the number of graduates reached 9.09 million, which was an increase of 350,000 compared to 2019. In 2021, the number of graduates exceeded 10 million, reaching 10.76 million, an increase of 1.67 million compared to 2020, setting a new historical record [5]. In the same recruitment environment, graduates from prestigious universities or those with postgraduate degrees will have a significant advantage in competition, alongside experienced non-contracted substitute teachers and institutional teachers. From the perspective of competitors, there is high competition pressure for normal college students from Zhejiang and even nationwide.

In conclusion, due to the current situation of oversupply in the teaching industry and strong competition from peers, normal college students face high competition pressure for working in the public schools.

3.1.2. Uncertainty in the Career Development Prospects of Teachers

At the same time, the demand for teachers is unclear. Similar to one of the reasons mentioned above, China's current population growth is slowing down, and birth rates are declining. In response to the gradual decrease in birth rates in China, the country has introduced the "three-child policy" in hopes of increasing the birth rate [6]. However, even with the relaxation of the three-child policy, there has not been a significant increase in population growth. This will lead to a decrease in the number of new students entering schools in

the future, leaving the question of whether the number of teachers will continue to increase or decrease unknown. Therefore, the outlook for the development of the teaching profession is uncertain.

Furthermore, the career advancement opportunities in the education industry are relatively narrow. Compared to other professions, the promotion prospects in the teaching industry are limited, mainly relying on evaluations and assessments by the education administrative department to rank teachers as "primary, intermediate, advanced, and special" teachers [7]. These evaluations and assessments are often influenced by various factors such as the size of the school, geographical location, and educational resources, which restrict the career development of teachers, making it difficult for them to realize their own value and potentials.

Lastly, the career development in the education industry is unstable, with influences from various factors in two aspects: First, influenced by the social environment, the rapid development of online teaching has raised higher expectations for the abilities of traditional teachers. Meanwhile, the career development prospects in the education industry are affected by educational reforms. The direction and content of educational reforms are constantly changing, requiring teachers to continuously update and adapt their educational philosophies and teaching methods, as well as constantly learn and improve their professional knowledge and skills, evaluate and enhance the quality and effectiveness of their education. Second, the career development in the education industry is influenced by personal factors [8]. As societal expectations for teachers increase, job pressures rise, job satisfaction decreases, confidence in the profession wanes, making it difficult to see the development potential and prospects of the education industry. These issues bring uncertainty and challenges to the career development of being a teacher.

3.1.3. Design of Relevant Employment Courses

Besides the external factors influencing the social aspect, students also mentioned factors related to employment training. From the collected questionnaire data (as shown in Table 1), it can be seen that the majority of schools have unreasonable employment course arrangements. The vast majority of students are taking courses such as "College Student Career Development and Employment Guidance," "Teacher Employment Guide," and "Innovation and Entrepreneurship Fundamentals," with proportions of 71%, 54%, and 80%, respectively. However, the content and format of these courses lack specificity and diversity, which do not align with the students' professional characteristics and employment needs. This mismatch results in students lacking interest and motivation in employment courses, attending classes just to pass exams rather than to enhance their employment skills and qualities.

Table 1. Employment Guidance Services Experienced by College Students

Training courses	Proportion
College students' career development and employment guidance	71.09%
Teacher employment guidance	54.50%
Innovation and entrepreneurship Fundamentals	80.57%
College students' career management and quality improvement	28.44%
Others	0.95%

Firstly, the content of the employment courses is overly theoretical, creating a significant gap with the actual job

market and its requirements. This leads to difficulties for students in applying and transforming the knowledge and

skills gained from the employment courses. Additionally, the lack of innovative and practical elements fails to nurture students' entrepreneurial spirit and practical abilities. The teaching style of the employment courses is monotonous, lacking interactivity and feedback, resulting in low student engagement and effectiveness. Moreover, the absence of personalized and targeted guidance fails to meet the diverse and individualized employment needs of students.

Simultaneously, the school's employment management services are generic and lack depth. As shown in Table 2, there is no tailored and reasonable employment management service provided based on the needs of teacher education students to enhance their job-related skills training. This makes it challenging for teacher education students to adapt to the job requirements after graduation, leading to a certain level of stress. Additionally, teacher education students express some dissatisfaction with the school's employment management services. The shortcomings in the school's employment courses prevent them from effectively providing job guidance and future employment-related training services for undergraduate students, indirectly exacerbating pre-employment anxiety among them.

Table 2. Employment Management Services Provided by the University

School Employment Management Service	Proportion (%)
Expert Lectures	49.76
Job Fairs	64.93
Professional Consultation Services	44.55
Job Referral Services	41.23
Employment Training Services	35.55
Employment Guidance Services	44.08
Employment Internship Services	38.86

3.1.4. Implementation of National Double Reduction Policy

For the normal students participating in the survey, 74% of university students have heard of the Double Reduction Policy and understand that it affects the geographic choices for employment and income treatment after employment for normal students. Among them, 78% of the respondents believe that the Double Reduction Policy will impact their employment. The "Opinions on Further Reducing the Homework Burden and Extracurricular Training Burden of Students in the Compulsory Education Stage" issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council on July 24, 2021 [9], proposed to further improve the quality of school education and teaching services, make homework assignments more scientifically reasonable, ensure that schools' after-school services basically meet students' needs, enable students to return to campus for better learning, and comprehensively regulate the training activities of extracurricular training institutions.

It advocates strict governance and comprehensive regulation of extracurricular training activities. No longer will new subject-specific extracurricular training institutions for compulsory education students be approved in various regions. Existing subject-specific training institutions will be uniformly registered as non-profit organizations, online subject-specific institutions will shift to an approval system, subject-specific training institutions will not be allowed to go public for financing, and capital operation will be strictly prohibited. Standards for non-subject-specific training institutions will be classified and approved rigorously. As a

result, training institutions will be reduced, leading to further restrictions on the employment choices of normal students [10].

Implementation of the "double reduction" policy has reduced the number of rural schools, limiting the choices of employment locations for teacher candidates. They are no longer able to search for employment opportunities as widely as before. Furthermore, the "double reduction" policy has led to changes in teacher benefits, with lower income levels for teachers, which has been the case for quite some time. Experienced teachers often engage in private tutoring for extra income, but this practice has been strictly prohibited after the implementation of the "double reduction" policy. Despite the gradual improvement in social status for teachers, their basic income and benefits have not correspondingly increased.

3.1.5. Psychological Stress and Self-Positioning Deviation of Normal College Students

The economic impact of the pandemic has made teacher candidates pay more attention to salary and benefits when choosing employment positions. However, the salary levels in the education industry have not met their expectations. The reduction in school size due to the "double reduction" policy could lead to cuts in teacher positions, potentially causing a decline in teachers' wages once again, thereby increasing the difficulty of employment for teacher candidates.

In recent years, the expectations and pressures on the employment of normal college students have been increasing. The expectations of students and parents are often too high, leading to a gap between the career expectations of normal college students and the social reality. This results in an idealization and beautification of the teaching profession by normal college students, while neglecting the hardships and challenges of teaching work. Nowadays, the teaching profession can be described as "turbulent." This pressure causes some normal college students to doubt their employment capabilities, believing that their existing abilities are insufficient to meet the demands of a teaching position. They feel that they cannot meet societal expectations. When faced with the practical difficulties and contradictions in education, they are prone to feelings of disappointment and frustration [9].

Mismatch between the career choices of normal college students and their personal interests leads to insufficient identification and passion for the teaching profession. Some students only aim to pass exams and secure employment, or are influenced by family and society. When faced with the pressures and challenges of teaching work, they easily become weary and resistant. Additionally, the misalignment between the career positioning of normal college students and societal evaluation results in a lack of self-esteem and confidence in the teaching profession. They face discrimination and criticism from society, leading to feelings of tension and fear when confronted with the demands and evaluations of educational reforms. Negative media coverage of the education industry further fuels doubts among some normal college students regarding their career choices and prospects.

3.1.6. Passion and Advantages of Education Majors in the Education Industry

Despite the various challenges that education majors face in securing teaching positions, their enthusiasm for the education sector and sense of social responsibility remains strong. They also exhibit a keen interest in education reform

and innovation. During the pandemic, the education sector encountered numerous challenges and opportunities. Education majors have shown a strong interest in education reform and innovation, actively exploring online teaching models and methods to enhance their professional skills and teaching standards. They are willing to adapt to new teaching methods and hope to contribute to the future development of the education sector through innovation.

Education majors are passionate about the field of education and are actively planning their future. According to the data collected from our surveys (see Table 3), it appears that the majority of the education majors we selected are in the early stages of their university education, accounting for approximately 43%. This indicates that university students are starting to focus on their job prospects early on, making thorough plans to enter the teaching profession. Their love for the education sector drives them to aspire to work in education for the long term and contribute to students' growth and achievements.

Table 3. University Students Employment Interest

Student Year	Sample Size	Proportion	Employment Interest (%)
Freshman	43	21.29%	83%
Sophomore	45	22.28%	86%
Junior	44	21.78%	87%
Senior	43	21.29%	90%
Graduate	27	13.37%	95%

Prospective teachers value the advantages of the teaching profession. They have a certain demand for job stability and room for development. Despite the impact of the epidemic on the employment situation, the demand for employment among prospective teachers still exists. The teaching profession offers job stability and certain room for development, meeting their need for stable employment. At the same time, entering the teaching profession allows prospective teachers to have access to rich educational resources and experiences, providing them with adequate preparation and laying a solid foundation for raising their own children in the future.

3.2. Suggestions to Enhance the Employment Willingness of Normal University Students

Despite the impact of the epidemic on the employment willingness of normal college students, their enthusiasm for the education industry, sense of social responsibility, and interest in educational reform and innovation still exist [11]. By strengthening employment guidance and training, expanding employment channels and resources, and other measures, we can increase the employment opportunities for normal college students, improve their job satisfaction, and promote the development of the education industry. In the post-epidemic era, students, schools, education departments, and various sectors of society should work together to support the employment of normal college students from individual and group levels, promote educational reform, and contribute to building a better future. Therefore, based on the above data analysis, the following suggestions and strategies are proposed:

3.2.1. Providing Corresponding Employment Guidance

In response to the employment needs of teacher candidates, schools should redesign and adjust the content and format of employment courses based on the professional characteristics

and employment needs of teacher candidates. This includes enhancing the pertinence and diversity of employment courses to make them more closely aligned with the actual job market and position requirements. Schools should aim to cultivate students' entrepreneurial spirit and practical abilities, change the teaching methods of employment courses, increase students' participation and effectiveness in employment courses, offer personalized and targeted guidance, and meet students' personalized and diversified employment needs. Additionally, schools should improve the quality and depth of employment management services, customize reasonable employment management services based on the needs of teacher candidates, enhance the training of teacher candidates' employment-related skills, help teacher candidates smoothly adapt to work positions after graduation, alleviate their employment pressure, and enhance their employment satisfaction

3.2.2. Increasing More Employment Opportunities and Paths

Schools and educational institutions should increase resources invested in the employment of teacher candidates [12]. By organizing job fairs, providing internal referral opportunities, and other means, they can expand the employment channels for teacher candidates, improve online and offline recruitment efforts, increase job opportunities, and actively collaborate with local educational departments, companies, schools, and social organizations to establish cooperative relationships, providing more job positions and opportunities.

3.2.3. Enhancing Professional Competence and Teaching Abilities

Teacher candidates should continuously improve their professional competence and teaching abilities during their time at school. They should strengthen their foundational knowledge, grasp education theories and teaching methods, participate in various practical activities such as educational internships, teaching competitions, educational research, etc., accumulate teaching experience and cases, enhance their teaching level and innovation capabilities, laying a solid foundation for their future teaching careers.

3.2.4. Broadening Career Perspectives and Development Space

Teacher candidates should broaden their career perspectives and development space, not limiting themselves to traditional positions as elementary or high school teachers. Instead, they should focus on the diversified development of the education field, such as vocational education, special education, continuing education, online education, educational consulting, etc. They should explore career directions that interest them and are suitable, continuously learn new knowledge and skills, enhance their comprehensive qualities and competitiveness, and plan multiple paths for their professional careers.

3.2.5. Cultivating Diverse Educational Perspectives and Concepts

Prospective teachers should cultivate diverse educational perspectives and concepts [13], learn from and draw on educational experiences and practices from different countries and regions, broaden their horizons and thinking, while also paying attention to the diversity and individualization of education. They should respect and meet the learning needs and characteristics of different students, create and implement teaching plans and strategies that are

suitable for them. In this way, prospective teachers can not only improve their own educational literacy and level but also contribute to the reform and innovation of education.

4. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound impacts on the global economy and society, both during the outbreak and in the post-pandemic era. Against this backdrop, the employment intentions of teacher education students, who are the main force in cultivating educational talents, have attracted significant attention. This article focuses on teacher education students at a university in Zhejiang, China, conducting research on the school's basic situation. By collecting relevant data through research interviews, questionnaires, and other forms, and utilizing methods such as comparative analysis, qualitative analysis, and quantitative analysis, the study examines the employment intentions and reasons of students in teacher education colleges under the influence of the pandemic, aiming to explore methods to enhance the employment management level of teacher education graduates.

The survey results indicate the following reasons: First, due to the impact of the pandemic, employment channels for teacher education students are limited, leading to high competition pressure. Second, unclear career development prospects. Third, deficiencies in school-related employment courses. Fourth, the promulgation and implementation of policies reducing staff and budgets. Fifth, psychological pressure and self-positioning deviations. Sixth, a passion for the education industry.

Therefore, it can be seen that the enthusiasm of teacher education students for the educational cause remains strong, a sense of social responsibility persists, and they also show a keen interest in educational reform and innovation. Therefore, in the post-pandemic era, efforts from students, schools, education departments, and various sectors of society are needed to collectively support the employment of teacher education students. This involves providing appropriate employment guidance, increasing more employment opportunities, enhancing professional literacy and teaching abilities, expanding career perspectives and development space, cultivating diverse educational perspectives and concepts, etc., to improve the employment opportunities and satisfaction of teacher education students and promote the development of the education industry.

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