

Article

Discussion on Strategies for Employment Planning and Development of Local University Students: An Investigation and Analysis of Employment Pressure and Career Decision-Making

Mengyao Zhou ^{1,*}, Liqin Shen ¹, Luxuan Ding ¹, Yukai Huang ¹ and Wangting Shi ¹

¹ College of Teacher Education, Quzhou University, Quzhou 324003, China

* Correspondence: Mengyao Zhou, College of Teacher Education, Quzhou University, Quzhou 324003, China

Abstract: This study examined the employment pressure and career decision-making abilities of students at local universities. A total of 160 undergraduates from a university in Quzhou participated in the research. The findings indicated that both employment pressure and career decision-making abilities among these students were at a moderate level. Notably, senior students experienced significantly higher employment pressure compared to their junior counterparts, and students from county seats and towns reported the highest levels of pressure. Based on these findings, the study proposes strategies to support the career development of local university students, aiming to offer a theoretical reference for enhancing university employment guidance and planning.

Keywords: local university students; career development; employment pressure; career decision-making

1. Introduction

Employment is a fundamental aspect of people's livelihood, and it is crucial to strengthen employment policies, improve promotion mechanisms, and ensure high-quality and adequate job opportunities. Among employment-related issues, college graduates' employment occupies a central position. In recent years, the number of college graduates in China has grown sharply, intensifying competition for jobs and creating a challenging employment environment. As a result, an increasing number of students have opted for delayed or gradual employment [1].

The employment situation of students in local universities deserves special attention. Local universities, funded and managed by provincial or municipal governments, primarily serve local communities and aim to cultivate talents for regional socio-economic development [2]. Graduates from these institutions often face higher employment pressure compared to their counterparts from key universities or vocational colleges due to differences in university hierarchy, scale, and resources. Limited investment and curriculum planning in local universities also hinder the provision of systematic employment guidance, leaving students less prepared for career planning and job market entry [3].

Internships and practical training are essential for integrating theoretical knowledge with real-world experience [4]. They help students develop professional skills, adapt to industry norms, and transition smoothly from campus to workplace. The lack of such experience can exacerbate employment pressure and negatively impact career decision-making ability [5-7].

Employment pressure and career decision-making are closely linked and jointly influence individuals' career development. Employment pressure refers to the psychological stress experienced during job hunting, which can affect both career outcomes and overall well-being [8]. Career decision-making involves analyzing personal circumstances,

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evaluating options, and making choices aligned with individual needs and social expectations. Strong decision-making ability promotes proactive career behavior, enhances adaptability, and facilitates the establishment of stable career goals [9].

Currently, research indicates varying patterns in the relationship between employment pressure and career decision-making [10-12]. Some studies suggest they can be simultaneously high or low, while others indicate an inverse relationship. Understanding the employment pressure and decision-making ability of local university students is essential for informing career guidance policies, optimizing education systems, and supporting individual career development [13].

In summary, students in local universities experience significant employment pressure, which can impair their career decision-making and create a challenging cycle. This study aims to investigate the current status of employment pressure and career decision-making among these students and propose strategies to support their career development, providing a theoretical reference for university employment guidance and planning [14].

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Employment Pressure

Stress is a psychological response experienced when an individual perceives threats or pressures in their environment without sufficient means to cope [15]. Employment pressure, as a specific form of stress, pertains to psychological tension related to the job-hunting process. It arises from the interaction between external demands and an individual's perceived capabilities, often affecting both physical and mental well-being [16].

College students, particularly graduates from local universities, are among the groups most affected by employment pressure. With the increasing number of graduates and the gradual saturation of talent demand, competition in the job market has intensified, leading to widespread difficulties in finding employment. Employment pressure negatively impacts students' mental health, contributing to anxiety, depression, and reduced self-efficacy [17].

Factors influencing employment pressure include gender, major, family background, and grade level. Students from rural or economically underdeveloped areas generally face higher pressure due to limited educational resources, fewer social connections, and heavier family responsibilities [18]. Similarly, students majoring in science or education, depending on local labor market conditions, may experience higher stress than those in other fields. Grade level also affects pressure, with upper-grade students often reporting greater employment stress due to imminent graduation and career uncertainty [19].

Local university students face additional challenges compared to their peers in first-tier cities [20-22]. Limited institutional resources, narrower employment markets, and less access to high-quality internships contribute to higher employment pressure. These students often lack professional skills, practical experience, and job-seeking abilities, making it difficult to compete with graduates from more prestigious institutions. High employer expectations further exacerbate their stress [23].

In summary, employment pressure among local university students is shaped by both external environmental factors and internal personal characteristics. Its intensity varies across different groups but generally poses a significant challenge to students' career readiness and overall well-being [24].

2.2. Career Decision-Making

Career decision-making refers to the process by which an individual, when faced with multiple career alternatives, analyzes their own circumstances and relevant information, evaluates different options, and selects a career path that aligns with personal needs and social expectations [25]. This process typically includes information gathering, comparative evaluation, and final selection, often accompanied by a public commitment. It is a

critical step for individuals to establish career directions, formulate development plans, and achieve career goals [26].

For college students, strong career decision-making competence indicates a clear understanding of career options and enhanced knowledge of future occupational pathways [27]. This competence not only aids in academic planning but also influences the starting point of their careers and long-term development trajectories. Career decision-making ability is shaped by both internal cognitive capacities and external environmental pressures, including social context, family background, personal traits, and regional characteristics of local universities [28,29].

Research on local university students shows that lower-grade students often have weaker career decision-making competence due to a lack of employment awareness and limited self-directed learning abilities [30]. Gender differences are also evident, with male students generally exhibiting higher competence than female students. Grade level affects competence, with senior students typically demonstrating stronger decision-making skills than juniors [31]. Major choice also plays a role; students in science or engineering tend to have higher competence than those in liberal arts. Family background and regional factors influence decision-making by affecting access to social resources, employment cognition, and job-seeking skills, with rural students often facing greater challenges than urban students [32].

Additionally, career choice anxiety can negatively impact decision-making, leading students to make less rational choices. Male students and students from rural areas tend to experience higher anxiety, which further affects their career planning and selection [33]. Overall, career decision-making competence among local university students is influenced by a combination of personal, social, and institutional factors, highlighting the need for targeted guidance and support in career planning [34].

2.3. The Relationship Between Employment Pressure and Career Decision-Making

Employment pressure and career decision-making are closely linked and mutually influential. Employment pressure often arises from career uncertainty, intense competition, and discrepancies between personal abilities and external expectations. Such pressure can increase anxiety and tension during decision-making, potentially leading individuals to make hasty or irrational choices or to forgo certain opportunities altogether [35].

The impact of employment pressure on career decision-making is complex. On one hand, excessive pressure can impair rational thinking, result in vague goals, impulsive decisions, and a focus on materialistic or utilitarian outcomes, thereby reducing the effectiveness of career planning [36]. On the other hand, moderate or internally driven employment pressure can stimulate self-awareness, motivate proactive coping strategies, and encourage students to clarify career goals and prepare adequately for employment. This positive coping approach enhances adaptability, innovation awareness, and overall career decision-making competence [37].

Existing research shows differing perspectives on this relationship. While some evidence suggests that high employment pressure undermines career decision-making, other findings indicate that pressure can act as a motivating factor that improves decision-making ability [38]. Given these inconsistencies, it remains necessary to systematically investigate how employment pressure affects career decision-making, clarify their internal interactions, and provide empirical guidance for improving students' career planning and outcomes [39-41].

3. Methods

3.1. Research Subjects

This study investigates the current status of employment pressure and career decision-making ability among students in local universities [42]. An online questionnaire survey was conducted at a university in Quzhou City, with questionnaires distributed via

the Wenjuanxing APP from March 19 to May 17, 2025. Data were collected over a two-month period, resulting in a total of 160 valid responses used for analysis [43,44].

The characteristics of the research participants are presented in Table 1. Among them, 66 were male students (41.3%) and 94 were female students (58.8%). In terms of grade level, 74 students were in the lower grades (Freshman and Sophomore years), accounting for 45%, while 88 students were in the upper grades (Junior and Senior years), accounting for 55%. Regarding major type, 93 students majored in humanities and social sciences (58.1%), and 67 in natural sciences (41.9%). In terms of family location, 28 students were from provincial capital cities (17.5%), 44 from prefecture-level cities (27.5%), and 88 from county seats or other towns (55%).

Table 1. Background Characteristics of Research Subjects.

component		count	ratio
gender	male	66	41.3%
	female	94	58.8%
grade	lower grades (Freshman and Sophomore years)	74	45.0%
	upper grades (Junior and Senior years)	88	55.0%
major type	humanities and social sciences	93	58.1%
	natural sciences	67	41.9%
family location	provincial capital city	28	17.5%
	prefecture-level city	44	27.5%
	proper		
	county seats and other towns	88	55.0%
total		160	100%

3.2. Research Instruments

Employment pressure was measured using a 10-item scale, with each item rated on a 5-point Likert scale, including reverse-scored items. Career decision-making ability was assessed using an 11-item scale, also rated on a 5-point Likert scale [45].

In this study, the reliability of the instruments was confirmed, with a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.946 for the employment pressure scale and 0.942 for the career decision-making ability scale. Both values exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.60, indicating high internal consistency. Details are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability of Research Instruments.

factor	item	number of items	Cronbach α
employment pressure	1*,2*,3*,4*,5*,6*,7*,8*,9*,10*	10	0.946
career decision-making ability	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11	11	0.942

*Reverse scoring questions.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedures

The data were processed using SPSS 26.0 following a systematic analysis procedure:

1. **Frequency Analysis:** Conducted to examine the demographic characteristics of the participants, including counts and percentages for categories such as gender, grade, and major, providing an overview of the sample structure [46].

2. **Reliability Analysis:** The Cronbach's α coefficient was calculated for the employment pressure and career decision-making ability scales to assess internal consistency and confirm the reliability of the measurement instruments [47].
3. **Descriptive Statistical Analysis:** For the core variables, employment pressure and career decision-making ability, descriptive statistics including mean (M), standard deviation (SD), skewness, and kurtosis were computed to summarize the overall distribution and central tendency [48].
4. **Differential Analysis:** Differences in employment pressure and career decision-making ability across demographic groups were examined:
5. **Independent Samples t-test:** Used to compare binary categories, including gender (male vs. female), grade (lower vs. upper), and major type (humanities/social sciences vs. natural sciences).
6. **One-Way ANOVA:** Applied to compare multiple categories, specifically family location (provincial capital cities vs. prefecture-level cities vs. county seats and towns).

4. Results

4.1. Analysis of Overall Conditions

To examine the basic characteristics of the core variables-employment pressure and career decision-making ability-descriptive statistics including mean (M), standard deviation (SD), skewness, and kurtosis were calculated. The results, along with the range of each variable, are presented in Table 3.

The survey data indicated that the mean score for employment pressure was $M = 2.78$, while the mean score for career decision-making ability was $M = 3.26$. Furthermore, the skewness and kurtosis values for both variables fell within the range of -2 to 2, suggesting that the data distributions can be considered approximately normal.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables.

component	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
employment pressure	2.78	0.70	-0.335	0.851
career decision-making ability	3.26	0.79	-0.168	0.033

4.2. Differential Analysis

Table 4 presents the differences in employment pressure and career decision-making ability among local university students across various demographic characteristics [49].

For employment pressure, no statistically significant differences were observed based on gender or major type. Significant differences, however, were found with respect to grade ($t = -2.061$) and family location ($F = 3.974$). Specifically, upper-grade students reported higher employment pressure ($M = 2.88$) than lower-grade students ($M = 2.65$). Regarding family location, students from county seats and towns experienced the highest employment pressure ($M = 2.85$), followed by those from prefecture-level cities ($M = 2.84$) and provincial capital cities ($M = 2.44$).

For career decision-making ability, no statistically significant differences were detected across any demographic variables, including gender, grade, major type, or family location.

Table 4. Difference Tests for Employment Pressure and Career Decision-Making Ability.

component		employment pressure($M \pm SD$)	career decision-making ability($M \pm SD$)
gender	male($N=66$)	2.77 $\pm$ 0.75	3.20 $\pm$ 0.84

	female(N= 94)	2.78±0.67	3.31±0.76
	t	-0.139	-0.874
	p	0.889	0.383
grade	lower grades(N=72)	2.65±0.76	3.35±0.73
	upper grades(N=88)	2.88±0.64	3.19±0.83
	t	-2.061	1.298
	p	0.041	0.196
major type	humanities and social sci- ences(N=93)	2.78±0.71	3.31±0.79
	natural sciences(N=67)	2.78±0.69	3.19±0.78
	t	0.026	1.007
	p	0.979	0.315
family lo- cation	provincial capital city(N=28)	2.44±0.67	3.04±0.76
	prefecture-level city proper(N=44)	2.84±0.67	3.24±0.74
	county seats and other towns(N=88)	2.85±0.70	3.34±0.82
	F	3.974	1.665
	p	0.021	0.193

5. Conclusions

Amidst increasingly fierce competition in the job market, phenomena such as "delayed employment" and "slow employment" have become more prominent. Local universities, as a major component of higher education in China, face unique challenges. Their graduates encounter greater employment pressure compared to peers from other types of universities, largely due to institutional limitations, insufficient educational investment, and fewer practical opportunities. This pressure significantly impacts students' career decision-making ability. Previous studies present inconsistent perspectives regarding the relationship between employment pressure and career decision-making, with some suggesting a positive, facilitative effect, and others highlighting a negative interference. This study aimed to clarify this relationship by examining the current status of employment pressure and career decision-making ability among students in a local university.

Overall, the survey indicates that local university students experience a moderately low level of employment pressure, while their career decision-making ability is moderately high. The mean scores-2.78 for employment pressure and 3.26 for career decision-making ability-reflect a distinct "low-high" trend. This pattern is consistent across demographic variables such as gender, grade, and family location, suggesting a potential negative correlation between employment pressure and career decision-making ability. In particular, senior students reported significantly higher employment pressure than their lower-year counterparts. The proximity to graduation, combined with the need to complete dissertations, internships, and job applications, creates a substantial time strain and heightens psychological stress. Lower-year students, on the other hand, are still adapting academically and have not yet systematically engaged in career planning or job-search preparation.

Family location also plays a notable role in shaping employment pressure. Students from county towns and rural areas reported the highest levels of pressure, followed by those from prefecture-level cities and provincial capitals. Urban students benefit from broader information networks, greater job opportunities, and stronger family support, whereas rural students face limited regional economies, narrower employment channels,

and heightened family expectations. The resulting discrepancy between available resources and personal aspirations intensifies employment pressure and creates a psychological burden unique to students from less developed regions.

These findings suggest the need for differentiated institutional support. Lower-year students would benefit from early career guidance that integrates discipline-specific industry knowledge, case studies, and exposure to workplace realities through enterprise visits and alumni forums. For upper-year students, targeted interventions such as training in resumes, interviews, and vocational assessments, coupled with flexible academic arrangements and expanded internship opportunities, can help alleviate employment pressure while facilitating a smoother school-to-work transition. Additionally, addressing geographical disparities through localized employment networks, specialized job fairs for rural students, and inter-regional information bridges can help mitigate structural inequalities in access to resources.

In summary, employment pressure and career decision-making are interrelated and inevitable processes in the career development of local university students. Pressure tends to accumulate progressively with grade level, particularly for seniors and students from rural areas. This accumulation results from the combined effects of time constraints, future uncertainty, academic obligations, and limited access to employment resources. For students in less developed regions, high family expectations further amplify the psychological burden, creating a pronounced gap between "expectation and reality." These dynamics underscore the importance of both individualized and structural interventions to support students' career development.

Despite these insights, the study has several limitations. The sample is limited to a single university, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand to multiple local universities to enhance representativeness. Additionally, key influencing factors such as family income and parental education were not explored, though they may significantly affect employment pressure and career decision-making. Finally, the exclusive reliance on quantitative methods limits the understanding of underlying mechanisms. Incorporating qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews and case studies, could provide richer insights into how employment pressure shapes career decision-making and reveal the nuanced interactions between individual, familial, and environmental factors.

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