

A Literature Review on Factors Influencing Employability Among College Students' Readiness in The Private University Hainan

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Abstract

In the current dynamic and competitive job market, having employability skills is essential for college students aiming to secure desirable job opportunities post-graduation. Employability encompasses a range of skills, attributes, and capabilities that enable individuals to gain and retain employment, as well as to succeed and advance in their chosen career paths. Higher education institutions, such as private universities in Hainan, are focused on improving their students' employability. The context of Hainan, with its growing economy and diverse industries, provides an interesting backdrop for exploring factors influencing employability among college students. Private universities in Hainan play a key role in preparing students for the workforce by offering academic programs, internships, career development services, and networking opportunities. However, the effectiveness of these efforts in enhancing students' employability remains a topic that requires further investigation. Universities should not only provide students with rich professional resources to reduce the unemployment gap, but should also analyse the factors influencing the employability of university students in order to promote their employability.

Keywords: Employability, growing economy, academic programs, internships, opportunities

Introduction

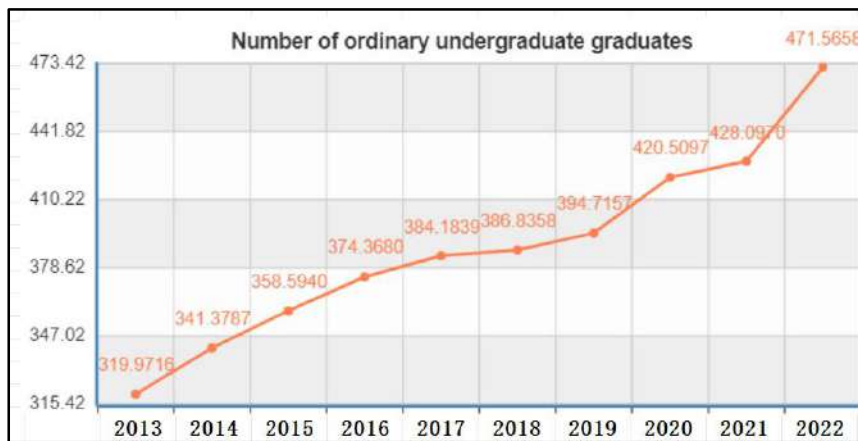
Many universities establish various types of enterprises and projects by utilizing their professional knowledge and skills, combined with market demand and personal interests, to inject new vitality into social and economic development (Hasanur Raihan Joarder et al., 2020). One of the challenges facing global college graduates in employment is the increasing uncertainty of employment prospects (Sityata et al., 2021).

Governments worldwide have implemented various policies and measures aimed at fostering the healthy growth of the job market for college graduates (Ortan et al., 2021). These initiatives are designed to support the employment prospects of recent graduates through targeted interventions and incentives. Such efforts are crucial in ensuring a robust and sustainable employment environment for young professionals entering the workforce.

Private colleges and universities in China, including those in Hainan, have experienced significant growth from their inception to rapid expansion. Hainan's private universities, exemplifying this trend, offer a valuable case study in understanding the factors influencing college student employability (Zhou Sen, 2023). Private colleges and universities should prioritize the development and enhancement of disciplines and majors to elevate their quality and standards (Schmid,

2022). In conclusion, the factors influencing the employability of college students in private institutions are diverse and multifaceted.

From figure 1, we can see very clearly, nearly ten years China's ordinary undergraduate number rose from 3.19976 million to 4.715668 million, facing increasingly serious college students' employment problem, the Chinese government attaches great importance to, thus the importance of college students' employment problem (Fulgence, et al., 2019).



Source: Source: China National Data Network (<https://data.stats.gov.cn/focus.htm?currentPage=1&pageSize=9>)

Figure 1: China's Ordinary Undergraduate

In China, an “ordinary undergraduate” refers to a student who is pursuing their first degree at a college or university. These degrees can include various fields such as Medicine (MBBS), Engineering, Business, Computer. In China, an ordinary undergraduate” refers to a student who is pursuing their first degree at a college or university. These degrees can include various fields such as Medicine (MBBS), Engineering, Business, Computer Science, Chinese, Accounting, Economics, Finance, Law and Marketing. The duration of undergraduate studies typically ranges from 4 to 6 years, depending on the program (Li, 2021).

Given the rapid growth of China's social economy and the shifting economic landscape, there has been a notable increase in the number of college students. Consequently, it becomes imperative to conduct research on the employability of these students (Akkermans et al., 2024). Although, private colleges and universities have made certain achievements in their

Conceptual Model

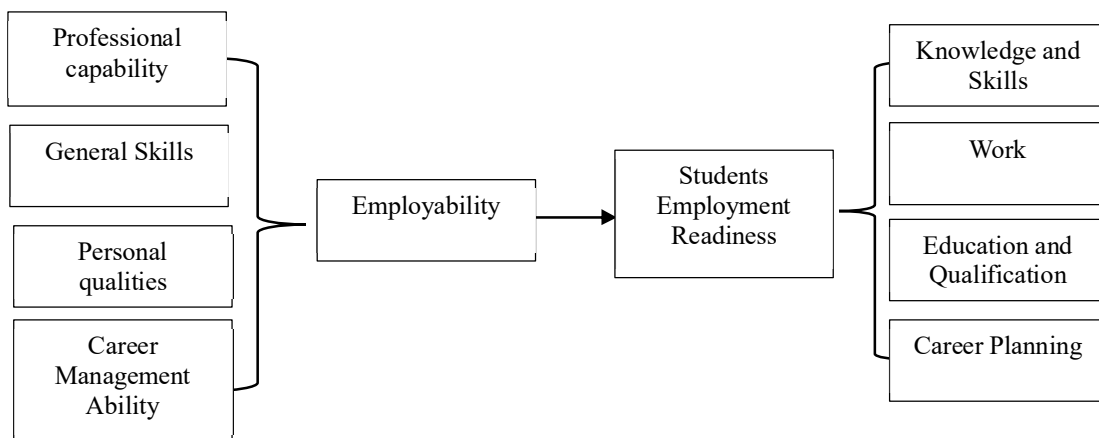


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

development history and current situation, they still have certain problems in cultivating students' employability compared with public colleges and universities (Sumanasiri et al., 2015).

Employability is represented by professional capability, general skills, personal qualities, and career management ability. These factors collectively contribute to an individual's overall employability, highlighting the various competencies and attributes necessary for a person to be considered employable. These factors collectively contribute to an individual's overall employability, highlighting the various competencies and attributes necessary for a person to be considered employable. Professional capability encompasses specific technical and job-related skills, while general skills refer to broader competencies such as communication and problem-solving. Personal qualities include traits such as resilience and adaptability, and career management ability reflects an individual's capacity to navigate their career path effectively.

Whereas, Students Employment readiness comprises skills and knowledge, work experience, education and qualifications, networking, and career planning and guidance. Skills and knowledge refer to the expertise and understanding required for a particular job role. Work experience provides practical exposure and a track record of professional activity. Education and qualifications indicate formal learning and credentials, while networking involves building professional connections that can facilitate job opportunities. Career planning and guidance encompass strategies and advice for career development, refers to an understanding of the specific sector in which one is seeking employment. The framework emphasizes the importance of both employability and employment readiness in preparing individuals for successful entry and progression in the workforce.

Underpinning Theory

To thoroughly understand college students' employment readiness and employability, it is essential to explore several foundational theoretical frameworks

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory has emerged as one of the most potent global pillars of the conversation on education policy in recent years. HCT has a significant impact on national education systems as well as international organizations like the OECD and the EU. HCT offers an enticing framework for neoliberal management of public education by promoting education as a "investment" that would eventually pay off for the person in terms of income and for the state in terms of job creation and economic expansion (Gillies, 2015).

Human Capital Theory, proposed by economists such as Gary Becker, posits that individuals improve their productivity and earning potential by investing in education and skill development. According to this theory, college students increase their human capital by acquiring more knowledge, skills, and abilities, making them more competitive and attractive to employers in the labor market. Human Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of education and training, suggesting that these investments can lead to better job opportunities and career advancement. For example, college students can enhance their professional skills through internships, obtaining industry certifications, and participating in skill training courses, thereby increasing their employment opportunities and job stability (Becker, 1964).

Romer, (1999) asserts that a nation's human capital is the primary driver of its production. According to Frank & Bemanke, (2007), investing in human capital can help boost productivity. Experience, education, training, habits, health, energy skills, and workforce initiatives all contribute to human capital. The effect of this combination will be varying levels of output throughout the nations. According to Surti et al., (2024) research, boosting the nation's economy's productivity is a crucial component of human capital. In 1776, the notion of human capital was first presented using ideas from classical economics) (Fitzsimons, 2015).

Social Cognitive Career Theory

The goal of the relatively new Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is to explain three interconnected aspects of career development:

- i. how fundamental academic and job interests emerge;
- ii. how decisions about education and careers are formed; and
- iii. how success in both academics and careers is attained.

Many ideas (such as interests, abilities, values, and environmental circumstances) that have been discovered to influence job development and that have been included in previous career theories are now included in the theory.

Developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) underscores the significance of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals in shaping career development. According to SCCT, students' confidence in their ability to perform tasks (self-efficacy) and their expectations regarding the outcomes of their efforts influence their career decisions and readiness for employment. Self-efficacy pertains to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully complete tasks, while outcome expectations involve beliefs about the likely results of their actions. For instance, students who perceive themselves as competent in a specific field are more likely to pursue related educational and career opportunities, thereby enhancing their employability. SCCT emphasizes that cultivating students' self-efficacy and fostering positive outcome expectations can significantly enhance their career readiness and success in the job market (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

The fundamental components of SCCT are three interconnected variables: goals, result expectancies, and self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy is the term used to describe a person's personal convictions about their capacity to carry out specific actions or behaviors. Self-efficacy beliefs are unique to certain activity domains and relatively dynamic, as opposed to universal confidence or self-esteem. People's self-efficacy with respect to the actions needed in various occupational domains varies.

As long as they have the required abilities and support from their surroundings, persons are more likely to show interest in, pursue, and excel at activities in which they have strong beliefs about their own abilities (SCCT). It is believed that self-efficacy beliefs originate from four main information sources: one's own performance achievements, vicarious experiences (such as seeing people who are similar to oneself), social persuasion, and one's own physical and mental states. Personal achievements (successes and failures with particular tasks) are thought to provide a particularly powerful source of efficacy information, but other factors that may be important include the kinds of physiological states one experiences while performing specific tasks, the social models and reinforcing messages one is exposed to.

Literature Review

Employability

Employability is influenced by various factors including education, skills, and personal attributes. According to research, education plays a crucial role in enhancing employability by equipping individuals with necessary knowledge and qualifications (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Furthermore, skills such as communication, problem-solving, and adaptability are highly prized by employers for their role in enhancing workplace efficiency and output (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Fugate et al., 2004). Additionally, personal attributes like motivation and resilience are crucial not only for securing but also for sustaining employment (De Vos et al., 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2011). Continuous learning and development further enhance employability by ensuring individuals stay relevant in a dynamic job market (Yorke & Knight, 2006; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011).

In Hainan, China, the employability of college students is influenced by various factors that determine their readiness for the job market. The figure above illustrates how independent variables such as professional capability, general skills, personal qualities, career management ability, and professional student employment readiness contribute to employability (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). These factors, in turn, affect dependent variables including skills and knowledge, work experience, education and qualifications, networking, career planning and guidance, and industry knowledge, which collectively determine employment readiness (De Vos et al., 2011; Zhang & Chan, 2020). For college students in Hainan, focusing on these employability factors can enhance their preparedness for entering the workforce. The region's strategic initiatives and burgeoning industries offer unique opportunities, making it essential for students to develop a comprehensive skill set, gain relevant work experience, and cultivate a strong professional network to succeed in the competitive job market.

College students' employment readiness encompasses various aspects, including professional knowledge and abilities, general skills, personality traits, and career management abilities. Students with strong professional knowledge and skills are more competitive in the job market, while good general skills, such as communication and teamwork, help them better adapt to the work environment (Wang, 2018). This ability enables students to meet social demands and achieve their personal employment ideals. This ability not only reflects students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, but also involves their resources and influence within social networks (Zhou, 2023).

Professional Capability - Professional knowledge and ability refer to the specific skills and knowledge students possess in their academic fields, enabling them to qualify for related job positions. Research shows that students with solid professional knowledge and practical skills are more likely to be recognized by employers. For instance, Zhang (2018) found that practical

experience gained through internships and laboratory work significantly enhances students' employability. Li (2019) pointed out that obtaining certifications and qualifications recognized by relevant industries is crucial for students entering the labor market. Sun (2020) emphasized that the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations is vital for students' performance in the early stages of their careers.

General skills - General skills refer to fundamental competencies applicable across diverse work settings, transcending specific industries or roles. These skills encompass effective communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking. According to Wang (2021), proficient communication skills enhance students' performance in job searches and workplace endeavors. Liu (2021) highlighted that employers prioritize teamwork abilities in recruitment processes. Moreover, Chen (2022) demonstrated that strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills enable students to adeptly navigate challenges in complex work environments.

Good communication skills enable college students to articulate themselves clearly and effectively during the job search process, leaving a strong impression on recruiters (Wang, 2018). Teamwork abilities allow college students to collaborate with others in group projects and work environments, demonstrating strong cooperation and coordination skills. Possessing strong problem-solving skills and critical thinking abilities helps college students to quickly find solutions to complex issues in the workplace, enhancing work efficiency and quality (Chen, 2020).

Personal qualities - Student personality traits include psychological and behavioral characteristics that affect their performance and adaptability in the workplace. Research shows that positive personality traits make students more competitive in job searches and at work. Huang (2022) found that resilience and adaptability are important psychological resources for students facing workplace challenges. Yu (2023) pointed out that students who demonstrate motivation and initiative are more likely to be favored by employers. Zhou (2023) emphasized that students with strong work ethics usually perform excellently in their careers, gaining recognition from colleagues and supervisors.

Student personality traits, such as resilience, proactivity, and work ethic, significantly influence their employment readiness. Resilient college students can maintain a positive attitude and persevere through the challenges and setbacks of the job search process (Liu, 2019). Proactive students are more likely to seek out opportunities, participate in internships, and engage in extracurricular activities, thereby gaining valuable practical experience. Students with a strong work ethic demonstrate integrity and responsibility in their work, which not only attracts employers but also helps them build a good reputation in the workplace (Chen, 2021).

The emphasis on industry-aligned education reflects a broader shift towards preparing graduates who can contribute effectively to Hainan's economic diversification and sustainability goals. By equipping students with industry-relevant knowledge and practical skills, educational institutions play a vital role in enhancing the employability and competitiveness of graduates in Hainan's evolving job market (Yang et al., 2020). This strategic alignment between education and industry needs not only supports local economic development but also positions Hainan as a magnet for global talent and investment, driving forward its ambitions as a leading free trade port in the Asia-Pacific region.

Students' employment readiness

In preparing for the job market, students in Hainan, China, benefit greatly from developing both technical proficiency and essential soft skills. Technical expertise relevant to their fields, such as engineering or healthcare, forms the foundation for job-specific tasks and industry standards. Concurrently, soft skills like communication and problem-solving are equally crucial, facilitating effective teamwork and adaptability in diverse work environments (Robles, 2012; Andrews & Higson, 2010; Yorke, 2006). Practical experiences gained through internships and volunteer work serve to connect academic learning with practical application, offering students valuable hands-on training and industry insights that significantly bolster their employability (Knouse, Tanner, & Harris, 1999; Astin, 1993). These efforts, coupled with a focus on academic achievements and certifications meeting industry standards, equip students with the qualifications necessary to succeed in competitive job markets (Purcell, Conand, Uthick, & Byrne, 2016; Cunningham & Villaseñor, 2016).

Beyond qualifications, building a robust professional network through networking events and mentorships plays a pivotal role in career advancement. Networking fosters connections with industry professionals, offering opportunities for learning and career growth (Granovetter, 1973; Murphy & Kram, 2010). Meanwhile, access to career services and personalized guidance aids students in formulating career goals and effective job search strategies, ensuring readiness for entering the workforce (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Fouad, Guillen, Harris-Hodge, & Henry, 2006). Understanding industry trends and applying theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios also enhances professional competence, preparing students to navigate dynamic market demands (Drucker, 1993; Kolb, 1984). Lastly, cultivating personal attributes such as initiative, resilience,

and a commitment to continuous learning enhances leadership potential and adaptability, crucial for thriving in today's competitive job landscape (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Masten, 2001; Luthans, 2002; Tynjälä, 2012).

Skills and Knowledge - Skills, which include specific knowledge and abilities related to their discipline, form the foundation of their professional competence. According to Robles (2012), skills are essential for performing job-specific tasks and meeting industry standards. Employers often prioritize candidates who demonstrate strong skills, as these skills ensure that the individual can effectively contribute to the organization's operational goals from the outset. For instance, in fields such as engineering, information technology, and healthcare, proficiency in technical skills is non-negotiable and directly impacts job performance and safety.

In addition to skills, soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability is equally important for career success. These skills facilitate effective collaboration, efficient problem resolution, and the ability to thrive in diverse and dynamic work environments. Andrews & Higson, (2010) highlight that employers value soft skills because they enhance workplace interactions and overall productivity. Communication skills, for example, are critical for conveying ideas clearly and collaborating with colleagues. Teamwork skills enable individuals to work effectively in group settings, while problem-solving skills allow them to navigate challenges and develop innovative solutions. Adaptability is essential for responding to changing circumstances and continuous learning. Yorke, (2006) emphasizes that these soft skills complement technical expertise, making graduates more versatile and capable of excelling in various professional contexts.

Education and Qualifications - Education and qualifications, including academic achievements, certifications, and degrees, are fundamental components that meet industry standards and requirements, significantly enhancing employability. Academic achievements such as high grades, honors, and awards demonstrate a student's commitment, discipline, and capability in their field of study. According to Purcell, Conand, Uthick, & Byrne, (2016), employers frequently consider academic performance as a crucial indicator of a candidate's potential and capacity to learn. Degrees from accredited institutions provide formal recognition of a student's expertise and are often prerequisites for entry-level positions in many professions. They serve as a benchmark that assures employers of a certain level of knowledge and proficiency in a specific discipline.

Certifications and specialized qualifications further enhance a candidate's attractiveness to potential employers by validating specific skills and competencies beyond general education. For instance, professional certifications in fields like information technology (e.g., CompTIA, Cisco) or finance (e.g., CFA, CPA) are highly regarded and sometimes required for certain job roles. Cunningham & Villaseñor, (2016) highlight that certifications can significantly boost a candidate's credibility and competitiveness in the job market, as they demonstrate a commitment to professional development and staying current with industry advancements. Additionally, these credentials can open doors to higher-paying positions and career advancement opportunities by signaling a higher level of expertise and dedication to prospective employers. Thus, a combination of robust academic achievements and relevant certifications equips students with the qualifications necessary to meet and exceed industry standards, positioning them strongly in the competitive job market.

Career Planning and Guidance - Educational institutions provide career services that offer resources tailored to students' career aspirations, including resume and cover letter reviews, interview preparation, and job search assistance. According to Dey and Cruzvergara (2014), these services are crucial in equipping students with the tools and confidence needed to navigate the job market. They assist students in identifying their strengths, interests, and values, which are essential for making informed career decisions and aligning academic pursuits with professional goals.

Workshops and counseling sessions further enhance students' career planning by offering specialized knowledge and personalized guidance. Workshops on topics such as networking, personal branding, and labor market trends provide practical skills and insights that are crucial for career development. Counseling sessions offer individualized support, helping students to articulate their career goals, create actionable plans, and overcome potential barriers. Research by Fouad et al. (2006) highlights the positive impact of career counseling on students' career readiness, noting that personalized guidance helps in setting realistic career goals and developing strategies to achieve them. These interventions collectively ensure that students are well-prepared to enter the workforce, equipped with a clear career vision, and the skills needed to achieve their professional aspirations.

Conclusion

The above content outlines the multidimensional composition and theoretical basis of college students' employability. Firstly, basic work abilities and professional knowledge abilities serve as the cornerstone of college students' employment,

including fundamental skills such as reading, writing, and computation, as well as the ability to apply professional theories and methods to solve practical problems. Secondly, social capital utilization abilities play a crucial role in college students' employment, as they can obtain more job-seeking information and opportunities by establishing strong interpersonal networks and enhancing social skills, thus enhancing their employment competitiveness. Finally, knowledge transfer and innovation abilities are essential components of college students' employability, requiring them to apply learned knowledge to practical work, while also being able to break out of traditional thinking patterns and propose novel ideas and solutions. These abilities and qualities together constitute a multidimensional framework for college students' employability, reflecting the importance of human capital theory, social cognitive career theory, and knowledge transfer theory in the process of college students' employment.

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