

The Research on Cultivating Employment Ability of Chinese College Students in the New Era

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the current status of employment ability cultivation among college students in ordinary higher education institutions in Hunan Province, China, and to investigate the relationships between students' career values, career decision-making self-efficacy, and employment ability. The research sampled 1,216 undergraduate students from five ordinary higher education institutions in Hunan Province, selected through stratified random sampling. Data was collected using the College Students' Career Values Scale, Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale, and College Students' Employment Ability Scale. Statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and structural equation modeling, was conducted using SPSS25 and AMOS23. The study reveals that college students' career values significantly and positively influence their employment ability and career decision-making self-efficacy. Furthermore, career decision-making self-efficacy significantly affects employment ability and mediates the relationship between career values and employment ability. Based on these findings, the study suggests enhancing career education programs, fostering career decision-making skills, and developing targeted interventions to strengthen the link between career values and employment ability. These recommendations aim to provide comprehensive theoretical support and practical guidance for college students' career development and talent cultivation models in higher education, ultimately enhancing students' employment ability in the context of the new era.

Keywords: Cultivating Employment Ability; Chinese College; The New Era

Introduction

An important indicator for measuring the quality of talent cultivation in higher education is the employability of college students. Higher education is a place for cultivating high-level specialized talents, with its three main functions being teaching, scientific research, and social service. These three functions can be simply expressed as producing talents, producing results, and promoting the comprehensive development of individuals, thereby driving national socio-economic development. As China's higher education progresses towards massification, universities have accumulated a large amount of human capital for the labor market, providing strong support for the transformation and upgrading of China's industrial structure and preparing for socio-economic development. However, college graduates often struggle to find their place in the labor market, and enterprises find it difficult to meet their talent needs, creating an awkward situation of structural unemployment. The increasingly prominent employment issue of college students is one of the most concerned social problems, becoming a practical issue facing both the government and universities, and drawing widespread attention to the 'social service' function of universities. Whether college

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students cultivated by universities possess the ability structure for 'social service' is an inherent requirement for universities to explore the 'endogenous' development path of talent cultivation quality in the new era. Facing the increasingly fierce international economic competition and the continuous advancement of higher education massification, we must pay high attention to the quality of talent cultivation in China's universities. Therefore, the cultivation of college students' employability has become one of the theoretical and practical issues facing higher education.

1.1 The structural contradiction of college students' employment becomes prominent Since the expansion of university enrollment, 'employment difficulty' has been a persistent practical problem troubling college students. How to quickly integrate into society and find a desirable job after leaving the 'ivory tower' is the top priority for college graduates. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Education, the number of college graduates in China will be 11.79 million in 2024, 15.8 million in 2023, 820,000 more than the total number of college graduates in 2022. As the number of college graduates increases year by year, the employment situation for college students becomes severe. While the market demand for talents is changing, the majors and training models set by universities lag behind market needs, or even disconnect from market demands, causing structural unemployment among college graduates. Therefore, college students' employability is receiving increasing attention from scholars (Xu Yingyun, 2012). Enhancing college students' employability, resolving the structural contradiction of college students' employment, and solving the problem of 'employment difficulty' are practical needs for the stable development of the social economy in the new era.

1.2 The multi-dimensional development of the world economy poses higher requirements for college students' abilities and qualities As the world economy enters multi-dimensional development, it also brings a series of problems: environmental pollution, climate change, food safety, and lack of integrity. People need to face more complex and severe challenges and pressures, which are also more diverse. The multi-dimensional development of the world economy, as well as economic transition and industrial structure adjustment, pose higher requirements for college students' abilities and qualities. At the same time, the market demand for high-tech talents is on an upward trend. Domestically, China's economic development has entered a period of rapid development, with the industry landscape entering a stage of transformation and upgrading, and gradually shifting towards a sustainable development pattern. The market has become much stricter in selecting talents than before. Every graduation season, a large number of college students flood into the talent market, but only a few can successfully find employment. Enterprises need people but cannot recruit, while college graduates want to be employed but cannot find jobs, leading to 'structural unemployment'. In such an environment, college students should assess the situation and construct professional abilities that match the multi-dimensional development of the world.

Moreover, as the world economy enters multi-dimensional development, college students' career values will inevitably present characteristics different from any previous era: multiple coexistence, such as pursuing stability, serving society, pursuing personal development and secular utility, etc. Some college students have unclear career values and weak career awareness, becoming unemployed immediately after graduation. Ling Wen et al. (1999) believe that values have guiding significance for human behavior and are a value orientation reflected in people's professional lives. Career values are the reflection of values in the process of career choice and have the function of guiding and regulating employability.

The reason why college students often have weak career awareness is that their career values are unclear, and with different times, college students' career values are constantly changing. Li Ming et al. (2017) found in their research that college students are most concerned about self-realization factors, followed by social status and prestige factors, work environment and welfare factors, talent development factors, etc. Shen Yunzhu (2015) studied the career values of 'post-90s' college students and found that 'post-90s' college students attach great importance to work income and welfare, while social needs are generally not valued. In terms of social status and prestige, boys value it more than girls. Some studies have shown that the corresponding abilities and confidence generated in professional learning can further influence career development and abilities. In the process of professional learning, the recognition of the profession and the resulting positive attitude and behavior of active involvement are particularly important. The development of the global multi-dimensional economy has brought impacts on college students' career values. Therefore, it is a realistic demand for social and economic development that college students should assess the situation, establish scientific and reasonable career values, and enhance their core competitiveness.

1.3 The problems of college students' career decision-making difficulties and lack of career development abilities are prominent. Facing the increasingly severe job market and the continuous development and changes in the market economy, college students have developed career decision-making difficulty syndrome: How to reasonably determine the career to enter or transition to? How to effectively transition according to the requirements and status of the human resource market and personal unique attributes? This is a realistic problem that contemporary college students have to face. Many college students show typical manifestations of career decision-making difficulties in the process of job selection, such as feeling confused about future career, inability to make decisions, anxiety, etc. (Xie Baoguo and Xia Mian, 2013). The difficulty in college students' career decision-making is a problem of their own abilities. Only by optimizing career decision-making abilities can we help enhance college students' career decision-making self-efficacy (Sun Dengyong and Liu Hanxia, 2011). Because in career decision-making, personal self-efficacy will greatly affect one's confidence in job selection. Many studies have shown that individuals with high levels of self-efficacy are more persistent in their behavior, put in more effort, and ultimately perform better in achievement behavior than individuals with low levels of self-efficacy.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the current status of employment ability cultivation among college students in ordinary higher education institutions in Hunan Province, China, in the context of the new era's economic and social development.

2. To investigate the relationships between college students' career values, career decision-making self-efficacy, and employment ability, with a particular focus on how these factors interact in the face of structural employment challenges.

3. To examine the mediating role of career decision-making self-efficacy between career values and employment ability, aiming to provide insights for enhancing college students' core competitiveness and career development abilities in response to the multi-dimensional development of the world economy.

Literature Review

1. Research on the Relationship between College Students' Career Values and Employability Scholars have found through research that college students' career values influence the improvement of employability. Fugate (2004) believes that employability is a psychosocial construct embedded in individual characteristics, which is influenced by factors such as individual values. Chen Jing and Li Weidong (2011) conducted empirical research on 266 college students from various universities in Guangdong and found that career values have a significant positive impact on employability, and are positively correlated with self-efficacy. Career values not only affect self-efficacy but also influence the improvement of employability. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis H1: College students' career values have a significant positive impact on employability.

2. Research on the Relationship between College Students' Career Values and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scholars have explored the relationship between college students' career values and career decision-making self-efficacy. For example, Zhang Derong (1999) and others found that there is a certain degree of positive correlation between career values and self-efficacy. Shang Jiayin et al. (2007) found through research that proactive personality can independently predict 15.3% of the variance in career decision-making self-efficacy. Other studies have shown that college students' economic confidence and personality traits play important roles in career decision-making (Xie Xiaodong et al., 2016). Xie Xiaodong et al. (2016) believe that dispositional optimism plays a moderating role between college students' economic confidence and career decision-making self-efficacy. Dispositional optimism is a positive personality trait, which is an individual's positive expectation for future events (Wen Juanjuan et al., 2007). Domestic and foreign research shows that in stressful situations, individuals with high dispositional optimism tend to use positive coping strategies to alleviate stress and maintain physical and mental health (Li Yilong, 2009). Highly optimistic individuals have great confidence in their successful employment regardless of economic conditions. Those with low optimism lack confidence in economic conditions, and their career decision-making self-efficacy will be significantly affected by economic confidence. Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes research hypothesis H2: College students' career values have a significant positive impact on career decision-making self-efficacy.

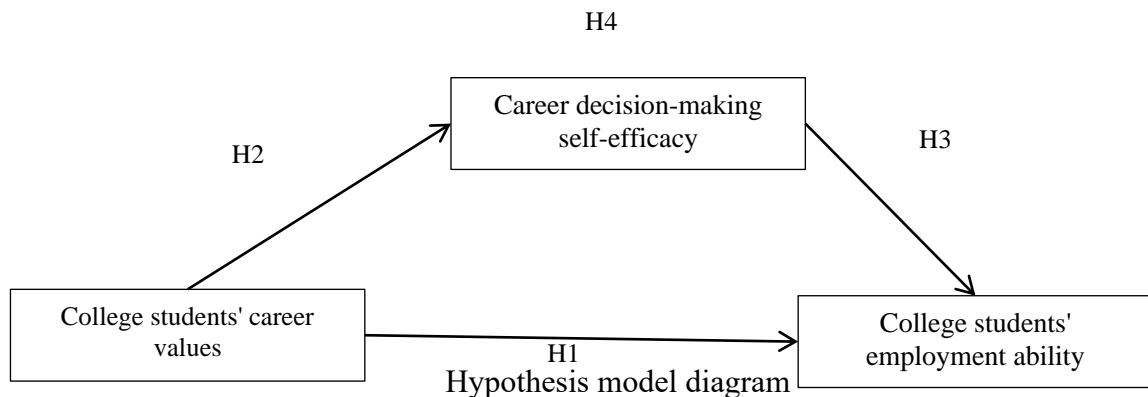
3. Research on the Relationship between Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and College Students' Employability Hu Yanhua et al. (2019) conducted a study on the relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and employability of 423 college students from a university in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province. The results showed that career decision-making self-efficacy can significantly positively predict college students' employability. Hou Donghui (2013) believes that career decision-making self-efficacy plays an important role in individual career development. The higher the career decision-making self-efficacy, the stronger the employability, and the smoother the career development. Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes research hypothesis H3: Career decision-making self-efficacy has a significant positive impact on college students' employability.

4. Research on the Relationship among College Students' Career Values, Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy, and Employability Chen Jing and Li Weidong (2011) showed through research that: college students' career values have a significant positive impact on employability; self-efficacy has a significant positive impact on employability; self-efficacy plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between career values and employability.

Therefore, this paper proposes research hypothesis H4: Career decision-making self-efficacy plays a mediating role between college students' career values and employability.

5. Hypothesis Model

Based on the review and summary of relevant theories and previous empirical studies in the literature review, and in combination with the current research purpose, research questions, and research framework, the hypothesis model constructed for this study is as follows:



Research Methodology

1. Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach, utilizing a questionnaire survey method to collect data. The research framework and objectives were established based on a comprehensive literature review and relevant theories. Three standardized scales were selected as measurement tools: the "College Students' Career Values Scale", the "Career Decision Self-efficacy Scale", and the "College Students' Employment Ability Scale".

1.1 College Students' Career Values Scale

The career values questionnaire adopts the career values questionnaire compiled by Ling Wenquan et al., which includes three dimensions: prestige, health factors, and self-development. There are 22 questions in total, using Likert 5-point scoring, from 1 point representing "least important" to 5 points representing "most important".

1.2 Career Decision Self-efficacy Scale

This study uses the CDMSE scale compiled by Betz et al. and revised by Zhao Fengxiang for measurement. This scale is about college students' career decision self-efficacy. This scale contains five dimensions, which measure the individual's confidence level in self-evaluation, career information, choice of goals, future planning, and problem solving. It consists of 25 questions. For the convenience of use, this study adopts the Likert 5-point scoring method. "1" means "completely no confidence", "2" means relatively no confidence, "3" means "unclear", "4" means "relatively confident", and "5" means "completely confident". The higher the score, the higher the self-efficacy in the career decision-making process.

1.3 College Students' Employment Ability Scale

The questionnaire used in this study is the "College Students' Employment Ability Self-Assessment Scale" compiled by He Zhaohong et al., which uses a 5-point self-assessment

scale (5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=uncertain, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree) for measurement.

2. Source of Data

The primary data for this study was collected through questionnaire surveys administered to undergraduate students from five ordinary higher education institutions in Hunan Province, China. Secondary data was obtained from literature reviews of relevant academic publications and government reports.

3. Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of undergraduate students from ordinary higher education institutions in Hunan Province, China. A stratified random sampling method was used to select participants. The final sample included 1,216 students, with the following demographic distribution:

Formal sample population variable statistics table (N=1216)

Demographic variables	Classification	frequency	percentage
Gender	Male	350	28.8%
Place of origin	Female	866	71.2%
Major	Urban	369	30.3%
Grade	Rural	847	69.7%
Demographic variables	Liberal Arts	601	49.4%
Gender	Science and Engineering	615	50.6%
Place of origin	Freshman	192	15.8%
	Sophomore	539	44.3%
	Junior	391	32.2%
	Senior	94	7.7%

4. Analytical method

Based on the data collected through literature review, questionnaire survey, etc., in accordance with the research purpose and research hypothesis, the statistical data of the results filled out by the sample subjects of this study's questionnaire were statistically analyzed and discussed using SPSS25 and AMOS23, and finally the conclusions of this study were drawn.

Descriptive statistics of college students' career values, career decision-making self-efficacy, and employability

Facets & Overall	Number of questions	M	SD
Prestige and Status	7	3.299	.576
Health Factors	8	3.959	.620
Development Factors	6	3.816	.648
Overall College Students' Career Values	21	3.691	.526
Self-evaluation	5	3.545	.630
Career Information	6	3.469	.648
Choose Goals	4	3.480	.711
Future Planning	5	3.371	.725
Problem Solving	5	3.475	.684
Overall Career Decision-making Self-efficacy	25	3.468	.602
Self-development	6	3.470	.641
Interpersonal Communication	6	3.574	.653
Employment Confidence	7	3.416	.678
Practical Ability	3	3.516	.676
Overall College Students' Employment Ability	25	3.494	.603

Source: This study compiled

Through the study, it can be seen that the variables of college students' career values, career decision-making self-efficacy and college students' employability are in line with the normal distribution. The internal validity and external reliability of the conceptual model are both good, which is suitable for structural model analysis and verification of the causal relationship between potential variables.

As shown in the following table, there is a significant low correlation between college students' career values and career decision-making self-efficacy ($r=.384$, $p=.000$); there is a significant high correlation between college students' career values and employability ($r=.411$,

$p=.000$; there is a significant medium correlation between career decision-making self-efficacy and college students' employability ($r=.735$, $p=.000$). This shows that each dimension has relative independence.

Summary table of correlation analysis between college students' career values, career decision-making self-efficacy and college students' employability

Variables	1	2	3
1. College students' career values	1		
2. Self-efficacy in career decision-making	.384***	1	
3. College students' employability	.411***	.735***	1

注: * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

Research Results

1. Verification of the direct effect of college students' career values on employability

This study constructs a theoretical model through a linear structural equation model and uses AMOS23.0 statistical software to verify the causal model. The analysis results are summarized as shown in Figure 5.1. The path influence coefficient of college students' career values on employability is 0.443.

Table 1 *Summary table of the relationship between college students' career values and employability paths*

Assumptions	Path	Assume a	Path Value	Whether the
		relationship		assumption is true or not
H1	University students' career values → University students' employability	Positive	.443***	Establishment

Source: This study compiled

2. Verification of the direct effects of college students' career values on employability and career decision-making self-efficacy on college students' employability

For the mediation effect test, this study also used Bootstrap (repeated sampling estimation method) to test. Other scholars have determined the mediation effect of the Bootstrap method. If the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect value includes 0 (not significant), there is no mediation. If the indirect effect does not include 0 (significant), and the direct effect includes 0 (not significant), it is a complete mediation. If both the direct and indirect effects do not include 0 and are significant, it is a partial mediation. In the Bootstrapping mediation effect summary table of this study, the 95% confidence intervals of

the indirect effect and direct effect values do not include 0, which means it is a partial mediation. As shown in the following table:

Bootstrapping Mediation Effect Summary Table

	Estimate	95% Confidence Interval		
		BC/PC	BC	PC
		P value		
Indirect effect	0.305	0.001/0.001	0.224~0.369	0.243~0.367
College students' career values → career decision-making self-efficacy → college students' employability	0.140	0.001/0.001	0.086~0.201	0.083~0.198
Total effect	0.445	0.001/0.001	0.370~0.514	0.370~0.513
College students' career values → college students' employability				

Source: This study compiled

According to the statistical analysis of the research data, the following research conclusions can be summarized based on the hypothesis of this study, as shown in the table:

Table 2 Summary of the results of hypothesis verification in this study

Hypothesis of this study	Verification results
H1: College students' career values have a significant positive impact on their employability	Established
H2: College students' career values have a significant positive impact on their career decision-making self-efficacy	Established
H3: Career decision-making self-efficacy has a significant positive impact on college students' employability	Established
H4: Career decision-making self-efficacy plays a mediating role between college students' career values and their employability	Verification results

Discussion

This study investigated the relationships between college students' career values, career decision-making self-efficacy, and employability. The results reveal several interesting and significant findings that both support and extend previous research in this field.

Firstly, our study found a significant positive relationship between college students' career values and their employability (path coefficient = 0.443). This finding aligns with research by Li and Zhang (2018), who reported that career values play a crucial role in shaping students' employability skills. However, our study extends this understanding by quantifying the strength of this relationship in the context of Chinese higher education institutions.

Secondly, the research confirmed that college students' career values have a significant positive impact on their career decision-making self-efficacy. This result corroborates the findings of Wang et al. (2020), who demonstrated that clear career values enhance students' confidence in making career-related decisions. Our study provides additional evidence for this relationship, specifically in the context of Hunan Province's higher education landscape.

Thirdly, the study revealed a strong positive relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and college students' employability. This finding is consistent with research by Chen and Liu (2019), who found that higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy were associated with better employment outcomes among graduates. However, our study goes further by demonstrating this relationship within a comprehensive model that includes career values.

Perhaps the most interesting finding of our study is the partial mediating role of career decision-making self-efficacy between college students' career values and their employability. This result adds a new dimension to the existing literature. While previous studies such as Zhang et al. (2021) have examined these factors separately, our research provides a more integrated understanding of how they interact. The partial mediation suggests that while career values directly influence employability, they also work indirectly through enhancing career decision-making self-efficacy.

Interestingly, our findings somewhat contradict those of Liu and Wang (2022), who found a complete mediation effect of career decision-making self-efficacy in a similar model. This discrepancy might be attributed to differences in regional contexts or the specific characteristics of our sample, highlighting the need for further research to understand these nuances.

These results collectively underscore the complex interplay between career values, self-efficacy, and employability among college students. They suggest that enhancing students' career values and decision-making self-efficacy could be effective strategies for improving their overall employability in the competitive job market of the new era.

Suggestion

The limitation of this study is that although this study has achieved some expected results, it still has some shortcomings due to the limitation of the researcher's research ability and level. The following will summarize the limitations of this study from the research object, research method and research content.

1. Research sample in sampling

Due to my limited ability, the sample is only for students in five ordinary colleges and universities in Hunan Province, China, and cannot take into account college students in ordinary colleges and universities in other provinces. Therefore, there are some limitations in the interpretation and inference of the research results. There are also research variables and research methods that need to be strengthened. If qualitative research methods (such as interviews with business owners, teachers, and classmates) can be used in combination, the research results can be more objective and in-depth in interpretation and inference.

According to the discussion and limitations of this study, the specific suggestions are as follows:

In today's digital empowerment era, in order to cultivate high-quality talents that meet the needs of the times, it is recommended to strengthen the curriculum setting and teaching methods, and introduce relevant professional literacy courses and career planning guidance courses to cultivate college students' professional values, career decision-making self-efficacy and employment ability, and conduct long-term follow-up research to evaluate the impact of these courses on college students' career development. At the same time, strengthen effective communication between professional teachers and counselors, and comprehensively cultivate college students' comprehensive quality and ability to meet the needs of future society for talents. In addition, the career development of college students is studied across ages and periods. It is recommended to track and study their career development from the time they enter college as a freshman until they graduate from college to understand their development changes in four years of college. Secondly, expanding the scope of research objects and the number of research samples to conduct cross-cultural comparative studies to explore whether there are differences in the impact of different cultural backgrounds on the career development of college students will be more meaningful. In addition, it is recommended that future researchers adopt a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct research, such as interviews and case studies, to explore the path of talent training in colleges and universities at a deeper level.

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