

# Employment Anxiety among Arts Graduates in Post-epidemic Era

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## Abstract

**In the post-epidemic era, the employment situation faced by college students majoring in arts is becoming more and more complex. The difficulty for arts majors' employment especially has become the biggest problems for college graduates at present as some students suffered some mental problems and have lost their competitive spirit as a result. This paper adopts the quantitative method and explores the general anxiety status among the college graduates majoring in arts and the major factors affecting their employment anxiety under the new situation, and then puts forward countermeasures from three aspects to reduce employment anxiety and alleviate the employment problems for arts graduates.**

## Keywords

**Employment Anxiety; Arts Graduates; Post-epidemic Era; Countermeasure.**

## 1. Introduction

All The global economic growth has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020, with numerous effects on various groups across a wide range of industries and fields. China had initially conquered the COVID-19 pandemic and had moved on to post-epidemic era, which posed new obstacles to the country's growth making the employment for college students even worse. The difficulty for arts majors' employment especially has become the biggest problems for college graduates at present as some students suffered some mental problems and have lost their competitive spirit as a result (Zhou et al., 2021). Anxiety, depression, stress, and other issues that may have an impact on students' mental health have been the subject of several earlier research. Li et al. (2021) have studies factors influencing college students' career choices, believing that personal factors, family factors, and school factors all have an impact on college students' employment intentions. Fang et al.(2022) shows that individual factors, college factors, family factors, and economic factors can influence colleges' career choices; Qin et al. (2021) divides the factors in influencing the employment of college students into two aspects: subjective factors and objective factors, where subjective factors include college students' psychological concepts, professional skills, work experience, career planning and courage and ability to participate in entrepreneurship, and objective influencing factors include social system, education system, and social environment. Qiu et al. (2020) believes that there are four factors that affect the employment of graduates: gender, internship and student work experience during school, career guidance at school, and the mentality and quality of self. These researches find that career choices are affected by various kinds of factors mainly divided into two categories: subjective and objective ones. Personal background and psychological factors are noted as the subjective ones while social and environmental factors are classified as the objective ones. Environment has been acknowledged as one important factor in college students' career choices. Since the end of the pandemic, social environment has been greatly changed. It is necessary to explore the influencing factors under the new circumstance.

There are some researchers who focused on the factor of anxiety and produced some findings and put forward some suggestions. By a questionnaire study, Cao et al. (2020) discovered that college graduates' anxiety is on the high side, and she advocated that college students' psychological health be prioritized. According to Li et al. (2021), female students are more anxious than male students when it comes to picking a job. Wang et al. (2020) used a survey to evaluate the anxiety levels of urban and rural college students when it came to finding work, and discovered that the anxiety level of urban college students was much lower than that of rural college students. Meanwhile, Zhao et al. (2021) discovered that the current job condition and quality of female students as vulnerable groups are not encouraging. From these studies, the high level of anxiety in college graduates is confirmed and some differences are found between male and female students and urban and rural students respectively.

From the analysis above, it can be found that most of the existing studies ignore the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, while there are also few studies that focus on the changes in students' career choices and the preference of university students' career choices. And the arts graduates who are under great influence of the pandemic are seldom targeted. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of arts graduates and specifically on high-risk groups who are at a greater risk for psychological disorders compared to others. Based on theoretical backgrounds, this paper aimed to add COVID-19-related factors, combined with the realistic basis, and summarized four major factors based on the existing research basis: COVID-19-related factors, personal differences, family factors, and government decisions.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Questions

The research questions to be studied are:

- (1) What is the general level of employment anxiety for arts students in post-epidemic era?
- (2) What are the major factors that affect arts students' employment anxiety?
- (3) What are the countermeasures to relieve arts students' employment anxiety?

### 2.2. Participants

The experiment was carried out in September 2022. A simple random sampling was conducted among arts graduates in ZYU, a local university in eastern China where most of the students are arts majors divided in languages and non-languages, and online questionnaires were distributed to collect data. A total of 860 questionnaires were distributed to the students majoring in arts such as English, international trade, Chinese, Japanese and so on who are going to graduate in 2023, of which 819 were valid after the collection. The subjects were randomly chosen so there were no big differences in number, gender, and academic performances in the school. Apart from the professional training and courses required to learn in school, guidance about the employment will be given in the semester, job fair opportunities will be offered by the school as well to facilitate their job seeking. Moreover, each faculty has set up the psychological consulting center and appointed teachers to take charge of it. Any students with mental discomforts could go to ask for help.

### 2.3. Instruments

#### 2.3.1. Questionnaire

This primary method of the paper was the adoption of a questionnaire themed "Career Selection Anxiety Questionnaire for College Students". There were altogether 28 items in this questionnaire, and the data for this study were collected. The questionnaire was written in Chinese so that subjects could have a better understanding of the questions and give an easier

response. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A had 12 items, all of which were objective factors including lack of employment support, employment prospects. Section B included 16 items about subjective factors covering socio demographic ones to see the general level of employment anxiety for arts students under the influence of the epidemic. The questionnaire was given online to the subjects during the experiment. The design of the questionnaire was taken from other study which has been tested to be trusted and applicable.

### 2.3.2. Interview

After conducting the questionnaire study, the author spoke with 12 students from Zhejiang Yuexiu University of Foreign Languages who had also been the subjects of the questionnaire. They were from six different majors ranging from languages to non-languages so that differences could be seen if there were between language majors and non-language majors. Semi-structured interview was adopted for subjects to explain any hazy concepts that had come out of the questionnaire. 6 male and 6 female students with various levels of anxiety were present. The students were given free rein to express themselves during the 30-minute interviews, which were conducted in their native Chinese and later transcribed.

## 2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The research adopted a quantitative approach and chose the questionnaire "Career Selection Anxiety Questionnaire for College Students" composed of objective factors including lack of employment support, employment prospects and subjective factors covering socio demographic ones to see the general level of employment anxiety for arts students under the influence of the epidemic and explore the major factors influencing the career anxiety in arts students in ZYU. Then the data were coded with the tool of SPSS 26. The social-demographic variables were described using descriptive statistics and frequency distributions. Based on the scoring method stated above, anxiety, was classified as mild to severe. To find correlations between the dependent variables of interest and the continuous independent variable, Spearman correlation was utilized (age). For categorical variables, a t-test and ANOVA comparative mean tests were used to investigate depression in relation to socio-demographic and health features. After assessing collinearity, variables with a p-value of less than 0.25 were incorporated into three independent linear regression models before adding variables to the final model. In all analyses, the significance threshold was set at p 0.05 with a 95% confidence range.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. General Level of Employment Anxiety for Arts Students in Post-epidemic Era

In this survey, varied gender, family geographical location, cost of living, and family economic position have varying degrees of effect on the mental health of arts students. And there is no statistically significant variation in mental health status between various genders or geographical areas where the family resides. An ordered logistic regression analysis was performed to examine the dependent variable, mental health status (scale 1-5), and the five covariates, gender, stage of schooling, geographical location of the household, cost of living level, and family economic position. The likelihood ratio test yielded a significant level of 0.027 for the ordered logistic model, showing that the model fit.

According to the survey, arts graduates have modest job pressure, with an average of 3.05 points, which is somewhat higher than 3. Among them, the scores for employment pressure in the dimensions of employment competition environment, professional evaluation, and professional supply and demand contradiction are higher than the average, indicating that the external environment and personal quality are the most important factors influencing arts

students' employment pressure. Because of the various unknowns regarding the outbreak's progression, the present job situation remains dire, with fewer college recruitment posts available and lower pay. At the same time, overseas students are returning to China in search of work, and competition is heating up. Furthermore, pupils who graduated last year but did not find a job as scheduled will also increase the difficulty of employment.

The need for talent is progressively growing, and many college students are suffering increased employment pressure because they are unable to fulfill society's high expectations and have a low feeling of self-efficacy. Furthermore, many institutions' talent education is detached from the practical demands of the social market. At college, students' knowledge development tends to be theoretical, with limited practical possibilities and a lack of comprehensive quality and aptitude, which surely impacts students' employment pressure. As a result, college students should endeavor to expand their scope of knowledge, and put their practical and operational skills to the real practice. The discrepancy between professional supply and demand receives the greatest grade for employment pressure.

The following are some possible explanations: To begin with, the population of college students grows each year, so does their competition. The small number of social employment jobs contrasts sharply with the large number of graduates. College students are finding it increasingly difficult to get careers in their respective fields. Second, the selection of popular and unpopular businesses has resulted in an overall conundrum of challenging work for college students; third, job losses as a result of the pandemic have worsened the difficulty of employment.

### **3.2. Major Factors Affecting Employment Anxiety for Arts Students in Post-epidemic Era**

First, this study found that there is a significant difference in the total score and various dimensions of employment stress between male and female arts students, and the score of female students' employment anxiety is significantly higher than that of male students, indicating that female students have greater psychological pressure for employment. Compared to previous studies, female college students have significantly increased their scores in the dimensions of employment competition environment, self awareness and positioning, lack of job search assistance, professional supply and demand contradiction, and employment psychological expectations. The reasons are as follows: first of all, when recruiting employees, there is subjective gender discrimination in the enterprise, and the requirements are prone to male candidates. Considering women's reproductive problems and the burden of future childcare and family care, some employers prefer male groups with more labor advantages. As for arts students, the higher proportion of females students makes it even worse when male students receive unfairly high attention from the employers. Coupled with the impact of the epidemic, the overall reduction of positions has greatly increased the psychological anxiety of females in employment; Secondly, some women have a poor sense of independence, rely on family and social relationships during the job search process, and have a weak ability to stand on their own feet, which hinders employment and increases employment pressure. Therefore, compared to male students, female arts students are more pessimistic about the future employment situation.

Second, the findings of this study also revealed that there is a significant difference in the scores of employment anxiety for arts graduates from urban areas and rural areas. Arts students from rural areas have greater employment pressure. The following are some possible explanations: First, the existing work situation is far from perfect, supported by the imbalance between supply and demand. Second, compared with urban students, rural students may have inferior talents in many areas owing to the effect of their early living environment, which hampers their progress in obtaining jobs. Fourth, as compared to metropolitan college students, rural

students have fewer people resources and relationships, limiting their potential to participate in superior units. As a result, college students from rural regions confront larger job challenges. Third, there is a significant difference language majors and non-language majors in the score of employment anxiety, and language majors have greater employment anxiety. This may be related to the severe employment situation in post-epidemic era when international trades are affected severely that career chances for language learners mostly rely on. Besides, language majors have a weaker competitiveness in terms of professional skills since their academic studies are rather about languages learning than practical skills and enterprises tend to choose students with more prominent professional abilities, which to some extent reduces the employment opportunities of language majors. Therefore, language major students should enhance their competitiveness, and strive to seize opportunities to achieve employment.

#### **4. Countermeasures to Alleviate Arts Students' Employment Anxiety**

The study found that familial background, feminine gender, and major difference are all connected with greater levels of employment anxiety among ZYU arts graduates. Females reported much higher levels of depression, and those from rural areas with tight budget showed more anxiety and less self-confidence. Future therapies should focus on developing methods to assist students' mental health and well-being. Furthermore, mental health services from school should be offered to all students, especially those who are predisposed to psychological discomfort by giving lessons about employment and offer prompt care when students find themselves uncomfortably ill. Those students with high level of anxiety could be gathered into some groups and receive additional care and help from the experts. Above all, it is recommended that faculties should begin focusing on students' mental well-being activities and supporting their health-seeking practices.

Following the pandemic, self-confidence is the most important element determining job anxiety among arts students, especially for those who had higher worry because of their gender or origin. Academic success and career self-confidence go hand in hand. As a result, beginning in the junior year of university, it is necessary to focus on the development of an academic environment, emphasize the importance of college students' studies for employment, set employment examples and models, and lay a solid foundation for college students' confidence in employment.

The benefits of a growth mindset of interest may also extend to those seeking employment. Having a growth mindset of interest can help job seekers expand their interests and become more adaptable to different fields, and take the initiative to learn new skills. Students should be encouraged to develop different kinds of interests in school where a variety of elective classes could be given so that they could be more likely to have innovative ideas that bridge multiple areas of knowledge to achieve better solutions.

This necessitates that graduates adapt their own position, deal with graduation pressure logically, limit their own sources of stress, set acceptable goals, and actively confront tough situations. Girls are more likely to have panic episodes and panic feelings, and their stress patterns are more likely to be negative. As a result, females must suitably minimize their demands on themselves and develop acceptable skills. They should enhance their mind and deal with unfavorable information rationally and calmly. College students from rural locations may suffer consumption challenges, social difficulties, study difficulties, specialization obstacles, and job difficulties after joining university. They are generally inferiority complex and confused, and need to continually manage their emotions and adjust to the new living situation. College students from cities and towns may face fewer emotional and psychological quandaries because they are constantly developing themselves, challenging themselves, broadening their horizons and patterns, and influencing others with outstanding achievements.

Solving the anxiety of college graduates requires the school to fulfill its functions, strengthen employment guidance and psychological guidance, provide more support to help students fully understand themselves and establish a suitable employment outlook to find the niche job.

## 5. Conclusion

Anxiety is prevalent among college students majoring in arts after the COVID-19 in ZYU. Some teams of students with a higher level of anxiety are highlighted in close relationship with the factors including females, family backgrounds and economic conditions under the severe employment condition because of the pandemic. Future interventions should concentrate on creating plans that advance the mental health and well being of the students. It is beneficial for college arts graduates who have battled the headache of anxiety to ease their mental burden and recommit to a happy and healthy life in the post-epidemic phase. Arts students especially those who are more susceptible to psychological discomfort, should have access to community health and mental health services given by school. Also, it is advised that all educational institutions begin concentrating on the student body's mental health initiatives and encouraging their health-seeking practices in early years rather than in the last year before graduation. Periodic seminars on the promotion of mental health might equip students for upcoming difficulties and consideration must be implemented to the individuals at risk because of their vulnerability towards serious mental disorders since they require immediate attention, assistance, and support. Because the key to successfully preventing and controlling occupational anxiety is to pay close attention to one's mental health, strive to build abilities for managing emotions and dealing with stress, and create psychological stamina to resist pain and setbacks with the help from the school, teachers and communities. To develop programs that focus on students' mental health, it is also recommended that collaboration among universities, government and industries is critically required. Collaboration between school and industries should be highly promoted to help students to have a better understanding be disparity between academic study and practical use in reality so that they know how to fill it up thus anxiety will be alleviated to some extent.

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