

The Curriculum Construction of Career Planning and Employment Guidance for Normal Students: Value Implications, Practical Dilemmas and Optimization Strategies

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Abstract: Improving the construction of the curriculum system of career planning and employment guidance for normal students is one of the effective ways to solve the difficulty of normal students' employment. Strengthening the development of career planning and employment guidance courses for normal students holds significant value in guiding students towards establishing sound professional values, stimulating their motivation to learn, and optimizing human resource allocation. However, the current development of such courses faces practical challenges, including insufficient practicality and relevance in classroom teaching, as well as a shortage of specialized teaching staff. Normal universities and colleges should enhance the practicality of course delivery, provide categorized guidance based on students' employment aspirations, strengthen the development of specialized teaching staff, and continually refine the curriculum framework for career planning and employment guidance. These measures will collectively elevate the employability of normal students.

Keywords: Normal students; Career planning and employment guidance curriculum; Curriculum construction

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1. Introduction

Employment constitutes the foremost livelihood project and forms the bedrock of societal prosperity and stability. As the primary bastion for cultivating high-calibre talent, higher education institutions bear the mission of nurturing professionals required by society. However, in recent years, the number of university graduates in China has continued to rise, increasing from 8.74 million in 2020 to over 11.7 million in 2024^[1]. Compounded by both international and domestic economic downturns, graduates face mounting employment pressures year on year, with securing employment becoming correspondingly more challenging. Against this backdrop, career planning and employment guidance courses for university students have entered the

public consciousness, becoming an integral component of higher education institutions' talent development curricula. Normal universities and colleges, as the cradle for cultivating future educators, should strengthen the development and reform of career planning and employment guidance courses in alignment with their institutional talent development objectives. This will guide normal students in forming sound professional values, thereby achieving full and high-quality employment.

2. The value implied in developing career planning and employment guidance courses for normal students

2.1. Guiding normal students to establish correct career values

Offering comprehensive career planning and employment guidance courses in normal universities and colleges can guide students to develop scientific career values. Many normal students lack in-depth analysis and objective assessment of primary and secondary school teaching positions and employment trends. Coupled with mounting job-seeking frustrations and psychological pressures, this further erodes their autonomy and enthusiasm in employment. Consequently, they lose professional identity and a sense of achievement in employment, giving rise to social phenomena such as 'delayed employment,' 'reluctant employment,' and 'non-employment' ^[2]. Career planning and employment guidance courses at normal universities and colleges serve as crucial pathways for fostering sound professional values among prospective teachers. They provide an effective channel for integrating students' future career development with their current academic pursuits, helping them identify latent strengths, formulate clear career objectives, fully leverage their talents, and enhance professional competence.

2.2. Awakening normal students' motivation to learn

Normal universities and colleges serve as vital institutions for cultivating and supplying primary and secondary school teachers to society, bearing the historic mission of teacher education. Faced with increasingly challenging employment prospects, normal universities and colleges should strengthen career planning and employment guidance course development, implement necessary educational reforms, and improve graduate employment rates. This course helps normal students integrate their professional knowledge and skills with societal demands and job requirements, enabling them to identify gaps between their capabilities and employer expectations. It guides students to set specific learning objectives aligned with employer needs, thereby awakening latent motivation to learn ^[3]. For instance, some employers stipulate that, in addition to obtaining the relevant subject teaching qualification certificate, normal students must also have received a National Scholarship (excluding the National Inspirational Scholarship), been recognised as an outstanding graduate at provincial level or above, been designated a provincial-level or higher "Three-Good Student", or have won awards in provincial-level or higher subject-specific teaching skills competitions or competitions organised by national ministries. Under these requirements, educators must guide normal students to formulate career plans early, actively participate in various levels of teaching skills competitions, obtain relevant qualifications, and enhance their professional competencies.

2.3. Optimising human resource allocation

The development of career planning and employment guidance courses for normal students at normal universities and colleges yields a mutually beneficial outcome: for students, it facilitates a thorough

understanding of employment information and employer requirements, enabling early career planning and preparation to enhance their employability ^[4]; for institutions, it fosters the establishment of distinctive career planning education programmes, elevates institutional reputation, and promotes sustainable development. Through offering career planning and employment guidance courses, normal universities and colleges enable students to gain an in-depth understanding of the latest national and regional employment policies, benefits, and market demands. This facilitates comprehensive analysis of personal strengths and interests, enabling students to set reasonable career objectives and develop sound professional attitudes and employment perspectives. For instance, by promoting the Western Development Programme policy, normal universities and colleges encourage students to serve in Western regions, grassroots settings, and areas where the nation's needs are greatest. This alleviates structural employment imbalances while contributing to educational advancement in western China. Furthermore, the refinement of this course enables normal students to accurately grasp the job requirements, responsibilities, and prospects of their target professions. During their studies, they develop the professional skills and comprehensive competencies needed for their desired roles, preparing them to meet future career demands. This approach optimizes human resource allocation and promotes balanced educational development across all regions.

3. Practical challenges in developing career planning and employment guidance courses for normal students

3.1. Lack of practicality and systematic approach in classroom teaching

Presently, classroom teaching within normal students' career planning and employment guidance courses generally lacks practicality and systematicity, manifesting in several aspects.

Firstly, teaching methods tend to be rather monotonous. Most instructors predominantly employ lecture-based approaches in their classroom delivery, failing to incorporate diverse activities, such as mock interviews, career planning competitions, CV drafting contests, and portfolio presentations. This approach struggles to stimulate students' interest in learning.

Secondly, course content predominantly focuses on imparting theoretical knowledge, leaving students with insufficient practical experience ^[5]. In some normal universities and colleges, course delivery remains confined to theoretical levels, covering topics such as career concepts and applications, career planning formulation and implementation, employment trends and policy analysis, CV preparation, interview techniques, and job-seeking strategies. The teaching content tends to be rather dry, resulting in suboptimal educational outcomes.

Thirdly, the course structure requires refinement ^[6]. Many institutions offer these courses for only one semester, failing to integrate them into the four-year curriculum for normal students, thus lacking systematic coherence and continuity. Some institutions only introduce this subject in the third year, leaving first- and second-year students unaware of what 'career planning' entails, its significance, or its crucial importance for their lives and future employment prospects.

3.2. Lack of tailored approach in career planning and employment guidance

Enhancing the tailored nature of career planning and employment guidance enables effective support for normal students across different disciplines and career aspirations. Currently, normal universities and colleges' career planning and employment guidance courses remain disconnected from their specialized curricula.

This course fails to adopt differentiated teaching approaches or content tailored to students' disciplines ^[7]. Instructors predominantly employ lecture-based methods, focusing on general knowledge such as the significance of career planning and employment policies, with insufficient subject-specific relevance. Employment guidance does not genuinely cater to all students. Even when career planning advice and counselling services are offered, they lack personalization. Consequently, when developing career planning and employment guidance courses, normal universities and colleges and educators must thoroughly understand the individual developmental needs of normal students. Tailored guidance should be provided for students across different disciplines, academic years, and employment aspirations. When delivering career planning and employment guidance, educators must consider students' abilities, personality traits, and career aspirations to provide targeted support and assistance.

3.3. Insufficient professional faculty resources

Currently, higher education institutions exhibit weaknesses in the professionalization and vocationalization of their career planning and employment guidance teams. There is a shortage of dedicated career planning and employment guidance staff, alongside a lack of instructors possessing specialized professional backgrounds in this field ^[8]. Normal universities and colleges similarly lack specialized full-time teaching staff. Career planning and employment guidance courses for normal students are typically delivered by staff from employment guidance departments or by deputy party secretaries and counsellors responsible for student affairs. These individuals are typically burdened with substantial administrative duties, for instance, faculty counsellors manage daily student oversight and ideological education, leaving limited time for lesson preparation and delivering nuanced, personalized guidance. Furthermore, some instructors may lack subject-specific expertise relevant to their students' disciplines, possess insufficient insight into current employment market dynamics and industry trends, and consequently struggle to provide targeted, individualized career planning and employment guidance, thereby undermining course effectiveness ^[9].

4. Optimization strategies for career planning and employment guidance courses for normal students

4.1. Enhancing practicality and systematicity in course instruction

Practical and targeted course instruction helps stimulate normal students' learning interest and proactive engagement. To enhance the practicality of the career planning and employment guidance course, normal universities and colleges may adopt the following three strategies.

Firstly, employ diverse teaching methodologies including case studies, role-playing, group discussions, and task-driven approaches to enhance experiential learning and student engagement ^[10]. For instance, design scenario simulations and exercises, such as mock interview competitions, enable students to experience the entire interview process in realistic settings, thereby accumulating interview experience and alleviating interview anxiety. Implement experiential, practical teaching. Normal universities and colleges may establish 'on-campus career experience camps' spanning multiple industries, enabling students to enhance professional competence through authentic occupational exposure.

Secondly, compile practical case study handbooks. Institutions may develop series such as Primary and Secondary School Principals Discuss Employment, Employer Recruitment Advice, and Interview Techniques for Normal Students, drawing perspectives from graduates, alumni, and employers. These handbooks should

cover practical employment guidance cases and interview skills for normal students, broadening the scope of career planning and employment guidance courses.

Finally, integrate career planning and employment guidance courses throughout all stages of normal students' studying. Normal universities and colleges should adopt varied teaching methods and approaches at different stages, arranging content with distinct emphases ^[11]. For instance, during the first year, offer study planning courses to help students understand university academic requirements and guide them in mapping their academic and career paths; during the second year, career planning courses should impart theoretical knowledge on career development, emphasizing the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities and professional skills; in the third year, employment guidance courses should provide targeted instruction on employment prospects within students' disciplines, CV design, teaching design, and job interview techniques; in the fourth year, students should be guided to adopt a positive mindset towards employment and master appropriate job-seeking methods.

4.2. Categorized guidance based on normal students' employment intentions

Implementing categorized guidance according to normal students' employment aspirations enhances the effectiveness of support. Their career preferences typically fall into four categories: firstly, 'civil service examinations,' participating in recruitment tests organized by national or local governments, such as civil service positions; secondly, 'public institution recruitment,' sitting examinations for positions in state-owned institutions, such as teacher recruitment tests; thirdly, 'postgraduate studies'; and fourthly, 'self-employment'. Normal universities and colleges may establish dynamic databases for normal students, regularly collecting academic performance and continuous progress data. By analysing and evaluating data within the system, educators can comprehensively understand students' actual development and provide guidance and support tailored to their strengths and career plans. Institutions may conduct a preliminary survey of students during their second year to ascertain their career preferences, assign them to specific career categories, and provide tailored guidance based on their career aspirations. For instance, students targeting civil service examinations could receive specialised third-year guidance and training for the National Civil Service Examination, Provincial Civil Service Examination, and Selected Cadre Programme, alongside dedicated employment boot camps to deepen their understanding of examination content and facilitate early preparation. For students pursuing postgraduate studies, third-year tutoring should focus on target institutions, subject selection, and examination subjects. Inviting alumni who have successfully gained postgraduate admission to share experiences can further assist students in securing places. For students with entrepreneurial aspirations, alongside innovation and entrepreneurship courses, faculty should assist with feasibility analyses to prevent ill-considered ventures. For projects demonstrating significant growth potential, institutions may offer policy, funding, and specialised guidance support to enhance entrepreneurial success rates ^[12]. Concurrently, normal universities and colleges should offer personalised career planning and employment guidance services for education students. Tailored to each student's background, academic discipline, and career aspirations, these services should help individuals identify strengths and interests, clarify career choices, and formulate effective action plans.

4.3. Strengthening professional faculty development

The Department of Education's 2024 Notice on Effectively Promoting Employment and Entrepreneurship for 2025 Graduates from National Higher Education Institutions explicitly states the need to 'fully equip

and strengthen the faculty with dedicated employment guidance teachers and professional employment staff at institutional level, establish clear career progression pathways for employment guidance teachers, and encourage career education and employment guidance personnel to participate in relevant professional title evaluations as required' ^[13]. To enhance the professional calibre of the teaching staff, normal universities and colleges may adopt the following optimisation strategies:

Firstly, establish a teaching team with strong professional expertise, combining full-time and part-time faculty ^[14]. Leveraging institutions such as the Innovation and Entrepreneurship College and the Admissions and Career Guidance Centre, effectively integrate departments including the Youth League Committee and Student Affairs Office. Select outstanding educators from disciplines like pedagogy and psychology to serve as full-time or part-time faculty. Engage specialist professionals, such as primary/secondary school principals, subject-matter expert teachers, and distinguished alumni, as course lecturers to deliver targeted career guidance and training for normal students. This ensures career planning and employment guidance content remains grounded in practical realities, thereby enhancing students' employability. The dual-mentor system will be implemented, with normal students being assigned both an academic supervisor from the university and a practical mentor from a primary or secondary school. During their teaching placements, practical mentors will provide guidance on practical skills such as classroom teaching and class management, thereby enhancing the students' teaching and management capabilities ^[15].

Secondly, enhance teachers' professional capabilities. Institutions may conduct training programmes to improve teaching competencies in Career Planning and Employment Guidance courses. This deepens educators' theoretical understanding while strengthening practical skills in career counselling, course delivery, and competition coaching. Emphasis should be placed on theoretical research within this field, transforming teaching challenges into research topics. Advanced study should convert theoretical findings into pedagogical content, thereby elevating teachers' research capabilities.

Thirdly, improve teachers' information literacy. With the advancement and innovation of information technology, normal universities and colleges can establish online teaching platforms to enrich teaching models, supplementing traditional classroom instruction. Institutions can provide training for instructors to enhance their information and digital literacy, focusing on cultivating their ability to identify valuable digital teaching resources and strengthening their capacity to design and develop such resources. Convenient, personalized online course platforms should be established for teachers to facilitate the sharing of high-quality course materials.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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