

Research on Employability Enhancement Strategy of International Trade under the Background of China-South Korea Free Trade Area Construction: Taking a University in Shandong Province as an Example

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Abstract: Under the background of the construction of the China-South Korea Free Trade Zone, this paper deeply analyzes the employment situation and challenges faced by graduates of international trade major in finance and economics colleges and universities, discusses the strategies to improve graduates' employability, and takes a university in Shandong as an example to carry out a case study. Through the background analysis of the construction of the China-South Korea Free trade area, the analysis of graduates' employment status, and the emphasis on targeted promotion strategies, the purpose is to provide a reference for finance and economics colleges to train international trade professionals to adapt to the development needs of China-South Korea Free trade area and promote the high-quality employment of graduates.

Keywords: China-South Korea Free Trade Area; Universities of finance and economics; International trade major; Graduate employability

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1. Introduction

With the deepening of economic globalization and the strengthening of regional economic cooperation, the construction of China-South Korea free trade area has brought new opportunities and challenges to the economic development of the two countries. In this context, the demand for professionals in international trade has also undergone profound changes. As an important base for training talents of economic management, finance and economics colleges and universities are facing new tests on the employability of their graduates majoring in international trade, especially on ways to improve the employability of graduates and make them better adapt to the needs of the construction of China-South Korea Free trade area has become an important

topic of the current education reform of finance and economics colleges and universities.

2. Research background and significance

2.1. Research background

The China-ROK Free Trade Area is the one that China has negotiated with other countries in the most extensive areas and the largest trade volume. Since the signing of the FTA, the two sides have deepened cooperation in trade, investment, and services, injecting new impetus into the economic development of the two countries. With the changes in the economic situation and the adjustment of market demand, finance and economics universities are faced with the problems of lagging curriculum, inadequate practical teaching, and low degree of internationalization in the training of international trade professionals, resulting in a certain gap between the employability of graduates and the market demand in the context of the construction of free trade zones.

2.2. Research significance

2.2.1. Theoretical significance

This study is helpful to enrich the theoretical system of international trade professional talent training in finance and economics colleges and universities and provide theoretical support for the educational reform of finance and economics colleges and universities in the context of the construction of the China-South Korea Free Trade area.

2.2.2. Practical significance

The research on the strategies for improving the employability of graduates can provide specific practical guidance for finance and economics colleges to improve teaching methods, optimize curriculum, strengthen practical teaching, improve the employment competitiveness of graduates, and provide high-level foreign trade talents for promoting the sustainable development of the China-South Korea Free trade area.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Literature research method

Through extensive reference to relevant literature at home and abroad, this paper deeply discusses and understands the background, development course and current situation of the construction of China-South Korea free trade area, and systematically combs and analyzes the research results on the training of international trade professionals.

3.2. Investigation and research method

A detailed questionnaire is designed to investigate and study the employment situation of graduates majoring in international trade in finance and economics universities. By sending out questionnaires, the employment data of graduates majoring in international trade are collected, including but not limited to key indicators such as employment rate, employment position, salary level and job satisfaction. Subsequently, the collected data were scientifically sorted out and analyzed to reveal the employment status and existing problems of graduates majoring in international trade.

3.3. Case analysis

A university in Shandong Province is selected as a specific case, and the measures to improve the employability of graduates majoring in international trade are deeply studied. Through consulting the educational policy, curriculum setting, practical teaching and other materials of the university, combined with the actual employment situation of graduates, the successful experience and possible shortcomings of the university in the training of international trade professionals are analyzed, so as to provide lessons for other colleges and universities.

3.4. Comparative analysis method

Select several representative finance and economics colleges and universities, and compare their differences in international trade professional talent training. By analyzing the differences in curriculum, teaching methods, teachers, practice platforms and other aspects of colleges and universities, this paper draws on the advanced experience of colleges and universities that have achieved remarkable results in the cultivation of international trade professionals, so as to provide reference for improving and enhancing the quality of education and teaching of the university.

4. Literature review

As an important base for training talents of economic management, finance and economics colleges and universities are facing new tests on the employability of their graduates majoring in international trade. Ways to improve the employability of graduates under the background of the construction of free trade zone and make them better adapt to the needs of the construction of China-South Korea free trade zone has become an important topic of the current education reform of finance and economics colleges and universities. Wang *et al.* (2024) point out that with the gradual slowdown of China's economic growth, the employment situation of finance and economics college graduates is becoming increasingly severe. Therefore, to carry out effective career planning education has become an important measure in college employment guidance ^[1]. Xu *et al.* (2024) analyzed the problems existing in the training mode of application-oriented undergraduate foreign trade talents in the Free Trade Zone and proposed to realize the integration of competition and education, efficient innovation and entrepreneurship through enriching the teaching design of "course-competition-certification-post," so as to clear the training objectives of talents, improve students' practical ability of foreign trade, and enhance students' confidence in employment ^[2]. Liu (2023) pointed out that to solve the problem of mismatch of international trade professional skills in application-oriented undergraduate colleges, it is necessary to increase practical teaching efforts, build off-campus practical training bases, expand the team of practical teaching teachers, improve the evaluation system, and establish the correct employment view of graduates ^[3]. Xu *et al.* (2023) combined the characteristics of strong initiative and fast learning of graduates of finance and economics colleges and universities, tried a variety of schemes, guided by national development and social needs, improved the linkage mechanism of "enrollment-training-employment," and established the "quality concept of talent training in the whole cycle."

Under the concept of employment education, universities strive to explore a closed and interactive virtuous cycle to effectively promote employment ^[4]. Taking Wuxi City as an example, Li (2021) analyzed that students majoring in international trade should take the regional economy as the orientation to cultivate comprehensive applied talents who can adapt to regional economic development, narrow the gap between social needs and

school training programs, and make talent training have the ability to actively adapt to society^[5]. Zhao (2017) said that correctly guiding college students to establish a good employment mentality under the environment after the establishment of the new free trade zone and studying and judging the nature of the employment market would facilitate college students to be fully prepared for employment under the new situation^[6]. On the other hand, Han (2017) showed that there were three problems in the international trade talent market under the background of the free trade zone: (1) the disconnection between enterprise demand and talent training, (2) the imbalance between professional knowledge education and professional quality training, and (3) the mismatch between teachers' "teaching" and students' "learning."

Colleges and universities of finance and economics should accurately locate talent training objectives, integrate quality education into knowledge imparting, optimize curriculum system, improve teaching methods, and optimize talent training programs for international trade majors^[7]. Long (2016) investigated the increasingly severe employment situation of graduates majoring in international trade in higher vocational colleges, which objectively reflected the urgent need for innovation in the talent training mode of this major. The majority of foreign economic and trade enterprises have put forward new and higher requirements for the quality of talents majoring in international trade, and the training of talents majoring in international trade has encountered unprecedented opportunities and challenges^[8]. Zhang *et al.* (2015) said that contemporary college students who intend to engage in work related to the free trade zone should understand the various policies and relevant dynamics of the free trade zone in real time, understand the shortage of talent in the free trade zone, keep up with the pace of the development of the free trade zone, learn relevant and interesting knowledge during college or work, and constantly enrich their knowledge and broaden their vision to grasp the opportunity tightly when it comes^[9]. Li *et al.* (2014) put forward measures such as building the brand on the outside, strengthening resource integration on the inside, and improving the working system and mechanism, to explore the ways and significance of characteristic employment in universities^[10]. Zhou *et al.* (2012) explored the impact of the financial crisis on the employment of graduates majoring in international economics and trade, conducted an empirical analysis of the employment situation of students majoring in international economics and trade during the financial crisis, and finally proposed countermeasures to improve the employment competitiveness of students majoring in international economics and trade^[11].

5. Background analysis of the construction of the China-South Korea Free Trade Area

5.1. Overview of the China-ROK Free Trade Area

The China-ROK FTA negotiations were launched in May 2012. After years of efforts, the governments of China and the ROK officially signed the Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Korea on June 1, 2015. It covers several areas such as trade in goods, trade in services, investment, and rules, including provisions on tariff concessions, trade facilitation and intellectual property protection^[12].

5.2. The impact of the free trade area on China's economy

5.2.1. Promote trade growth

The construction of the China-ROK FTA has lowered trade barriers between the two countries and promoted the growth of bilateral trade. China's exports of agricultural products, electronic products, machinery and

equipment are expected to increase, while also benefiting China's import of advanced technology and equipment from South Korea.

5.2.2. Promote industrial upgrading

Through industrial cooperation with South Korea, China can learn from South Korea's advanced technology and management experience to promote the upgrading and transformation of domestic industries. Especially in the manufacturing and service sectors, it is expected to achieve technological innovation and optimize the industrial structure.

5.2.3. Attract foreign investment

The construction of the China-ROK FTA has provided more convenient conditions for ROK companies to invest in China and also attracted companies from other countries to invest in China. The inflow of foreign capital will bring advanced technology, management experience, and capital to boost China's economic development.

5.3. The special impact of the construction of the free trade zone on the economy of Shandong

5.3.1. Geographical advantages

Shandong is located on the east coast of China, facing the Republic of Korea across the sea, and enjoys unique geographical advantages. The construction of the China-ROK free trade zone will further strengthen the economic ties between Shandong and the ROK and promote trade exchanges and investment cooperation.

5.3.2. Strong industrial complementarity

Shandong and South Korea are highly complementary in terms of industrial structure. Shandong's manufacturing, agriculture and marine industries can complement each other and develop together with South Korea's electronic information, automobile and chemical industries.

5.3.3. High degree of opening-up

Shandong has always been an important window for China to open up to the outside world, and the construction of the China-South Korea free trade zone will further enhance Shandong's level of opening up to the outside world and promote the international development of Shandong's economy.

6. Case study of a university in Shandong

6.1. Overview of International trade major at a university in Shandong

Established in 1993, the major of International Trade at a university in Shandong aims to cultivate high-quality applied talents with solid theoretical knowledge and practical operation ability of international trade, familiarity with international trade rules and practices, and an international vision and innovative spirit. This major has a team of high-quality teachers, including 18 professional teachers, 13 professors and associate professors, 14 of whom have a doctorate. There is 1 foreign teacher, and 5 external enterprise teachers. At the same time, the school is equipped with advanced teaching facilities, such as an international trade simulation laboratory and a cross-border e-commerce training center.

6.2. Analysis of current measures to improve employability

6.2.1. Curriculum and teaching reform

According to the market demand and the requirements of the construction of the China-South Korea Free Trade Zone, the school has optimized the curriculum and added courses related to the free trade zone. At the same time, the school has actively promoted teaching reform and adopted teaching methods such as case teaching and project teaching to increase students' interest in learning and participation.

6.2.2. Practical teaching and school-enterprise cooperation

The school has strengthened practical teaching, established several foreign trade practice bases and employment bases, and carried out extensive cooperation with foreign trade enterprises, multinational companies, and other employers. Through internship, practical training, graduation projects and other links, students in the enterprise to accept practical exercises, and improve their practical operation ability and professional quality.

6.2.3. Career guidance and employment service

The university has strengthened career guidance, opened career planning courses, and provided students with career planning guidance and employment counseling services. At the same time, the employment service system has been improved, an employment information platform has been established, and activities such as campus job fairs and special job fairs have been organized to provide students with more job opportunities.

6.3. The advantages and disadvantages of case universities

6.3.1. Advantages

6.3.1.1. Geographical advantages

The university is located in Yantai, Shandong Province, facing South Korea across the sea, with unique geographical advantages. In the context of the construction of the China-South Korea Free Trade Zone, the University can better play its geographical advantages and strengthen cooperation with South Korean universities and enterprises.

6.3.1.2. Distinctive professional characteristics

The International Trade major of the University has distinct characteristics in the curriculum, teaching methods, practical teaching and other aspects, focusing on cultivating students' practical operation ability and innovative spirit.

6.3.1.3. Strong teaching staff

The school has a team of high-quality foreign trade teachers, who have rich teaching experience and international trade practice experience and can provide students with high-quality teaching and guidance

6.3.2. Deficiencies

6.3.2.1. The degree of internationalization needs to be improved

Although the school has carried out international education, the degree of internationalization needs to be improved compared with the world-class universities. It also needs to be further strengthened in the introduction of foreign high-quality educational resources and the development of international cooperation in

running schools ^[13].

6.3.2.2. Construction of practice teaching base to be strengthened

Although the school has established a number of practice bases and employment bases, the cooperation with enterprises is not deep enough, and the construction of a practice teaching base needs to be further strengthened.

6.3.2.3. The employment service system needs to be improved

Although the school has improved the employment service system, it still needs to be further improved in the construction of employment information platforms and employment guidance services.

7. Challenges to the employability of finance and economics graduates

7.1. The impact of the construction of the Free Trade Area on the demand for international trade talents

7.1.1. The requirements for professional knowledge are more comprehensive

The construction of the China-South Korea free trade area involves trade, investment, finance, law and other fields, and the professional knowledge of international trade professionals is more comprehensive. Graduates should not only master the traditional theory and practical knowledge of international trade but also understand the relevant policies, regulations and business processes of the FTA.

7.1.2. Higher foreign language proficiency is required

The construction of the China-South Korea free trade area needs a large number of talents with foreign language skills such as Korean and English. Graduates should not only have good foreign language listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, but also be able to communicate across cultures.

7.1.3. The requirement of practical operation ability is stronger

The construction of a free trade zone requires graduates to have strong practical operation ability and be able to master the practical operation process of trade, such as customs declaration, inspection, freight forwarding and so on. At the same time, they also need to have a certain innovation ability and the ability to solve practical problems.

7.2. Requirements of FTZ policies for talent training

7.2.1. Optimize the curriculum

According to the needs of the construction of the China-South Korea Free trade area, optimize the curriculum of international trade major and increase the courses related to free trade area, such as free trade area policies and regulations, cross-border e-commerce practice, etc.

7.2.2. Strengthen practical teaching

Strengthen practical teaching links to improve students' practical operation ability. Through practice, practical training, experiments and other ways students in practice to master the trade of practical operation skills.

7.2.3. Cultivate international vision

Strengthen international education, and cultivate students' international vision and cross-cultural communication ability. Through international exchanges and cooperation, the introduction of foreign high-quality education resources, etc., to improve students' international level.

7.2.4. Improve the comprehensive quality

It is important to pay attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive quality, improve students' communication ability, teamwork ability, innovation ability, etc. Through the development of comprehensive quality activities, strengthen professional quality education and other ways to improve students' comprehensive quality.

8. Research on strategies to enhance employability

8.1. The optimization of curriculum and teaching mode

The course system of international trade majors can be adjusted according to the needs of the construction of the China-South Korea Free Trade area. Courses related to the free trade zone can be added, such as policies and regulations of the free trade zone, cross-border e-commerce practices, and international logistics management. At the same time, the integration of professional courses should be strengthened to improve the comprehensiveness and practicability of courses. Diversified teaching modes can be adopted, such as case teaching, project teaching, simulation teaching, and so on. Through practical case analysis, project practice, and simulated trade operation, students' learning interest and participation are enhanced, and students' practical operation ability and innovation abilities are cultivated. The bilingual teaching of English and Korean should be strengthened to improve students' foreign language proficiency. Establish bilingual courses and adopt bilingual textbooks and teaching methods so that students can improve their foreign language ability while learning professional knowledge.

8.2. Strengthening school-enterprise cooperation and practical teaching

Cooperation with foreign trade enterprises, multinational companies, and other employers can be strengthened, and at the same time, practice bases and employment bases can be established. Through internship, practical training, graduation projects, and other links, the students receive practical training in the enterprise, improving their practical operation ability and professional quality. A variety of practical teaching activities have been carried out, such as foreign trade simulation competitions, cross-border e-commerce entrepreneurship competitions, etc. Through the form of competitions, students can improve their trade practical operation ability and innovation ability in practice. Corporate tutors will be introduced to provide practical guidance and career planning advice to students. Business mentors can combine their work experience to impart knowledge and skills in practical work to students and improve their employment competitiveness.

8.3. International education and language ability training

International exchanges and cooperation should be carried out to broaden students' international horizons. Establish cooperative relations with South Korean universities, and carry out student exchange, teacher visits, and cooperative education programs. Provide students with opportunities to get in touch with the cultures and education systems of different countries and improve their cross-cultural communication skills. High-quality

education resources can be introduced from abroad to improve teaching quality^[14]. Advanced foreign teaching concepts, teaching methods and textbooks can be introduced, so that students can have access to cutting-edge international knowledge and technology. The teaching of foreign languages such as English and Korean should be strengthened to improve students' language ability. Language training courses and activities such as foreign language corners can be set up to provide students with more language learning opportunities. At the same time, students are encouraged to take foreign language proficiency tests and translation qualification tests to improve their language proficiency.

8.4. Strengthen vocational guidance and employment services

Vocational guidance can be strengthened to help students establish a correct outlook on career and employment. Courses on career planning will be offered to provide students with career planning guidance and employment consultation services. At the same time, professional managers and experts of foreign trade enterprises are invited to hold career lectures for students, so that students can understand the latest trends of foreign trade industry and employment situation. The employment service system will be improved to provide students with comprehensive employment services. An employment information platform should be established to release employment and recruitment information on time. Campus job fairs, special job fairs and other activities will be organized to provide more job opportunities for students^[15]. At the same time, the tracking service for graduates will be strengthened to understand the employment situation of graduates and the feedback of employers.

9. Conclusions and suggestions

Under the background of the construction of the China-South Korea Free Trade Area, this study discusses the strategies to improve the employability of graduates majoring in international trade in finance and economics universities. By analyzing the background of the construction of the China-South Korea Free Trade Area, the current employment situation of graduates, and putting forward the corresponding improvement strategies, the research concludes that the construction of China-South Korea Free Trade Area provides new opportunities and challenges for the graduates of international trade major in finance and economics colleges and universities. To adapt to this development, graduates must master more comprehensive professional knowledge, better foreign language ability, stronger practical skills and higher comprehensive quality, to ensure that graduates of international trade majors in finance and economics universities can seamlessly connect with the China-South Korea Free Trade Area and even the broader international economic stage.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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