

AN IMPACT OF JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOR ON EMPLOYABILITY OF GRADUATES FROM HOPE COLLEGE OF SOUTHWEST JIAOTONG UNIVERSITY*

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Abstract

Research Objective: To study the current job-seeking behavior and work ability of graduates from Hope College, Southwest Jiao Tong University, and to analyze the impact of job-seeking behavior dimensions on graduates' work ability.

Research Methodology: Based on the parameters of this study, Hope College, Southwest Jiao Tong University, has 9,832 graduates expected to graduate in 2025, and using a significance level (α) of 0.05, the required sample size is estimated to be approximately 384 Quantitive research. **Results:** Networking or utilizing digital platforms with industry partners is recommended to enhance students' professional skills and career awareness. It is possible to understand and analyze the impact of job-seeking behavior dimensions on graduates' work ability.

Keywords: Behavior, Employability, Graduating

Introduction

Since the implementation of large-scale higher education expansion in China in 1999, (Ou, & Zhao,2022) the number of university graduates has increased continuously, profoundly reshaping both the scale and structure of the graduate labor market. (Zhu, Zhang, & Zheng, 2024). By 2003, the first cohort of graduates produced under the expanded enrollment policy had formally entered the labor market, marking a critical turning point at which graduate employment

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began to attract sustained attention from the public, policymakers, and academic researchers. What initially appeared to be a transitional challenge has gradually evolved into a persistent feature of China's higher education and employment systems. (Nachatar Singh, 2020) Based on 2025 reports, Southwest Jiaotong University Hope College (SWJTU Hope College) has achieved significant milestones in research, innovation, and educational quality. (Luo, 2019) Key developments include a five-star rating in teaching by QS Stars, recognized high-level application-oriented status, and a "double breakthrough" in national skills competitions Southwest Jiaotong University Hope College (SWJTU Hope College) operates amid China's national challenges, including economic transition, the demand for highly skilled practical professionals, and the rapid advancement of transportation technology. As a leading practice-oriented undergraduate institution in Sichuan Province, the college has responded to these challenges by integrating research and teaching with its location (Chengdu) to align with both local and national needs. Its goal is to bridge academic theory with industry needs.

In line with ongoing higher education reforms in China, which increasingly emphasize employment quality, long-term career development, and graduate adaptability rather than employment quantity alone, there is a growing demand for empirical research that examines the mechanisms through which student behaviors influence employability outcomes.(Lixu,2004) In particular, context-specific studies focusing on non-elite and private higher education institutions remain underrepresented in the existing literature. Addressing this gap, the present study focuses on graduates of Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University and seeks to examine the effect of job search behavior on employability. By analyzing how different dimensions of job search behavior contribute to employability development, this research aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform institutional policy-making and support the design of targeted interventions to enhance graduate employability in an increasingly complex and competitive labor market.

Aligned with China's ongoing reforms in higher education, which emphasize the quality of employment, long-term career development, and adaptability of graduates over mere employment quantity, there is an increasing

demand for empirical research investigating the mechanisms through which student behavior impacts employability outcomes. Notably, research specifically addressing private and non-leading higher education institutions is limited in the current literature. To address this gap, (Ryan, 2011)

This study examines the graduates of Hope College at Southwest Jiaotong University, focusing on the impact of job-seeking behavior on employability. This study analyzes how each dimension of job-seeking behavior contributes to graduate employability, aiming to provide empirical evidence to support institutional policies and the development of targeted measures to enhance graduate employability in increasingly complex and competitive labor markets.

Objectives

To study the current situation of job search behavior and employment ability of graduates from Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University.

Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is designed to comprehensively investigate the effect of job search behavior on the employability of graduates from Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University. Population and Sample. The population of this study comprises final-year undergraduate students from Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University, a private higher education institution in Western China. Target Population The target population consists of 9,832 final-year students across various disciplines including engineering, business, humanities, and applied sciences. The target population of this study consists of final-year undergraduate students at Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University. These students are in a critical transition stage from higher education to employment and are actively engaged in job search activities, making them particularly suitable for investigating job search behavior and employability.

Research Design

This study employed a mixed method. Quantitative data collection and analysis constitute the core component of the research, while qualitative

inquiry serves a supportive and interpretive role. In the quantitative phase, a cross-sectional survey design is employed to measure graduates' job search behavior and employability across multiple dimensions. This design enables the researcher to (1) examine the overall levels and characteristics of key variables, (2) analyze the effects of job search behavior dimensions on employability, and (3) identify which behavioral dimensions contribute most strongly to employability outcomes.

Population and Sample

Sample for Quantitative Method To calculate the sample size, Yamane's (1967) formula is applied:

$$N = 9832 / (1 + 9832 \times 0.0025) = 9832 / 25.58 = 384$$

Based on the parameters of this study, with Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University has a graduating cohort of 9,832 students in 2025, and employing a significance level (α) of 0.05, the calculation formula estimates a required sample size of approximately 384. Given the inherent uncertainty associated with online surveys and the ease of conducting online questionnaire-based research, I have opted to expand the sample size to 450.

Research Instruments

To supplement the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with experts from both the academic and business sectors. These experts came from the fields of higher education administration, student affairs management, employment guidance services, psychological counseling, and recruitment. The selection criteria emphasized the diversity of professional roles, years of experience, and direct involvement in graduate employment development and recruitment approaches to ensure a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the mechanisms by which job-seeking behavior impacts graduate employment. This expert-based qualitative research approach allows for a deeper interpretation of quantitative research results and provides contextual insights into institutional practices and improvement strategies. The experts were selected based on the following rigorous criteria: (1) Demonstrated expertise in graduate employment, career development, educational research, or human resource administration; (2) At least five years of relevant work experience (3) Holding a current position,

such as a university professor, recruitment manager, or a comparable role in academia or an organization. (4) Being representative of both academia and the business sector to ensure the breadth and representation of perspectives.

Data Collection

This study primarily surveys the graduating cohort of 2025 from Hope College and Southwest Jiaotong University, focusing on demographic characteristics, including gender, discipline, employment status, and internship experience. Data analysis was conducted using statistical analysis software, employing the following methodology: first, sample data files were filtered through the software; subsequently, descriptive statistics for demographic characteristics were generated using the analysis functions within the software's menu bar; finally, frequency analysis tables were produced.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using statistical software. Descriptive statistics were first used to examine the overall characteristics of job search behavior and employability, addressing RQ1. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Pearson correlation analysis was then employed to explore associations between job search behavior dimensions and employability dimensions. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the effects of job search behavior dimensions on employability, addressing RQ2. Importantly, the relative strength and significance of regression coefficients also provided empirical evidence for identifying key behavioral areas that warrant prioritization in employability development.

Results

1) To study the current situation of job search behavior and employment ability of graduates from Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University.

presents the findings of the empirical investigation into the effect of job search behavior on employability among graduates from Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University. Guided by the research questions and objectives

outlined in previous chapters, this chapter reports and interprets both quantitative and qualitative results derived from the questionnaire survey and expert interviews.

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Table 4.1 Results of analysis of frequency and percentage personal status of respondents
(n = 440)

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency (N = 440)	Percent
Gender	Male	233	52.95%
	Female	207	47.05%
Major Category	Engineering	237	53.86%
	Economics and Management	113	25.68%
	Literature	48	10.91%
	Education	26	5.91%
	Others	16	3.64%
Employment Status	Employed	307	69.77%
	Job Searching	111	25.23%
	Further Study	22	5.00%
Internship Experience	Yes	297	67.50%
	No	143	32.50%

As shown in Table 4.1, a total of 440 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis. In terms of gender, 233 respondents (52.95%) were male and 207 respondents (47.05%) were female, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution with a slight predominance of male students.

Regarding academic background, students majoring in engineering constituted the largest proportion of the sample, with 237 respondents (53.86%). This was followed by economics and management majors, who accounted for 113 respondents (25.68%). Literature majors represented 48 respondents (10.91%), while education majors accounted for 26 respondents (5.91%). The remaining 16 respondents (3.64%) were from other disciplines. This distribution reflects the application-oriented disciplinary structure of Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University.

With respect to employment status, 307 respondents (69.77%) reported being employed at the time of the survey. A total of 111 respondents (25.23%) were still actively seeking employment, while 22 respondents (5.00%) had chosen to pursue further study. These results indicate that the majority of graduates had already entered the labor market, while a substantial minority were still in the process of job searching.

In addition, 297 respondents (67.50%) reported having internship experience, whereas 143 respondents (32.50%) indicated that they had not participated in internships. The relatively high proportion of students with internship experience suggests that most respondents had some level of exposure to practical work settings prior to graduation, which may have influenced both their job search behavior and employability.

Discussion

Imbalance in Job Search Behaviors: High Action, but Limited Preparation and Reflection An interesting finding of this study is the imbalance in various dimensions of job search behavior. Graduates demonstrate relatively strong action-oriented behaviors in their job search, such as actively participating in interviews and recruitment activities. However, behaviors related to preparation and reflection in the job search process remain weak. This pattern suggests that students are more focused on immediately actionable job search activities rather

than systematic preparation or reflective learning, which is consistent with the research of KA, Et al (2021). Bridging job search and perceived employability in the labor market: A mediation model of job search, perceived employability, and learning goal orientation.

One possible explanation for this may be the short-term employment pressures faced by graduating students. Under time constraints and highly competitive labor market conditions, students may prioritize rapid application and participation over strategic planning and post-application reflections. Qualitative findings further indicate that some students consider long-term preparation and reflection to be secondary once they have received a job offer, which limits the development of adaptive job-search strategies. This is in line with the research by Zeeshan Et al (2025). Bridging the Graduate Transition: The Role of Perceived Employability, Career Decision-Making, and Job Search Behavior among University Students. This finding highlights a key issue: while vigorous action may increase short-term employment opportunities, inadequate preparation and reflection can weaken students' ability to adapt to changing labor market demands and hinder sustainable career development in an era of technological transition.

Uneven Development of Employability Dimensions

Another significant finding concerns the unequal development of employability skills among graduating students in the study. General skills and self-management abilities are relatively well developed, whereas career awareness and professional skills remain relatively weak. This suggests that students possess basic transferable skills but lack a clear understanding of career positioning and job-specific competency requirements, consistent with the research of Kopackova et al. (2024). Digital transformation leaders wanted: How to prepare students for the ever-changing demands of the labor market.

This imbalance may stem from the structure of the higher education curricula. While universities often emphasize general competencies such as communication, teamwork, and self-discipline, systematic career guidance and industry-aligned professional training may receive less attention from universities. Expert interviews revealed that students often enter the labor market without a realistic understanding of career expectations or clear long-term career paths.

Differential Impact of Job Search Behavior Dimensions on Employability Regression analysis revealed that not all dimensions of job search behavior contribute equally to employability. Job search preparation and reflective behaviors showed stronger predictive results than information acquisition and action behaviors. This finding has theoretical significance, as it suggests that employability is greatly influenced by how students prepare for and learn from the job search process, rather than merely the frequency of job search actions.

From the perspective of human capital and experiential learning, preparatory behaviors, such as skill development and career planning, enhance students' job-relevant competencies, while reflective behaviors facilitate learning from experience and promote adaptability. In contrast, information acquisition and action behaviors, while necessary, may serve more as enabling conditions than as primary drivers of employability development.

Conclusion

Based on the empirical findings and qualitative insights of this study, several practical recommendations are proposed to enhance graduates' employability through more effective job search behaviors. These recommendations are presented from the perspectives of higher education institutions, students, and employment support systems.

Recommendations

First, higher education institutions should strengthen the integration of career education with academic training. (Berchin,Dutra, & Guerra, 2021). The findings indicate that while students demonstrate relatively strong job search execution, deficiencies remain in job search preparation and reflection. Universities are therefore encouraged to embed systematic career planning, resume development, and interview preparation into the curriculum, rather than treating career guidance as a supplementary service.

Second, institutions should place greater emphasis on reflective learning mechanisms within career education. Structured reflection activities—such as post-internship reflections, mock interview feedback sessions, and guided job search reviews—can help students transform job search experiences into employability-enhancing learning outcomes. Stiwnne,& Jungert,(2010). Engineering

students' experiences of transition from study to work. This approach aligns with the study's finding that job search reflection behavior shows a stronger association with employability development.

Third, Development of undergraduate students' professional skills. (Siller, Et al 2009) and career cognition. By incorporating real-world projects, employer-led workshops, and mentoring programs, universities can help students better understand occupational requirements and align their competencies with labor market expectations.

Incorporating employer feedback into reflective thinking serves as an effective developmental strategy that enhances performance. Employees who engage in reflection on feedback are 30% more likely to retain information and apply it effectively. This approach converts external critiques into internal actionable insights, promoting professional growth and mitigating defensive reactions.

Based on the finding that "reflective thinking" is a weakness, it is recommended that the institution implement an Eportfolio system. This digital tool will help students systematically record and analyze their job-seeking behaviors, transforming raw experiences into measurable job-related skills and competencies.

Since 67.50% of the sample group has internship experience, the recommendation should focus on integration. Suggestions from employers indicate that graduates are highly capable and work-ready. The study also found that "the gap between skills and market needs matches the demands."

Specific recommendations should be provided for the **32.50%** of students without internship experience. It is advised that they undertake internships that closely resemble real-world experience to help them develop and practice behaviors and skills that will truly enhance their employability.

Suggestions

Suggestions for Expanding Research Samples and Contexts future studies are encouraged to expand the research sample beyond a single institution. Although focusing on Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University In addition, future research may consider comparative studies across different types of higher education institutions, such as research-oriented universities,

application-oriented universities, and vocational colleges. Such comparisons could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional contexts shape job search behavior and employability development.

Suggestions for Future Research

It is recommended to present a Longitudinal Study next time, as this would be useful in tracking graduates over a period of **6** months, **1** year, and **3** years. This method can help determine whether job-seeking behavior during university studies is related to long-term career advancement. Additionally, it is suggested to study mediating variables and moderating variables such as education, mental health, or socioeconomic status to assess students' future readiness. Understanding how these factors influence the relationship between job-seeking behavior and job attainment can lead to the development of more comprehensive social and behavioral models.

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