

The Impact of College Students' Salary Expectations on Career Decisions and Countermeasures

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Abstract: *This paper discusses how the salary expectations of college students affect their career decisions, revealing the significance of these expectations in the students' career decision-making process. Through a comprehensive analysis, targeted strategic recommendations are proposed in three areas: higher education policy, personal psychological development, and the social employment environment. These recommendations aim to guide college students in establishing more scientific and reasonable salary expectations, thereby assisting them in making wiser and more appropriate career decisions that are aligned with their long-term development in a complex and dynamic job market. Ultimately, by optimizing college students' salary expectations, this paper hopes to promote a virtuous cycle and the healthy development of the job market for college graduates, thus providing a talent guarantee for the steady progress of the social economy.*

Keywords: *salary expectation, career decision, college student, employment pressure*

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the socio-economy and the increasingly fierce competition in the job market, the relationship between college students' salary expectations and their career orientation has garnered widespread attention. As an important force in social progress and economic construction, the employment choices of college students are not only related to their own career development and quality of life but also affect the labor market structure and human resource allocation within the country. Currently, college students' salary expectations significantly influence their career decisions. On one hand, with the improvement of material living standards, college students' expectations for initial salaries have been rising year by year. This trend leads many to prefer positions with higher pay when choosing a job^[1], sometimes even at the expense of their interests and professional expertise. On the other hand, due to information asymmetry^[2], some students may hold unrealistic salary expectations, which could lead to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction in their future employment. This, in turn, affects their job stability and potential for development.

Therefore, this paper examines the influence of college students' salary expectations on their career decisions and offers relevant countermeasures and recommendations. The goal is to assist college students in forming accurate salary expectations, guiding them towards more informed career decisions, and thus fostering a healthy job market for graduates, which in turn provides robust support for talent development and socio-economic progress in our country

2. The Impact of College Students' Salary Expectations on Career Decisions

2.1. Personal Values and Goal Orientation

In today's era of rapid economic and technological development, college students face an unprecedented diversity of career opportunities. Salary, as an important consideration, significantly influences their job selection decisions. However, everyone has unique personal values and future goal orientations, which also guide them to make decisions that better align with their own expectations and aspirations.

For those college students who regard salary as the primary consideration, they tend to favor industries with higher initial pay and rapid growth rates. Fields such as finance, the internet, and

information technology attract a large number of job seekers due to their potential for high earnings. These students usually are strongly economically motivated, hoping to rapidly improve their quality of life and achieve self-worth through relentless effort. However, there are other college students who place greater emphasis on career development prospects, seeking enterprises or industries that offer broad promotional opportunities and chances for personal growth. They often possess strong core self-evaluation skills and can clearly recognize their goals, interests, and strengths^[3]. For these students, salary is not the top priority; rather, a good professional platform that promotes continuous learning and skill enhancement is key to reaching the pinnacle of their careers.

However, for those college graduates who fail to establish clear values and career objectives, the lack of a clear direction in career development often leads to confusion among the multitude of job postings. They may submit resumes blindly, which not only reduces the efficiency of their job search but also might cause them to miss out on good opportunities that match their potential interests and abilities. Furthermore, due to an inability to set salary expectations that align with their skills, job seekers may easily compromise when facing employers, thereby accepting compensation below the market level or their actual value.

2.2. Educational Background and Professional Skills

A college student's educational background and professional skills are important factors that determine their salary expectations and indirectly influence their employment choices. With the rapid development of the economy and the continuous optimization and upgrading of industrial structures, the market demand for high-quality talent is increasing daily. In this context, a college student's educational background and professional skills become an important 'business card' as they enter the job market, directly affecting their starting salary levels and career development prospects.

Firstly, the level of education largely represents an individual's knowledge and learning capabilities. Graduates from renowned higher education institutions often enjoy a more advantageous starting point in employment. This is because employers generally believe that these graduates possess a solid theoretical foundation and good adaptability, and are therefore more inclined to offer them higher salaries and better benefits. Consequently, these graduates tend to have higher salary expectations and access to a wider range of career choices. In contrast, graduates with lower educational qualifications may face more limited job opportunities. For instance, those with associate degrees or lower might need to adjust their salary expectations or pursue more physically demanding positions to cope with the competitive pressures of the job market^[4].

On the other hand, college students with professional skills are more competitive in the job-seeking process, typically enabling them to command higher starting salaries. Employers often prefer offering more substantial compensation to new hires who can quickly assimilate into the workplace and promptly contribute value. Moreover, graduates with professional skills find it easier to secure cross-field employment opportunities; their prospects are not confined to their own field of study but can extend into other industries. For example, computer science students not only have the potential to advance within IT companies but also to explore opportunities in the IT departments of finance, education, healthcare, and other sectors. Conversely, recent graduates lacking these skills might be at a disadvantage in the competition, which could result in them having to settle for lower initial salaries. Additionally, with the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence technology, many jobs previously performed by low-skilled workers are being increasingly replaced by intelligent systems and robots^[5]. This trend has intensified the employment competition for low-skilled laborers, especially in comparison to the growing number of high-skilled graduates, significantly heightening their employment challenges.

2.3. Social Comparison and Economic Environment

From the perspective of social comparison, college students' salary expectations are influenced not only by their personal career goals and educational backgrounds, but also significantly by their surrounding environments, particularly the salary levels of their peers, classmates, or friends. Under this socio-psychological influence, they may be more inclined to choose careers that provide a competitive edge in terms of economic income, thereby achieving a sense of relative superiority within their peer group. To gain a better status through social comparison, college students may pursue well-recognized high-paying industries, such as finance and technology, or emerging and rapidly growing fields, such as artificial intelligence and big data analysis. Additionally, they might consider

jobs that offer more opportunities for career development, symbols of social status, and a broader international perspective, including positions in multinational corporations or opportunities for overseas employment. However, during the actual job-seeking process, due to psychological issues such as dependency, comparison, feelings of inferiority, and conformity^[6], college students may not necessarily find positions that meet their expectations and are likely to encounter difficulties and setbacks. When they cannot find jobs that match their expectations and are unwilling to lower their psychological standards, they become prone to career choice anxiety.

The social environment and macroeconomic conditions can profoundly impact college students' salary expectations and career choices. During periods of economic prosperity, when overall market demand is strong and corporate profitability generally increases, competition in the labor market typically intensifies. Companies, aiming to attract and retain talent, often offer more attractive compensation packages^[7]. In such an environment, college students naturally tend to have higher expectations for starting salaries and career development opportunities. Conversely, during economic recessions or periods of instability, companies face cost pressures and recruitment demands decrease, leading to slower salary growth and potentially increasing the risk of layoffs. These macroeconomic conditions can lower college students' salary expectations and prompt them to consider employment security and long-term career planning more seriously. Therefore, fluctuations in the employment market, driven by economic cycles, not only influence college students' salary expectations but also add to the pressure they experience during the job search process. This combination of uncertain factors can further exacerbate the anxiety college students feel when seeking employment.

3. Strategies for College Students to Establish Realistic Salary Expectations

3.1. Vocational Education and Psychological Counseling

The university plays a crucial role in students' career planning, with university counselors guiding students to develop a proper understanding of and formulate their future career paths. In this process, vocational planning education is particularly vital as it not only helps students recognize their interests, professional skills, and career development directions, but also cultivates their ability to establish realistic salary expectations and comprehensive career perspectives. Universities should offer dedicated vocational planning courses, organize career development lectures and workshops, provide real industry data and market trend analysis, and enable students to understand the salary standards and underlying factors in different industries and positions. They should also help college students enhance their ability to analyze the alignment between their personal capabilities and market demands, allowing them to recognize the positive correlation between self-improvement and salary growth. Additionally, universities need to strengthen students' career perspective education by guiding them to evaluate career choices from multiple dimensions. Apart from salary, factors such as career development potential, job stability, personal interests, and values should also be considered. Through case studies, role-playing simulations, and career consultations, students can gain a comprehensive understanding of the diversity and complexity of a career.

Universities are crucial battlegrounds for college students to develop independent thinking, self-awareness, and emotional management skills. Therefore, universities should offer psychological counseling services to guide students on how to cope with the anxiety and confusion they may encounter during the career decision-making process, thereby helping them to establish a healthy professional outlook. When facing career decisions, college students may experience uncertainty and worry, such as confusion over future career path choices, concerns about their own professional skills, and fear of the gap between expectations and reality regarding salary and benefits. These challenges not only affect the students' psychological states but can also hinder their career development. Through psychological counseling, students can receive the necessary support to confront these challenges with a positive attitude, thus enhancing their confidence and adaptability. Furthermore, with the prevalence of social media, students are easily influenced by others' success and income, which can lead to unnecessary comparisons and negative emotions. Psychological counseling can assist students in dealing with this comparison mindset, helping them realize that everyone's growth path is unique, and that blind comparison only adds to stress. What is important is to find one's own direction and to work diligently towards it. Therefore, the provision of psychological counseling services by universities plays an indispensable role in fostering students' personal growth, shaping their professional attitudes, and enhancing their emotional management abilities.

3.2. Understand oneself and commit to lifelong learning

Before entering the workforce, college students should conduct a comprehensive and in-depth self-assessment. This process should cover multiple aspects, including professional knowledge and skills, practical experience, and personal traits. First, professional skills are key to job-seeking success, encompassing not only the mastery of theoretical knowledge but also the application of related technical abilities and other supportive skills. Second, practical experience can be gained from internships, project participation, or club activities both on and off campus. These experiences help students apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, enhance their problem-solving abilities, and provide a direct understanding of the work environment, teamwork, and industry trends, while also improving their social adaptability and professional demeanor. Moreover, personality traits, which are often overlooked during the job search process, significantly impact career development. For instance, characteristics such as confidence, patience, a sense of responsibility, and team spirit play different roles in various professions. Therefore, before looking for a job, college students should honestly reflect on their character strengths and potential shortcomings to choose the most suitable career path for themselves.

In addition to this, college students should also clarify their career interests and goals. Career interest is the intrinsic motivation that drives an individual to move forward continuously, while clear career goals act like a guiding light, leading the way. Choosing a profession that matches one's abilities and interests can make work more meaningful and valuable, instead of merely pursuing high salaries. In the competitive environment of society, college students should recognize the principle that 'effort and reward are directly proportional,' realizing that only through continuous learning, accumulation, and the investment of effort and time can one expect to receive corresponding returns.

In today's rapidly changing job market, the correlation between salary growth and individual ability and performance is becoming increasingly tight. It is crucial for college students to recognize this fact. They should be aware that as society develops and technology advances, job requirements and compensation standards are constantly evolving. Therefore, relying solely on the knowledge acquired during their time in school is far from sufficient; they must regard continuous learning and self-improvement as an essential part of their career development. Lifelong learning involves constantly updating one's knowledge base, mastering new skills, and enhancing problem-solving abilities. This not only helps college students quickly adapt to the workplace after graduation but also enables them to maintain competitiveness in their future careers, thus achieving salary growth and professional advancement. By participating in various training programs, seminars, online courses, and professional certifications, college students can broaden their horizons and enhance their expertise and technical levels in specific fields. In summary, college students should embrace the concept of lifelong learning and continually enhance their personal abilities and job performance to adapt to the ever-changing career market and compensation structures. This proactive attitude benefits not only their personal growth and development but also plays a significant role in advancing societal progress and innovation.

3.3. Corporate Responsibility and Policy Support

When formulating compensation policies, companies should fully consider the reasonable salary expectations of college students. This entails having an accurate understanding of market salary levels on one hand, and on the other hand, paying attention to the educational background, professional skills, and career development expectations of these students. A compensation system should reflect not only job value and individual contribution, but also industry standards, regional differences, and the company's own economic conditions. Establishing a compensation system that is both fair and reasonable is crucial for attracting college students who possess vitality, innovative capabilities, and potential for long-term development. Furthermore, a robust compensation system should include transparent promotion mechanisms and incentive measures, enabling employees to see that their efforts will result in fair compensation and opportunities for career advancement. By offering competitive remuneration, companies can attract talent and stimulate employees' work enthusiasm, enhance their loyalty to the company, thus reducing talent turnover and laying a solid foundation for stable company development. In this process, companies need to regularly review and adjust their compensation policies to ensure they remain aligned with market trends and employee expectations, achieving a win-win outcome for both the enterprise and its employees.

The government plays a crucial role in promoting the healthy development of the job market,

especially for new entrants to the labor force such as college graduates. To facilitate their smooth employment and ensure that they receive compensation commensurate with their educational background and skills, the government can implement a series of incentives to encourage businesses to offer more attractive salaries.

Tax incentives are powerful tools that can reduce the burden on businesses and encourage them to offer higher starting salaries to college graduates. These incentives can take the form of corporate income tax reductions or tax credits. In addition, the government can provide direct subsidies, particularly targeting companies in strategic emerging industries such as high technology, green energy, and advanced manufacturing. Subsidies can also be directed at companies located in economically underdeveloped areas that are willing to employ a large number of college graduates. Through these fiscal measures, the government not only incentivizes companies to invest in high-quality talent but also guides college students towards fields that urgently need development for national and societal progress. Such policies help college graduates achieve better economic rewards and promote industrial upgrading and balanced regional development. In this way, the government can effectively regulate the labor market, support the career development of college graduates, and drive comprehensive progress in both the economy and society.

4. Summary

With the rapid development of the socio-economic landscape and intense competition in the job market, the relationship between college graduates' salary expectations and their career choices has garnered attention. The employment of college students not only affects individual development but also relates to the national allocation of human resources. Rising salary expectations may lead students to favor high-paying positions, sometimes at the expense of their interests and expertise. Additionally, asymmetric information can lead to unrealistic salary expectations, potentially resulting in employment frustration. This paper explores the impact of college students' salary expectations on their career orientation and proposes countermeasures to promote the healthy development of the job market.

Personal values and goal orientation, educational background and professional skills, social comparison, and economic environment are the main factors affecting college students' salary expectations and career choices. Universities should provide career education and psychological counseling to help students establish correct salary expectations and a comprehensive view of their careers. Enterprises need to consider reasonable salary expectations and establish a fair compensation system. The government should promote employment and salary matching for college graduates through policy support, jointly fostering the healthy development of the job market for college graduates.

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