



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Current Status and Structural Analysis of College Students' Employability

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| ARTICLE INFO   | ABSTRACT  |
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| Received: Aug 24, 2024<br>Accepted: Oct 18, 2024       | With the rapid development of the social economy and the advent of the knowledge economy era, the employability of college students has become a key indicator for measuring the quality of higher education and promoting social progress. Currently, improving the employability of college students is not only related to their personal development but also to the overall level of the national innovation system and economic construction. This study aims to explore the employability of students at Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College. Through random sampling, we surveyed 300 recent graduates (covering various majors) and 200 previous graduates (covering various majors) from Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College, and invited 10 companies that hired graduates from the college to participate in an online questionnaire survey. We also conducted interviews with five companies that recruit graduates from Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College to analyze in depth the current status of college students' employability, covering aspects such as cognitive ability, professional skills, social skills, and innovative spirit. The research results show that college students have rich theoretical knowledge but lack soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving ability, interpersonal communication skills, and coordination ability. To address these issues, this paper proposes the development of training courses to enhance the employability of college students. |
| <b>Keywords</b>  |   |
| College Students'                                      |   |
| Employment   |   |
| Employability  |   |
| Structure of Employability                             |   |
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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is currently undergoing a critical period of transformation. As the primary force driving future societal and technological advancements, the employability of college students is increasingly attracting attention from various sectors of society. With the intensification of competition in the job market, enhancing the employability of college students is not only essential for their personal development but also crucial for the overall level of the national innovation system and economic construction. This study focuses on the students of Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College, using random sampling surveys and interviews to deeply analyze the current state of college students' employability. It was found that while college students possess rich theoretical knowledge, they lack soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving abilities, interpersonal communication skills, and coordination abilities (Smith, A., & Smith, B. 2019). This situation reveals a disconnect between current higher education and market demands, as well as a deficiency in students' professional qualities and practical abilities (Johnson, C. 2020). In light of this, the study aims to identify the skill gaps that current college students face in the job market and provide targeted strategies from three perspectives: curriculum design, skills development, and career guidance. The conclusions of this study will offer directions for higher education institutions to improve educational quality and carry out teaching reforms.

## Objectives

The main objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the employability of college students through systematic surveys and in-depth interviews. We will focus particularly on the development of cognitive skills, professional knowledge, social skills, and innovative thinking, while also exploring how these abilities interact with the demands of the actual job market. By collecting and analyzing a large amount of questionnaire data and employer perspectives, our goal is to reveal the structural characteristics of college students' employability and the alignment of these characteristics with market demands. This will help identify potential challenges and improvement pathways, thereby providing empirical evidence for optimizing college students' job readiness.

- (1) Investigate the current state of employability among students at Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College.
- (2) Analyze the main factors influencing college students' employability.
- (3) Propose strategies and recommendations to enhance the employability of college students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of higher education is to develop students' overall qualities, enabling them to adapt to and succeed in their future careers. However, with the rapid development of the social economy and the constantly changing job market, the disconnect between higher education and market demands has become increasingly evident. Many studies indicate that current higher education focuses more on the transmission of theoretical knowledge, while neglecting the cultivation of students' practical abilities and professional qualities (Zhang, X., 2018).

### 1. Definition and components of employability

Employability is a multifaceted concept encompassing various attributes and skills necessary for obtaining and maintaining employment in the labor market. According to Hillage and Pollard (1998), employability includes foundational academic abilities, professional qualities, personal attributes, and practical experience. Foundational academic abilities involve theoretical knowledge and technical skills. Professional qualities refer to work ethics and vocational attitudes. Personal attributes encompass soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Practical experience pertains to work experience accumulated in real-world settings. This multidimensional approach aligns with other studies that emphasize the importance of both technical and soft skills in enhancing employability (Smith & Smith, 2019).

### 2. Relationship between higher education and employability

The relationship between higher education and employability has been extensively studied. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in fostering students' employability by integrating practical experience and vocational skill development into their curricula. Mason et al. (2009) noted that incorporating real projects and industry internships significantly enhances students' employability. Furthermore, Johnson (2020) argued that bridging the gap between education and employment requires collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders to align educational outcomes with market demands. Effective career guidance and employment training are also vital in preparing students for the labor market (Knight & Yorke, 2003).

### 3. Current state of college students' employability

Recent studies indicate a significant gap in college students' employability. While many students excel in theoretical knowledge and technical skills, they often lack soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and communication (Zhao & Li, 2021). This gap is particularly evident in China, where the education system's focus on theoretical knowledge often overshadows the development of practical and interpersonal skills. Zhang (2018) suggested that these deficiencies are partly due to flaws in curriculum design and teaching methods, which fail to holistically develop students' employability.

### 4. Factors influencing college students' employability

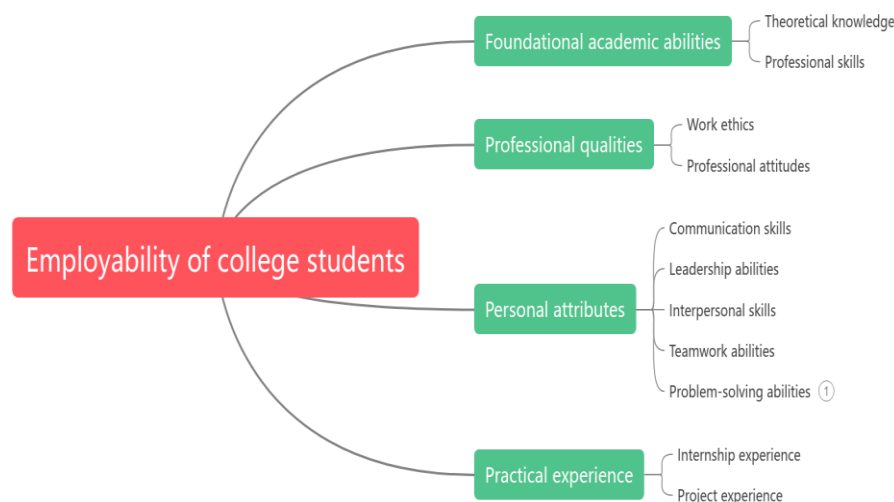
Numerous factors influence university students' employability. Curriculum design and teaching methods are primary determinants as they shape students' learning experiences and skill acquisition. Additionally, social and family environments significantly impact students' professional

qualities and practical abilities (Tomlinson, 2017). Effective career planning and guidance also play a crucial role in enhancing employability. Integrating employability skills into higher education curricula, coupled with a supportive external environment, collectively promotes positive employment outcomes for graduates (Smith & Smith, 2019).

### 5. Strategies to enhance college students' employability

To address the deficiency in college students' employability, various strategies have been proposed. Universities should develop comprehensive training programs and increase opportunities for practical courses and industry internships (Mason et al., 2009). Strengthening career guidance to assist students in effective career planning is also essential. Additionally, universities should focus on developing students' soft skills through targeted training programs and activities (Knight & Yorke, 2003). Enhancing abilities in teamwork, communication, and problem-solving can better prepare students to meet the dynamic demands of the labor market.

### Conceptual framework



**Figure 1: Research framework for college students' employability**

## METHODOLOGY

To comprehensively analyze the current state of college students' employability and propose effective strategies, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

### Research sample

1. A random sample of 300 current students from each major at Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College will be surveyed.
2. A random sample of 200 graduates from each major at Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College will be surveyed.
3. A random sample of 10 companies that hire graduates from Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College will be surveyed. These companies include:
  - SAIC-GM-Wuling Automobile Co., Ltd. (SGMW)
  - Liuzhou Iron and Steel Co., Ltd.
  - Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport
  - Shenzhen Metro Group Co., Ltd.
  - Hsu Fu Chi International Group
  - Fujian Jinjiang Lilanz (China) Co., Ltd.
  - Shunde District Furniture E-commerce Industrial Park, Foshan
  - Youzan (Guangzhou) E-commerce Co., Ltd.
  - Liuzhou Avocado Culture Communication Co., Ltd.

4. A random sample of 5 companies that hire graduates from Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College will be interviewed, including:

- Guilin Fuda Co., Ltd.
- Liuzhou Bailian Airport
- Guangxi Liugong Group Co., Ltd.
- Shangri-La Hotel
- Walmart Supermarket (Liuzhou)

### Instrument

1. Questionnaire for Current and Former Graduates of Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College. This is a 5-point Likert scale student opinion questionnaire covering various genders and majors. Conducted online, it includes 26 items: personal traits, employment traits, career management skills, career identity, teamwork abilities, basic office skills, interpersonal skills, independent work abilities, problem-solving skills, execution skills, innovation and entrepreneurship skills, practical skills, personal management skills, job-seeking abilities, adaptability, learning abilities, resource integration and utilization skills, information management skills, reasoning and judgment abilities, organizational leadership abilities, communication and coordination skills, social capital (such as graduate schools and social relationships), socioeconomic factors, academic human capital (such as academic performance and social relationships), professional skills, and professional knowledge. The questionnaire requirements and online survey link were forwarded to graduates from different majors at Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College.

The survey questionnaire mainly includes two parts. The first part collects basic information about the respondents, including gender and major type. The second part identifies whether the sample includes recent graduates. Respondents are asked to evaluate their personal situation based on the above 26 abilities with the question, "How do you rate yourself on the following abilities? 1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied." This question aims to understand the subjective evaluation of college students regarding their own employability levels and to explore which employability skills they are satisfied with.

2. Employer Questionnaire on College Students' Employability. To align with students' perceptions and evaluations, this study also incorporates the comprehensive analysis results of previous domestic and international research on the components of college students' employability. Using these insights, an employer version of the questionnaire was developed to understand the importance of various employability skills from the perspective of employers and to assess their evaluation of college students' employability. This approach indirectly gauges employer satisfaction with and demand for graduates' employability.

The employer survey questionnaire is a 5-point Likert scale opinion survey and consists of two main parts:

1. **Basic information:** This section collects basic information about the respondents, including gender, type of organization, and location.
2. **Employability assessment:** Respondents are asked to evaluate and rate the current state of the 26 employability skills of college students within their organization. The question is, "How do you rate the following employability skills of college students in your organization? 1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied."

This question helps us understand employer satisfaction with the current employability levels of college graduates. On the one hand, it reveals the strengths and weaknesses of students' employability. On the other hand, it identifies the skills that employers value but find lacking in graduates.

3. Semi-Structured Interview on Factors Influencing Employers' Demand for the Employability of Graduates from Liuzhou Higher Education Institutions

The interview is divided into four parts:

1. **General information about the interviewee:** This section contains 2 questions.
2. **Impressions and experiences with graduates from Liuzhou vocational and technical college:** This section contains 2 questions.

3. **Employer's demand for the employability of graduates from Liuzhou vocational and technical college:** This section contains 2 questions.
4. **Suggestions and expectations for the school:** This section contains 1 question.

### Measurement and data collection

1. The survey link was distributed on June 1, 2023, and closed on June 20, 2023. A total of 300 questionnaires were sent to current graduates, with 276 valid responses received, yielding a response rate of 92.00%. For past graduates, 200 questionnaires were distributed, with 190 valid responses received, resulting in a response rate of 95%. Ten questionnaires were sent to companies, all of which were returned with valid responses, achieving a response rate of 100.00%. Questionnaires were filtered based on the criterion of complete information.
2. The researcher conducted interviews with HR managers from 5 companies between June 12 and 18, 2023.

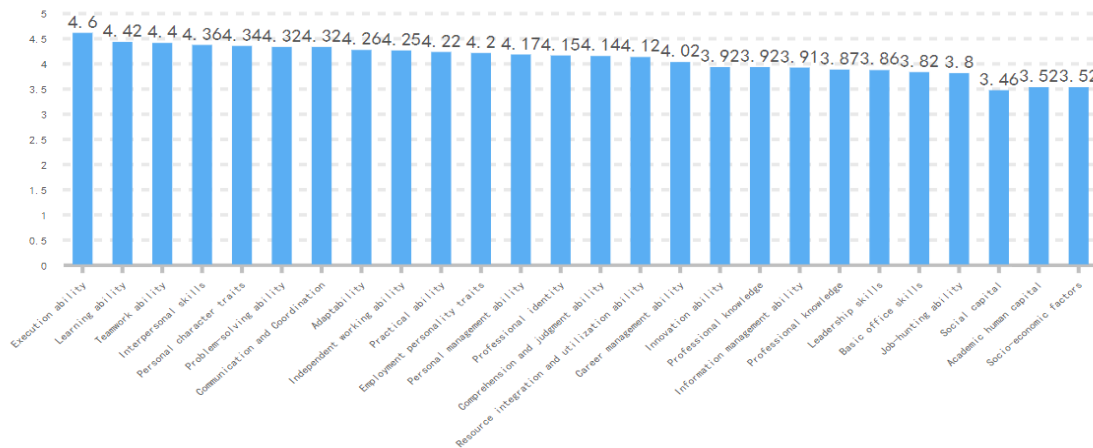
## RESULT

**Table 1: Ranking of the perceived employability of higher vocational students**

| 1. This paper employs a questionnaire survey method to delineate 26 key indicators that reflect the structure of university students' employability skills. Based on this indicator framework, a self-assessment questionnaire for university students' employability skills was developed. Using SPSS software, the relevant data were analyzed, and descriptions and analyses were conducted on the data's mean, standard deviation, and correlations with various factors: |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| <b>Recent graduates:</b>  |  |      |
| Ranking of the perceived employability of higher vocational students  |  |      |
| Execution ability   |  | 4.30 |
| Problem-solving ability   |  | 4.25 |
| Adaptability  |  | 4.24 |
| Teamwork ability  |  | 4.24 |
| Learning ability  |  | 4.21 |
| Practical ability   |  | 4.20 |
| Independent working ability   |  | 4.18 |
| Personal character traits   |  | 4.18 |
| Personal management ability   |  | 4.18 |
| Professional knowledge  |  | 4.18 |
| Communication and Coordination  |  | 4.17 |
| Career management ability   |  | 4.15 |
| Comprehension and judgment ability  |  | 4.15 |
| Interpersonal skills  |  | 4.13 |
| Professional skills   |  | 4.12 |
| Resource integration and utilization ability  |  | 4.12 |
| Information management ability  |  | 4.09 |
| Basic office skills   |  | 4.08 |
| Job-hunting ability   |  | 4.08 |
| Professional identity   |  | 4.07 |
| Employment personality traits   |  | 4.05 |
| Leadership skills   |  | 4.05 |
| Academic human capital (academic grades, certificates, etc.)  |  | 4.01 |
| Socio-economic factors  |  | 4.01 |
| Social capital (graduate school, social relations, etc.)  |  | 4.01 |
| Innovation and Entrepreneurship ability   |  | 4.00 |

The statistical results show that vocational college students rated the importance of all 26 employability skills above 4.00, with an overall average of 4.13, indicating a high level of perceived importance. As seen in Figure 3, the top five factors considered most important by vocational college students for employability are execution skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork abilities, adaptability, and learning abilities, with scores ranging from 4.18 to 4.30. The skills ranked lower are communication and coordination skills, job-seeking abilities, career management skills, and practical skills, with scores between 4.02 and 4.17. The bottom three skills are social capital (such as graduate schools and social relationships), academic human capital (such as academic performance and certificates), and innovation and entrepreneurship abilities, with scores ranging from 4.00 to 4.01, significantly lower than the other employability skills.

### Past graduates:



**Figure 2: Ranking of the perceived employability of higher vocational students**

The survey results from both current and past graduates of Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College indicate notable weaknesses in certain employability skills. The detailed analysis is as follows:

- **Theoretical knowledge:** Most students are confident in their theoretical knowledge, with an average score of 4.25 (out of 5). This reflects their solid foundational knowledge accumulated through coursework during their studies.
- **Teamwork abilities:** Students rated themselves lower in teamwork abilities, with an average score of 3.75. Many students indicated that effectively collaborating with team members remains a challenge in actual work settings.
- **Problem-solving skills:** Students generally feel they lack sufficient experience and skills in solving practical problems, scoring 3.60. This result suggests a gap between the education they received in school and the problem-solving demands of real-world work.
- **Interpersonal skills:** Interpersonal skills received one of the lowest self-assessment scores, at 3.45. Many students reported feeling insecure in communication with colleagues and supervisors and not knowing how to establish and maintain good interpersonal relationships.
- **Communication and coordination skills:** This skill also scored relatively low, at 3.50. Students commonly reported deficiencies in effectively communicating and coordinating tasks, especially when handling multiple tasks simultaneously.

### Enterprise:

**Table2: Employer perceived employability importance ranking**

| Employer perceived employability importance ranking          |      |
|--|------|
| Execution ability  | 4.62 |
| Learning ability   | 4.48 |
| Teamwork ability   | 4.40 |
| Interpersonal skills   | 4.35 |
| Personal character traits                                    | 4.34 |
| Problem-solving ability                                      | 4.34 |
| Communication and Coordination                               | 4.34 |
| Adaptability   | 4.26 |
| Independent working ability                                  | 4.25 |
| Practical ability  | 4.22 |
| Employment personality traits                                | 4.20 |
| Personal management ability                                  | 4.17 |
| Professional identity  | 4.15 |
| Comprehension and judgment ability                           | 4.14 |
| Resource integration and utilization ability                 | 4.12 |
| Career management ability                                    | 4.02 |
| Innovation and Entrepreneurship ability                      | 3.92 |
| Professional knowledge                                       | 3.91 |
| Information management ability                               | 3.89 |
| Professional skills  | 3.89 |
| Leadership skills  | 3.88 |
| Basic office skills  | 3.86 |
| Job-hunting ability  | 3.75 |
| Social capital (graduate school, social relations, etc.)     | 3.46 |
| Academic human capital (academic grades, certificates, etc.) | 3.38 |
| Socio-economic factors                                       | 3.32 |

According to the statistical results, employers rated the importance of the 26 employability skills between 3.32 and 4.62, with an overall average score of 4.06, indicating a high level of importance.

The top five skills that employers value in college graduates are execution skills, learning abilities, teamwork abilities, interpersonal skills, and personal traits.

- **Execution skills:** Employers place the highest value on execution skills, which is the ability to complete work with quality and efficiency. They consider execution skills to be one of the most crucial abilities in graduates, with a score of 4.50. Employers expect employees to complete assigned tasks on time and with high quality.
- **Learning abilities:** Employers rate graduates' learning abilities highly, with a score of 4.40. Many companies believe that while graduates may lack practical experience initially, they can quickly adapt to job requirements if they possess strong learning abilities.
- **Teamwork abilities:** Employers gave a lower evaluation of graduates' teamwork abilities, with a score of 3.70. This aligns with the students' self-assessment, indicating that this is an area in need of improvement.
- **Interpersonal skills:** Employers rated graduates' interpersonal skills as average, with a score of 3.65. Many employers pointed out that graduates often seem inexperienced in managing complex interpersonal relationships.

It is evident that college students must exhibit strong learning abilities to adapt to the challenges and problems they will encounter in their future careers.

2. Employ the Content Analysis method to scrutinize the data from interviews with enterprises regarding the employability of graduates from Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College. Enterprises believe that college students lack teamwork and problem-solving abilities in employment, and suggest enhancing these aspects in training courses.

In summary, students from Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College exhibit certain weaknesses in their employability, particularly in teamwork, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and coordination skills. Higher education institutions should adjust their curriculum design according to the needs of enterprises, focus on cultivating students' practical abilities and professional literacy, and enhance their competitiveness in the job market.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. The disconnection between theory and practice

This study reveals a significant gap in the employability of students from Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College, particularly the disconnection between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. While students excel in theoretical knowledge, they lack hands-on operation and problem-solving abilities. The effective integration of theory and practice is key to enhancing students' employability. Higher education institutions should actively promote practical teaching, strengthen cooperation with enterprises, create more internships and practical opportunities, and allow students to exercise their problem-solving skills in real work environments.

### 2. Cultivating teamwork skills

Teamwork skills are crucial in the modern workplace. Both students and enterprises rate this ability as inadequate, indicating the underdevelopment of such training in higher education. Schools can enhance students' awareness and ability in teamwork by increasing team projects, organizing interdisciplinary cooperation, and simulating workplace environments. Additionally, involving enterprise experts and career advisors in teaching can help students understand the requirements and methods of teamwork in actual work situations.

### 3. Interpersonal communication and coordination skills

Interpersonal communication and coordination skills are important soft skills for students after entering the workforce, but the study found that these abilities are rated low both by the students themselves and by enterprises. Higher education institutions should focus on cultivating students' social skills and communication abilities by offering relevant courses and workshops to teach effective communication techniques and strategies. Simultaneously, enhancing students' communication and coordination skills in real work situations can be achieved through mock interviews and workplace drills.

#### 4. Deepening industry-academia cooperation

Industry-academia cooperation is an important way to enhance students' employability. By establishing close cooperative relationships with enterprises, higher education institutions can better understand the needs of enterprises, adjust curriculum settings, and ensure that teaching content matches market demand. At the same time, enterprises can provide students with internship opportunities and practical projects to help students accumulate practical experience and enhance their employability during their school years. Higher education institutions should actively explore various forms of industry-academia cooperation to form a long-term and stable cooperation mechanism to promote students' career development.

In summary, the employability of students from Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College faces several challenges, including the disconnection between theory and practice, inadequate teamwork skills, and a lack of interpersonal communication and coordination abilities. To address these challenges, a series of targeted measures need to be taken by higher education institutions. One of the key strategies is the development and implementation of specialized training courses. These courses not only enhance students' employability but also help them better adapt to the workplace environment and strengthen their competitiveness in the job market. Higher education institutions should actively explore and establish long-term and stable industry-academia cooperation mechanisms to support the overall development and career planning of students.

#### CONCLUSION

This study, through surveys of recent and former graduates of Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College, as well as employers, has uncovered the strengths and weaknesses of students in terms of employability. The results indicate that while students excel in theoretical knowledge and learning capabilities, they fall short in areas such as teamwork, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and coordination skills. These deficiencies to some extent restrict the competitiveness of students in the job market.

The study suggests that the disconnection between theory and practice is the main reason for the inadequacy of students' employability. Enterprises demand higher practical skills from graduates, and higher education institutions need to adjust their curriculum and teaching methods to better meet market demands. Concurrently, higher education institutions should develop training courses, increase practical teaching segments, and strengthen the cultivation of soft skills such as teamwork, interpersonal communication, and coordination. These measures will help students succeed in the future workplace. By deepening industry-academia cooperation, higher education institutions can provide students with internship opportunities and real projects, aiding the accumulation of practical experience and enhancing the ability to solve real-world problems during their school years.

In summary, to enhance the employability of college students, higher education institutions should focus on developing training programs, enhancing practical teaching, and strengthening the cultivation of soft skills like teamwork, interpersonal communication, and coordination abilities to improve their competitiveness in the job market. Additionally, deepening industry-academia cooperation is an effective way to boost students' employability. These measures will lay a solid foundation for college students in their future careers.

#### RECOMMENDATION

To enhance the employability of college students, higher education institutions should take the following measures:

1. **Develop Training Courses** Design and implement specialized training programs to strengthen students' soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving abilities.
2. **Deepen Industry-Academia Cooperation** Establish close cooperative relationships with enterprises to provide students with internships and practical opportunities, helping them to accumulate valuable work experience during their studies.
3. **Increase Practical Teaching Elements** Integrate more case analyses, project practices, and simulations into the curriculum to enhance students' practical operation skills and innovative capabilities.



4. Optimize Teaching Methods Adopt more flexible and diverse teaching methods, such as flipped classrooms, group discussions, and peer instruction, to stimulate students' interest and participation in learning.
5. Strengthen Career Guidance Services Provide personalized career guidance and career planning services for students, helping them to better understand themselves and clarify their career development directions.

By implementing these measures, higher education institutions can effectively enhance the employability of college students, helping them to adapt and integrate into the workplace, thus achieving personal career development and societal progress.

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