

A Study on the Employment Situation of French Majors in Zhongbei College of Nanjing Normal University

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Abstract

This study was conducted to understand the employment situation of French majors in Zhongbei College of Nanjing Normal University through a questionnaire survey, aiming to help students of French majors to clarify their employment direction. The results of the survey show that most of them do not have a clear employment direction and goal before graduation, the number of those whose jobs are fully compatible with their majors after graduation is relatively low, and they lack practical experience in their work, and also professional qualification certificates. Based on the research and social needs, French majors should learn about different employment channels, schools should help students set up clear goals and career development plans, teachers should help students improve their language skills, and relevant national authorities should encourage relevant enterprises to increase French internship positions in a targeted way to improve students' practical ability to use French in the workplace.

Keywords

Zhongbei College, French Major, Employment, Survey

1. Introduction

As a minority language, or not in general use language, French has a low demand for jobs compared with English. Taking "51job.com", one of the more famous job sites in China, as an example, if we search for recently posted jobs with "English major" as the keyword, there are 183 pages of results, and with about 50 jobs per page, there are about 9150 jobs. If we use "French major" as the keyword, there are only 5 pages of results, with about 50 jobs per page, there

are only about 250 jobs. In the post-epidemic era, the number of graduates who choose to work abroad has decreased sharply, and most of the students choose domestic employment in order to ensure safety. The severe employment rate also highlights the necessity of studying the employment situation of French majors over the years.

The paper *Analysis and Reflection on the Current Employment Situation of Undergraduate French Majors in Universities in Beijing* (Chen, 2014) analyzed the employment data of undergraduate French majors in five universities in Beijing in the past three years. The results showed that the employment situation of graduates of French majors had problems such as “imbalance of the ratio between the demand of men and women”, “gap between the working ability of graduates and the demand of employers”, and “the teaching of French needs to be further connected with the market demand”; the paper *Survey on the Employment Situation of French Majors in Colleges and Universities in Hebei Province and Analysis of Countermeasures* (Gao, 2016) took the employment situation of French graduates in two universities in Hebei province and 100 questionnaires for the employers of graduates of French majors as the survey samples, explored the basic employment situation and constraints of graduates of French majors, and put forward corresponding countermeasures; the paper *Analysis of the Employment Situation of French Majors under the Background of “Supply-Side Reform” Strategy—Taking the French Department of Hubei University as an Example* (Mao, 2017) reflected that the background of mass entrepreneurship and innovation created more new employment growth points, which laid a solid material foundation for improving the employment situation. Under the background of supply-side reform, the employment opportunities and challenges of French graduates coexist; and also we have the paper *Investigation on the Employment Quality and Talent Cultivation of French Majors in Universities in Shandong Province* (Wang, 2021) took graduates of Shandong University of Finance and Economics majoring in French as the research object and 85 questionnaires of French graduates of the university as the research data to analyze the basic employment situation and talent cultivation of French majors in universities in Shandong Province.

So far, there is no study on the employment situation of graduates of French majors in universities in Jiangsu Province. This study refers to the research method and research model of the above papers, and for the first time investigates the employment situation of graduates of French majors from Zhongbei College of Nanjing Normal University (ZCNNU), which fills the gap to a certain extent. On the one hand, the employment situation of French graduates in our school can be used as a reference for future graduates of our school and French majors nationwide, so that they can understand their options in advance and have a grasp of the future; on the other hand, it can enable French majors to consciously improve their French professional ability, so as to enhance their competitive advantage and establish a French-related employment direction according to their

own situation.

2. Analysis of Results of the Survey on the Employment Situation of Graduates of French Majors from ZCNU

This paper investigates the basic employment situation of French graduates from ZCNU (Zhongbei College of Nanjing Normal University) in the past years. Based on the research results, we summarize the employment direction chosen by most of the graduates through statistical analysis, and combine the specific demand for French-related positions in China and the opinions and suggestions of previous graduates to provide suggestions for the development goals and employment direction of future graduates.

2.1. Results of the Survey

The project team distributed questionnaires online, and counted the employment situation of 120 previous graduates of French majors. The following results are all based on the raw data obtained from this statistical survey of 120 graduates from ZCNU. The data are as follows: of the graduates surveyed, 16.67% are male students, 83.33% are female students; 33.33% are under 22 years old, 66.67% are 22 - 28 years old, 0% are over 28 years old; 16.67% are not working after graduation, 33.33% are working after graduation; the percentage of those who have not yet obtained the level certificate is 60.67%, the percentage of TFS-4 (professional level 4) is 18.67%, the percentage of TFS-8 (professional level 8) is 26%, and the percentage of other certificates is 11.33%; 58.33% know the employment situation of French majors generally, 16.67% know the employment situation of French majors very well, 25% do not know the employment situation of French majors very well; 25% think the employment situation of French majors is serious, 58.33% think the employment situation is average, 9.33% don't know much about the employment situation, 7.33% think the employment situation is optimistic; 41.67% have a clear employment goal, 38.33% have a general employment direction and are working hard, 20% can find a job to support themselves; according to statistics, the first factor most graduates consider before employment is personal interest and salary and benefits, followed by job stability and development space, and finally consider whether their majors are compatible with their jobs, as well as their parents' opinions or other factors; 41.67% of the graduates' current jobs have nothing to do with their French majors at all, only 16.67% of the graduates' current jobs are fully compatible with their French majors, 8.33% of the graduates think they can use French at work and it will help them at work, and the percentage of those who choose "other" is 33%; according to 66.67% of the graduates, the fact that their French majors are not compatible with their jobs will cause some difficulties in employment, but they can be overcome, 17.67% cannot accept the professional mismatch and think it will bring employment difficulties, 15.67% think the phenomenon of professional mismatch is common and professional mismatch is irrelevant; 66.67% lack relevant

employment experience in employment, 50% lack understanding of professional knowledge and demand of the target position, 41.67% have insufficient education and their level qualification certificate is not up to standard, the percentage of those who choose “other” is 16.67%; the statistical results of working area show that most graduates are employed in economically developed areas, mostly in first-tier, second-tier and third-tier cities, and only 10.33% work abroad; the current monthly salary of three thousand yuan (CNY) to six thousand yuan accounts for 46.67%, monthly salary of six thousand to nine thousand accounts for 8.33%, monthly salary of nine thousand to ten thousand accounts for 7.33%; 83.33% think that they need to improve their competitive ability in employment by taking examinations, improving independent study ability and enhancing crisis awareness during college, followed by participating in internships to improve competitiveness, and finally relying on obtaining various professional certificates. The employment ratio of male and female students of French majors is different, and the employment ratio of female students is greater.

2.2. Problems Revealed in the Survey Results

From the statistical results, we can see that graduates of French majors in Zhongbei College generally have a low awareness of the importance of certification during their college years, most of them do not know much about the employment situation of French majors, they do not have clear employment directions and goals, and they are confused about the future, and most of them just follow the general trend. Most of the graduates prefer jobs with high salary and benefits for employment, and pay less attention to whether their majors are compatible with each other. At present, the percentage of jobs with French majors that are fully compatible with each other is relatively low. Most of the graduates are indifferent to whether their majors match or not. Graduates of French majors lack relevant experience in the workplace, and are unable to apply their professional knowledge of French and work together flexibly, and have fewer internship opportunities, insufficient practical application ability, insufficient experience and flexibility, and lack of academic and professional qualifications.

2.3. Solutions to Improve the Current Employment Situation

Improving the employment situation for French majors requires a concerted effort by multiple parties. College students of French majors should be aware of the employment channels for French majors to facilitate the planning of better employment goals, and to strengthen their awareness of obtaining professional qualifications by analyzing and comparing the employment scenarios of certified and uncertified students. “Secondly, improve your confidence in spoken French, bravely face diversified work, clearly express your strengths and demands, and build a rational career plan and future development plan” (Tian, 2016); schools should conduct a lot of publicity on the current employment channels and pathways for French majors to strengthen their awareness of French majors and

improve their confidence in the employment situation; deans, counselors and class teachers should help students to build up their confidence in the employment situation, set up clear goals and career development plans from freshmen to prevent ambiguity in their future employment direction, and help students to establish the idea of not aiming at making quick money, and to establish the awareness of improving their own abilities and development space; teachers should enhance students' motivation to learn French, update teaching contents, and keep up with the times to help students improve their language skills and core competitiveness; our country, especially the relevant national authorities should encourage relevant enterprises to increase the number of French internship positions in a targeted manner, taking into account the different demands for French expertise, so that French majors can have a better understanding of the target positions' expertise in advance and improve their practical ability to use French in the workplace.

3. Suggestions of Career Paths for French Majors

Since people refer to languages other than English as “minor languages”, there are fewer French major graduates than English major graduates, and consequently less competition for jobs. “Although there are many colleges and universities offering French majors in the country, there is still a shortage of real French talents. As of November 2011, there are about 93 public and private institutions of higher learning in China offering French majors” (Qu, Wang, & Song, 2015). McKeith Research Institute released a report on the employment of Chinese college students on June 10, 2019: “Employment Blue Book: 2019 China Undergraduate Employment Report” (Wang & Chen, 2019). The report shows that the average monthly income of French majors after graduation reached 6029 yuan, which is 30% higher than the national average salary of 4624 yuan, and ranked 7th in the monthly income ranking, the only liberal arts major among the top 10 majors. The *List of universities offering French majors*, released by the website “College Essentials” on May 30, 2021, shows that “by the year 2021, there are roughly 143 colleges and universities across the country offering French majors” (College Students' Essential Network, 2020). The employment of French majors is relatively less oriented than such majors as accounting, and not as extensive as such majors as English and marketing. Based on the findings above, the author suggests the following four types of employment channels for French majors.

3.1. Foreign Trade and Media

Except for those whose families are financially capable of going abroad for further study or having their jobs arranged by their families, general French major graduates can go to first-tier cities (such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen) to work on foreign trade transactions with French-speaking countries or apply for some management training positions with language requirements.

News and media organizations such as Xinhua News Agency, International Radio, Foreign Language Bureau, People's Daily Online, China.com and other international news and media organizations also accept French major graduates. Because these organizations are media organizations, they require a high level of French language skills and have many conditions. For example, Xinhua News Agency requires certificate of CET-6 (College English Test-6) in addition to French language skills; international radio stations will consider whether the image and voice quality meet the requirements of the position; Foreign Language Bureau and People's Daily Online basically require a graduate degree or above. These organizations are the industries that many French major students easily think of, but in reality, they do not receive many French major graduates every year. In terms of salary, because they are public institutions, they are also accustomed to go standard, and generally the salary for entry is not too high, but will be enhanced afterwards.

3.2. Expatriate to Africa

Companies will send French major graduates to work as resident translators in French-speaking countries (mostly in West and North African French-speaking countries). There are advantages and disadvantages to expatriate French translation jobs. For the position of French translator abroad, male students have a natural gender advantage over female students, but due to the fact that there are always more women than men in French major, it is easier for female students to find a job as a French translator abroad. The starting salary for French major graduates sent to Africa to work as translators is generally higher than most other graduates, which is an obvious benefit of the job of a French translator abroad, but there are also has some disadvantages. Most of them can quickly accumulate the first bucket of money, but they will soon face the problem of career transition and the problem of getting married, having children and returning to China or not, especially when they have children. If they return to China, they can either choose one or two tier cities to find a job matching their major, but the fast-paced life style and high cost of living will be a strong contrast with the rhythm of work and life based in Africa, it can be very challenging for them to adapt; or choose the slow-paced life in third or fourth tier cities, but there are few jobs matching their French major in third or fourth tier cities, and their previous work experience abroad will hardly add any points to their transition in China, and their salary will plummet. This is the problem that most French translators have to face after returning to China for career transition. Many French translators have to return to Africa after a period of time, or are forced to start their own business.

3.3. Civil Service or Teaching

French major graduates can choose to enter the civil service. For those who have such aspirations, civil service is a shortcut. French-speaking civil servants are re-

cruited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Foreign Liaison of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, and some provincial and municipal foreign affairs departments, which are, on the whole, mostly decent institutions. Being a civil servant, they may not have the worries of being sent to a tough country for a long time, but the income is relatively average compared to those sent to Africa.

French major graduates also have the option of obtaining a teaching certificate. French teaching positions absorb many French major graduates. More than a decade ago, undergraduates could apply for teaching positions at independent colleges, but now they all require a graduate degree or higher, and even a doctorate. Since the Two Sessions put forward the policy of strengthening the cultivation of minority language talents, more and more parents and children are focusing on minority languages, and English is no longer the only choice. An important program proposed by the Ministry of Education in the *Notice on 2020 General College Enrollment* released in January 2020: “adjusting foreign language planning, foreign languages are no longer limited to English” (*The Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2020*). It is clear in the program that the foreign language planning will be adjusted and three more languages, Spanish, French and German, will be added to the original English, Russian and Japanese, allowing schools to independently choose the first foreign language within a fixed range, while encouraging schools to create conditions to open a second foreign language. The Ministry of Education announced the latest general high school curriculum plan, the foreign language subject of the college entrance examination can be taken in six foreign languages—English, Russian, Spanish, Japanese, German and French, the same value of 150 points. This means that in addition to universities and colleges, there will be an increasing demand for teachers of minority languages in elementary and secondary education, which will undoubtedly give graduates majored in minority language, including French, a great motivation. And there are many advantages of being a teacher, such as two fixed paid holidays in a year, no need to always sit in the classroom, free to do some part-time jobs like lecturing or translating, stable, respectable social status, low stress, and easy to maintain a young mental state when dealing with young students.

3.4 Interdisciplinary Employment or Starting Own Business

A large percentage of French major graduates choose to work in jobs that are not related to French. Some of them think they can’t continue their career in French, for example, after working as a translator in Africa for a few years, they find that their life and work status is not what they want and return home to become teachers or start their own business. There are also a large number of graduates who choose to change their current situation by preparing for the postgraduate examination, hoping to go to graduate school, and choose some majors other than French, such as pedagogy, psychology, law, international economics and

trade, etc. There are many successful cases, and it is most important to be clear about the employment goal and willing to work hard for it.

4. Conclusion

This study hopes that future French major graduates will gain some inspiration from it, become aware of the social employment environment they have to face, and make changes and take action to improve the current situation. Students of French majors should have a thorough understanding of their majors and employment channels, strengthen their professional skills during their school years, and accumulate professional capital for employment; the university should give students sufficient publicity and encourage them to carry out career planning early; the society should regard the employment of college students as an important issue, encourage enterprises to strengthen the cooperation between industry, academia and research with colleges and universities, and provide more platforms for internship and employment for French majors. With the joint efforts of all parties, the employment situation of French majors will definitely be effectively improved in the future.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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