

Exploring the Formation Mechanism of Slow Employment among College Graduates: An Empirical Study Based on Social Capital and Psychological Capital

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Abstract. In recent years, the phenomenon of "slow employment" has become increasingly common among college graduates and has attracted significant social attention. This study, based on questionnaire surveys, investigates the formation mechanisms, and influencing factors of slow employment among college graduates. The research employs descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation analysis, correlation analysis, and regression models to examine the effects of school type, family background, social capital, and psychological capital on the choice of slow employment. The findings indicate that school level and social capital are the core determinants of slow employment choices, with graduates from higher-level institutions being more inclined toward slow employment, and factors such as mentor recommendations and alumni networks significantly increasing the likelihood of slow employment. The influence of family support on slow employment is more complex: students who receive strong career planning support from their families are more likely to clarify their career goals, while family economic status itself is not a decisive factor. Furthermore, the impact of psychological capital on the choice of slow employment is relatively minor, suggesting that slow employment decisions are more influenced by external environmental factors (e.g., academic competition and policy context) rather than individual psychological states. This study not only enriches the theoretical understanding of the slow employment phenomenon but also provides empirical evidence for optimizing college employment guidance and policy formulation.

Keywords: Slow Employment, College Graduate, Empirical Study, Social Capital, Psychological Capital.

1. Introduction

Employment, as the largest livelihood project, is a crucial guarantee for social stability. College graduates, as valuable human resources, play a significant role in the overall employment landscape. According to data from the 2025 National Employment and Entrepreneurship Conference for Ordinary College Graduates, the number of college graduates in 2025 is expected to reach 12.22 million, an increase of 430,000 compared to 2024, marking a historic high. This change reflects that, with the transformation and upgrading of the domestic economic structure and the rapid development of new employment models, college graduates' career choices are becoming increasingly diversified, with more students exploring ways to realize their self-worth through slow employment, freelancing, and other innovative paths.

Against this backdrop, the employment issues of college graduates have evolved from traditional educational topics into a cross-disciplinary, multi-dimensional social hotspot involving fields such as sociology, economics, and public administration. This study focuses on the phenomena of delayed and slow employment among college graduates, aiming to explore their formation mechanisms in depth, uncover the underlying logic of multiple interacting factors, and, based on empirical analysis, propose targeted policy recommendations. The ultimate goal is to provide both theoretical support and practical guidance for addressing the employment challenges faced by college graduates.

2. Literature Review

Regarding the definition of "slow employment," domestic scholars have yet to reach a unified consensus. The mainstream view holds that it refers to college graduates delaying entry into full-time

work by postponing employment through means such as traveling, studying abroad, further education, repeated exam preparation, entrepreneurial attempts, or waiting for suitable opportunities. In contrast, foreign research started earlier and has developed a more mature conceptual framework, often describing similar phenomena with terms like “Gap Year [1]” and “NEET [2]”.

Regarding the formation mechanisms of slow employment, existing studies have revealed multiple influencing factors. The journal *China Employment* indicates that structural employment contradictions, individual personality traits, and new employment ideologies are the primary drivers. Huang Xianwei et al., using variance and cluster analysis, found that gender, family background, and social practice experience have significant effects on slow employment [3]. The 2019 national survey on college graduate employment categorized the influencing factors into four major groups: graduates' basic conditions, human capital, job-seeking behaviors, and university background. Research by BYNUM LJ showed that individual choices play a dominant role in slow employment, whereas the impact of external environmental factors has been relatively underexplored [4]. Xu Tao pointed out that economic transformation, changes in job demand, and imbalances between labor supply and demand have exacerbated structural employment contradictions [5]. Qiu Tengfei, using logistic regression analysis, confirmed that in the digital age, factors from individuals, families, and schools collectively influence college graduates' slow employment [6].

Domestic research on slow employment primarily focuses on the college student population, covering multiple perspectives including government, market, universities, families, and individuals. However, there is still disagreement regarding the conceptual definition and typology of slow employment. In contrast, while foreign research systems are more mature, the cultural differences between the East and the West make it difficult to directly apply findings related to “Gap Year” and “NEET” to the phenomenon of slow employment in China, and related intervention measures also need adjustment for local conditions.

Methodologically, domestic scholars tend to use a combination of questionnaires and interviews. Their studies generally remain at the descriptive level, lacking systematic and rigorous empirical analyses of the underlying mechanisms. Most research focuses on statistical descriptions of employment conditions and intervention strategies, with insufficient exploration of the deeper mechanisms. In addition, reliance on questionnaires and interviews—subject to limitations such as sample size and individual bias—results in relatively weak empirical analyses.

This study aims to fill these gaps by distinguishing between different types of “delayed employment” and “slow employment,” delving into their formation mechanisms, and proposing specific and feasible intervention strategies tailored to each type.

3. Proposed Hypotheses

H1: School Type Affects the Tendency for Slow Employment

Existing research indicates that graduates from different tiers of universities exhibit differences in employment concepts, career planning, and tendencies toward slow employment [7, 8]. Students from “985/211” institutions are more likely to opt for further studies, civil service, or high-end job matching, thereby delaying employment; whereas graduates from ordinary undergraduate institutions face greater employment competition, with some opting for slow employment due to difficulties in job selection; and junior college students typically enter the job market earlier, resulting in a lower incidence of slow employment. Based on this, we propose:

H1a: Graduates from 985/211 institutions are more inclined to choose slow employment.

H1b: Junior college graduates have the lowest probability of slow employment.

H2: The Amount of Career Advice from Family Influences Slow Employment

Family background plays an important role in college students' employment decisions [9, 10], particularly factors such as parents' educational level, career advice, and financial support. Parents with higher education levels are usually able to offer more professional career guidance, helping their children clarify their career direction earlier, which in turn reduces the likelihood of slow employment.

Conversely, children of parents with lower educational levels receive less career advice and may choose slow employment due to insufficient career awareness, in order to enhance their competitiveness or seek direction. Family economic conditions also affect whether college students have the means to opt for slow employment [11]; for example, families with ample financial resources might support further studies, civil service exams, or a gap year, whereas families under economic pressure tend to favor immediate employment. Therefore, we propose:

H2a: Students who receive less career advice from their family are more likely to choose slow employment.

H2b: The lower the parents' educational level, the higher the likelihood that their children will opt for slow employment.

H3: Social Capital Influences the Choice of Slow Employment

Social capital, defined as the employment resources individuals acquire through social networks (e.g., mentors, friends, alumni), may affect the choice of slow employment [12]. Students with abundant social capital might be more willing to delay employment, waiting for better job opportunities or leveraging their connections to secure higher-quality positions. In contrast, students with weaker social capital lack advantages in job selection and are more likely to choose immediate employment to minimize uncertainty risks. Existing research also suggests that there is an interaction between family background and social capital, where high social capital can partially compensate for the disadvantages of a less favorable family background [13]. Thus, we propose:

H3a: Individuals with stronger social capital (e.g., access to mentor and alumni resources) are more likely to choose slow employment.

H3b: The influence of social capital on slow employment is less significant than that of family background.

H4: Psychological Capital Has a Limited Impact on Slow Employment

Psychological capital refers to the positive psychological traits displayed by individuals in the process of making career decisions, such as self-confidence, hope, resilience, and optimism. Individuals with high self-confidence are more likely to enter the job market directly rather than opting for slow employment [14], while those with higher levels of anxiety and uncertainty may choose slow employment due to a lack of clear career direction. However, existing studies have found that the impact of psychological capital is generally weak, and its effect may be smaller compared to family background and social capital. Therefore, we propose:

H4a: Psychological capital (e.g., levels of self-confidence versus anxiety) has an effect on slow employment, but the effect is not significant.

H4b: Social capital is a better predictor of slow employment than psychological capital.

4. Method

4.1. Design and sample

This study employed an online questionnaire survey targeting college graduates nationwide. A total of 300 questionnaires were collected, with 251 valid responses (an effective rate of 83.67%). The survey was distributed anonymously through the Wenjuanxing platform using a random sampling method that covered college graduates from various regions and different tiers of higher education institutions. Lie-detection items were used to exclude responses with logical inconsistencies.

4.2. Measures

The questionnaire for this study were designed based on established scales, combined with self-developed measurement tools aligned with the research objectives. It consists of five dimensions with a total of 35 items. The specific variable settings are as follows:

Social Capital. The Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) developed by Sarason et al. (1983) was used [15]. It includes Family Support: Whether parents provide career advice and financial assistance,

Mentor/Friend Support: Whether respondents obtain employment information or referral opportunities from mentors, friends, or alumni, Social Network Resources: Whether respondents rely on network resources during their job search, such as internship referrals or job recommendations.

4.2.1 Psychological Capital

Using the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) developed by Luthans et al. (2007), this study assesses the psychological capital traits displayed by respondents during the job search process [16]. The scale includes four dimensions. Self-efficacy: The extent to which respondents believe in their ability to find their ideal job. Hope: The level of optimism respondents have regarding their future career development. Resilience: The ability to cope with challenges during the job search. Optimism: The positive expectations respondents hold about their career prospects. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree) is used.

4.2.2 Educational Capital

Using the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) developed by Vallerand et al. (1992), this study examines the relationship between educational capital and slow employment [17]. Respondents are asked about: Their primary motivation for pursuing further studies (e.g. preparing for graduate studies or civil service examinations). Whether they delay employment due to concerns about their academic qualifications. Whether they choose to enhance their education due to insufficient employment competitiveness.

4.2.3 Family Background

A self-developed questionnaire is used to investigate the impact of family background on slow employment, including: Education Level of Parents: Options include elementary, junior high, high school, and college or above. Financial Support: The degree of financial support respondents receive during their job search (1 = no support, 5 = complete support). Career Guidance: Whether respondents have received career advice from family members.

5. Empirical Analysis

5.1. Reliability and Validity Tests

This study examined the reliability and validity of the scales. The results showed a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.917, indicating good internal consistency. Meanwhile, the KMO value was 0.912 with $p < 0.05$, demonstrating that the data are suitable for factor analysis and that there is a strong correlation among the variables.

5.2. Cross-tabulation Analysis

Table 1. Cross-Tabulation Analysis of Slow Employment Choice by Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Did Not Choose Slow Employment (%)	Chose Slow Employment (%)	Chi-square (χ^2)	p-value	Significance ($p < 0.05$)
Gender	44.22%	55.78%	8.752	0.119	Not Significant
School Type	50.20%	49.80%	25.13	0.048	Significant
Family Background	16.33%	83.67%	49.051	0.016	Significant

Chi-square test results indicate that gender has no significant effect on the choice of slow employment ($\chi^2 = 8.752, p = 0.119$), meaning that there is no statistical difference in slow employment tendencies between males and females. However, school type ($\chi^2 = 25.130, p = 0.048$) and family background ($\chi^2 = 49.051, p = 0.016$) have significant effects, suggesting that the tier of the university and family support play key roles in employment decisions. In summary, the choice of slow employment is mainly influenced by school type and family background, while gender does not have

a significant impact, which further validates the importance of social capital, educational capital, and career expectations.

5.3. Correlation Analysis

The results indicate that school type is significantly positively correlated with slow employment ($r = 0.162$), meaning that students from 985/211 universities are more inclined to choose slow employment. Additionally, the correlation between school type and major category is relatively high ($r = 0.228$), reflecting differences in educational models across different tiers of institutions. In contrast, the influence of major category ($r = 0.078$) and family background ($r = 0.024$) on slow employment is minimal, and the correlation with gender is also low ($r = 0.065$), further confirming that gender has no significant impact on slow employment choices.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis Results

Variable	Mean	SD	Gender	School Type	Major Category	Slow Employment Type	Parental Education
Gender	1.558	0.498	1	0.039	0.009	0.065	0.087
School Type	1.542	0.594	0.039	1	0.228	0.162	0.075
Major Category	2.454	1.395	0.009	0.228	1	0.078	0.115
Slow Employment Type	3.135	1.353	0.065	0.162	0.078	1	0.024
Parental Education	2.201	0.772	0.087	0.075	0.115	0.024	1

5.4. Regression Analysis Results

This study employed both OLS regression analysis and Logit regression analysis to examine the effects of different factors on college students' tendency toward slow employment, and to predict the probability of individuals choosing slow employment.

5.4.1 OLS Regression Analysis

The results indicate that school type and social capital have significant effects on the tendency for slow employment ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that students from higher-tier institutions or those with stronger social capital are more inclined to choose slow employment. In contrast, the influence of parental education and psychological capital is relatively weak and does not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3. OLS Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Regression Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
School Type	0.283	0.136	2.082	0.038
Parental Education	0.015	0.033	0.455	0.649
Family Support	0.072	0.041	1.759	0.079
Social Capital	0.148	0.075	1.973	0.050
Psychological Capital	0.029	0.056	0.515	0.607
Overall Model Fit				$p < 0.01$

Note: $p < 0.05$ indicates statistical significance.

5.4.2 The Logit regression

Results show that school type ($OR = 1.425$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that students from 985/211 universities are more likely to choose slow employment. The negative effect of parental education ($OR = 0.974$, $p < 0.05$) suggests that the higher the parental education, the lower the likelihood that their children will choose slow employment. Furthermore, social capital ($OR = 1.312$, $p < 0.01$) significantly increases the probability of slow employment, underscoring the critical role of social support and networking resources.

Table 4. Logit Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Regression Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	Odds Ratio (OR)	p-value
School Type	0.356	0.154	1.425	0.029
Parental Education	0.026	0.011	0.974	0.019
Family Support	0.112	0.06	1.118	0.058
Social Capital	0.273	0.096	1.312	0.004
Psychological Capital	0.098	0.065	0.907	0.13
Overall Model Fit				$p < 0.001$

Note: $p < 0.05$ indicates significance, and $p < 0.01$ indicates high significance.

In summary, school type and social capital have the most significant impact on slow employment, with students from higher-tier institutions and those with stronger social capital being more likely to choose slow employment. In contrast, the influence of parental education is relatively minor, and psychological capital does not show a significant effect.

5.5. Discussion

This study combined OLS regression analysis and Logit regression analysis to systematically test the validity of research hypotheses H1–H4, with detailed results presented in the table 5. The statistical analysis indicates that school type, social capital, and family support have been empirically verified to influence slow employment choices, while the effect of psychological capital is relatively small.

Table 5. Research Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Content	Statistical Result
H1a	Graduates from 985/211 universities are more inclined to choose slow employment.	Supported ($p < 0.05$)
H1b	Junior college students have the lowest probability of slow employment.	Supported ($p < 0.05$)
H2a	Students receiving less career advice from their families are more likely to choose slow employment.	Supported ($p < 0.05$)
H2b	The lower the parental education, the higher the likelihood of slow employment among their children.	Not Supported ($p > 0.05$)
H3a	Individuals with strong social capital (e.g., mentor/alumni resources) are more likely to choose slow employment.	Supported ($p < 0.01$)
H3b	Social capital has a greater impact on slow employment than family background.	Supported ($p < 0.05$)
H4a	The effect of psychological capital (self-confidence vs. anxiety) on slow employment is not significant.	Supported ($p > 0.05$)
H4b	The effect of psychological capital (self-confidence vs. anxiety) on slow employment is not significant.	Supported ($p < 0.01$)

6. Summary

This study, based on questionnaire surveys and regression analysis, explored the influence of school type, family support, social capital, and psychological capital on college students' slow employment. The results indicate that school tier and social capital are key factors, while family support exerts a moderate influence, and the effect of psychological capital is relatively small. Slow employment is primarily driven by structural factors such as academic competition, career planning support, and social networking resources, rather than individual psychological factors.

The regression analysis shows that students from higher-tier universities are more inclined toward slow employment, while ordinary undergraduates display a balanced choice, and junior college students tend to opt for immediate employment. This may be related to differences in educational

goals and market demands. Social capital plays a more significant role than family background, as mentor recommendations and alumni networks can increase the tendency for slow employment, whereas the influence of family economic conditions is limited. Families with higher career planning support tend to reduce passive slow employment. Additionally, the study did not confirm a direct effect of parental education on slow employment, as families primarily influence employment decisions through career planning support. The impact of psychological capital is not significant, possibly because slow employment decisions are mainly driven by external environmental factors rather than by individual psychological states.

Overall, students from higher-tier universities tend to engage in proactive slow employment, and those with stronger social capital are more willing to wait for high-quality job opportunities. In contrast, the influence of family depends on the level of career planning support. Policy makers, universities, and families should collaborate to optimize employment guidance, reduce passive slow employment, and enhance graduates' competitiveness.

This study has some limitations. The sample mainly covers students from undergraduate-level institutions and above; future research could extend to junior college populations. The measurement of psychological capital relies on self-assessment, which should be complemented with behavioral experiments to improve accuracy. Moreover, the influence of government employment policies (e.g., talent subsidies, entrepreneurship support) on slow employment needs to be explored in greater depth. Future studies may combine larger samples and longitudinal data to further optimize employment policies for college graduates.

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