

Weighting the Benefits of Part-Time Employment in College: Perspectives from Indigenous Undergraduates

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Abstract

Although many scholars assert that students' job involvement is beneficial, there is no consensus on the effect of part-time employment taken by term-time undergraduates. Since more and more indigenous students are participating in part-time employment, and most of them are involved in disadvantaged jobs—longer hours, heavier workload, and smaller salaries, it is getting more important than ever to investigate the effects of their part-time job experiences. This study is thus endeavored to identify the major benefits of part-time jobs performed by indigenous college students, to determine the relative weights of each benefit, and to decide the most beneficial type of part-time job for indigenous college students. A self-developed questionnaire was constructed specifically for this research, and AHP was adopted as the major tool to calculate the relative weights of each benefit. Based on the research results, we highly suggest universities should improve their career counseling platforms, building cooperative relationships with term-time job employers, and offer career related classes to help indigenous students gain most from their off-campus working experiences.

Keywords: part-time employment, undergraduate, indigenous college students, benefit of education, analytic hierarchy process

1. Introduction

For the past two decades, many countries in the world have been putting increasing importance on expanding their higher education system because they believe that the expansion of higher education will contribute to equal educational opportunity, and will also contribute to a prosperous economy in this knowledge-based and globalized economy. However, the increase of the number of higher educational institutions is not accompanied with a commensurate increase of governmental fiscal supports to universities, and has thus forcing universities to seek alternative financial supports—such as tuition. This rapid increase of college tuition has forced many college students to take part-time employment to cover their tuition costs. More than 30% of undergraduate students took at least one part-time employment in the year of 1992/93 (Ford, Bosworth, and Wilson, 1995), which has forced one-third of universities to run job clubs for students to ensure their students benefits from their part-time job experiences (Lucas and Lammont, 1998). It is more important than ever for universities to develop sound policies to improve the benefits of term-time student workers (Little, 2002).

Taiwan is no exception, the number of higher educational institutions have been dramatically expanded from 28 in 1986 to 164 by 2006, expecting that this expansion would enhance educational equity and lead to greater economic prosperity. This expansion of higher education institutions has forced many students to take term-time jobs while learning full time, so that they may cover the rapidly increased tuition. It is especially difficult for students from more disadvantaged and extremely poor families, and many scholars in Taiwan has proposed that more financial assistances have to be provided to students from disadvantaged families to alleviate their financial burden, so that they may concentrate on their academic studies (Ho, 2009).

Many scholars claim that not every student benefit equally from their term-time work experiences. Hirschman and Voloshin (2007) assert that students from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to work in

good jobs: shorter working hours and better pay, while students with more disadvantaged background are often involved in bad works: longer working hours per week and lower salaries.

There were approximately 446,000 indigenous people in Taiwan, which consisted about 1.9% of the total Taiwan population (Chen and Jacob, 2008). Since they are minority in Taiwan with languages and culture that are very different from the majority of Han Chinese people, it is more difficult for them to succeed in Taiwan society, especially in the public school system (Yen, 2009). Since many indigenous students are from disadvantaged backgrounds in Taiwan, and their families often cannot profoundly support their school study, they are more willing to take part-time jobs to cover costs of schooling, which might have some negative effects on their academic work (Yeh, 2006; Yang, Chen, Ho, and Wang, 2012). Although indigenous students have heavier burden for earning money, they have more chance than other students to involve in disadvantaged jobs and earn less than their more advantaged background counterpart students. Therefore, it is crucial to explore students' part-time employment experience, with a specific focus on indigenous students.

2. Related Literature

Laura (2010) claims that working is now the fundamental responsibility for many undergraduates: Many students must work to pay the costs of attending college, some may see employment as a way to explore career options and earn an insight into the working world, still for some students, working experience forms their identity, which in turn enhance their confidence.

One of the most popular assertions of college student development theory is that college students may obtain different abilities and social experiences if they spend time on various career-related activities both on-campus and off-campus (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 1995).

Some research argue that working experience can not only help students fiscally, but benefit students socially and academically. The argument may be attributed to the concern that paid employment can help the young people prepare for working life in adulthood. Such preparation may provide students with an opportunity to play the role as a worker in advance, or might include the acquisition of social and other practical skills that are not taught in the school, but will be required in the future. Cheng and Alcantara (2007) assert that students part-time working experience will provide students with a great deal of money to cover their tuition costs, and also is a way to make students' college experience more meaningful (Cheng and Alcantara, 2007) .

One of the most important advantages of having the paid employment is that students can be familiar with the workplace in adulthood earlier. The research results constructed by Hobbs et al. (2007) are consistent with Cheng and Alcantara's statement, and they suggest that most of the young workers perceived that their working experience is helpful, and they believed that their working experience help them a great deal to prepare them for their occupation upon graduation. Moreover, paid employment can potentially provide young workers with practical learning experiences and contribute to their social development and a sense of autonomy.

However, there are negative voices about students' term-time work. Many researches found that the longer hours students devotes to employment, the less they involve in either academic or social activity (Fjortofy, 1995). Moreover, some other researches show that part-time employment may cause dangers to students' health and safety. In addition, it also may have negative effects on schooling. The research constructed by O'Donnell and While (1999) reveals that students who spend more than 10 hours a week on working have worse performance on learning than students spend less than 5 hours a week or non-workers.

Paul (1982) suggests that the working experience of the undergraduates had negative effect on their academic performance. Darmody and Smyth (2012) also claim that students working longer hours experience higher levels of dissatisfaction with their academic workload. On the contrary, Kuh (1995) found that the working experience of college students may be beneficial to their interpersonal competence, practical competence, cognitive complexity, knowledge, academic skills, and humanitarianism. Moreover, Ehrenberg and Sherman (1987) assert that the effects of on-campus jobs are better than off-campus jobs, and therefore, it is important for college students to make adequate career selections. Gault, Redington and Schlager (2000) find that business majored undergraduates possess better overall job satisfaction and acquire first position in a shorter period of time upon graduation if they had term-time internship experience, and thus suggest that part-time job is beneficial.

Studies have yielded inconsistent evidence regarding the effect of part-time job. Some scholars found that students' working experience have their pros and cons, and it's all depends on students' characteristics and working status. Laura (2010) argues that working location will affect students' working results. They indicate that on-campus working is helpful to students academically than off campus works. Hirschman and Voloshin (2007) claim that students from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to work in good jobs,

while those with disadvantaged backgrounds are often involved in longer hours per week and lower salaries. Since most indigenous students are from disadvantaged backgrounds in the developed world, they are more stressed to take part-time job to cover their tuition costs (Bradley, Draca, Green and Leeves, 2007), while they tend to involve in disadvantaged jobs. Therefore, it is crucial to explore students' part-time employment experience, particularly for indigenous students.

3. Methodology

The purposes of this study are to determine the major benefits of participating in par-time employment, to calculate the relative weight of each benefit, and to decide benefits carried by different types of part-time jobs.

3.1 The Analytic Hierarchy Process

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) was adopted as the major tool for acquiring relative weights of benefits of part-time jobs. The AHP will decompose a complex problem into smaller problems, and then organize these smaller problems into a perceptive hierarchy (Saaty, 1990). Since AHP facilitates the researcher to elicit the opinions from experts, streamline these opinions into organized attributes, and allocate weights to individual attributes, it is most appropriate method for carry out this research.

In figure 1, the main goal located at the topmost level (on the far left side) is to understand the benefits of part-time jobs performed by undergraduates. The second level of the hierarchy consists of three major dimensions—Economic, Social, and Learning; and the third level consists of the 6 benefits of part-time jobs: earning money, enhancing employability upon graduation, increasing social involvement, gaining friendships with people in the workplace, Enriching professional knowledge, and acquire practical skills that are marketable to the working environment.

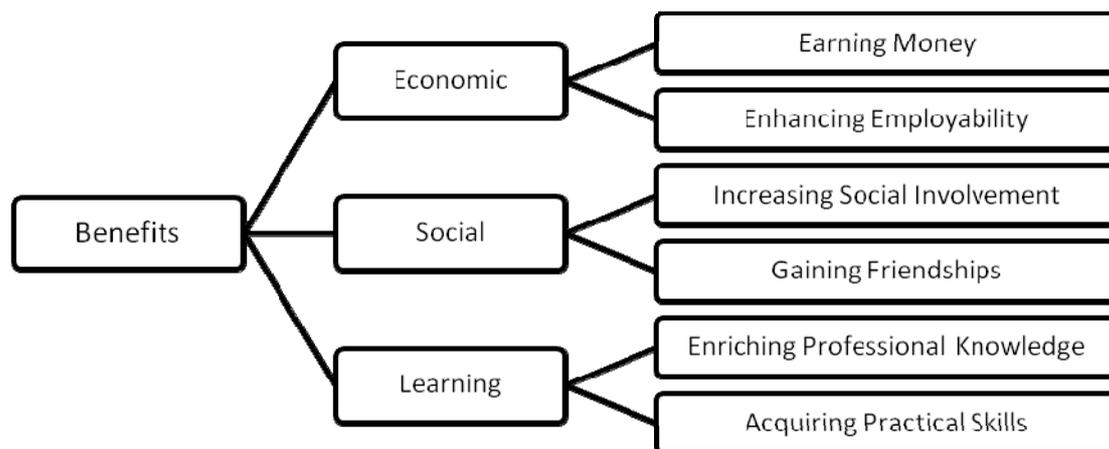


Figure 1. AHP Structure

3.2 Design of the Questionnaire

A self-developed questionnaire is constructed to investigate how indigenous undergraduates may consider the benefits of their part-time job experiences. The questionnaire was composed of three parts. The first part is designed to elicit the participant's demographic background, i.e., gender and working experience; the second part contains 6 pairs of AHP questions for calculating the relative weights of each benefits, and the third part is a check list cross-table for identifying different benefits contributed by different types of part-time employment. The row of the cross-table is formed by the six benefits of part-time career: earning money, enhancing employability, increasing social involvement, gaining friendships, enriching professional knowledge, and acquiring practical skills. The column of the cross-table is formed by the eight types of jobs most commonly taken by students: professor's instructional assistant or research assistant, on-campus administrative assistant, off-campus laboring operations, off-campus general services, off-campus tutoring, clerk services, official operational works, and tribe services.

3.3 Research Participants

The questionnaire was administered to 165 indigenous students from 3 universities in Taiwan, and 100 were retrieved and valid for analyses. 59% of them were male and 41% were female. About 70% had part-time job experiences, and only 30% had no experience of working.

4. Research Results

This section shows the results of AHP, and a presentation of the statistics indicating which type of part-time job may have the most benefits for students.

4.1 Results of AHP

Microsoft Excel 2010 was used to carry out the AHP analyses. An eigenvector consistency test was adopted for confirming the validity. The CR value of the positive matrixes was 0.017, far below the 0.1 judge standard suggested by Saaty (1980), hence confirming its validity.

The results of the second level of AHP showed that the Economic Dimension (.44) is most important dimension for inspiring students to take part-time employment, followed by Learning Dimension (.33) and Social Dimension (.23).

Table 1. Weights of the Three Dimensions

First Level	CR	Second Level	Weight	Order
Benefits	.017	Economic	.44	(1)
		Social	.23	(3)
		Learning	.33	(2)

Saaty (1980) suggested that the consistency is self-evident if the AHP procedure contains for less than two alternatives, and the validity test is not required. Since all three third-level AHP procedures in this research contained for less than three alternatives, eigenvector tests were not performed at this level.

The results of the third level showed that the most important benefit of part-time job (table 2) is Earning Money (.24). It was followed in descending order by Acquiring Practical Skills (.21), Enhancing Employability (.19), Enriching Professional Knowledge (.13), Increasing Social Involvement (.12), and Gaining Friendships (.11).

Table 2. Weights of the Six Benefits

First Level	Second Level	Third Level	Weight	Order
Benefits	Economic	Earning Money	.24	(1)
		Enhancing Employability	.19	(3)
	Social	Increasing Social Involvement	.12	(4)
		Gaining Friendships	.11	(6)
	Learning	Enriching Professional Knowledge	.13	(5)
		Acquiring Practical Skills	.21	(2)

4.2 Results of the Descriptive Statistics

Which of the 7 types of part-time job best meet the benefits pursuit by students? Table-3 shows the average score of different part-time job to each different benefit. Tribe Services contribute a great deal to social involvement and Making Friends. Instructional Assistant has the most bearing on Enriching Professional Knowledge. Finally, Tutoring is not only beneficial to Earning Money, but it is also beneficial to Enhancing Employability and Acquiring Practical Skills.

Table 3. Type of Job on Benefits

	Earning Money	Enhancing Employability	Increasing Social Involvement	Making Friends	Enriching Professional Knowledge	Acquiring Practical Skills
Instructional Assistant	3.30	3.42	3.21	3.28	3.72	3.43
Administrative Assistant	3.42	3.35	3.21	3.33	3.25	3.34
Laboring Operation	3.26	2.98	3.13	2.99	2.95	3.08
General Services	3.6	3.55	3.76	3.59	3.17	3.54
Tutoring	3.73	3.66	3.67	3.51	3.67	3.65
Clerk Services	3.57	3.62	3.43	3.25	3.39	3.46
Office Operation	3.40	3.16	3.30	3.25	3.09	3.26
Tribe Services	2.97	3.22	3.91	3.87	3.39	3.48

Thereafter, the researcher tried to figure out the most beneficial job by using the data acquired from table 2 and table 3. Multiplications of the original average score of each type of job (table 3) to the weights of the benefits (table 2) were performed to generate the weighted total scores of each type of part-time job (table 4). The results showed that Tutoring is the most lucrative type of job (3.64), followed by General Services (3.54), Clerk Services (3.48), Instructional Assistant (3.43), Tribe Services (3.39), Administrative Assistant (3.36), Office Operation (3.26), and Laboring Operations (3.10).

Table 4. Weighted Score of Type of Job on Benefits

	Earning Money	Enhancing Employability	Increasing Social Involvement	Making Friends	Enriching Professional Knowledge	Acquiring Practical Skills	Total
Instructional Assistant	0.81	0.65	0.39	0.37	0.46	0.75	3.43
Administrative Assistant	0.84	0.64	0.39	0.38	0.41	0.72	3.36
Laboring Operation	0.80	0.57	0.38	0.34	0.37	0.65	3.10
General Services	0.88	0.68	0.45	0.41	0.40	0.73	3.54
Tutoring	0.91	0.69	0.44	0.40	0.46	0.75	3.64
Clerk Services	0.87	0.68	0.41	0.37	0.42	0.72	3.48
Office Operation	0.83	0.60	0.39	0.37	0.38	0.69	3.26
Tribe Services	0.72	0.61	0.47	0.44	0.42	0.73	3.39

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The expansion of the higher educational system in the world has led to the increase of tuition, coupled with the decrease of family supports to students' studying attributed to the recent economic recession has forced many more college students to engaged in term-time works while study full time, and this is especially true for students from more disadvantaged family background—such as many indigenous students in Taiwan. In order to ensure students can benefit fiscally, socially, and academically, there is an increasing call for universities to establish sound policy to manage students' term-time work activities. The aim of this research is thus to determine the benefits of part-time jobs performed by indigenous undergraduates, to calculate their relative benefits, and to investigate the particular functions of different types of part-time jobs.

The results of AHP Analysis showed that the benefit of part-time job is Earning Money. It was followed in descending order by Acquiring Practical Skills, Enhancing Employability, Increasing Social Involvement, Enriching Professional Knowledge, and Gaining Friendships.

Understanding that each type of job bearing different importance and those different jobs contribute differently to certain benefits can help student to select the most appropriate type of job in a timely manner. The results of the AHP showed that Earning Money and Acquiring Practical Skills are most stressed by indigenous students. The results of the descriptive statistics reveal that the most effective way of addressing the former is Tutoring and General Service, and the best way of achieving the latter is also Tutoring and General Service. Therefore, taking the aforementioned two types of jobs are most beneficial to indigenous students. Strengthening university's career counseling platform is very important if the aim is to help indigenous students to select a tutoring and general service job that may benefit them fiscally, socially, and academically.

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