

Analysis of Perception of Struggles in Finding a Job for Fresh Graduates at the College Level

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the perceptions of struggles experienced by fresh graduates in finding employment, focusing on both internal and external factors that affect their experiences. Data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to 34 alums of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences who graduated between 2020 and 2024, as well as in-depth interviews with four selected informants. The results showed that 72% of respondents had work experience; however, 48% of them did not secure a job immediately after graduation. Factors that affect difficulties in job search include lack of work experience, company-set qualification limitations, and low soft skills of respondents. In addition, 56% of respondents reported that the uncertainty of their post-graduation future is a source of anxiety, which is exacerbated by social pressures from their surrounding environment and comparisons with the achievements of their peers. Most respondents (80%) stated that they struggle to find a job, even when applying for positions that do not align with their field of study. Adaptations made by fresh graduates include applying for entry-level jobs, expanding their professional relationships, and continuing their studies to the S2 level. These findings offer valuable insights for universities, companies, and educational institutions on supporting the transition of recent graduates into an increasingly competitive workforce.

Keywords

Fresh graduate, Job search, Internal factors, External factors, Anxiety, Uncertainty

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) reported that Indonesia's unemployment rate reached 7.07%. This happened as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The COVID-19 outbreak has had a profound impact on the lives of the Indonesian people, particularly in terms of restrictions on outdoor activities, including offices, universities, schools, religious sites, public transportation, and other crowded areas. Adaptation to these activities apparently does not only give rise to

policies Work From Home (WFH) or School From Home (SFH) (Krisnandika et al., 2021), but the decline in labor needs. This then prevents people of working age from getting the opportunity to be employed or becoming unemployed. In unemployment, individuals lose the opportunity to earn an income and are denied access to social welfare (Sejati, 2020).

The increase in the number of people who are not commensurate with the number of jobs is a scourge that exacerbates the unemployment problem,

especially in a country with a large population such as Indonesia. As a result, job seekers face stiff competition for opportunities in the workforce. Individuals should strive to improve their quality, especially in education, to gain recognition from the industry. (Ishak, 2018).

Unfortunately, the current achievement of high-quality education has not been able to guarantee employability in the industry's perception. This phenomenon is often caused by the gap between the skills required by the industry and the competencies acquired during the education period. This inequality is exacerbated by the lack of access to information regarding the needs of the workforce and the specific skills relevant to the job market. As a result, even college alumni, especially recent graduates, are among the groups contributing to the significant unemployment rate. A fresh graduate is a designation for students who have just graduated from college and generally receive a qualification in industrial skills. (Nastiti, 2024).

The gap between the skills of college graduates and the skills required by the industry not only undermines the industry's trust in new graduates but also triggers anxiety in them as they enter the workforce. Anxiety or Anxiety. This response addresses their negative perception regarding the difficulty of securing a job in the industry. Physically, anxiety can trigger symptoms such as a pounding heart and cold sweats. On a psychological level, individuals often experience unsettled thoughts,

overthinking, and loss of cognitive ability to think clearly. The appearance of this anxiety can occur because individuals feel that the situation they are facing is unnatural, which is difficult to control and overcome (Kierkegaard, 2019).

The phenomenon of high unemployment among college graduates is one of the primary factors that causes anxiety among recent graduates. This anxiety arises because they feel that they will enter a world of work that they have never experienced, and are worried about experiencing failure at work or having difficulty finding a job. The process of transitioning from education to industry, which often involves struggling to find a job, adds to the anxiety of uncertainty about their career futures. (Laily, D. F. N., 2024).

In another study, fresh graduates tend to experience increased anxiety during the job application process compared to when unemployed. This is due to an increase in irrational thinking, often related to a lack of soft skills, insufficient information about the job, and overall skill deficiencies. In fact, the skills acquired while in college are still not provided with a debriefing to get a job (Anas & Raba, 2022).

This condition makes them not confident when applying, especially during the interview stage. This feeling of insecurity often exacerbates the anxiety they feel and affects their performance in the recruitment process. (Nurjanah, 2018). Opinion (Kamisa & Mirza, 2021), explaining that finding a job is not as easy as it seems, as one has to compete with other job applicants.

In addition to internal factors, the support factor of close people and the number of rivals in applying for a job can affect the increase in anxiety. (Nurjanah, 2018). The surrounding environment, such as the community or relatives who only provide pressure, like constantly questioning job prospects after graduating from college, can contribute to negative perceptions of job difficulty. In fact, the need to reduce anxiety levels is necessary by individuals to be able to set strategies in getting a job (YAZICI et al., 2023). This study specifically aims to provide an empirical picture of how negative perceptions related to difficulties (struggles) experienced by fresh graduate in the process of finding a job.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive design in a qualitative approach. (Panudju et al., 2024)to explore the negative perceptions experienced by recent graduates during the job search. This approach is highly accurate for a study involving a population or sample, utilizing relevant data sources. Descriptive analysis is used to identify relationships between social phenomena that are studied inductively (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023).

The target population in this study consists of alumni from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences who graduated between 2020 and 2024. Through this research, the researcher aims to explore the specific difficulties faced by recent graduates in the job search process.

Collection of field data sources, which is carried out through electronic media such as WhatsApp groups, by distributing the Google Survey Form Link to the Alumni of College Students (Abduh, M., Alawiyah, T., Apriansyah, G., Sirodj, R. A., & Afgani, 2023). The researcher obtained the results of 34 alums of fresh graduate students who responded to the questionnaire. In addition to questionnaires, online semi-structured interviews using Zoom or Google Meet applications aim to facilitate access to research and obtain in-depth confirmation.

The researcher involved four informants who were purposively selected based on variations in post-graduation conditions.

Table 1 Identity of Alumni Informant of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences

Initials	Year of Graduation	Age	Gender	Jobs
AEO	2024	23	Male	Work
US	2022	25	Male	Further Study
PRH	2024	23	Women	Work
WP	2024	24	Women	Not Working

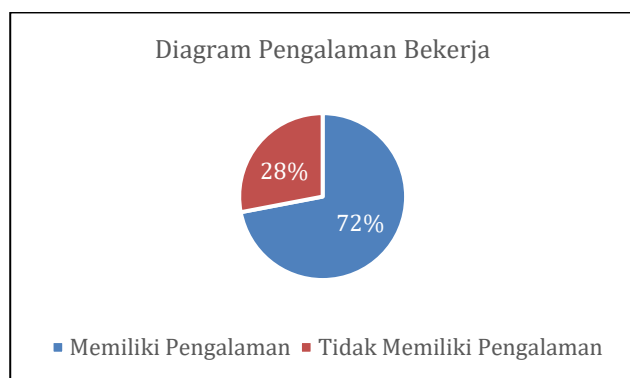
The selection of informants was conducted purposively, considering the diversity of educational backgrounds and job search experiences. The data obtained were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns of struggles, as well as to group the causative factors into internal and external categories. Therefore, the data received from the four informants is expected to be

sufficient to achieve the desired depth of analysis. However, the limited number of informants will be discussed as part of the research limitations in the discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of distributing questionnaires to alumni of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) students, data were obtained indicating that 72% of respondents had work experience, both during the lecture period and after completing their studies. Meanwhile, the other 28% of respondents had no work experience at the time of completing the questionnaire. Respondents who participated in this survey were in the age range of 22 to 25 years, which is generally the age of transition from education to the workforce. The following are the results of the percentage of respondents from students in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) who completed the research questionnaire.

Figure 1. Diagram of Alumni Students Who Have Work Experience and Have No Supply Experience



From the diagram above, the researcher conducted interviews as a

data amplifier. The informants reported that their work experience was gained through various activities, including participation in research projects with lecturers, internship programs, and part-time jobs. Some informants reported having worked, while others stated that they had no work experience. Informants who have not worked indicated that their semesters 7 and 8 are filled with thesis preparation activities, which reduces the time available to seek work experience.

These findings indicate that most FISIP alumni have a high awareness of the importance of work experience as a means to face competition in the labor market. This experience can be gained through various means, including part-time work, internships, campus projects, or full-time employment after graduation. However, some alumni do not have work experience, which may be due to various factors, such as a greater focus on academics, time constraints, lack of information about job opportunities, or other personal conditions. The relatively young age of the respondents reflects that they are still in the early stages of building their careers and are in the process of seeking opportunities that match their field and interests.

In the context of job search, the results of the questionnaire showed that 52% of respondents secured a job immediately after graduation, while the remaining 48% did not. Informants who have not been employed identify themselves as active job seekers, who continue to apply for jobs from one vacancy to another. Most respondents,

i.e., 80%, stated that they experienced significant struggle in finding a job. They are even willing to apply for jobs that don't fit their field of study or jobs that offer greater incentives. However, some other informants still attempt to apply for jobs that align with their interests and field of study.

As many as 56% of respondents reported that uncertainty about their future after graduating from college can affect their thoughts and feelings. Meanwhile, another 44% of respondents stated that they do not feel affected by post-graduation ignorance. Some informants reported that they had received offers to consult a psychologist and were diagnosed with anxiety.

As many as 66% of respondents stated that a less supportive environment caused their anxiety disorders. The neighborhood includes neighbors who often discuss negative things, even though their parents don't seem to care much about the situation. Additionally, the country's economic factors are also considered to contribute to the difficulty in finding jobs. Anxiety also arises due to bad feelings towards parents, as well as other obstacles faced, such as difficulty finding a job in your hometown.

A total of 64% of respondents revealed that their anxiety disorder is influenced by job qualifications set by companies, which often prioritize candidates with work experience. These qualifications usually include an age limit, such as 24 years old, which prevents some people from applying for jobs. In addition, 76% of respondents stated that a lack of soft skills and public

speaking skills also caused their anxiety disorders. Informants recognize that they are less active during their college years, which can lead to a lack of skills necessary in the workforce.

As many as 64% of respondents reported that their anxiety was also caused by thoughts about the possibility of failing a job interview. Informants stated that waiting for an interview call often caused anxiety, which was evident in their behavior during the interview, such as confusion and feelings of excitement.

Most respondents (76%) admit that they feel overthinking when they see a friend's posts about work, which makes them feel compelled to compete for a job. The results of the interviews showed that informants felt insecure, especially when they had not graduated, but their friends had already found jobs. This sense of insecurity also arises when their friends can reward themselves with their own salary.

One of the informants suggested that relationships are a crucial factor in finding a job. If one does not have a strong relationship, they are advised to try entry-level jobs as a stepping stone. The informant also suggested that each campus provide a forum for skill development. Some informants even choose to continue their education because they feel there are few promising career opportunities in the workplace today.

Fresh graduates are a group of recent graduates from universities who are in the transition phase to the world of work. Not all of them get a job right after graduation. Some are able to work

quickly, while others have to wait for an uncertain period of time. This waiting period creates a condition of uncertainty, which is a situation that is perceived as difficult to control and triggers stress (Kierkegaard, 2019). This uncertainty raises anxiety, especially when graduates do not yet have a clear direction about their career futures.

One of the factors triggering this anxiety is economic pressure and low wage levels. Opinion (Ishak, 2018) Stating that wages or income are a form of compensation for services provided by the workforce. However, the reality on the ground shows that many FISIP alumni are faced with job options with low wage levels, especially in the education sector. This causes them to have to reconsider their career options, even working outside the field of expertise in order to earn a decent income. This decision is often accompanied by a sense of overthinking, because they feel that they have failed to realize the expectations of the ideal profession.

Internal factors also worsened the psychological condition of fresh graduates. Some of the main causes include low self-confidence or self-efficacy (Nastiti, 2024). lack of work experience during college, as well as limitations in soft skills such as public speaking and adaptability. Lack of internship experience, project participation, or part-time work makes them feel unprepared for the job selection process, especially when faced with interviews. This can lower their performance and increase the likelihood of rejection, which ultimately reinforces

anxiety.

In addition, external factors such as the company's policy in setting the age limit for applicants also add to the pressure. Fresh graduates feel caught up in time because they are worried that they will not be able to get a job before the maximum age required. On the other hand, the demands on work experience by companies also narrow opportunities for new graduates. Social environments, such as negative comments from neighbors or family, as well as comparisons with peers who have worked and flaunted their achievements on social media, further magnify insecurity. This situation reinforces the perception that the job market is not friendly to new graduates and adds to the perceived psychological burden.

The perception of struggles experienced by fresh graduates is the result of individual interpretations of post-graduation challenges. According to cognitive theory, anxiety arises due to negative mindsets, excessive predictions of fear, and low self-confidence. Views that conclude that the world of work is unfair or unfriendly to new graduates with no experience also reinforce mental pressure and inhibit the spirit of struggle.

However, some fresh graduates are able to respond to this condition with adaptive strategies. Some of them choose to consult a psychologist to manage anxiety, apply for a job outside of the field of study as a career start, or start from an entry-level position as a stepping stone. There are also those who take part in soft skill development training or continue their education to a higher level to expand career opportunities. These strategies

demonstrate adaptability and flexibility in the face of competitive job market dynamics (Samsul Arifin, Rahayu Mardikaningsih, 2018)

Thus, the perception of struggles in fresh graduates is greatly influenced by work experience, social environment support, and how individuals interpret the challenges faced. This perception can be a source of motivation to grow and develop, but it can also be a trigger for anxiety if not balanced with effective coping strategies and adequate social support. Therefore, it is important for higher education institutions to not only focus on academic achievement, but also provide career development facilities and psychological mentoring for students before and after graduation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this research, it can be concluded that the anxiety experienced by fresh graduates in facing the world of work is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors include lack of work experience, low self-confidence, and limited soft skills such as public speaking skills. Meanwhile, external factors include qualification demands from the company, social pressure from the surrounding environment, as well as social comparisons with peers. However, some fresh graduates show the ability to adapt to these conditions through strategies such as applying for entry-level jobs, expanding relationships, and considering further education. Thus, the perception of struggles in fresh graduates is a reflection of structural and psychological pressures that affect their

mental readiness to enter the world of work. Social support, career guidance, and relevant skills training are urgently needed to help them manage anxiety and build better job readiness.

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