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Social Stigma and Construction of Educated Unemployment: A Case Study in Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

The number of unemployed people with undergraduate education has increased quite rapidly from previous years. It is estimated that thirty percent (30%) of university graduates cannot get the job based on their expertise. This research aims to explain the condition of fresh graduates from top universities who are forced to become educated unemployed. The results of this research are also expected to contribute ideas related to employment issues which are currently become the social problems for numerous fresh graduates. This research is using a qualitative method that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems through examining participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. This research describes the phenomenon of educated unemployment in Surabaya, that they are forced to accept the status of educated unemployed due the intense job competition and minimum of job vacancy. Based on research result, it was found that fresh graduates faced several obstacles in finding the opportunities for limited job vacancies. From this, it can be ascertained that not all fresh graduates can get the work based on their expertise, and most of fresh graduates have to receive an unexpected status as educated unemployed group for no specified time period. In addition, the high expectation from family and society for fresh graduates makes them become more depressed.

Keywords: Education, Entrepreneurship, Graduates, Skills, Surabaya Universities

INTRODUCTION

The high demand for every individuals after they graduates from school or universities is getting the job and have a stable income. With the stable income, the individuals are able to fulfill their needs and their family economy, also to improve their social status in society. In addition, work is not only become a source of earning the salary, but as a symbolic need and self-existence. Moreover, the work is closely related to career development of an individual themselves. A career is described as a series of jobs, employment, and appointments leading to a life in the workforce (Mali et al., 2022). Career development is directly related to personal growth and preparation for the workforce, that has an impact on future employment performance (Sumarni & Sudira, 2022). Unfortunately, finding a job is not as easy as fresh graduates expectations, since the number of fresh graduates who looking for a job is increasing every year.

The number of unemployed people with undergraduate education has increased quite rapidly from previous years. It is estimated that thirty percent (30%) of university graduates cannot get the job based on their expertise. In addition, the university graduates contribute the largest number of unemployed. Due to resource wastage caused by unemployment, the national economy is unable to reach its maximum output capacity (Susanto & Siswanto, 2022). It should be noted that the word unemployed refers to individuals who are not working, are still looking for work, work less than two days a week (random) or individuals who are still looking for a permanent job. Moreover, the individuals who become unemployed cannot work to meet their daily needs (self preservation), interactive and harmonious relations with the social environment (social bonding), self-esteem and the social environment. Moreover, unemployment frequently has a detrimental effect on a person's health and their behavior. Unemployed persons frequently experience depression compared to those who are employed (Kito & Ueno, 2016). In essence, the anxiety that befalls the educated unemployed is the discomfort that exists in the mind and the fear of an increasingly bleak and uncertain future coming out of crisis times.

During Covid-19 pandemic, the number of fresh graduates unemployed is increasing, meanwhile the company is reducing the number of its workers. As a result, many fresh university graduates must be labeled as educated unemployed and must accept the identity of educated unemployed for an uncertain time. Then, this research aims to explain the social construction of being educated and unemployed graduated from a top university. This research is expected to be able to contribute in the literature related to the study of employment sociology, especially studies that focus on young workers who are still productive and fresh graduates. This research aims to explain the condition of fresh graduates from top universities who are forced to become educated unemployed. The results of this

research are also expected to contribute ideas related to employment issues which are currently become the social problems for numerous fresh graduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educated Unemployment

The globalization and industrial revolution are becoming the problem in various country, including Indonesia. In Indonesia, this revolution is resulting in rapid development of dynamic employment. To increase and accelerate the nation's economic growth, the problem of unemployment must be solved by creating jobs (Wijayanto & Ode, 2019). In this case, evaluation has a very important role, especially in higher education, which must be able to align with the needs of workforce. One of these very important shifts has had adverse effects, including an increase in educated unemployment, both in the category of open unemployment and underemployment. The changes in global economic and social system have controlled the power and effects of world labor market which resulted in increasingly complex and difficult qualifications and competencies needed to become the employee.

Moreover, the dynamics of population and employment in Indonesia are increasingly concerning. The population in Indonesia is not evenly distributed in each region, that Java Island has the highest population density that is 57 percent of Indonesian population (Hardati et al., 2021). The increasingly competitive job market forces fresh graduates to be prepared to the burden of being educated unemployed. People who are unemployed are those who do not have a job but are actively looking for one and are currently eligible for employment (Husin et al., 2021). Moreover, the job seeker who has a large human capital investment will tend to have high aspirations for work that will have an impact on reservation wage. The existence of companies in the midst of society contributes to the national problem of unemployment (Putri et al., 2022). In obtaining the employment for company, it requires complex requirements and most of them are not owned by fresh graduates such as work experience and basic soft skills for work.

The process of externalization is recognition, adaptation, and adjustment of individuals to socio-cultural world in their environment. Individuals in this case can create something and produce symbols which understood and used as a representation of their life. The process of externalization creates rules and values to become more institutionalized and builds existing structures into an ongoing process. In accordance with data obtained during the research, the process of externalizing the educated unemployed in Surabaya can be explained through interaction with family, friends and the community.

Many previous research have been conducted with the construction of educated unemployed. For example, the research from Azeez & Akhtar, (2019) entitled *Educated Unemployment: A Case Study of Kerala* that indicates that the

workforce that has just graduated from university faces a dilemma in facing the challenges and rigors of the world of work. In addition, there are not enough job opportunities to accommodate a large number of fresh graduate workforce. Thus, the fresh graduate workforce must be patient in looking for a limited number of jobs and must be mentally prepared to face the stigma of society as a group of educated unemployed which adds to the narrowness of job opportunities. Meanwhile, the government is still working hard to find solutions related to educated unemployment in Korala.

Moreover, Hidayah & Hakim (2019) in their research found that there were employment problems related to the increasing number of educated unemployed fresh graduates from year to year. Numerous fresh graduates must compete strictly to get their job based on their expertise with limited opportunities. This situation resulting in many fresh graduates must be forced to accept the status of educated unemployed while still trying to find existing jobs vacancies. In addition, the social construction of those who have graduated from college but are still unemployed is very negative, especially the stigma from the family and community. This makes fresh graduates feel psychologically burdened. They must struggle to compete in getting a job, and must be psychologically immune to facing insults from the surrounding environment.

The two studies show that there is a construction of being educated unemployed by social environment for fresh graduates. Then, the fresh graduates who are forced to accept the status and become educated unemployed are in a subordinate position, considered a burden on the family, a burden on the state, and a failure in teaching at universities. The impact resulting from this employment problem is that many young fresh graduates experience severe stress because they feel they have failed to get a job and that there is no bright future in their minds.

Through this research, it can be learned that the stigma and bad image of fresh graduates who do not get a job makes them feel psychologically depressed, since they facing the difficulties in the competitive job vacancies and the stigma of social environment that regard them as products of failed education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is using a qualitative method that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems through examining participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior (Tenny et al., 2022). This research describes the phenomenon of educated unemployment in Surabaya, that they are forced to accept the status of educated unemployed due the intense job competition and minimum of job vacancy.

One of the prestigious universities in Surabaya is Airlangga University or known as UNAIR which has become a symbol of higher education in East Java, especially in Surabaya. However, having a top prestigious university graduate does not help fresh graduates to graduate immediately after completing their studies.

Many fresh graduates from UNAIR face many challenges in the competitive job market. In examining and uncovering the reality that occurs, qualitative research methods are able to describe and present a detailed picture of the data or state of research subject to find and understand a reality that occurs in society.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected in this research was conducted by direct interviews. The interviews were conducted in depth and structured according to interview guidelines that had been prepared, then the results obtained were in accordance with the research focus. The interviews in this research adjusted to informants' time. Thus, in-depth interviews can be conducted more freely and not in a hurry. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic which limited that all activities outside, some informants asked not to conduct interviews by meeting face to face and only one informant was willing to meet in person at Warkop Ramones near Campus B Unair. Therefore, most of the interview informants were conducted using Google meet application.

Data analysis in qualitative research is conducted by classifying and categorizing data based on several themes according to the research focus (Suyanto & Sutinah, 2013). The results of the interviews were converted into transcripts to explain the data obtained in detail. The interview transcripts were written according to the authenticity of informant's words. The data analysis is the final stage in research, which categorized, interpreted and discussed in accordance with the theoretical framework or previous studies that have been conducted related to the research themes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Fresh Graduates and Challenges

This research was conducted on fresh graduates from UNAIR Surabaya. In addition, Surabaya was chosen as research location since it is a metropolitan city that has many industries and offers a higher UMR than other regions. Moreover, Surabaya is full of competitive nuances, that the fresh graduate must be persistent and compete to be eligible for getting the job vacancies in Surabaya.

The subjects in this research were fresh graduates from Airlangga University, Surabaya since the community has proud achievements as a graduate from Airlangga University. The researchers chose research friends during their bachelor degree at Airlangga University, after the researchers conveyed the aims and objectives of this research and asked their willingness to become informants for this research.

In conducting interviews, the researchers used Google Meet based on the request from three informants since its more practical to conduct due the large social restriction in Surabaya. Meanwhile, another person had an in-person interview at Ramones Warkop near Campus B, Airlangga University, Surabaya. In conducting

interviews, the researcher did his best not to utter words that could offend the informant's esteem, due to the informants is fresh graduate that having difficulty finding jobs, and their emotions and psychology are easily offended by small things that used to be taken for granted. Therefore, the researcher tried as much as possible to protect the feelings of the informants. Apart from that, the researchers also occasionally inserted fresh humor for the interviews could run smoothly and the informants could tell stories in a relaxed manner. Then, the researcher can obtain complete data to support the quality of this research.

Regardless of several obstacles above, the researcher obtained 4 informants who all work as fresh graduate and trying to get permanent jobs and be able to support their future. The following is a table of informant data in this research:

Table 1. Research Subjects and Informants' Determination

No	Name	Educational Background	Hometown
1	Syad (22 years old)	Unair Bachelor of Sociology	Medan
2	Gel (23 years old)	Unair Bachelor of Anthropology	Surabaya
3	Cah (23 years old)	Unair Bachelor of Sociology	Surabaya
4	Nyo (23 years old)	Unair Bachelor of Public Administration	Gempol

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The first informant was Syad (22), a sociology graduate from Social Sciences Faculty of Airlangga University from Medan who had just graduated 4 months ago and is applying for jobs in various state-owned and private agencies. After completing his bachelor's degree for 4.5 years, Syad decided not back to Medan because he was ashamed of being unemployed after completing his undergraduate studies. Moreover, there is a desire to back to Medan to visit his father, who has been left by his mother. He stated that he will make his father proud after he has found a stable job. Until now Syad is still struggling to get a job while doing voluntary internships (without salary) at a company in Surabaya.

The second informant, Gel (23), is an anthropology graduate from Faculty of Social Sciences at Airlangga University who just graduated 6 months ago and is a native Surabayan youth. Gel is an only child from an underprivileged family, that his father works as a masseuse and his mother works as a housemaid. After completing his undergraduate education, Gel was involved in several research anthropology lecturers. While conducting a research project entrusted to him by his

lecturer, Gel applied for work in several agencies, both government and private agencies that opened job vacancies. Gel didn't give up despite numerous hiring organizations rejecting his job applications. He also didn't care about the stigma that people around him considered him an educated unemployed, he only cares about himself and not bothering his parents with financial matters anymore.

The third informant is Cah (23), a sociology graduate from Airlangga University from Surabaya that previously did an internship at a research institute with a small salary, but he doesn't care about it. Most importantly, at his age, he can gain life and work experience to build his career. After his internship is over, he helps his father manage a small printing press, although his neighbors and his mother asked why he didn't work in an office after completing his undergraduate studies. However, Cah states that now is his time to learn and gain many new knowledge and experiences since he believes that there is an opportunity for him in the future to become success and make his parents proud. Even though his neighbors knew him as an educated unemployed, Cah is still relaxed and smiles in facing the rumours. In addition, the most important thing for him is not causing any trouble for people, as well as living independently and happy.

The last informant is Nyo (23) who is a graduate of State Administration from Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Airlangga University, Surabaya. Nyo has completed her undergraduate studies within a period of 4.5 years. Currently, Nyo still doesn't have a permanent job and when asked by neighbors she answers that she is still in college. Some neighbor even asked why she hasn't graduated, and she remains relaxed and answers her neighbors' questions jokingly. Even though Nyo doesn't have a steady job yet, she remains to coach children's football in her village and sell clothes through online platform. For Nyo, there is nothing to regret in her life, because in her 20s is still confused about building a career. According to Nyo, what people in their 20s needs is try and not complain about the existing conditions.

The Stigma on the Identity of the Educated and Unemployed

Nowadays, the competition for job vacancies is increasingly competitive, and the job opportunities for fresh graduate is very limited. This is in contrast to the increasing number of university graduates and these fresh graduates who need jobs. This phenomenon resulting in fresh graduates must be forced to accept the status as educated unemployed and the negative stigma in society. This is in line with the statement from Syad:

“The stigma has become my daily consumption from my older sister who considers me a burden to the family.”

The same thing was experienced by Cah who had to accept ridicule from neighbors because he had not gotten an office job yet:

“I'm depressed, especially when I see and hear neighbors who are sarcastically commenting on me, because after graduating from college I can't work in an office wearing uniform.”

The average informant in this research must accept the status of educated unemployed because they do not have work experience which is an important requirement for applying for a job. This condition has been exacerbated by Covid-19 pandemic, which has limited the opportunities to find work. Therefore, fresh graduates who have just graduated from university face a dilemma in facing the challenges in finding the job vacancies. This is in line with the statement from Nyo:

“There have been dozens of job applications submitted, some have refused politely and some have not even replied to my email. Nowadays, it is very difficult to find a job.”

Nyo's statement was emphasized by the statement from Syad:

“There are countless and lots of rejections, especially since lacks of work experience in my portfolio, then the companies and agencies lack of trust and are a bit confused about recruiting fresh graduates with minimal job experiences like me.”

As stated by Azeez & Akhtar (2019) fresh graduates who have just completed their studies at university will face challenges in getting their job that they have never predicted and imagined. Universities should also have a clear knowledge of what is expected of them in terms of technical abilities and how these skills are transferrable to the workplace (Wafa et al., 2020). Moreover, being an educated unemployed means that fresh graduates are forced to adapt to their new identity which is unpleasant, one might even say embarrassing. The study conducted by Hidayah & Hakim (2019) explains that fresh graduates who have not found a job will carry a heavy social burden from their status and identity as educated unemployed. This is in line with the statement from Gel:

“The problem is there are some people and friends who think I'm unemployed, and I can't blame it.”

In line with Gel's statement, Syad expressed the heavy burden as an educated unemployed man:

“Being educated unemployed is more embarrassment than being unemployment that only graduated from elementary, junior, and senior high school. This is the reality that we faced, and we need to survive from this difficult situation.”

In addition, being unemployed is not always resulting in failure. In general, most fresh graduates feel inferior and depressed about the situation they are facing and the embarrassing status they are carrying. As stated by an informant named Nyo:

“There is a feeling of pressure because of numerous trying to get the job after graduating from college.”

However, one of the informants named Cah could learn from his status as an educated unemployed. For him, he can learn a lot to achieve his goals to become a successful entrepreneur from this unemployed status.

“When my father is not busy printing, I usually attend webinars about business, that I can learn many ways to develop a business.”

Through the statements of Cah, it can be understood that not all educated unemployed are depressed when having their status as educated unemployed. For some fresh graduates who do not intend to work in companies or government agencies, being unemployed is a way of learning the business skills which to develop their businesses in the future.

People experience anxiety on certain occasion, and anxious people can never be completely removed from society (Naibaho, 2022). This is also experienced by fresh graduates that become educated unemployed that has a negative stigma in their community. This is in line with the statement from Syad:

“Nowadays, don't be too optimistic because now looking for a job is hard. Just keep trying and lower your expectation.”

In addition, Gel expressed his anxiety because he had not found a permanent job that could guarantee his future and make his parents happy.

“Honestly, I've been pressured to face the ambiguity of this situation, I have sent job applications to various companies, and I have had enough of rejection.”

Moreover, college majors have an important influence on getting a job, that most companies and agencies prioritize science and economics majors. However, the opportunities offered for social sciences and humanities majors are very limited to a few sectors such as social services and several ministry agencies. Syad revealed that his major has limited job offering for its graduates:

“Our major (sociology) teaches us to become social researchers, but not to become employees or ready for practical work.”

In addition, soft skills are become the most important component for graduates in finding the job opportunities. Furthermore, according to Republic of Indonesia Ministry of Education and Culture (DIKTI) that the increase in unemployed graduates is caused by lack of soft skills or skills beyond main capabilities concerned. This was found in the statement of Cah:

“Students must have the organizational skills and take part in internships at agencies or companies while they are still in college. The learning is not only in class, but can be expanded and supplemented through internships or joining organizations that can improve the students' soft skills.”

Additionally, it is crucial to develop the knowledge acquired through various practical activities as well as to advance the knowledge that is provided in lectures.

This is also stated by Gel that “As long as I studied in Universitas Airlangga at anthropology department, I got many useful soft skills and hard skills that only need to be improved for helping me get the job in the future. Now, I am participating in anthropology lecturer’s research.”

Furthermore, being educated unemployed will result in excessive anxiety about their negative status. Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress that has different effects on every person (Naceanceno et al., 2021), and it happens because of wrong thoughts about something and excessive reactions to uncomfortable and embarrassing things. This is emphasized by the statement from Nyo:

“There is a feeling of pressure because who doesn't feel uncomfortable after graduating from college, but he doesn't have a stable job yet. Luckily, the neighbors didn't know I had graduated from college because I said I was still doing my thesis.”

In addition, several informants remained enthusiastic about continuing to apply for jobs until they got the job based their expertise, because they believe that life needs to be fought for, including in searching the work that increasingly competitive nowadays. This is emphasized by the statement from Syad:

“Life is a struggle. Even though finding the job is really hard nowadays, but we have to keep up the enthusiasm and don’t give up.”

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Fresh graduates faced several obstacles in finding the opportunities for limited job vacancies. From this, it can be ascertained that not all fresh graduates can get the work based on their expertise, and most of fresh graduates have to receive an unexpected status as educated unemployed group for no specified time period. In addition, the high expectation from family and society for fresh graduates makes them become more depressed.

Meanwhile, the government is still experiencing difficulties in overcoming the problem of increasing educated unemployment. The government programs called pre-employment cards are still not a solution for solving the educated unemployment. This condition also complicates the fresh graduate in finding their job with their status as educated unemployed. Moreover, fresh graduates also experiences anxiety due to the failure to get their job and fulfill their family’s expectations.

Suggestion

The increasing number of fresh graduates and competitive employment opportunities resulting in numerous educated unemployment in Indonesia, especially in Surabaya. It is important for universities to review the curriculum and provide the courses related to soft skills such as creative entrepreneurship and big data. Moreover, the students should be more active in joining organizational skills,

learning about technology and be creative entrepreneurs. Through appropriate curriculum and courses, the fresh graduates will be ready for building their own business or have the specific skill that will be helpful for them to find the job based on their expertise. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) needs to prepare students with tertiary institutions with the entrepreneurial, organizational and technological skills that are much needed to compete in today's world of work.

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