



Analysis of the relevance between higher education graduates and job opportunities in the digital technology era in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the relevance of higher education graduates to job opportunities in the digital technology era in Indonesia. This study uses a descriptive exploratory approach with a literature review method and direct observation of the research object. The literature review method is conducted by searching for research data or information through reading scientific journals, reference books, and published materials available in libraries and on the internet. This study also uses direct participant observation techniques, conducted by researchers on both employed and unemployed college graduates. The results of this study indicate that the relevance of higher education has a positive impact on job opportunities for some graduates who equip themselves with skills during their studies. From this research, it is hoped that the government and higher education institutions can improve the quality of higher education institutions and also the human resources (HR) of their graduates with the skills needed by the workforce to compete globally.

Keywords: Higher Education, Job Opportunities, Graduates, Digital Technology, World of Work

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INTRODUCTION

The increasingly severe challenges of the future in today's technological era include the decreasing availability of formal jobs as industries shift to using artificial intelligence (AI) technology in their production processes. The sight of queues of job applicants is presented vividly through social media, which circulates rapidly among the public. This raises anxiety among many about the uncertain future of finding employment as a means of earning a living. The high rate of educated unemployment in Indonesia has also increased drastically (Muhson et al. 2012).

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the workforce increased from 149.38 million people in February 2024 to 153.05 million people in February 2025. However, this number was not accompanied by a decrease in the number of unemployed during the same period. The number of unemployed in Indonesia in 2024 was 7.20 million people. Meanwhile, the number of unemployed in Indonesia in 2025 increased by 83 thousand people to 7.28 million people. This means that the number of unemployed grew by 0.08 percent from February 2024 to February 2025. On the other hand, the number of people who were fully employed in February 2025 was 66.19 percent. This decreased by 1.88 percent compared to August 2024, which was 68.07 percent (Gede Arga Adrian n.d.). Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS 2025) shows that the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) in February 2025 was 4.76 percent, down 0.06 percentage points compared to February 2024.

The high number of educated unemployment in Indonesia certainly has a correlation with the world of higher education which is experiencing a degradation of quality and morals that have hit academics such as the many cases of fake diplomas even by government officials to the ease of getting a bachelor's degree (S1), (S2) and even (S3) from various universities as long as they can pay a certain amount of money. It cannot be denied that the world of Indonesian education is not in good condition where the number of educated unemployment from Diploma, Bachelor's and even Postgraduate levels is very worrying for the nation today.

Since the fall of the New Order, many government policy changes have occurred, including the policy of universities having to finance themselves, which has had a significant impact on attracting new students. Universities must now compete to attract as many students as possible to survive and continue to grow, as students are the primary source of income for universities today. In this era, the Single Tuition Fee (UKT) or Educational Development Contribution (SPP) is the primary source of income for universities. UKT is an education payment system implemented at State Universities (PTN) in Indonesia, where students pay a fixed tuition fee per semester (syafiril., Jannah and Rifai 2025).

One example of the declining quality of graduates from state universities (PTN) and private universities (PTS) is the decline in the number of unemployed graduates due to the poor quality of their graduates. The admissions process at top state and private universities used to be very strict, but now anyone can study there as long as they have the money to pay the high entrance fees and tuition fees.

The importance of the relevance of college graduate competencies to labor market needs has been a primary focus of numerous studies. Research (Susanti, N., Wahyuni, S., & Hartono 2020) suggests that graduates with skills aligned with industry demands are more likely to secure jobs in strategic positions. Other research also suggests that graduates, as agents of change, must be able to create jobs to increase the value of work participation in Indonesia, which has an impact on economic growth (Novanda 2022).

The Indonesian context demonstrates that achieving a high level of education does not guarantee employment if graduates' competencies are not relevant to industry needs. Therefore, collaboration between universities and the business world is a crucial strategy to bridge this gap. This is increasingly relevant in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which demands mastery of digital skills and rapid adaptation to technological change. Education is one

of the government's core programs to improve public welfare. Currently, everyone has a stake in education, as it is one way to improve people's lives.

From several previous studies that were used as references, the framework of thought in this study uses a literature review from various research sources and also direct participant observation regarding the relevance of higher education graduates to job opportunities in the current digital technology era with the following image:

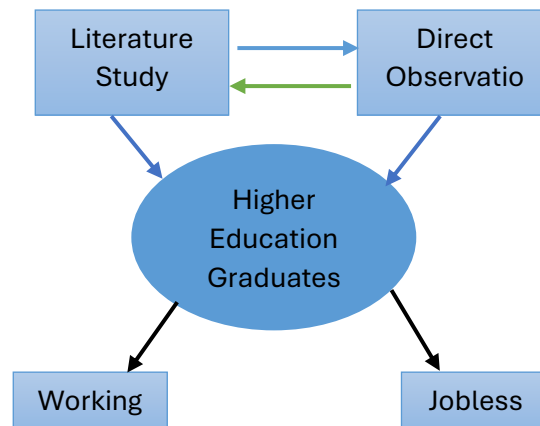


Figure 1. Framework

This research is very interesting to re-examine the relevance of higher education to job opportunities in the era of digital technology, which is increasingly being used by companies. The shift in companies' paradigms regarding college graduates has also had a significant impact on the rising unemployment rate among college graduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

University Graduates

A higher level of education is often associated with better job opportunities and more strategic positions within organizations. However, the relevance of the curriculum to job market demands is a determining factor in graduates' attractiveness to recruiters. Therefore, the relationship between the quality of university graduates and recruitment interest is a key issue in employment research. Quality education is crucial for a nation's professional development, playing a vital role in national development and increasing global competitiveness (Aman 2009) and (Carcolini 2017). Furthermore, crucial for student advancement, lecturers are encouraged to adopt modern approaches to developing the younger generation, particularly in higher education.

Universities need to track the extent to which their graduates are absorbed into the workforce. (Djamaris 2018) stated that assessing the quality of graduates is not sufficient simply by looking at their output, which is measured by their mastery of formal knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as reflected in their Achievement Index. It is also necessary to assess their outcome, namely, the extent to which university graduates are absorbed into the workforce. The rate of graduate absorption into the workforce and entrepreneurship is an indicator of a university's success in producing graduates (output). One measure of a study program's quality is the rate at which its alumni are absorbed into the workforce (Mandias 2021).

Similarly, (Camuyong et al. 2023) stated that higher education institutions (HEIs) equip students to acquire the necessary professional knowledge and skills that will contribute to the advancement of their chosen fields. Academic institutions provide quality teaching, conduct relevant research, and engage in significant extension activities to develop undergraduate students into competent and qualified future practitioners who meet the needs of the labor

market and global society. Another study (Alvarez and Cammayo 2023) stated that the most significant factors contributing to alumni employability are course content/curriculum, student services (training, seminars), and facilities.

Employment Opportunities

Education is the path to success. It is one way to address hunger. Connecting a college degree with employability is a core challenge for today's academics (Alvarez and Cammayo 2023). One of the key issues in employment, in addition to the state of the economically active population and the structure of the workforce, is unemployment. According to World Bank data (2018), Indonesia's unemployment rate in 2017 was 4.2%, indicating that it remains significantly higher than in developed countries (Budiharso and Tarman, 2020). Education must be oriented toward the competencies required by the workforce because the percentage of unemployed among educated individuals continues to rise (Ali Muhson, Daru Wahyuni 2024). From an economic perspective, unemployment is a product of the labor market's inability to absorb the available workforce (Muhson et al. 2012).

The relevance of university graduates to the world of work is a crucial issue that has received significant attention from various parties. University graduates are expected to possess competencies and skills that align with job market needs to ensure their successful absorption. However, there is a significant gap between the competencies possessed by graduates and current job market needs (Pramesti, Meisya, and Amrillah 2024).

To improve employability and higher promotion means that graduates are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to work in their respective fields (Maghamil 2025). The human capital theory by Becker and Schultz as cited in (Petchko 2018) supports this claim because further education and training can produce more productive and efficient workers. Their abilities and skills, which may include effective communication skills, human resource management, problem-solving abilities, and others, can be enhanced through additional training and postgraduate education.

Digital Technology

In the era of rapidly developing digital technology, all aspects of people's lives have been touched by technology, including the increasingly competitive world of work (Makmur, et al., 2025). Technology has replaced many jobs previously performed by humans, enabling them to compete effectively and efficiently in the global marketplace. Competition for jobs is also increasingly fierce, as all industries are now based on high technology to win in the global marketplace. Companies seek candidates who possess not only a diploma but also strong adaptability and digital skills. Graduates with competencies aligned with industry needs are more attractive to recruiters than those with irrelevant competencies. On the other hand, a skills gap exists, making it difficult for some college graduates to be absorbed into the job market. This phenomenon underscores the need for an in-depth study of the relationship between college graduate quality and recruitment interest.

The mismatch between the educated workforce and the job market has led to a high rate of educated unemployment in Indonesia. In fact, there's a growing understanding that companies no longer focus on university graduation or GPA (Grade Point Average) scores, but rather on those who possess specific skills to be hired. It's no surprise, then, that many young people are skipping college and opting to directly seek employment, enroll in specific skills courses, or learn independently. Self-study methods include digital resources, mentorship, and involvement in projects or organizations to gain practical experience, both in hard and soft skills.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach, as explained by Sugiyono 2016 (Sugiyono 2016), which states that qualitative research is conducted in natural settings, directly with data sources, and predominantly uses words, not numbers. This research is descriptive and exploratory in nature. The descriptive approach is used to explain problems or phenomena related to college graduates, while the exploratory approach is used to conceptually explain how college graduates find employment opportunities in today's digital technology era.

This research uses a literature study methodology that analyzes various theoretical references relevant to the identified problems. Data sources come from journals and scientific articles, which are then analyzed, reviewed, and methodically analyzed. Literature studies are investigations into the relevance of higher education to job opportunities in the digital technology era (Marzali 2016). This study also uses direct participant observation techniques, where observations are conducted by researchers while gathering information about alumni who have worked and also alumni who have not found work after graduating (Khaeriyah, et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is undeniable that in the job search process for fresh graduates, their Grade Point Average (GPA) is the initial assessment used to determine competency before entering the interview phase. Interviewers will use GPA to select applicants based on established administrative requirements such as minimum GPA, maximum age, major or study program, and so on. Although applicants with a high GPA do not guarantee easier job placement compared to those with an average GPA. Another important factor in employment is international language skills. Graduates who are proficient in one of the international languages, including English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, and others, have greater opportunities in the job market, especially in multinational and global workplaces.

In addition to having a high GPA and fluent international language skills, technical training also plays a significant role in helping fresh graduates find work. (Pratiwi 2012) stated that technical training has a positive effect on job opportunities. Another factor that influences the speed at which fresh graduates find work is the reputation of the university. The higher the reputation of the university, the higher the likelihood of its graduates finding work. The process for these graduates is easier and faster because employers perceive these prospective employees as having greater potential (Jun 2017).

A similar opinion was expressed by (Mandias 2021). The researcher suggested including soft skills development in the curriculum for students and personality development to shape the attitudes of prospective employees, thus enabling graduates to find employment more easily in the workforce. Furthermore, the researcher recommended honing students' skills through practical work and certifications required in the workplace to prepare graduates for the workforce.

From the results of the BPS (Central Statistics Agency 2025) Working Population Report According to Highest Education Completed, the level of education can indicate the quality and productivity of the workforce. In February 2025, the majority of the working population had an elementary school education, namely 35.89 percent. Meanwhile, the working population with higher education, namely graduates of Diploma I/II/III and Diploma IV, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral degrees, amounted to 12.83 percent and experienced an increasing trend from February 2023. The distribution of the working population according to the highest education completed still shows the same pattern as February 2023 and February 2024. The higher unemployment rate among educated groups indicates increased competition for high-paying

jobs in the modern sector. Individuals with higher levels of education face more challenges in finding employment.

This is certainly inseparable from changes in employee recruitment systems, both private and public, which prioritize specialized skills, communication skills, and integrity, which have received less attention from higher education institutions and educational curricula. Research (Al Habsi and Madbouly 2021) states that one of the biggest challenges faced by higher education students is a lack of time management skills. Teamwork and communication skills are also considered positive advantages for students during their studies.

Definition of unemployment according to Central Statistics Agency, 2025, Unemployment is the population aged 15 years and over who are not working but are looking for work; preparing a new business; have been accepted for work/are ready to start a business but have not started working/business; or feel it is impossible to get a job (desperate). The Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) is an indicator used to measure the workforce that is not absorbed by the labor market and illustrates the underutilization of the labor supply. The TPT results of Sakernas February 2025 were 4.76 percent. This can be interpreted as there are five unemployed people out of 100 people in the workforce. In February 2025, the TPT decreased by 0.06 percentage points compared to February 2024. In February 2025, the male TPT was 4.98 percent, higher than the female TPT which was 4.41 percent. The male TPT increased by 0.02 percentage points, while the female TPT decreased by 0.19 percentage points compared to February 2024.

In February 2025, the unemployment rate for vocational high school graduates remained the highest compared to graduates of other educational levels, at 8.00 percent. Meanwhile, the lowest unemployment rate was for those with elementary school education and below, at 2.32 percent. During the February 2023-February 2025 period, the distribution of unemployment based on the highest level of education completed was dominated by high school graduates, which in February 2025 reached 28.01 percent. Meanwhile, the lowest unemployment rates were for graduates of Diploma I/II/III and Diploma IV, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees, at 2.44 percent and 13.89 percent, respectively.

According to a Bloomberg study (Bloomberg Technoz 2025), the unemployment rate among college graduates has consistently increased over the past four years. As of February 2025, the unemployment rate among college graduates reached its highest level since 2021, at 6.23%. This can be seen in Figure 2 below:

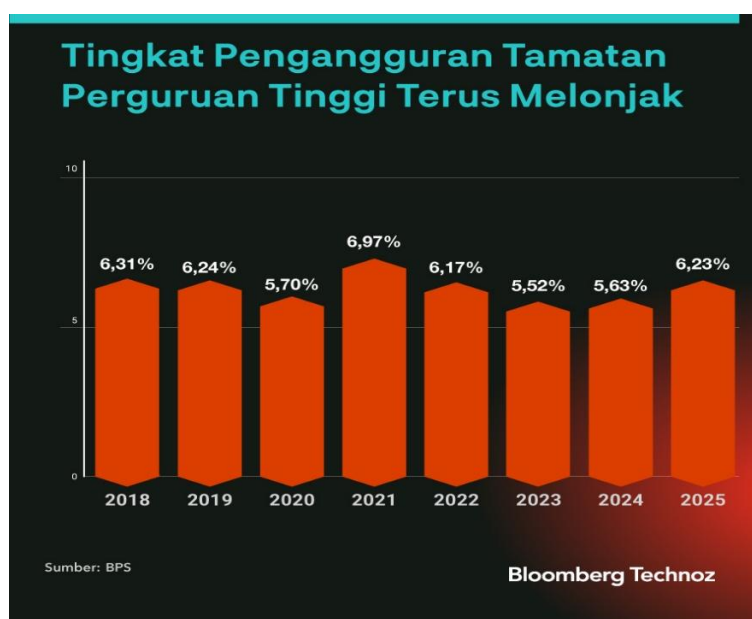


Figure 2. Unemployment Rate Among College Graduates Continues to Soar
Source: (Bloomberg Technoz)

The high rate of educated unemployment in Indonesia is partly due to the fact that Indonesian universities annually graduate thousands of new graduates from all over the country, both from private and public universities (Rizki and Pasaribu 2021). The proportion of unemployed college graduates (diploma IV, bachelor's, and doctoral degrees) also continues to increase year after year. In February 2023, their contribution to the unemployment rate reached 9.43%, then in February 2024, the percentage rose to 12.21%, reaching a three-year high of 13.89%. This figure equates to 1.01 million unemployed college graduates. Research (Munawaroh and Masrifah 2023) found that college graduates are more unemployed than high school and vocational school graduates. Based on research results (Nurlaily 2020), it is stated that it is necessary to improve the quality of higher education by providing courses related to the world of work, bringing in practitioners in the world of work who are experts in their fields, and encouraging university accreditation.

Furthermore, the wave of layoffs (PHK) is now growing. In the four months of this year, as of April 23rd, 24,036 people have lost their jobs, according to the Ministry of Manpower. This figure already reaches one-third of last year's total of nearly 78,000 layoffs. The increasing job shortage has increased the number of unemployed graduates, as indicated by the decline in the Job Availability Index for this group, which has fallen for four consecutive months. Although still at an optimistic level, at 104.6 as of April 2025, the downward trend is becoming worrying, reaching 28.4 points in just four months. The Job Availability Expectation Index for college graduates, or bachelors, fell slightly by 0.9 points in April. Still in the optimistic zone, this figure is also at its lowest level since September 2021, when the economy was still gripped by the pandemic.

Major is also one of the factors that is no less important as a determinant of an individual's opportunity to get a job, quoted from (Zein Zahiratul Fauziyyah 2025) that there are 10 majors with the highest unemployment rate in 2025, including: Anthropology - 9.4 percent, Physics - 7.8 percent, Computer Engineering - 7.5 percent, Commercial Arts and Graphic Design - 7.2 percent, Fine Arts - 7.0 percent, Sociology - 6.7 percent, Computer Science - 6.1 percent, Chemistry - 6.1 percent, Information Systems and Management - 5.6 percent, Public Policy and Law - 5.5 percent. The high unemployment rate in these fields is generally caused by limited job opportunities, fierce competition, and the need for high work experience. Most students with these graduates choose to work for themselves or become entrepreneurs.

Essentially, according to (Maghamil 2025), education serves as a stepping stone to better job security, higher positions, and better earning potential, making it a valuable investment for long-term career success. Research from (Nugroho, et al., 2024) states that programs in higher education, including internships and soft skills training, play a crucial role in improving graduates' job readiness, demonstrating that they develop the skills and competencies required by the workforce. The increasing number of unemployed college graduates each year is due to graduates being deemed to have insufficient work experience, grades that do not meet company standards, and insufficient competencies possessed by graduates.

The increasing unemployment rate, which is not matched by a large number of job opportunities, will undoubtedly make competition for decent jobs that match their skills even fiercer. This will also be a burden for newly graduated students who must find jobs that align with their academic fields. This high level of competition will inevitably impact student anxiety if they don't find the jobs they desire. The results of research conducted by (Vira Zwagery 2020) on Psychology students at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM) showed that 43.4% of respondents had high anxiety, 43.4% had moderate anxiety, and 13.2% had low anxiety. According to (Rizki and Pasaribu 2021), anxiety in facing the world of work is the excessive feeling of worry experienced by individuals when entering or facing the world of work.

Job qualification requirements requiring applicants to have work experience are also a contributing factor to anxiety in the workplace for recent graduates with no prior work experience. Many factors contribute to students' job search anxiety, including a lack of soft skills such as leadership and public speaking, a lack of organizational experience, a lack of self-confidence, and a lack of information about the job itself. Furthermore, a lower future orientation further increases students' anxiety about facing the workforce (Hanim, L. M., & Ahlas 2020).

Many companies are reluctant to hire new graduates for various reasons related to skills gaps, cost, and differing expectations. While graduates possess theoretical knowledge, they are often perceived as lacking the practical experience and social skills needed in the workplace. In fact, according to Kompas (MARYOTO 2024), nearly half of companies in the United States plan to remove the college degree requirement from job advertisements, according to a survey conducted by Inteligent.com.

From direct observations of university graduates in the author's area, it is clear that many have not yet found jobs that match their education and are still searching for them. The difficulty in finding employment today is due to several crucial factors, including the mismatch between the demands of the job market and the educational backgrounds of job seekers. Companies currently require work-ready applicants who possess the skills required for the positions offered. Furthermore, many university majors and study programs are poorly adapted to the world of work, creating unemployment among graduates. This mismatch between the skills required by the job market and the availability of job seekers is not new but has been recurring.

Universities can analyze the job absorption of their graduates by conducting alumni tracer studies. This allows them to assess the suitability of the workforce to their graduates, based on their majors or study programs. The results of these tracer studies are expected to enable universities to formulate policies tailored to the current job market. Recent research has shown that graduates from employee-level programs perform better in the job market than those from regular, non-employee-level programs.

"Linking and matching" the workforce with higher education is a policy to align higher education curricula and graduates with industry and job market needs, thereby increasing their relevance and competitiveness. This concept involves collaboration between education, industry, and government, implemented through various programs such as joint curriculum development, real-world project-based training, and internships. The goal is to ensure graduates possess the necessary competencies, reduce unemployment, and increase employment.

To better align job availability with job seekers, universities must truly focus on keeping up with technological developments used by companies today, such as digital technology, industrial technology, engineering technology, modern management, and other applied sciences. Furthermore, universities must also foster the passion of their graduates to become independent, creative, innovative, and resilient entrepreneurs, thereby successfully creating business and employment opportunities for others.

CONCLUSION

Higher education, as the driving force of national progress, is expected to produce top-notch graduates capable of competing globally. In today's digital technology era, universities must play a crucial role in producing a ready-to-work workforce with advanced technology skills to be absorbed into the labor market. The high rate of educated unemployment reflects the inability of universities to fully meet the current labor market demand for job opportunities. Unemployment also reflects the continued lack of qualified university graduates in the increasingly competitive job market.

The relevance of higher education graduates to job opportunities in the digital technology era is a major challenge that universities must overcome. Higher education is not merely about getting a bachelor's degree; it also demands the ability to participate in the real world of work and create job opportunities for others. The mismatch between job market demand and the supply of higher education graduates requires serious attention from the government and university administrators in this era of increasingly rapid digital technology change. Technological change cannot be stopped by anyone, but it is humans who must be able to keep up with it.

This research certainly has many shortcomings, far from perfection. Research on the relevance of higher education to job availability in the digital age is highly interesting to continue developing, as it represents a fundamental issue in higher education. It is hoped that future research will continue to develop research techniques to align issues related to higher education and the world of work in today's digital technology era.

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