

Social Phenomenology of Communication Science Graduates Experiencing Prolonged Unemployment

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Abstract. This study aims to understand the experiences and meanings constructed by 2024 Communication Science graduates of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu who experienced prolonged unemployment. This research uses a qualitative approach with Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology. The analysis focuses on four concepts: subjective meaning, intersubjectivity, typification, and stock of knowledge. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving four graduates who experienced a job waiting period of more than six months. The findings show that prolonged unemployment is not only interpreted as the absence of employment, but also as a life experience involving social pressure, anxiety about the future, declining self-confidence, and adjustment within family, friendship, and community environments. Subjective meaning appears through uncertainty and learning during the waiting period. Intersubjectivity is formed through social interaction, typification appears through labels attached to unemployed graduates, and stock of knowledge is reflected in the use of education, communication skills, digital media, and vacancy information as resources for job searching.

Keywords: *Social Phenomenology; Job Seekers; Prolonged Unemployment; Communication Graduates; Alfred Schutz.*

INTRODUCTION

The open unemployment rate among university graduates remains an important employment issue in Indonesia. Educated unemployment reflects an imbalance between the increasing number of graduates and the ability of the labor market to absorb educated workers. Nugroho and Wibowo (2020) explain that educated unemployment is related to the mismatch between graduate competencies and industrial needs, while Suryadarma et al. (2022) emphasize that the growth of formal employment has not always kept pace with higher education output.

This issue is also experienced by 2024 Communication Science graduates of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu. After completing their studies, some graduates did not immediately obtain permanent jobs related to their academic field. This condition is influenced by limited communication-related job opportunities in the region, practical competency demands, the development of digital industries, and the need for professional portfolios. Rahmawati (2020) states that communication graduates face strong competition because the communication industry tends to require practical experience, technical skills, and professional portfolios.

The job waiting period affects not only economic conditions, but also social and psychological aspects. Graduates who have not yet found employment often face repeated questions from their families, comparisons with friends, anxiety about the future, and declining self-confidence. McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) explain that unemployment is associated with increased psychological distress and decreased individual well-being. From a communication

perspective, this experience is important to study because job seekers must manage interaction, self-image, and social meanings that emerge during unemployment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Phenomenology is an approach that focuses on understanding the meaning of lived experience. Husserl (1970) views phenomenology as the study of human conscious experience, while Creswell (2014) explains that phenomenology is used to understand the essence of several individuals' experiences of a particular phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) emphasizes that phenomenology seeks to explore the subjective meaning of experiences directly lived by participants.

This study uses Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology. Schutz (1967) emphasizes that individual experience always exists in the everyday life-world and is formed through social relationships. The four main concepts used in this study are subjective meaning, intersubjectivity, typification, and stock of knowledge. Subjective meaning explains how individuals give meaning to their experiences. Intersubjectivity shows the formation of meaning through relationships with others. Typification explains the social labeling or categorization of individuals. Stock of knowledge refers to the collection of experiences and knowledge used by individuals to understand situations and determine actions.

A job seeker is an individual who is trying to obtain employment according to their abilities, education, and interests. In the context of university graduates, prolonged unemployment can be understood as an extended job waiting period after graduation. This condition does not only indicate the availability of employment opportunities, but also shows the transition from student identity to professional identity. Therefore, a phenomenological approach is relevant for examining how graduates understand themselves as job seekers amid social pressure and the demands of the digital labor market.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology. This approach was chosen because the research aims to explore the subjective experiences of Communication Science graduates who experienced prolonged unemployment. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used so that informants could explain their experiences openly, while observation and documentation were used to strengthen data related to the job search process.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: graduates of the Communication Science Study Program in 2024, having experienced unemployment for more than six months after graduation, actively seeking employment, and being willing to share their job search experiences. This study involved four informants, namely Nada, Westi, Yuni, and Dimas. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation, member checking, and persistent observation.

Table 1. Informant Profile

No	Informant	Gender	Status	Unemployment Duration
1	Nada	Female	2024 Graduate	8 months
2	Westi	Female	2024 Graduate	7 months
3	Yuni	Female	2024 Graduate	8 months
4	Dimas	Male	2024 Graduate	12 months

Source: Processed research data, 2026

RESULTS

The findings show that prolonged unemployment among 2024 Communication Science graduates is not only related to the condition of not having a job, but also to emotional pressure, social interaction, social labeling, and job search strategies. The findings are organized according to the four concepts of Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology so that the relationship between interview data, observation, documentation, and researcher interpretation can be presented clearly.

Table 2. Results Matrix Based on Alfred Schutz's Social Phenomenology

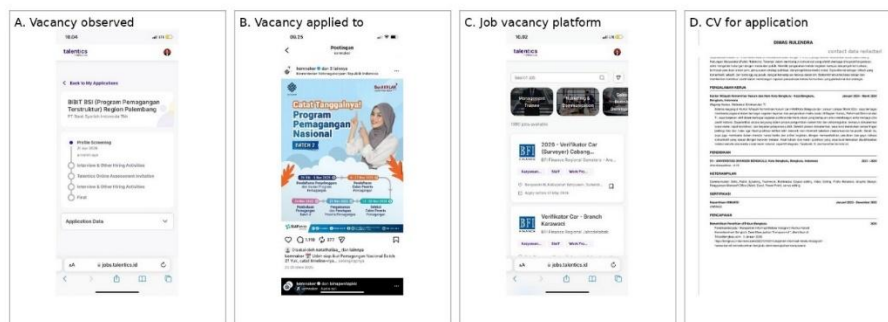
Schutz Dimension	Main Findings	Data Indications	Meaning of Findings
Subjective meaning	Unemployment was interpreted as an uncertain, tiring phase that made informants feel held back after graduation.	"Every day feels the same: sending applications, waiting, but not necessarily getting results." (Nada); "I have been looking for work for a long time but have not found one, so sometimes I feel stuck." (Dimas).	The job waiting period became a personal experience that affected self-confidence, views about the future, and the feeling of being a fresh graduate.
Intersubjectivity	The meaning of unemployment was formed through interaction with family, friends, and the social environment.	Families provided support but often asked about job progress. Friends who had already found work created social comparison, while friends who were also job seekers became spaces for sharing.	Unemployment became a social experience because support, questions, expectations, and comparisons from the environment shaped how informants understood themselves.
Typification	Informants experienced social labels attached to unemployed graduates, such as unsuccessful, unprepared, not trying hard enough, or left behind.	"People usually see those who have not worked as unsuccessful." (Nada); "Sometimes people think we are lazy or not serious about finding work." (Dimas).	Employment status became a social measure of success. These labels created pressure and encouraged informants to maintain a self-image of actively trying.
Stock of knowledge	Informants used their college experience, organizational experience, communication skills, digital media, and friendship networks as resources for job searching.	Informants searched for vacancies through Instagram, websites, job vacancy applications, friends, and chat groups. Dimas improved his CV and learned the skills needed by employers.	Unemployment was not experienced passively. Informants used previous knowledge and experience to develop strategies and maintain hope of finding employment.

Source: Processed research data, 2026

The results matrix indicates that the experience of prolonged unemployment follows interconnected patterns. At the personal level, informants experienced fatigue, anxiety, and confusion because job applications did not always receive responses. At the social level, interactions with family and friends could either strengthen or pressure their emotional condition. At the symbolic level, society tended to measure graduate success through employment status. At the strategic level, informants continued to use digital media, organizational experience, and communication skills as resources for entering the labor market.

Figure 1. Documentation of job search process, vacancy information, and CV preparation

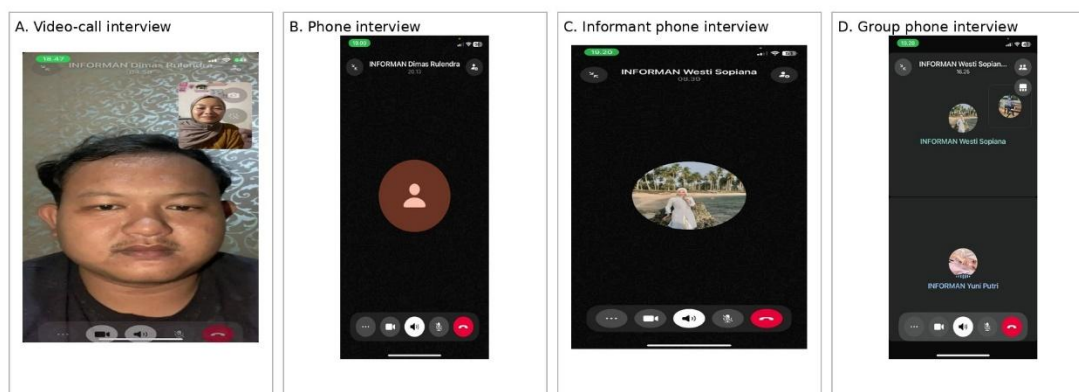
Documentation of the Job Search Process



Source: Research documentation, 2026

Figure 2. Documentation of online and phone interviews with informants

Documentation of Informant Interviews



Source: Research documentation, 2026.

DISCUSSION

The discussion shows that prolonged unemployment among 2024 Communication Science graduates is a complex social reality. In Schutz's perspective (1967), human experience cannot be understood only through visible events, but must also be interpreted through the meanings individuals construct in the everyday life-world. Therefore, the informants' experience as job seekers is not merely a matter of being unemployed, but a process of self-meaning formation, social relationships, environmental pressure, and survival strategies during the post-graduation transition.

Table 3. Discussion Synthesis and Research Implications

Discussion Aspect	Interpretation	Theory/Literature Connection	Implication
Personal meaning of unemployment	Informants interpreted unemployment as an uncertain, tiring phase that caused anxiety. Graduation did not	This is in line with Schutz's subjective meaning, in which experience is understood through individual awareness and reflection. The finding is	Career assistance needs to address graduates' emotional conditions, not only the technical aspects

	automatically become an entry point to permanent employment.	also related to McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) regarding the psychological impact of unemployment.	of job applications.
Social relations and environmental pressure	Family and friends played dual roles as sources of support and pressure. Repeated questions about work could be interpreted as attention, but also increased mental burden.	This is in line with Schutz's intersubjectivity, which explains that meaning is formed through relationships with others and shared social reality.	Family and social communication should be more supportive so that job seekers do not feel judged during the waiting period.
Social labels toward job seekers	Unemployed status generated social typifications such as unsuccessful, unprepared, or not trying hard enough. These labels affected self-confidence and how informants presented themselves.	This is in line with Schutz's typification and Goffman's (1959) view of self-presentation in social interaction.	There needs to be a shift in perspective so that the job waiting period is not treated as the only measure of graduate success.
Strategies and knowledge resources	Informants used college experience, organizational experience, communication skills, digital media, and friendship networks to search for opportunities.	This is in line with Schutz's stock of knowledge and with Susanto and Putri (2022), who state that communication-related employment requires digital skills and portfolios.	The study program needs to strengthen portfolios, internships, digital training, and job information access before graduation.

Source: Processed research data, 2026

These findings show that unemployment cannot be understood as an individual failure. It is shaped by the meeting point between personal hopes, social expectations, limited job opportunities, and the competency demands of industry. Communication Science graduates need to adapt to a labor market that increasingly emphasizes digital skills, portfolios, networks, and practical communication abilities. Thus, the job waiting period should be understood as an important phase for strengthening readiness rather than as a sign that graduates have failed.

Academically, this study strengthens the use of Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology in examining job seekers' experiences. Schutz's four concepts help explain that prolonged unemployment involves subjective meaning, social interaction, social categorization, and stock of knowledge. Practically, the findings can serve as input for study programs to develop more directed career development programs, such as CV and portfolio training, job interview simulations, digital marketing training, and expanded internship collaboration with communication industries and digital media.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that prolonged unemployment among 2024 Communication Science graduates of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu is both a personal and social experience. In terms of subjective meaning, unemployment was interpreted as a phase full of uncertainty, fatigue, and anxiety about the future. In terms of intersubjectivity, the experience was shaped by interaction with family, friends, and the social environment, which could provide support as well as pressure. In terms of typification, informants experienced social labels toward individuals who had not yet found work, such as unsuccessful, not trying hard enough, or left behind. In terms of

stock of knowledge, informants used educational experience, organizational experience, communication skills, digital media, and social networks to find job opportunities.

Overall, prolonged unemployment is not merely a condition of not having a job, but also a transition process that shapes self-meaning, mental resilience, social relations, and job search strategies. The study program is recommended to strengthen career development, portfolio training, digital skills development, and access to internship and employment information so that students are better prepared to face the labor market after graduation.

LIMITATION

This study is limited by the number of informants, which consisted of only four 2024 Communication Science graduates from Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all university graduates. The data also depended on informants' subjective experiences and the documentation available during the research process. Future studies may involve a wider range of informants, compare several study programs, or examine the roles of universities and industries in strengthening graduate work readiness.

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