

# THE DOUBLE BARRIER OF AGE REQUIREMENTS AND HIGH QUALIFICATIONS IN ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN INDONESIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Strict age limits and increased qualification requirements have currently dominated Indonesia's entry-level job market. Although intended for new graduates, many positions demand 1–2 years of experience, technical skills, or formal internships—contradicting the essence of entry-level employment. This paper investigates how these practices create structural barriers to formal employment. Using existing literature and a survey on new graduates, we examine the impact of age and experience-based filters on applicant confidence, readiness, and job access. The finding reveals a mismatch between employer expectations and what new graduates can realistically offer, given Indonesia's socioeconomic and educational conditions. To address this gap, the paper proposes reforms from both employer and policymaker perspectives to support a more inclusive labour market. It highlights how current hiring practices contribute to the growing number of unemployed new graduates, adding to the discourse on youth unemployment and workforce equity.*

*Keywords: Age limits, Entry Level Employment*

## ABSTRAK

Batasan usia yang ketat dan persyaratan kualifikasi yang meningkat saat ini telah mendominasi pasar kerja tingkat pemula di Indonesia. Meskipun ditujukan untuk lulusan baru, banyak posisi menuntut pengalaman 1–2 tahun, keterampilan teknis, atau magang formal yang mana bertentangan dengan esensi pekerjaan tingkat pemula. Tulisan ini membahas bagaimana fenomena ini menciptakan hambatan struktural terhadap pekerjaan formal. Dengan menggunakan kajian pustaka dan survei terhadap lulusan baru, kami meneliti dampak pembatasan usia dan pengalaman terhadap kepercayaan diri, kesiapan, dan akses pekerjaan pelamar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan ketidaksesuaian antara harapan pemberi kerja dan apa yang dapat ditawarkan oleh lulusan baru, mengingat kondisi sosial ekonomi dan pendidikan Indonesia. Untuk mengatasi kesenjangan ini, makalah ini mengusulkan reformasi dari perspektif pemberi kerja dan pembuat kebijakan untuk mendukung pasar tenaga kerja yang lebih inklusif. Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana fenomena perekrutan saat ini berkontribusi terhadap meningkatnya jumlah lulusan baru yang menganggur, menambah wacana tentang pengangguran kaum muda dan kesetaraan tenaga kerja.

Kata kunci: Batasan Usia, Persyaratan Kerja Pemula

## 1. Introduction

Entry-level jobs are meant to be a starting point for new graduates and young talent to begin their careers. These roles should provide a space to gain experience, build practical skills, and adjust to professional environments before deciding on the next steps (Gourani, 2024). However, in Indonesia, many young job seekers face serious barriers that make this first step harder. Two of the most common problems are the age requirements and

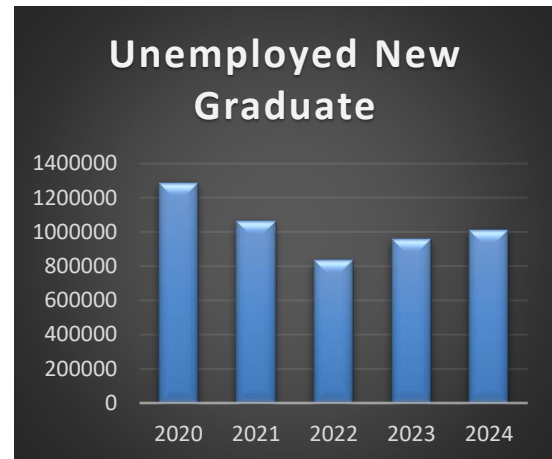
unrealistic qualification demands (Wijaya, 2024).

Starting from age limitations, companies in Indonesia often set a maximum age of 25 to 27 years for staff hire roles and 27 to 30 years for pro-hire positions (Pangestu, 2024). Since most bachelor's graduates are around 20 to 22 years old, they are pressured to secure employment quickly; otherwise, they risk being disqualified solely because of age. This issue is further exacerbated during periods of economic uncertainty such as the COVID-19

pandemic, when many companies halted recruitment and reduced job opportunities (Ayyubi et al., 2023). As time passes, young jobseekers grow older, while the availability of suitable roles diminishes, creating an unfair disadvantage. Moreover, many so-called entry-level positions require one to two years of work experience or advanced qualifications, which are not realistic expectations for new graduates.

This issue began even before graduation. Many students already struggle to secure internships while in university because the bar is getting higher. In some cases, internships even ask for prior internship experience, creating a frustrating paradox (Jaeger et al., 2023). Without experience, they could not have obtained experience. This cycle is particularly difficult for those from lower- or middle-class backgrounds. These young people often have limited resources and small networks to support unpaid internships, certification programs, or additional training that could help them become more competitive (Azzahra et al., 2024). Consequently, they are left behind.

The impact of these challenges is reflected in youth unemployment rates. According to the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), in 2024, the unemployment rate for those aged 20–24 was 15.34%, while for those aged 25–29, it was 7.14% (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2025). In addition, Indonesia's National Bureau of Statistics (BPS) also mentioned that the number of fresh unemployed graduates, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak, will increase in 2023. This shows that young people, especially in the early stages of adulthood, are still most affected by job market entry barriers (Marta et al., 2025; Muamar, 2024).



**Figure 1. Unemployed New Graduate Chart**  
Source: bps.go.id

In addition, they race over time. Once they have passed a certain age, they may no longer qualify for entry-level roles. The combination of strict age limits, skill mismatches, and unrealistic job qualifications holds true for many young Indonesians. Instead of supporting them in starting their careers, these hiring practices often leave them stuck in the starting line. This is not just a personal struggle; it reflects a broader issue that affects the development of Indonesia's future workforce.

The purpose of this study is to examine how age restrictions and demands for high qualifications affect access to entry-level employment opportunities for fresh graduates in Indonesia. It aims to explore how these requirements create barriers for young job seekers and how they contribute to the high number of unemployed youth in Indonesia.

This study also aims to highlight the gap between what employers expect and what new graduates can realistically offer, especially in terms of professional experience, certifications, and job readiness. By using a qualitative approach as well as a mini survey, this study analyzes the existing literature, policies, hiring trends, and fresh graduates' insights to better understand how current recruitment practices contribute to youth unemployment and labor market inequality.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are particularly important for three key groups. First, employers and HR professionals provide a reason to rethink how entry-level recruitment is performed. Shifting the focus to skills and

potential, rather than just age or experience, can help companies attract stronger and more diverse talent. Second, this study shows the need for clearer regulations to bridge the hiring gap for young jobseekers. Lastly, universities serve as a reminder to not only equip students with knowledge, but also ensure fair access to experience and networks. By addressing these challenges, this study aims to support fairer recruitment practices in Indonesia and help reduce the barriers that prevent fresh graduates from starting their careers, resulting in lower youth unemployment.

## 2. Literature Review

Several studies have discussed the challenges faced by young jobseekers in Indonesia when finding jobs. These include strict age limits for entry-level job recruitments. Even though these jobs are meant for fresh graduates, companies in general set an upper age limit between 25 and 27 years. This becomes a problem for graduates who need more time to finish their studies for financial, family, or personal reasons. Amelia et al. (2024) showed that age rules significantly reduce job opportunities for youth who are still capable and qualified.

An article on The Jakarta Post written by Windaningrum (2017), also raised public concern about age discrimination in hiring. The article argued that young people should be judged based on their skills, not their age. Similarly, Rismala et al. (2025) discussed how Generation Z often faces ageism in the workforce and called for stronger policies to protect young jobseekers.

In addition to age, many studies have also discussed how high qualifications are now required for entry-level jobs. These positions often require prior work or internship experience, even though the applicants are fresh graduates. Allen (2016) points out that there is a mismatch between what employers expect and what most graduates can offer. Research from Sultana (2022) and O'Brien et al. (2020) supports this by showing that many companies ask for experience before offering any chance to gain it, creating a frustrating cycle. Azzahra et al. (2024) add to this by showing that high job qualification standards contribute significantly to graduate

unemployment in Indonesia. Their study found that 40% of employers believed fresh graduates lacked essential competencies, and only 53% of graduates were employed in jobs aligned with their field of study. This mismatch between educational outcomes and job market expectations leaves many young people stuck in a cycle of under-employment or joblessness.

Putranto et al. (2024) found that vocational education is supposed to help bridge this gap, but this is still insufficient. Many graduates struggle to meet their employer demands. Ramadhani et al. (2025) added that other factors such as gender, location, and class also affect young people's access to good jobs. Students from outside big cities or lower-income families have fewer opportunities to build experience or networks during their studies. Natalia and Putranto (2024) also analyzed national labor data and found that many new graduates are not yet working, partly because of the mismatch between job requirements and real conditions. Rismala et al. (2025) and Amelia et al. (2024) also mentioned that unfair hiring practices affect students who cannot afford extra training or unpaid internships.

Despite growing academic and public attention to these challenges, there remains a lack of focused research that connects age limitations and high entry-level qualifications to broader patterns of youth exclusion from the labor market. This study aims to address this gap and explore how these barriers affect young job seekers, resulting in a new suggestion for the related parties to reduce youth unemployment.

## 3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach to analyze how age limitations and high qualification demands shape the entry-level employment market in Indonesia. The analysis combines insights from three main perspectives: Human Resource Management (HRM), youth employment and labour market trends, and social equity in access to work opportunities.

The data for this study were primarily drawn from secondary sources, including

statutory laws, academic journals, policy papers, news articles, and other credible and relevant publications. In addition, a short exploratory survey was conducted with approximately 50 respondents, consisting of new graduates. The purpose of this mini survey was to gather initial insights into how young job seekers experience age restrictions and qualification barriers during their job searches. This combined approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the current hiring practices in Indonesia and their broader impact on youth access to formal employment.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

##### *Age Limits Create Pressure and Exclusion*

The results of this study highlight the significant impact of age limits on young Indonesians' job-seeking experiences. Based on a mini survey involving 30 new graduates, 89.7% of respondents reported that age restrictions made it harder for them to apply for jobs, while 88.5% believed that job advertisements for entry – level positions should not include age requirements. Furthermore, 75.9% considered these limits unreasonable, and nearly half of the respondents admitted that they avoided applying for certain roles because they felt too old to meet the listed criteria. These responses suggest that age-based filters not only restrict access to opportunities, but also discourage applicants from affecting their perception of eligibility.

Although Indonesian labor laws promote equal employment opportunities, age-based restrictions remain legally ambiguous. Articles 5 and 6 of Law No. 13/2003 on Manpower, as amended by Job Creation Law No. 11/2020, emphasize non-discrimination in employment, but they do not explicitly prohibit age limits in recruitment practices (Amelia et al., 2024; Pangestu, 2024). This legal gap enables organizations to set arbitrary age criteria without facing regulatory consequences. By contrast, countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and members of the European Union have implemented stronger legal protection. These include the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) and the requirements that employers justify age-related hiring decisions (Rismala et al.,

2025), indicating a more inclusive global trend in recruitment policies.

Despite this shift, age restrictions remain embedded in Indonesian recruitment practices. For example, Rekrutmen Bersama BUMN officially accepts applicants up to the age of 30 for bachelor's degree holders. However, many participating companies still set stricter limits, often capping eligibility to 27 (Wulandari, 2025). Public and private banks also frequently set an upper age limit of 21 years for officer development and 25 years for entry-level programs (Pangestu, 2024). These hiring norms pressure young job seekers to secure employment as early as possible, not necessarily because they are job-ready but out of fear that they will soon exceed the eligibility threshold.

The survey findings also underscore how these age limits fail to reflect the varied paths young Indonesians take into the workforce. Although most students graduate between the ages of 21 and 23, others require additional time due to personal responsibilities, economic hardship, or external disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Ami, 2020). Respondents stated that age should not determine employability. They highlighted how students from low-income backgrounds may need to balance part-time work with their studies, while career changers or those pursuing education later in life often face further delays. Graduates from outside urban cities may also require more time and resources to access comparable employment opportunities (Natalia & Putranto, 2024).

While employers may use age as a quick screening tool to manage applicant volume, such filters can unintentionally narrow the talent pool and exclude candidates with valuable experience (OECD, 2020). Age-based hiring preferences may reduce diversity, hinder team learning, and overlook traits such as resilience and adaptability—qualities that often develop through nonlinear life and education paths (De Meulenaere et al., 2022). Moreover, research suggests that favoring younger candidates can lead to higher turnover rates and lower long-term employee engagement (De Meulenaere et al., 2022; Kartika & Purba, 2018).

This issue is particularly concerning Indonesia's current youth unemployment rate. According to the BPS (2024), 15.34% of individuals aged 20–24 and 7.14% of those aged 25–29 was unemployed, reflecting the challenges faced by young people entering the workforce. These figures indicate that unemployment is not simply a matter of lack of motivation or ability but is also shaped by hiring norms that do not account for the reality that young job seekers face (Pangestu, 2024).

As Indonesia currently faces serious concerns about the number of unemployed fresh graduates for the past three years, rather than expanding the talent pipeline, rigid age limits may constrain it, preventing organizations from accessing diverse and capable candidates. These findings highlight the need for a shift toward skill-based recruitment that values competencies and potential over age. Such a change could support more inclusive hiring, reduce youth unemployment, and better align workforce development with the evolving needs of the labor market.

### ***Employer Expectations Reinforce Labour Market Inequality***

The findings of this study illustrate that the misalignment between job titles and actual job requirements contributes to significant barriers for new graduates entering the workforce. The term entry-level, which refers to roles that require little to no experience (Gourani, 2024), is often misleadingly used to describe job descriptions that demand advanced qualifications or prior professional exposure. This inconsistency is evident in job vacancy postings for roles such as “Development Program,” “Management Trainee,” or “Staff” in various large companies. Though labelled as entry-level, these positions frequently require one to two years of working experience. This requirement even extends to several internship opportunities that note “internship experience is a plus.” Several job posts on platforms such as LinkedIn and company career websites confirm this contradiction.

#### **Marketing Internship, ShopeePay**

Internship

#### **Requirements:**

- Final semester student at a reputable university, preferably an overseas university
- Major in STEM preferred
- Fresh graduates are welcome to apply
- Excellent communication skills, both written and verbal
- **Marketing internship experience will be a plus point**
- High willingness to learn and eagerness to take on new challenges

Blue Bird Group

#### **Management Development Program**

Jakarta, Indonesia · 1 day ago · Over 100 applicants  
Promoted by hirer · No response insights available yet

✓ On-site Contract

Easy Apply Save

#### **About the job**

As part of our effort to continue providing service excellence, and to implement our initiatives to meet customer needs, develop new capabilities, **Bluebird Group is looking for Management Development Program.**

#### **What You Will Do**

- Receiving a series of training and development program, including project assignment and on-the-job experience as a program commitment in creating ready and fully-skilled operational leader for the company.
- Conducting projects, delivering results, and presenting findings and proposals as part of the Management Development Program.
- Learn and overcome challenges in the Department, with 12 months development target to becoming first-tier Leaders.

#### **What You Need**

- Min D4/S1 in all Majors with Min. GPA 3,00 (*Fresh Graduate are welcome*)
- **Preferably having 6 - 12 months experience (Especially experience as leader team)**
- Actively involved in extracurricular activities
- Familiar with Ms. Office
- Willing to work shifts (*including night shift*)
- Willing to undergo the program for 1 year
- Willing to places in our branches (Jabodetabek / Nationwide)

#### **HR GA Staff**

##### **Distribution**

📍 Seluruh Area 📶 Lulusan Baru

##### **Deskripsi Pekerjaan**

- Bertanggung jawab atas seluruh tugas administratif terkait dengan karyawan DC (Absensi, Payroll, BPJS, Asuransi).
- Berkoordinasi dengan dengan pihak internal/eksternal perusahaan terkait dengan kebutuhan karyawan DC.
- Bertanggung jawab atas proses rekrutmen personel DC.

##### **Kualifikasi**

- Pendidikan minimal S1 dari semua jurusan dengan minimal IPK 3.00 (skala 4.00).
- Lulusan baru atau yang memiliki pengalaman bekerja 1 tahun dipersilahkan melamar.
- Fasih dalam menggunakan Microsoft Excel dan Microsoft Word.
- Bersedia ditempatkan di Jabodetabek, Jawa Barat, Banten, Sumatera, dan Kalimantan Barat.
- Berpengalaman di bidang HR Generalist atau sejenisnya akan menjadi nilai tambah.

Lihat Lebih Singkat

Daftar sekarang

Kawan Lama Group

#### **Operation Management Trainee - Informa & Group**

Jakarta Metropolitan Area · 1 week ago · Over 100 people clicked apply  
Promoted by hirer · Responses managed off LinkedIn

✓ On-site ✓ Full-time

Apply Save



**About the job****About the Role**

Operation Management Trainee (OMT) is a special training program for young talents who have good leadership, analytical skills, and are innovative to be developed as future leaders.

**Requirements:**

- Bachelor's degree in any major from reputable university.
- 1-2 years of work experience, preferably in handling store operation, sales, marketing, or other related fields.
- Fresh graduates are welcome to apply (max: 25 years old).
- Passionate in retail industry.
- Experienced in multiple organizations, preferably as a leader.
- Good communication, analytical, and leadership skill.
- Willing to be placed all across Indonesia.

**About Kawan Lama Group**

Established in 1955, Kawan Lama Group is a multi-sector group of companies who are constantly innovating for improving the quality of lives. Manages 28 brand portfolios operating in six different sectors: Commercial & Industrial, Consumer Retail, Food & Beverages, Property & Hospitality, Manufacturing & Engineering, and Commercial Technology. Aiming to be more than family business - but beyond that, we are business for families, we carry the mission to bring values for betterment of lives through business development and continuous growth.

**Figure 2. Job Posting Example**

This phenomenon contradicts the essence of inclusivity and undermines support for the younger generation's transition into employment. When organizations label a role as entry-level yet expect professional-level competence, they reinforce a cycle that disadvantages those genuinely seeking their first full-time job. The survey results underscore this concern: all respondents acknowledged that most companies now expect one to two years of experience or relevant internships for entry-level roles. Although the term "entry-level" is still used, expectations around prior work experience, technical skills, and even certifications have become increasingly standard. Because of these heightened expectations, 89.7% of the respondents admitted feeling less confident when applying for positions if they lacked related experience.

These findings reflect a growing disconnect between employer expectations and students' typical educational journey. While some level of preparation is reasonable, the threshold for entry has shifted so dramatically that it has actively disadvantaged those without access to costly or exclusive opportunities. Access to internships, certifications, and extracurricular activities is often shaped by geography, institutional resources, and socioeconomic status. As noted by Natalia and Putranto (2024), students from the outer islands or low-to middle-income families face structural barriers that limit their ability to meet these rising standards.

What emerges, therefore, is a labor market that unintentionally rewards privileges. Students from elite universities and urban

centers are overrepresented in competitive talent pools largely because they can afford to be, with better access to training, internships, and professional networks. This dynamic not only fuels inequality, but also undermines national efforts to reduce youth unemployment and improve workforce inclusivity.

Beyond individual setbacks, broader implications are far reaching. As highlighted by Athallah (2024) and Allen (2016), overly stringent entry requirements contribute to skill mismatches, underemployment, and prolonged unemployment among educated youth. When graduates are unable to access roles suited to their qualifications, they often resort to informal or unrelated employment, which weakens the long-term potential of Indonesia's workforce.

This pattern is echoed in the survey's qualitative responses. Many participants expressed frustration with being stuck in the classic paradox: "You need experience to get a job, but you need a job to gain experience." Encouragingly, 96.2% of respondents agreed that involvement in student organizations, campus activities, or informal internships should be counted as valid alternatives to formal work experience. Moreover, all respondents supported the notion that training or onboarding programs could effectively substitute work experience, especially for fresh graduates. One participant remarked, "Every graduate's creativity can be shaped through training," highlighting the critical role of structured programs in building competence. Others emphasized that onboarding helps prevent avoidable mistakes and aids adaptation to workplace culture.

These responses indicate a promising pathway. Rather than insisting on rigid and exclusionary requirements, employers could embrace a more inclusive definition of experience — one that recognizes potential and contextualizes achievement. This shift was not only fair, but also strategically sound. According to Wandhe (2023) and Dundon and Rafferty (2018), effective human resource management is rooted in long-term development, talent nurturing, and internal growth. Hiring decisions based solely on short-term readiness risk overlooking high-potential candidates who, with the right

support and onboarding, could become invaluable long-term assets.

From a broader perspective, the survey revealed unanimous agreement among respondents (100%) that the government should play a more active role in expanding access to training and certification programs for jobseekers. If made widely accessible and affordable, such initiatives could help standardize competence expectations and reduce employer bias against non-traditional backgrounds. Backed by appropriate policies, these programs could enhance employability without depending solely on prior professional experience, which many young Indonesians lack due to systemic inequalities.

In conclusion, Indonesia's entry-level job market is facing a dangerous paradoxical. By demanding near-professional standards from graduates, organizations are effectively closing doors on a generation that is not underqualified but undersupported. Instead of serving as steppingstones, many entry-level roles have evolved from the outset into mini-professional jobs that require mastery. If this trend continues, it will likely lead to the demoralization and eventual deskilling of Indonesia's youth workforce — a risk that must be addressed with urgency and collective action.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper highlights the challenges within Indonesia's entry-level labor market, particularly regarding age restrictions and qualification expectations. Despite being framed as a standard hiring criterion, these requirements indirectly disadvantage young job seekers, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds or regions outside major urban centers. They contradict the intended purpose of "entry-level" roles, reinforce inequality, and contribute to the risk of youth unemployment crisis.

These findings suggest a critical misalignment between employer recruitment practices and the socioeconomic realities of Indonesia's emerging workforce. This gap creates a paradox that hinders access to formal employment, which is particularly problematic for countries with large and growing youth

populations. Without strategic intervention, Indonesia faces the risk of wasting the potential of its demographic dividends. These conclusions align with previous findings by O'Brien et al. (2020) and Azzahra et al. (2024), who highlighted how inflated job requirements and misaligned hiring expectations contribute significantly to graduate under-employment. Thus, systemic barriers should be addressed through the collaboration between employers and policymakers.

From the employer's perspective, they must begin by shifting towards competency-based recruitment to create a more inclusive and equitable entry-level job market. Rather than relying on age-based filters or requiring extensive prior experience, hiring practices should focus on evaluating relevant skills, aptitude, and growth potential. This can be effectively implemented through practical assessments, situational judgement tests, or project-based tasks, which better reflect real-world job demands. Employers also need to re-examine what constitutes an "entry-level" role by revising job descriptions to set realistic expectations for new graduates. Excessive requirements, such as multiple internships or advanced certifications, only serve to exclude capable candidates, especially those from less-privileged backgrounds. This issue was also raised by Allen (2016), who pointed out a growing mismatch between graduate supply and employer demand. To bridge the gap between education and employment, organizations should invest in structured early career programs such as graduate trainee schemes, internships, and mentorship opportunities that are accessible to students from public universities and underserved regions.

From a policy perspective, the Indonesian government must take a more proactive role in addressing the structural barriers that hinder youth employment. Labor regulations need to be updated to explicitly prohibit arbitrary age limits in recruitment, particularly for entry-level roles, where such restrictions are least justifiable. These legal protections must be supported by clear and accessible enforcement mechanisms that empower young applicants to report discriminatory practices. In parallel, government-led internship and apprenticeship

programs should be expanded with a deliberate focus on inclusivity, prioritizing students from low-income families, public universities, and geographically remote areas, to ensure equitable access to professional exposure and soft skill development. Furthermore, public universities across Indonesia must be equipped with better-funded and better-staffed career services that offer tailored guidance, employer engagement, and job readiness support to close the gap between graduation and employment.

Hence, the double barrier of age and overqualification in Indonesia's entry-level job market is more than a policy oversight—it is a structural issue that demands immediate and sustained reform. By fostering inclusive hiring practices and reforming regulatory frameworks, Indonesia can unlock the full potential of its youth, paving the way toward a more equitable and resilient labor market.

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