

Graduates Without Jobs: Understanding the Situation of Unemployed Kachin Youth in Myanmar

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Hpung Awng
Kachin Theological College and Seminary (KTCS)
Myitkyina City, Kachin State, Myanmar

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ABSTRACT. Unemployment among college graduates has become a global issue that puts young people in a disadvantaged position. Employing a collective case study design, this paper aimed to understand Kachin graduates' life experiences, subjective perspectives on unemployment, and career interests and challenges. Online interviews were conducted with seven participants who had graduated but remained unemployed for at least six months. The results showed that political instability, a downturn in the economy, and a mismatch between education and the job market were the key factors that contributed to the unemployment problem of Kachin graduates nowadays. The research also found that low self-esteem, social isolation, and financial problems are the major consequences of unemployment experienced by Kachin graduates. The majority agreed that they had career interests in self-employed business but faced the challenges of lacking economic capital. In conclusion, the systems of social institutions were the key factors causing the unemployment problems

of Kachin's young graduates; therefore, structural reforms are required to achieve lasting change. Putting this into context, unemployed Kachin graduates should try to be job creators at an individual level and in cooperated means rather than being job seekers or employees.

1.0. Introduction

The current world of development in this technological era emphasizes qualified human capital resources. Countries with more human capital resources are far ahead of those without it. However, not all governments have qualified human capital and can balance their labor market. Many countries worldwide are facing unemployment issues in different forms, like Myanmar. The labor market in Myanmar has not yet recovered from the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the military takeover, and the ensuing socioeconomic upheaval. Ongoing civil and political conflict, escalating public debt, a worsening trade balance, and rising inflation have negatively impacted the country's macroeconomic outlook (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023).

Myanmar's unemployment rate was 1.33% in 2021 and increased to 2.53% in 2022. An International Labour Organization report said that 1.2 million people had lost jobs in Myanmar even in the second quarter of 2021 when a political change came (Eleven Media Group, 2023). The latest report from the ILO,

in July 2023, said that 41% of employed people lost their jobs since the political change in Myanmar (ILO, 2023). Youth employment is essential to a country's socioeconomic growth and development. However, the youth unemployment rate in Myanmar peaked at 4.96 percent in 2020 (Statista, 2024).

Kachin is a minority group of people out of (135) ethnic groups in Myanmar. Kachin people comprise most of the population in Myitkyina City and Kachin State. Most Kachin people are Christian. Kachin people have a long history of political conflict with Myanmar's military junta. Therefore, the Kachin people support their ethnic armed group, the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) (Graceffo, 2024). Hostilities between these two parties resumed in 2011 and worsened after the military coup in 2021 (Radio Free Asia, 2023). Such a political crisis badly affected every aspect of the life conditions of the people of Kachin State.

The regional government of Kachin State tried to address the issue of unemployment by several means. For instance, since 2015, the regional government has allowed Chinese investment in tissue-culture banana plantations in five areas of Kachin State, including Myitkyina, to create more job opportunities (Hayward et al., 2020). However, the unemployment

*Correspondence: hpungawng@su.edu.ph
Hpung Awng, Kachin Theological College and Seminary (KTCS)
Myitkyina City, Kachin State, Myanmar



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rate in Kachin State still increased by 47.5 percent in 2020 (Myanmar Statistical Information Service, 2015). After the military coup in 2021, there were data limitations in the numbers of youth unemployment and the annual report of the graduates from Myitkyina University.

The United Nations defines youth unemployment as the unemployment of individuals aged 14 to 28. An unemployed person is characterized as someone who does not have a job but is actively seeking employment. To be officially classified as unemployed for statistical purposes, the individual must be without employment, willing and able to work, of the designated 'working age,' and actively searching for a job (United Nations, 2015).

Based on the different societal settings, there can be various factors causing graduate unemployment. In Malaysia, job mismatch significantly affects graduate unemployment due to the disparity between the skills demanded by the job market and those supplied by graduates. Consequently, over-qualification makes it challenging to secure employment. In summary, employment mismatch, the excess of required skills in the market, and over-qualification collectively contribute to the difficulty of obtaining work (Salahuddin et al., 2023).

In the case of the Philippines, a decrease in foreign direct investment and trade openness are some of the factors significantly affecting the unemployment rate (Caligagan et al., 2022). Similarly, in Chile, the commodity shock negatively impacted human capital accumulation in the most affected regions, thereby limiting future economic growth and increasing unemployment once the shock subsided (Rodriguez-Puello et al., 2022). Furthermore, political instability can also contribute to higher unemployment rates. Political instability, stemming from high uncertainty, may reduce labor demand and increase unemployment (Hailu Demeke, 2022).

Graduate unemployment has significant economic consequences, including the erosion of human capital, underutilization of labor resources, and a decrease in economic welfare and quality of life. It drastically diminishes the appeal to foreign investors and reduces foreign direct investment. Additionally, it raises the cost of doing business for the private sector, increases the cost of providing public services, and reduces gross domestic product. Furthermore, on social consequences, graduate unemployment creates perpetual unhappiness for the affected individuals. This ultimately results in a rise in violence, crime, drug abuse, and political instability. Additionally, it exacerbates psychological issues such as frustration, depression, hostility, abduction, murder, and armed robbery (Gelle et al., 2021).

Furthermore, unemployment or weak labor

market attachment tends to delay parenthood for both men and women, with a stronger association observed in men. Numerous studies have highlighted the connection between economic downturns and declining fertility rates across various European countries. Both men and women generally seek stable employment to secure a livelihood before embarking on parenthood. Low income tends to cause postponement of first birth among educated couples (Meitinen & Jalovaara, 2020).

There could be many causes and consequences of unemployment in Kachin state that need to be understood so that the real causes and consequences of unemployment among the deserving young Kachin graduates could be addressed by appropriate government agencies and private organizations interested in the youths. Investigating the situation of unemployed youth is one area to consider in knowing about the life experiences and possible solutions for unemployed youth.

The findings can alert and update educational institutions to review their education system. The findings can lead them towards developing work-based learning and education curricula that give learners more exposure to the real work environment. Moreover, the findings can encourage policymakers from the community and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment to develop strategic or master plans that deal with the problem of unemployment among graduates. The findings can also alert non-government organizations to propose more skills development projects for unemployed graduates that equip them with relevant knowledge and skills for the labor market. Finally, this study can benefit continuing undergraduate students by raising their awareness of unemployment among graduates and enabling them to effectively prepare for their future career choices.

Although some studies have examined the unemployment of youth in Myanmar, particularly in Yangon City, the largest city and the industrial and commercial center of the country, this phenomenon is still undocumented in the Kachin state. This research gap limits our understanding of the unemployment of youth from Kachin state. Thus, this study aims to explore the lives of unemployed Kachin youth from the Kachin state of Myanmar to better understand their situation in the labor market despite having earned college degrees. Specifically, this will answer the following questions: Why do the Kachin youth have no jobs even after finishing school? How do the unemployed Kachin youth sustain themselves? What are the individual or collective actions of Kachin youth to get employment?

2.0. Methodology

Research design. This study used a qualitative approach with a collective case study design. Yin (2003) asserted that qualitative research entails examining the meanings of people's lives as they are experienced in real-world conditions. It prioritizes the perspectives and voices of participants, allowing them to express their experiences and opinions in their own words. In a collective case study design, the researcher could compare and contrast different cases to identify patterns, similarities, differences, and unique aspects of the phenomena. Through this design, the researcher could also examine the causes and consequences of unemployment among Kachin graduates. The collective case study design also gave the researcher a contextual understanding of the phenomena in which each case operated. The researcher could get rich and detailed descriptions of each case and grasp meaningful insights into the phenomena. Therefore, a collective case study design was utilized to understand the broader phenomenon of unemployed Kachin graduates from Myitkyina City.

Research setting. This study was conducted in Myitkyina City, the capital of Kachin State, the northmost state of Myanmar. The city has a population of approximately 92,000 (in 2023), a mix of ethnic minority groups: Kachin, Shan, Bamar, some Chinese, and Indians (World Population Review, 2024). Kachin people make up most of the city's population.

The income sources of the people from Myitkyina City are from agriculture and mineral mining, such as gold and gems (Eleven Media Group, 2023). Apart from these, there are small numbers of weaving and other factories in the city, but they are small-sized factories and family business types (Lwin, 2019). Similarly, tourism and hospitality businesses have not yet been carried out on a large scale either. Many people, including young graduates, engage in hard manual labor jobs such as agriculture, construction, mining, maintenance, etc.

Because of the ongoing civil war, international communities placed Myitkyina City under a 'Do Not Travel' zone because of safety concerns (Smart Traveler, 2024). The military government imposed more rules and restrictions on mobility and social gathering. As a result, it became more difficult for the people of Myitkyina City to exercise their daily business activities and to get employed.

Myitkyina City has three universities, two colleges, and other non-government institutions. In the school year of 2018 – 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were about 9,000 students in Myitkyina University alone (Eleven Media Group, 2023). Before the military coup in 2021, the city used to be crowded with many college students.

Study participants and sampling. Considering the context of the study, purposive sampling methods were utilized. Sarantakos (2013) stated that in this sampling technique, the researcher purposely chooses the participants from the most qualified individuals based on criteria and the individuals' ability to offer valid and useful information. Therefore, among several ethnic groups living in Myitkyina City, only participants from the Kachin ethnic group were included because they have the largest population and can represent the rest. Moreover, both male and female participants from different locations of the city who were between 22-28 years old were selected for this study. Only the participants with single status were selected. They all graduated from different academic disciplines from Myitkyina University of Myitkyina City but were unemployed for at least six months before conducting this study.

Lawrence (2014) noted that qualitative researchers select participants based on their relevance to the research topic rather than their representativeness. Typically, they do not determine the sample size in advance and have limited knowledge about the broader group or population from which the sample is drawn. Sarantakos (2013) also mentioned that a small sample would be sufficient if qualitative data were required. It also said that a smaller sample size is required if the study aims to achieve deductive generalizations and a more in-depth data collection method.

The intended sample size of this study was ten participants. After interviewing seven participants, the researcher began to realize the similarities among the responses of the participants. However, he continued interviewing two more participants and got the same answers from them. The data from the last two participants were incomplete, and the researcher could not contact them again for clarification because of a bad internet connection. Therefore, only seven participants were considered since there was data saturation. Out of seven participants, four were male, and three were female.

Research instrument and data collection procedure. The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to gather primary data from the participants. Sarantakos (2013) described semi-structured interviews as a middle ground between structured and unstructured formats, incorporating elements of both: some aspects are more structured, while others are more open-ended. Therefore, the researcher formulated guide questions for the interviews to get the types of information sought, which, of course, is determined by the research objective. Those open-ended guide questions allowed me more freedom and flexibility in interviewing the study participants. The interview structure is flexible

with minimal restrictions, primarily serving as guidelines rather than strict rules. Thus, the researcher served as a guide or instructor while conducting the online interview with the participants.

Because the researcher is currently pursuing his graduate studies in the Philippines, he used online interviews (video calls) through the social media apps Messenger and Viber to gain primary data from the participants. His initial plan was to conduct the interview through Zoom or Google Meet. However, during the initial contact, he discovered that the participants were unfamiliar with those options. He conducted interviews with them through Viber and Messenger apps for their convenience.

Considering the limitations and challenges of gathering the research information mentioned above, the researcher employed data collection procedures that ensured the dependability of the gathered information as follows: First, the researcher interviewed five participants for a pilot study to test the reliability of the interview questions. The researcher also got help from one of his colleagues from Myitkyina City to contact the potential research participants who could offer valid and useful information about the study. Second, the researcher informed and explained the study and its objectives to the identified participants.

Third, after getting consent from the participants, the researcher sent them guide questions (translated into Kachin – the participants' dialect) before the interview. Yin (2003) argues that providing interview questions in advance allows participants to prepare thoughtful responses, ensuring a more productive and in-depth interview process. By sending questions ahead of time, participants can reflect on their experiences and provide richer insights during the interview (Yin, 2003). Fourth, the researcher set interview appointments according to the convenience of the participants. Fifth, he interviewed them as they arranged schedules and concluded with words of thanks.

During the interview, the researcher used the Kachin language, the mother language of all the participants. The researcher posed flexible follow-up or probing questions based on the given answers to generate deeper or more in-depth responses. This allowed the participants to express their inner voices, feelings, and viewpoints without a language barrier. It was helpful that the researcher got a detailed and substantial account of the phenomenon from the participants. The researcher requested two participants to encode their answers to the questions sent to them, which he further validated by asking clarificatory questions through Messenger.

The interview questions were divided into four parts. The first part focused on the participants' socio-

demographic background. The second part explored their perspectives on the causes of their unemployment. The third part explored their perspectives on the consequences of their unemployment. The final part focused on their future employment.

Data analysis. Procedures that ensure credibility and confirmability while analyzing the gathered data were applied. The analysis was based on two types of cross-referenced data: the responses of the participants and the secondary sources such as published literature and media sources. As the researcher used the thematic analysis approach to make sense of the available data, the researcher employed the following procedures. According to Braun and Clarke's (2017) approach to thematic analysis, there are six steps of thematic analysis, namely familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, writing the report.

First, the researcher began to familiarize with the audio-video recordings and the notes taken during the interviews. He read and edited raw data generated from the questionnaires that the participants answered. Meanwhile, he also recontacted three participants out of seven for the missing information and clarification that he was not clear about. Second, the researcher transcribed and typed the online interview recordings in Kachin and then translated them into English. In this stage, a data reduction process was also done to ensure that only data relevant to the research problem of this study would be treated. He analyzed the interview transcripts and the data from published literature and media sources such as journal articles, reports, and other scholarly publications. The researcher continued coding and processing data through which emerging themes and common meanings were highlighted and extracted. Sarantakos (2013) also mentioned that themes are invented, formed, and re-formed during the analysis process before they are fully constructed. Third, as the theme is a set of categories that share the same or similar meanings, he closely examined the data to identify similarities and differences that came up repeatedly. In this stage, the researcher looked for certain themes and classified them into certain groups or categories. Fourth, he repeatedly reviewed the captured and categorized themes to ensure accurate data representations. Fifth, he continued the process of defining and naming the classified themes. As the final step mentioned by Braun and Clarke (2017), he wrote up the interpreted findings. Then, he sent it back to the participants and asked for their feedback and confirmation on his interpretation of the data. Then, he labeled and defined the reviewed themes to ensure that the gleaned meanings were accurate and that the names could be easily understood. The analyzed and

interpreted findings of the study were also reviewed by the research supervisor.

Ethical considerations. The study was conducted according to the following ethical standards. First, the researcher explained the purpose and benefits of the study to the participants and obtained their consent before data collection. During the interview, note-taking and audio-video recording were employed with the permission and consent of the participants. The participants were free to quit or continue the study at any time. After the interview, all recorded videos and transcriptions (i.e., data) were saved and used properly. Personally identifiable information was not sought or collected throughout the data collection process. Furthermore, collected data were securely stored to avoid potential harm to the participants. The findings of the study were accurately presented and used, and other ethical standards were followed to protect the participants' welfare and rights. The used transcripts were securely saved for a certain period and were shredded in a manner that left no possibility for information reconstruction.

3.0. Results and Discussion

For ethical purposes, the study participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure their privacy and anonymity, as this knowledge made them more comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives during the interview.

The scarcity of job opportunities in Myitkyina City was why most of the cases interviewed were unemployed. However, this was more complicated based on their individual experiences and perceptions. Political unrest, a downturn economy, and a mismatch between education and the job market were identified as factors that contributed to the scarcity of job opportunities. The consequences of unemployment were manifested in mental health issues and financial problems of the young Kachin.

Self-employment appeared to be a common career interest, whereas lack of economic capital appeared to be a common challenge among the young unemployed Kachin in this study. The discussion that follows is divided into three themes: the causes of unemployment, the consequences of unemployment, and their career interests and the challenges they faced to overcome unemployment problems.

Cause of unemployment

Political instability was an important factor in determining the job opportunities of the graduates. Political instability may not be a direct cause of unemployment among graduates, but it contributes to the causes of unemployment. The majority of the participants agreed that they were unemployed

because of the ongoing political conflict in the country.

Yes, military coup occurred when I was applying for an accountant job in the city municipal office. The military government offered me the job I applied for, but my parents did not allow me to work for the military government. That is how I became unemployed till now. (Naw Awng, written answer to a questionnaire, November 24, 2023)

Myanmar has a long history of military dictatorship and political instability (Thabyay Education Foundation, 2016). In addition to the resumed civil war in Kachin State in 2021, the military launched a coup against the civilian government in 2021. The military coup further extended the political effects on the problem of unemployment among graduates. It eventually led to joblessness among the employed graduates and reduced the job opportunities for the new graduates. As in other cities of Myanmar, many young people, including employed graduates who were working in various public sectors, lost their jobs, as represented by this case:

Yes, I can say that I lost my job because of a political crisis. I am a high school teacher until 2022. But I quit my job after three months after the military coup in 2021. Because I did not want to support the military coup. (Naw Mai, written answer to a questionnaire, December 6, 2023)

In response to the military coup, many young workers from government sectors quit their jobs and joined the civil disobedience movement (CDM). Many officers, doctors, nurses, and school teachers became unemployed. Even though there are many job vacancies in government sectors, new graduates did not want to work for the military government. They chose alternative means of survival rather than working for the military government. As political instability is one of the root causes of the unemployment of graduates, it should be addressed by local political organizations with the support of neighboring and international communities.

Downturn economy. The downturn of the economy was another factor in the unemployment problem of Kachin graduates. Myanmar has been experiencing economic contraction or decline for more than one decade. During the period of economic

recession, the government and local economy could not provide jobs or create job opportunities for many young graduates, as reflected in this case;

The problem of youth unemployment here in Myitkyina City and other cities in Myanmar is that we do not have job opportunities. Here, we do not have big factories, companies, and mega projects that can provide jobs to hundreds of graduates. For this reason, many graduates were unemployed and went out for overseas jobs. I am also planning to go out for an overseas job either in Singapore or Malaysia. (Zau San, online interview, November 20, 2023)

Since 2011, the resumed civil war directed the economy of Myanmar to the downside. In addition, the current military government's incompetence and mismanagement have led to many economic problems for the country (Byrd, 2023). Political unrest, such as strikes, protests, civic disobedience movements, and civil war, negatively affects economic conditions. It led to international sanctions and blacklisting of Myanmar, which have deterred foreign investment and economic growth.

Political instability disturbed business transactions, operations, and other activities. Since it created uncertainty for future investment and success, many factories were closed, and many cooperating companies left the country. In addition, it also leads to the devaluation of its currency. This, in turn, results in money inflation, making imported goods and raw materials more expensive. Many workers lost their jobs. Human resources were misplaced and unutilized (Says, 2021). The overall economic situation in Myanmar is still heading to decline.

Here in Myitkyina City, job opportunities are very limited, especially for graduates. Only a few graduates used to get hired every year. Till now, I cannot find a suitable job for my degree. Nowadays, the chance of getting a job is getting further since the civil war is getting worse. (Seng San, online interview, December 17, 2023)

The economic activities of Myitkyina city have also declined along with the economic recession of the country. Myitkyina is a suburban area with smaller job markets than other urban cities in Myanmar. In addition, the political instability of the country created mobility restrictions in Myitkyina, which in turn deterred the economic activities of Myitkyina city. Traditional small-size weaving factories are the

most popular and dominant factories in Myitkyina. However, they are not required to hire graduates. Banking, tourism, and hospitality businesses also reduced their workforce and froze hiring new employees during this chaotic situation. New projects and trading cooperations were also delayed or canceled. In addition to this, the absence of diverse factories, shopping malls and centers, communication businesses, and other service businesses made it more difficult for graduates to secure employment in Myitkyina City.

The stagnation of the existing businesses, the lack of new businesses opening, and significant economic or infrastructural development set limits for the job opportunities of the graduates. The number and diversity of job opportunities in Myitkyina are restricted, making it challenging for graduates to find suitable employment that matches their skills and qualifications. The finding showed that the economic downturn was the root cause of job scarcity. Therefore, proper measurements or policies are needed for economic development, especially for the agriculture and entrepreneurship sectors.

A mismatch between education and the job market. The findings reveal that the mismatch between education and the job market is another factor in the unemployment of Kachin graduates. Skills mismatch refers to the gap between the skills that employers seek and the skills that individuals possess. In other words, it is a disconnect between the skills available and the jobs on offer. This occurs when education and training do not equip individuals with the skills needed in the labor market or when the economy fails to generate jobs that align with people's skills (ILO, 2020). The majority of participants agreed that the bad quality of education contributed to the causes of the unemployment problem. These sentiments were evident among Kachin graduates as follows.

I can say that I am unemployed because of my degree major. I graduated with a psychology major. I gained some knowledge about how our minds work but cannot find the right job for me. So, I can say that I learned something in school and have to do something else for a living. (Zau San, online interview, November 20, 2023)

I got my bachelor in history major but once I worked as a waitress in a bar. To be honest, that job had nothing to do with my bachelor's degree. (Doi Bu, online interview, November 20, 2023)

The mismatch between education and the job market can occur under the two circumstances.

First, when the level of education is higher or lower than expected in the job and occupation, it is called a vertical mismatch (ILO, 2020). This is a situation in which the development of society cannot cope with the educational curricula. Traditional societies with modern academic subjects are more subject to this phenomenon. In this case, students are equipped with the latest knowledge, which is not in line with the requirements of the job market of societies. As a result, students are overqualified for the skills demanded by the job market. Therefore, there will be a mismatch between the education system and the job market. It is vice versa for modern societies with traditional academic subjects.

Second, it is called horizontal mismatch, when workers are educated in a particular field but work in another (ILO, 2020). This refers to a situation where individuals have received education or training in a specific field but end up working in a different field altogether. This phenomenon is characterized by a misalignment between the educational qualifications of the workforce and the requirements of the jobs they hold.

Future jobs will differ in the ASEAN because of shifting labor markets; hence, job requirements demand more complex and sophisticated skills (Bachata & Bayoneta, 2021). These statements were encoded in the responses of the participants, who said that they were acquainted with a diverse set of theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills, which were essential in the job market. The education system of the Myitkyina Universities prioritizes theoretical knowledge, which is less applicable in practical life. The curriculums gave less exposure to the real working environment and were not designed by current developments in the field. The lack of practical skills prevented Kachin graduates from getting involved in the workforce.

The finding showed that the educational institution and labor market are not inline or correlated. Therefore, effective partnerships between universities and industry must be established to develop a curriculum for employment fulfillment and market suitability.

Consequences of Unemployment

Low self-esteem. The state of being unemployed can significantly affect both the levels of the individual and their families. Unemployed graduates seem to suffer more than others. One participant said:

In terms of mental effects, I felt like losing self-confidence and respect from others during my two years of staying unemployed. (Doi Bu, online interview, November 20, 2023).

The findings show that all the participants agreed that they have mental issues because of their unemployment. Almost all participants agreed that they experienced a sense of low self-esteem due to their being unemployed.

They often had feelings of inadequacy and incapability—being losers and worthless. Another participant recalled,

Since I am unemployed, I feel like my words are not taken seriously by the people around me, including my family members. (Du Du, online interview, December 29, 2023).

There was a moment for long-term unemployed graduates when they began to doubt their potential and lose self-confidence. They felt they could not meet the societal expectations that a graduate should have work and income. Some participants still rely on their parents or family members for their basic needs even after graduating. They also felt a sense of guilt about being unemployed. They lost self-respect and respect from others around them, including their family members.

Social isolation. In general, the societal expectation of a graduate is that he or she should be employed soon after graduation. Individuals who cannot meet this societal expectation may have feelings of shame, embarrassment, and diminished sense of self-worth. This was reflected in the response of Bawk Seng;

Yes, it affects my social life. Since I do not have income, I cannot join some social gatherings with my friends. Sometimes, I feel embarrassed and ashamed of myself. (Bawk Seng, online interview, November 29, 2023)

Most participants agreed that they felt the same way as mentioned. As job status often plays a significant role in one's identity, they used to question their values and places in society. Their unemployment made them feel the loss of individual roles and identities in their society. Lack of job titles and societal roles eventually led to social isolation and alienation. They also expressed that they tended to withdraw from social activities due to shame or embarrassment.

Financial problems. Unemployment typically brings financial challenges, such as struggling to meet basic needs. It can also affect individuals in various aspects of their lives. One participant said,

Of course, it affects my well-being and development. I could not enjoy my life and access skill development training like my other friends. And now, I am left behind. (Seng San, online interview, December 17, 2023).

Most of the participants agreed that they all have financial problems as a result of their unemployment. Financial strain can limit individuals' access to the basic needs for well-being. Participants expressed that they could not live happy lives compared with others who are employed and earning. They could not afford quality food, could not afford to buy cars, could not afford quality healthcare, and could not have leisurely lives.

The financial strain affects individuals' attainment of their basic needs and leaves them behind in their professional growth. Some participants wanted additional education or training to enhance their skills and employability. However, they could not afford the costs of their professional development as they did not have sufficient income. As a result, they are far more from employability and getting employed.

Unemployment also affects the entire families of the individuals who are unemployed. One case sadly recalled:

I was very disappointed when I could not pay medical expenses for my sick mother. I wished I could give her the best medical treatment at the best hospital. But I could not make it. (Bawk Seng, online interview, November 29, 2023).

Almost all the participants agreed that they could not support their families in terms of finances. Although they wanted to pay for the education of their younger siblings and medical costs for their sick parents, they could not support them. In addition, they felt that their existence had become an extra burden for their families.

Unemployment is a social problem affecting the unemployed and their social environment. In this context, they should be treated as social victims and provided with psychological, social, and financial support from the community and government.

Career Interests and Challenges

Self-employment through business. In Myitkyina City, self-employment is seen as one of the most important aspirations for government jobs among Kachin youth, their parents, and the community. This was the case of one participant:

Although I am a graduate, I do not want to work in government jobs. I

want to be an online saleswoman for cosmetic products. So that I can please my parents and be a role model for my younger siblings. (Seng San, online interview, December 17, 2023).

The majority of the participants were encouraged and interested in self-employed jobs. They wanted to have small, privately-owned businesses such as small restaurants and mini stores and work as tourist guides. Almost all Kachin families are directly or indirectly connected with their ethnical armed group (Kachin Independent Army) in one way or another. The long history of political conflict between the Kachin ethnic group and Myanmar's military junta created political hatred and tension between the two parties (Radio Free Asia, 2023). The military's control over the government regulations and activities paralyzed Kachin graduates' interest in working in government sectors. Therefore, government jobs are not seen as a priority and are reputed in the Kachin community of Myitkyina City.

As a result of the civil disobedience movement, there were many job vacancies in government sectors, and many people from different government sectors left their government jobs. Even so, the families and social environment of the participants did not support them working in government sectors, especially in the current chaotic situation.

Lack of economic capital. Going for a self-employed business seems to face more challenges and difficulties than being an employee in a company or government sector. Despite various requirements, economic capital is still one of the initial requirements to start up a self-employment business. It is needed for initial startup costs such as space, equipment, products, and other administrative expenses. Participants agreed that lack of economic capital is a common challenge for them, as reflected in the case of another participant:

I want to have a car retail business. I have got the business ideas and the required information for it, but I do not have money for the startup. Currently, I am unemployed and cannot save money for it. I discussed it with my family and relatives to get support from them. But still, I do not get any support from anyone. (Du Du, online interview, December 29, 2023)

In terms of economic capital, participants from the lower class faced more challenges to follow through with their careers. In addition to their poor family backgrounds, being underemployed was not in favor of saving for economic capital. They cannot get

support from their poor parents, relatives, and social environment either. The government still could not adequately support young people through loan banks or other means for the small business setup.

Lacking economic capital was a collective challenge for the common career interests of Kachin unemployed graduates. Therefore, it should be addressed as a societal need by the communities or organizations responsible for society's welfare.

4.0 Conclusion

The specific causes and consequences of youth unemployment may vary from one society to another. As stated above, educational, economic, and political factors contributed to the problems of unemployment among Kachin graduates. As a result, they also experienced psychological issues and financial strain.

Based on the findings of the study, if the problem is resolved, Kachin graduates can have strong self-esteem and make positive contributions to their social environment. Getting employed can also make them more productive for economic growth and more active in political activities. On the other hand, persistent youth unemployment can detrimentally affect the national workforce and economic growth. Leaving it unsolved can also lead to the termination of youth contribution to social, economic, and political benefits of society.

To solve or at least reduce the issue of unemployment, the researcher would give the following recommendations. Unemployed graduates should try to be self-reliant job creators; they should look for opportunities for self-employed businesses. On the other hand, creating job opportunities for youth will serve as a long-term solution for unemployed Kachin graduates. For this phenomenon to take place, the regional and national governments should carry out needed reforms in many interconnected sectors, such as economic, educational, political, technological, and other societal sectors, which interact and reinforce each other.

5.0 Limitations of the Findings

This study focuses on the Kachin youth from the Palana and Du Kahtawng blocks of Myitkyina City of Kachin State, Myanmar. The findings and discussion of this study are limited to Kachin youth who graduated from Myitkyina University and were unemployed for at least the past six months before conducting this study. All participants were between 22-28 and from middle-class and lower-class family backgrounds. They all are Christians and belong to the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC). In addition, the discussion was also corroborated by the published literature and news reports related to the subjects of the study.

The study found a gap between the demand and supply of the youth labor market in Myitkyina City; the supply was higher than the demand. The study also highlighted the phenomenon of mismatch between the graduates' career interests and their obtained education degrees and the mismatch between their obtained education degrees and the available labor market. In future research, addressing these identified gaps and mismatches will bring more potential implications for theory, practice, and policy.

7.0 Practical Value of the Paper

The important contribution of this study is that it can serve as a foundation for future studies concerning the problems of unemployment among Kachin graduates. Although there might be other unturned stones, it could present the clear subjective perspectives of the unemployed Kachin graduates on their being unemployed. The study was able to prove that social institutions (educational, economic, and political) and social human beings affected each other reciprocally in the sense that unemployed Kachin graduates were affected by the social institutions, which will, in return, be affected in the future by the unemployment of the Kachin graduates. Therefore, this study can influence the policy or decision makers of the social institutions in creating a labor market for young Kachin graduates and in providing knowledge and skills needed in the labor market. This study can raise public awareness and garner support for policy interventions to better prepare young people for the job market.

8.0 Directions for Future Research

Although the study clearly illustrates the subjective perspectives on the causes and consequences of the unemployment of Kachin graduates, it also raises the question of other objective perspectives on this matter. It proved that the problem of unemployment of Kachin graduates was not the result of a single factor but a multifaceted or complex phenomenon. This assumption aligns with the functionalist interpretation that considers society as a complex system comprising various interconnected and interdependent parts. It would be interesting to investigate this phenomenon through a functionalist approach from the eyes of policymakers, academicians, employers, and business managers. Therefore, in further research, a functionalist perspective should be applied to understand and solve the problem of unemployment of the Kachin graduates.

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10.0 Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflicts concerning the authorship, content, communities involved, research, and publication of this article. Wherever necessary, I have acknowledged the source from which I derived any ideas or extracts.

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Additional Author's Information:

HPUNG AWNG
hpungawng@su.edu.ph
hpungawngpausa@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8769-0266>