

New Members of the Proletariat: A Qualitative Study of the Over-Educated¹

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Abstract

This study critically examines how overeducation, a significant issue in Turkey's labour market, is experienced by higher education graduates. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 graduates from diverse disciplines and employment statuses living in Ankara, where provincial overeducation is relatively low, and Muğla, where it is high. Data were analysed qualitatively using content analysis. The findings are grouped under five themes. The transformation of higher education shows that massification increases graduate supply and accelerates the relative devaluation of educated labour. The reserve army of labour theme shows that surplus supply operates as an employer favouring pressure mechanism, suppressing wages and weakening bargaining power through unemployment and insecurity. The necessity dilemma indicates that most participants, facing livelihood pressures and unemployment risk, are compelled to accept low paid, informal jobs be-

low their qualifications. The return of nonmeritocratic criteria highlights that favouritism in hiring and promotion overshadows merit and confers advantage on those with stronger economic capital. The internalisation of inadequacy shows that, under family and societal pressure, structural problems are read as individual faults, prompting feelings of failure and inadequacy. Accordingly, the study departs from quantitative literature centred on micro indicators by framing overeducation as a structural outcome of capitalist accumulation strategies that systematically devalue educated labour and sustain profit maximisation.

Keywords: Over-education, Transformation of Higher Education, Neoliberal Policies.

JEL Codes: I23, J01, J08

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1. Introduction

In the 1980s, the Turkish bourgeoisie's project of building a low-wage economy integrated into global capitalism was realized through the neoliberal reforms of January 24, 1980, and the economic and political re-regulation that followed the September 12, 1980 military coup (Boratav, 2022; Boratav, 2005). In line with global capitalist imperatives, education was restructured on neoliberal lines (Ünal, 2005); institutions were refashioned to fit market logic and became sites where neoliberal ideology was reproduced in everyday life (Hız, 2010). Higher education, in particular, was constituted as a new field of capital investment; as commodification spread across all stages, education was converted into an economically valued commodity at the expense of its social benefits (Ersezer & Ulutürk, 2007; Sayılan, 2007).

After the crisis of the 1970s, the consolidation of neoliberalism within global capitalism intensified the commodification of education and expanded educational systems through rising student numbers. In Turkey, the "one university for each province" policy reflected this trajectory. In 1980 there were 19 state universities; by the 2022–2023 academic year, the total reached 207, including public and foundation universities. The number of graduates with potential labor-market entry increased from 36,919 in 1982–83 to 1,167,119 in 2021–2022, while the higher-education enrollment rate rose from 8.9% in 1980 to 31% in 2022 (CoHE, 1980, 2022, 2023).

However, the expansion of access to higher education has not been accompanied by a commensurate expansion of employment opportunities for graduates. The employment rate of university graduates fell from 79.5% in 1988 to 68.6% in 2022; over the same period, unemployment rose from 9.1% to 11.3% and labor-force participation declined from 87.5% to 77.3% (TURKSTAT, 2024). Despite this decline, graduates still display higher employment rates than other education groups (TURKSTAT, 2022a) and remain the most advantaged in average annual income. Even so, while diplomas confer a numerical advantage in labor-market entry, the quality and character of jobs obtained largely determine the substantive value of that advantage.

In this context, the Turkish Statistical Institute's 2022 Labour Force Statistics Micro Data Set shows that 14.2% of university graduates employed as "wage and salaried" workers are in clerical services and 13.4% are in service and sales. When "wage, salaried and casual" employees are included, these shares increase. Notably, a substantial proportion of graduates work in unskilled, temporary, and low-paid jobs. The rising supply of graduates produced by the ex-

pansion of universities has brought the phenomenon of overeducation to the fore, as more workers possess education levels exceeding job requirements, warranting analysis of overeducated workers as a distinct labor-market group. In 1988, 12.5% of higher-education graduates worked in jobs below their formal educational qualifications (TURKSTAT, 1988); by 2022, this figure had increased to 36%. Within the objectives of neoliberal restructuring and the dynamics of capitalist production relations, these trends indicate the progressive devaluation of diplomas from the 1980s onward and the structural transformation of educated labor into a reserve workforce.

Most studies on overeducation in Turkey (Acar, 2017; Ege, 2020; Filiztekin, 2015; Kantarmacı et al., 2021; Kurnaz-Baltacı, 2015) address the issue primarily through empirical analysis, while critical work linking overeducation to capital accumulation regimes, class structure, and labor devaluation remains limited. This study seeks to contribute by examining overeducation through a qualitative approach grounded in critical theory.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the paradigm of critical theory, which aims to make social reality visible and offer a critical analysis of the workings of the capitalist system (Neuman, 2019:205). Focusing on overeducation emerging from the massification of higher education, the study analyzes this phenomenon within capitalist production relations through the devaluation of skilled labor and processes of proletarianisation. It investigates labor-market imbalances generated by the education system's incorporation into market logic, demonstrating how employers deepen exploitation through enhanced bargaining power and providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the social and economic dimensions of over-education.

2. The Transformation of Higher Education and the Phenomenon of Overeducation

With the massification of higher education, the value of academic degrees in the labor market has significantly diminished. University diplomas, once exclusive to a narrow elite in the early 19th century (Collins, 2011), have gradually evolved into functional tools meeting the demands of a skilled labor force required by the capitalist system. This transformation has accelerated with market-oriented education policies shaped by neoliberal ideology, turning universities into "service stations"² serving capital accumulation (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Particularly over the last century, higher education has been presented as a fundamental instrument in the modern economic

² The title "From Ivory Tower to Service Station" used by Bowles and Gintis (2011) in their book "Schooling in Capitalist America" has great meaning in terms of emphasising the historical transformation in the role and importance of higher education.

system, enabling individuals to enhance social mobility and access better job opportunities to improve their economic status (Cunningham, 2016).

In order to comprehend the alterations occurring within the higher education system, it is necessary to acknowledge neoliberalism as an ideology that is confined to specific segments of the capitalist class. This ideology is one that supports the interests of the dominant classes, and it has the capacity to reshape the social structure. Furthermore, it functions as a mechanism that consolidates the hegemony of capital (Mautner, 2010; Marx & Engels, 1974, as cited in Holborow, 2012). Neoliberal discourse presents education as the key to individual success, reducing structural problems to personal inadequacies and thus functioning as an ideology that reinforces capital accumulation (Harvey, 2021; Clarke, 2020). In accordance with this ideology, the expansion of higher education has increased the supply of skilled labour. However, the labour market's insufficient capacity to absorb this supply has resulted in the devaluation of degrees and the spread of the phenomenon of over-education. Consequently, while university degrees support capital accumulation, they offer uncertain returns to individuals, effectively becoming an 'insecure currency' (Cunningham, 2016) and reducing graduates to the status of 'new members of the proletariat'.

The "credential inflation" (Collins, 2011:228) resulting from the expansion of universities throughout the 20th century, and the increasing uncertainty faced by graduates, necessitates that the issue be addressed not merely as an individual concern but as part of a structural transformation. Within this transformation, the phenomenon of overeducation functions as a structural mechanism, akin to mass unemployment, that provides the system with the flexibility it requires (Rumberger, 1981, as cited in Büchel, 2000; Bowles & Gintis, 1975). Therefore, the transformation of higher education and the overeducation phenomenon represent a deepening crisis within capitalist production relations, arising from the ideological and structural alignment between market demands and education policies.

2.1. Overeducation in the Literature

The concept of overeducation was first introduced as an economic issue by Richard Freeman in his 1976 book *The Overeducated American*, where he addressed the economic consequences of the rapid increase in university graduates and the declining returns from higher education. Research on overeducation in the literature has approached the topic from various perspectives by examining occupational discrepancies, mismatches between supply and demand for education and skills in the labor market, and economic returns. This lays a critical foundation

for understanding the impacts of overeducation on the labour force.

Although the term *overeducation* is often discussed alongside other concepts in the literature, these terms do not always overlap and may vary depending on the context. For clarity, it is essential to distinguish overeducation from other types of mismatches. The key concepts in the mismatch literature are educational/qualification mismatch, skill mismatch, and field-of-study mismatch (OECD, 2016).

- *Educational/qualification mismatch* occurs when employees possess a higher or lower level of education than required for their jobs. If the individual has more education than required, this is categorized as overeducation; if less, undereducation (Quintini, 2011b). This mismatch is also referred to as vertical mismatch (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2011).
- *Skill mismatch* refers to discrepancies between workers' general and specific skills such as literacy, numeracy, or problem-solving and the skills required by their jobs (OECD, 2016; Quintini, 2011a).
- *Field-of-study mismatch, or horizontal mismatch*, occurs when individuals work in a profession unrelated to their area of study (Montt, 2015, Robst, 2007).

Additionally, the term *underemployment* (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011), while broader in scope, is often used in relation to overeducation. However, this study specifically focuses on overeducation, where individuals' education levels exceed the requirements of their jobs.

Overeducation is commonly defined in the literature as a mismatch between an employee's level of education and job requirements (Rumberger, 1981). Smith (1986) considers this a consequence of declining demand for educated labor and the education system's inability to adapt. Overeducation also implies that knowledge and skills acquired through education are not effectively utilized in the labor market. However, Büchel (2000) argues that this definition is vague, and suggests that overeducation should be understood as having formal qualifications exceeding the educational requirements of a job.

Similarly, Quintini (2011a) defines overeducation as a situation where the worker possesses higher qualifications than the job requires, describing it essentially as an oversupply of educational credentials for the existing job structure. Capsade Munsech (2017) conceptualizes this as an excess of formal educational skills. Kucel criticizes existing definitions for implying that individuals are to blame for "wrongly" investing in excessive education. He emphasizes that the problem of overeducation is not the result of individual misjudgements, but rather a structural problem stemming from the labour market's inability to pro-

vide suitable employment for educated workers and the education system's failure to respond to market demands (Kucel, 2011).

2.2. The Consequences of Overeducation in Labour Market Dynamics

The widespread belief that a university degree guarantees access to better jobs began to shift in the final quarter of the 20th century, as the mismatch between graduates' qualifications and their occupations increased (Rumberger, 1984; Smith, 1986; Clogg & Shockey, 1984). In a study covering 1960 to 1976, Rumberger (1981) attributes the rise in overeducation to significant increases in educational attainment with only limited changes in the labor market's skill demands. McGuinness and Pouliakas (2016) posit that other contributing factors include seniority, unemployment, and field of study. Whilst human capital theory considers overeducation to be a temporary issue, Sloane et al. (1999) view it as a persistent problem. Kucel asserts that overeducation is too widespread to be seen as affecting only a portion of the workforce (Kucel, 2011).

Empirical studies on the impact of excessive education on economic returns show that this phenomenon has negative consequences on wages and productivity. Research conducted in the US labor market in particular supports this finding. Duncan and Hoffman (1981) found that approximately 40% of workers are overeducated and that the return on excessive education is half that of compulsory education. Rumberger (1987) revealed that excessive education does not always increase productivity, while Sicherman (1991) determined that overeducated workers earn on average 5% less than those with similar levels of education. Overeducation also exacerbates social inequalities through a "crowding-out" effect, reducing the employment chances of less-educated workers (Aberg, 2003), and disproportionately affects vulnerable groups such as youth, women, and migrant workers (Kucel, 2011; Capsade-Munsech, 2017). In addition to its economic consequences, overeducation can lead to psychological effects including disappointment, low self-esteem, stress, and reduced job satisfaction (Burris, 1983; Allen & van der Velden, 2001; Peiro et al., 2010). Jones, Kaya, and Nan's (2025) study on graduates in China reveals that being over-educated not only reduces economic returns but also lowers individuals' subjective well-being and job satisfaction. While capital seeks to increase accumulation by transforming the rising supply of educated labor into a cheap and flexible workforce, this renders overeducation not merely an individual issue but a key area for analyzing the functioning of the capitalist system. In this context, overeducation represents not only a personal concern

but also a critical component for understanding the dynamics of capitalist structures.

3. Methodology

In this study, the phenomenon of "overeducation" which has long persisted as a structural issue in the Turkish labor market, is examined through a qualitative research approach framed by the critical theory paradigm. This theoretical preference differs from approaches that seek to explain the phenomenon of over-education on the basis of individual rational choices or market imbalances (such as Matching, Signalling, Career and Queueing theories), aiming instead to question the social, ideological and structural dimensions of the phenomenon. The study aims to bring theoretical diversity and depth to the field by examining a known phenomenon (over-education) from a different paradigmatic perspective. The critical perspective enables a comprehensive analysis of the structural causes underlying the phenomenon, rather than merely addressing surface-level data. Within this framework, the chosen qualitative method provides flexibility and room for intervention during the research process, enhancing the study's effectiveness. Furthermore, it facilitates the exploration of the multifaceted nature of the cognitive and emotional impacts that events and phenomena exert on individuals, which are layers that cannot be comprehensively understood through quantitative data alone.

Accordingly, in order to explore how university graduates experience working in jobs that do not match their educational qualifications and how they make sense of this situation in their daily lives, in-depth interviews were employed as the primary data collection tool (Robson, 2017). Among the interview techniques, the "semi-structured interview" format was used.

Before commencing the research process, an application was submitted to the Ethics Committee of Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University³, and the research process was initiated following the decision of the Ethics Committee.

The selection of the provinces of Ankara (TR51) and Muğla (TR32) in this study is based on both empirical and pragmatic reasons. According to the analysis of the 2022 Labour Force Statistics Micro Data Set by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), the rate of over-education in the TR32 region (Aydın, Denizli, Muğla) is 40.6%, which is above the Turkish average (36%). This situation indicates that the region's structure, based on tourism, services and seasonal employment, concentrates higher education graduates in jobs below their qualifications. Education stock data at the NUTS-2 level also supports this selection. While the proportion of the population with

³ The Ethics Committee Decision is included in Appendix 1.

a 'secondary school and below' education level is 82.5% in the TR32 region, this proportion is 76.2% in TR51. In contrast, the proportion of the population with a higher education degree is 23.8% in TR51, which is 6.4 points higher than in TR32 (17.4%). This divergence points to a structural difference in the education stock, explaining the high over-education rate observed in TR32 (40.6%) during the same period and the low over-education rate in TR51 (30.6%). Therefore, Ankara and Muğla are suitable examples for a comparative analysis of two different education-employment regimes representing high and low levels of mismatch. In line with the nature of qualitative research, the aim of this study is semantic transferability rather than statistical representation. Ankara and Muğla are considered two opposing poles representing Turkey's socio-economic diversity: Ankara reflects a centralised and bureaucratic labour market structure, while Muğla reflects a regional economy focused on tourism and services. The researcher's field connections in both provinces facilitated access to participants from different sectors, thereby increasing the diversity of qualitative data. Furthermore, tables and figures⁴ showing education levels and over-education rates for Turkey as a whole and for the TR51 and TR32 regions were presented in the appendices to enhance the comprehensibility of the sampling framework.

The sample consists of 12 overeducated individuals, selected based on the results of the 2022 TURKSTAT Labour Force Statistics Micro Data Set analysis, which identified men, young people, and single individuals as the groups most at risk of overeducation. The interviews were structured around three main stages: (1) objective working conditions (e.g., salary, working hours, leave entitlements), (2) subjective experiences (e.g., emotions, thoughts, and psychological effects), and (3) reasons for accepting jobs below

their qualifications and future strategies. Conducted on a voluntary basis, the face-to-face interviews took place at locations chosen by the participants (e.g., home, workplace, café) and, with their permission, were audio recorded. The duration of the interviews ranged from 15 to 57 minutes. Participants were reached using the snowball sampling method, with initial participants recommending others.

The main criterion for participant selection was that, despite having a university degree, their current jobs did not align with their level of education. In this context, no comparison was made between the vocational orientation of their degree programs (e.g., engineering, teaching) and their current employment. As generalization is not the goal of qualitative research, but rather a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon, the sample size was determined based on data saturation. Interviews with a total of 12 individuals provided the opportunity to evaluate the phenomenon of overeducation in a multidimensional manner, and the process was concluded upon reaching the point of data saturation (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2015).

To determine whether participants were overeducated, the study adopted a method that combines Chevalier's (2003) "normative" and "self-assessment" approaches. First, under the normative approach, participants were evaluated objectively by comparing their actual education levels with the level of education deemed necessary for their occupations, based on occupational definitions (ISCO-08 occupation codes)⁵ (McGuinness, 2006). The subjective measure of required education was assessed through self-reported questions such as "How much formal education is typically required for a job like yours?" (Duncan & Hoffman, 1981:77). In this study, participants were asked: "What do you think about the compatibility of your job with your degree?"

Table 1. Interviewee Profile

	Age	Gender	Residence	Education Level	Field of Study	Occupation	Minimum Education Required ⁶	Perceived Educational Mismatch
P.1	27	Male	Muğla	Bachelor's	Contemporary Turkish Dialects and Literature	Construction Laborer	Illiterate	"Not compatible with my degree"
P.2	23	Female	Muğla	Bachelor's	Labour Economics and Industrial Relations	Office Worker	Literate	"I am not working in a job related to my qualifications"

⁴ The relevant tables and figures are included in Appendix 2.

⁵ The educational qualifications of the research participants were determined according to the codes in Turkey and then structured within the framework of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97). The qualifications of higher education graduates were evaluated at ISCED (5-6) level and were considered high. The participants' professions were coded using the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) and the Turkish Vocational Dictionary. This dictionary was chosen because it provides detailed information on the minimum educational requirements for each profession.

⁶ The Turkish Vocational Dictionary has been used. For access, see: <https://esube.iskur.gov.tr/meslek/meslek.aspx>

P.3	27	Female	Ankara	Bachelor's	Economics (English)	Junior Accountant	Secondary education (High school and equivalent)	"A job below my qualifications"
P.4	24	Female	Muğla	Bachelor's	Sociology	Sales Counsellor	Secondary education (High school and equivalent)	"I am not working in a job related to my education"
P.5	33	Male	Muğla	Bachelor's	Public Administration	Automotive Mechanic	Primary School	"I am not doing the job I was trained for"
P.6	32	Female	Muğla	Master's	Labour Economics and Industrial Relations	Street Vendor (Non-food)	Illiterate	"Actually, I am not doing a compatible job"
P.7	28	Male	Muğla	Bachelor's	Philosophy	Sales Counsellor	Secondary education (High school and equivalent)	"It has nothing to do with my degree"
P.8	27	Male	Muğla	Bachelor's	Labour Economics and Industrial Relations	Grocery Store Clerk	Primary School	"Not suitable"
P.9	33	Male	Ankara	Master's	Political Science and Public Administration	Store Manager	Secondary education (High school and equivalent)	"Of course I think it's not appropriate for my degree"
P.10	28	Female	Ankara	Associate's	Audiometry & Civil Defense and Firefighting	Call Centre Employee	Secondary education (High school and equivalent)	"It has nothing to do with the job I do"
P.11	24	Male	Ankara	Associate's	Pharmacy Services	Taxi Driver	Primary School	"Definitely not appropriate"
P.12	22	Female	Ankara	Bachelor's	Nutrition and Dietetics	Cashier	Primary School	"I definitely think it's not appropriate"

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously, allowing for an in-depth examination of the data and the identification of interrelationships (Glesne, 2013). In this study, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and the data were broken down into smaller units of meaning using content analysis (Domas White & Marsh, 2006), with similarities grouped under themes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015). The coding system was derived from the statements made by the participants, and the themes were subjected to continuous review and comparison with new data throughout the research process.

3.1. Ethical Permission for the Research

This study was conducted in accordance with the Guidelines on Scientific Research and Publication

Ethics in Higher Education Institutions, and no ethical violations specified in the guidelines were committed. The study (protocol number 2021/210083) was reviewed by the Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee on 29 December 2021, who unanimously found it to be in compliance with ethical principles.

4. Findings

The testimonies gathered through in-depth interviews serve as the primary data for the analysis and offer a profound understanding of the subject. Recurring themes emerging from the interviews include social pressure, feelings of inadequacy, the devaluation of labor, regret, disappointment, hopelessness, anxiety about the future, obligation, and support from family or acquaintances.

4.1. The Transformation of Higher Education: From Fortresses of Knowledge to Sandcastles

Under the influence of capitalist ideologies, education has become an investment focused on individual gain rather than providing social benefit, and this situation has constituted a critical turning point in the commodification of education. The promotion of privatisation and market-oriented approaches by institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the OECD has led to higher education becoming increasingly aligned with economic objectives rather than academic goals.

"There are so many universities being opened... They believe that even if they open a school and a campus in the smallest district, it will develop the area. But students go there with the hope of getting an education... They go to the most remote places... they struggle, they work hard... they give their everything... They believe that once they graduate, their lives will change... They'll practice their profession... But then you tell them: sorry... you are just a factor in the development of this district... you're just a pawn..." (P10, age 28, call centre employee).

The capitalist system's desire for economic growth deliberately creates a surplus of educated labour, thereby fuelling a destructive competitive environment. This situation accelerates the relative devaluation of educated labour by leading individuals who have invested everything in their pursuit of a better life to realise that they have been assigned nothing more than the role of 'pawn'.

The commercialisation of the higher education system also serves as a tool that seemingly reduces the unemployment problem created by the capitalist economy by keeping individuals in education for longer.

"I think the root of the problem is that universities have become so widespread... The young population has increased, they need to join the workforce, the unemployment rate will rise... What shall we do? Let's keep them out of the workforce, let's open a university. Let them go for four years, let them hang around. That way the unemployment rate will fall." (P8, age 27, sales counsellor)

The massification of higher education is permanently increasing the supply of graduates; this increase intensifies competition in the labor market through the reserve army of labor mechanism, lowers wages, and weakens employment security. The increase in the school enrollment rate in higher education from 8.9% in 1980 to 31% in 2022 clearly demonstrates this rapid increase in the supply of graduates. Interviews show that educated graduates under financial pressure are forced to work in jobs that are far below

their qualifications, insecure, and low-paid. Analyses based on TURKSTAT's 2022 microdata also support these narratives, revealing that overqualified individuals employed on a salaried, wage, or daily basis earn on average 35% less than those working in jobs commensurate with their qualifications. Similarly, the study by Ernas and Aksoy (2025) demonstrates that overeducated employees experience a significant loss of earnings compared to peers with similar educational backgrounds, emphasizing the persistent devaluation of skilled labor. These findings are a concrete reflection of the accumulation strategies prioritizing the reduction of wage costs in Turkey after 1980.

"The law of economics is that if something is too much in the market, its value decreases, and labour as much as a grain of sand is too much, so people are looking for work. They say they are going to labour like crazy, I am selling my labour to the market, but no one buys it, so labour becomes worthless. Unemployment should already be maintained at a certain level so that the minimum wage does not increase too much, for example, that is also a policy... but some employers say that they cannot find employees, so there is a problem at this point, so again, I think education policy is a very important factor in this matter." (P5, age 33, automotive mechanic).

In this context, over-education should not be interpreted as individual maladjustment, but rather as a structural process whereby the surplus supply caused by massification suppresses wages and bargaining power through the reserve labour force mechanism. When normalised in this dynamic labour market, public policies and workplace practices position skilled labour as a low-cost and flexible resource.

"It's because of government and neoliberal education policies. For example, there's a shortage of teachers in the country. They are bringing up the issue of paid teaching in order to employ teachers at very low wages. These policies force people into exploitation. They have to turn to other jobs... One of my friends, who stutters, scored 86 on the KPSS exam, but during the interview they told him, 'You can't be a teacher because you stutter.' The system shouldn't work this way. It creates conflict within the class itself... between permanent and substitute teachers. Or people resent retirees who don't step aside, saying, 'We can't get appointed because of them.' All of this stems from flawed government policies." (P1, age 27, construction laborer).

Marx and Engels (2014) state that the bourgeoisie has stripped all the professions that were previously held in high esteem and bowed down to, including doctors, lawyers, priests, poets and scientists, of their dignity and turned them into its own wage la-

bourers. In this context, the teaching profession may be viewed as increasingly situated within the dynamics of capitalist relations of production, whereby it has gradually assumed the characteristics of wage labour. The emergence of paid or contractual teaching reflects a distinct dimension of these labour relations, contributing to divisions and tensions within the profession that may, in turn, dilute collective consciousness. Accordingly, the bourgeoisie can be understood to have consolidated its influence in the educational sphere—as in other potential sites of dissent—reconfiguring it in ways that align with the broader imperatives of capital.

"In the morning, I prepare breakfast at the office, I'm responsible for cleaning, and I handle paperwork... I'm a personal assistant and also deal with personal errands. That's how I spend my working hours." (P2, age 23, office worker).

"I am a freelancer in the construction industry. I go to work whenever my employer calls me. Sometimes, I don't get called for two or three months. I do risky, uninsured, and dangerous work that requires physical strength. Sometimes, I work as a paid teacher, working full-time but only getting half-day insurance coverage. I earn less than others doing the same job. We are subject to labour exploitation." (P1, age 27, construction laborer).

"Now, since I work part-time, we don't get paid for overtime. But unfortunately, we do work overtime... Definitely, we do everything. I think that in the service sector, there are very few people who fully meet the job description and, as a result, are able to do only what is required by that job description. I've worked in many jobs. I've never just done what my job was. I always did more and more. It's the same here... Another issue with our jobs is that they keep reducing staff, so we end up having to do the work of several people at once." (P7, age 28, sales counsellor).

Participant narratives demonstrate that overeducation translates into health issues and loss of self-esteem in daily life, due to the expansion of job descriptions and the normalisation of precarious employment types. In this context, overeducation should be regarded not merely as an employment mismatch, but as an experience that produces detrimental effects on both physical and psychosocial levels.

The rise of knowledge as the main driver of productivity and increasing global competition has led to the transformation of higher education institutions, once seen as 'ivory towers', into 'service industries' that communicate and collaborate with the business world. When examining the working conditions of overqualified participants, it is observed that in today's uncertain and volatile environment, they are mostly employed in jobs that do not require quali-

fications and under harsh working conditions. This situation, coupled with low wage policies, has become part of employers' cost-cutting strategies and positions overqualified labour as a means of capital accumulation.

4.2. The Dilemma of Necessity: Unemployment? or Overeducation?

The neoliberal state has reduced education to the production of human capital and job readiness by making the education system an integral part of the market society. This process has led to the unprecedented devaluation of diplomas and certificates. The commodification of education in this way is emerging as a social problem (Standing, 2015) and is forcing university graduates to work in jobs that are far below their qualifications and do not meet their expectations. Standing (2015:206) explains this situation by saying that most people have diplomas that are rusting in their brains and are no longer useful. University graduates are aware that their diplomas have become an 'insecure currency' in the job market (Cunningham, 2016), and this awareness leaves them facing a dilemma: unemployment or working in low-paying, insecure jobs that are below their qualifications?

"I mean, I went to university for four years, so I can't accept a job that pays minimum wage, but now, for example, when I talk to my friends who graduated, we're all working off the books, and we're all getting paid less than minimum wage. It's because we don't have any other options. You can't stay unemployed for too long... You need to have some income, even if it's very little, to get by... People are forced to work for less than the minimum wage, especially university graduates. Unemployment is very difficult for them now; we have no other options." (P2, age 23, office worker).

The fundamental reality that contemporary capitalism presents to educated workers is the fear of unemployment or long-term unemployment (Gençoğlu, 2020). This situation, which has become sustainable through the deregulated financialisation process of capital accumulation, forces individuals to work in jobs that do not match their qualifications in order to sustain their livelihoods.

Within the context of the capitalist system, characterised by its flexibility and uncertainty, the fear of unemployment, exacerbated by economic pressures, has led to a shift in the employment focus of overeducated individuals. Rather than seeking employment that aligns with their qualifications, these individuals have adopted a more passive approach, accepting any available job offer. This shift in perspective has made the acceptability of owning a business more important than the quality or content

of the work itself. Overqualified individuals facing the threat of unemployment often accept working for less than the minimum wage or turn to informal employment. According to an analysis of the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TURKSTAT) 2022 microdata set, the unemployment rate among higher education graduates is 11.5%, the second highest after high school graduates; moreover, the fact that 68% of university graduates working informally are overqualified highlights the structural nature of this situation. Under these conditions, individuals' expectations of finding jobs commensurate with their educational levels are overshadowed by the fear of unemployment, and over-education emerges as a deep structural contradiction produced by the neoliberal system.

The qualitative nature of work affects not only the material but also the psychological and social development of individuals. Meaningful work increases individuals' self-esteem and capacity for self-actualisation, whereas work performed solely out of a sense of obligation is a source of social problems (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). In this context, looking at the participants' statements, working in low-quality jobs negatively affects not only economic but also physical and psychological health, undermining individuals' self-confidence and leading to social problems.

"My previous job was very hard. I worked in a bookshop... we delivered books to schools... There were two of us working there, but all the heavy lifting was done by me. Because the other guy was the manager. We would travel together in the car, but all the heavy work was on me. By the way... can I tell you something personal? It was really disgusting. While I was working at that bookstore, which was about 1-1.5 years... my feet started to smell. It had never happened to me before in my life. And my feet were always sore. And I developed a herniated disc. I have a herniated disc now... We're constantly lifting boxes, and sometimes the guy says, 'It's almost 200 metres, don't waste the petrol, you carry it...' There's constant verbal harassment in the store... We try to endure the bullying as much as possible... Out of necessity. Because the economy is really bad. Under these conditions, people can't live. That's why we try to endure the bullying as much as possible." (P7, age 28, sales counsellor).

"Unfortunately, the current economic situation is forcing us into this position. This necessity also forces us to tolerate things that a normal person would not tolerate... So I am working purely out of necessity." (P7, age 28, sales counsellor).

"This was the most suitable job I could find at the time... otherwise I would have been unemployed. That's why I chose this job... Because I've faced unemployment many times... It wasn't an

area I chose voluntarily, but I had to work out of necessity." (P6, age 33, street vendor (non-food)).

Overeducated individuals are forced to take jobs below their qualifications in order to achieve financial stability and avoid unemployment. The threat of unemployment compels workers to endure mobbing, harsh conditions, and low wages. This situation directly affects individuals' career planning and life satisfaction. Furthermore, over-education diminishes the perceived value of a university degree in society and leads to graduates being perceived as "losers." For example, P8, who works with people with lower educational levels in their professions, often encounters colleagues who express sentiments such as, 'I'm glad I didn't get a formal education; look, our situations are similar.' These conditions support Gorz's (2001: 82) assertion that "To get a job or to keep a job, be ready for all kinds of compromises, humiliation, submission, competition and betrayal, for 'he who loses his job loses everything'". These forced labour experiences of over-educated individuals have a profound impact not only on the economic level, but also on their relations with their social and cultural environment. The fear of unemployment emerges as the most powerful factor shaping individuals' decisions, forcing them to willingly accept exploitation. In this context, over-education compels individuals to compromise with the precarious forms of employment imposed by the market.

4.3. Capitalist Expansion and Ideological Control: The Role of the "Reserve Army of Labour"

Under neoliberal policies, the quantitative expansion of education has generated a surplus of highly educated labor, transforming universities into reservoirs of cheap, flexible manpower. Although the Labor Law No. 4857 sets the standard workweek at 45 hours, 2022 microdata show that 28% of higher education graduates work beyond this limit, with over half of them (55.5%) classified as overeducated and averaging 9.5 hours of unpaid overtime per week. These patterns align with Karahanoğlu's (2025) empirical findings, which reveal that overeducated employees earn substantially less than their well-matched counterparts and that wage losses are most severe among lower-income workers—indicating a systematic devaluation of qualified labor. The capitalist system requires not only a supply of skilled labor for strong expansion, but also a "reserve army of labor" willing to accept low wages (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Therefore, a vast pool of educated graduates has become a structural element serving the interests of employers.

"University graduates are very unemployed and there are too many university graduates. The army of unemployed people mostly consists of

university graduates... People are forced to work for less than the minimum wage... We have no other choice now. We have to find a job even if it is not in our field." (P2, age 23, office worker).

Throughout the historical course of capitalism, the reserve army of labour, which has consistently maintained its existence and functioned as an ideological control mechanism, is in fact the long working hours promised to workers, informal and flexible employment conditions, and workplace violence (Yücesan-Özdemir, 2014). Based on participants' statements, the findings substantiate the concept of a "reserve army of labor" and confirm over-education as one of the structural contradictions of neoliberal capitalism.

"During the pandemic process, remote working, working from home came, but since I am in the food sector, the work intensity increased, we started to work overtime...but they did not pay the wage. Their attitude was important, we tried to maintain the current situation...since there are few job opportunities outside. We expected them to say something to reassure us during the pandemic, but instead they said, 'If you're scared or worried about getting sick, there are plenty of people out there looking for work-you can leave.' So we had no choice but to continue." (P3, age 27, junior accountant).

"For example, in my current job, we always hear the same sentence. And by 'we', I mean all the employees. It was said several times today, and several times yesterday too: Do you think you're an irreplaceable Indian fabric? (a Turkish idiom implying someone believes they are too valuable or unique to be replaced)." (P7, age 28, sales counsellor).

Threatening statements such as 'There are many seeking employment outside, the door is here' (P3), 'Do you think you're an irreplaceable Indian fabric? (a Turkish idiom implying someone believes they are too valuable or unique to be replaced) (P7), "The door is there, go ahead and write your resignation letter" (P9) clearly show that employers, considering the reserve in the labor market, use the threat of unemployment as a disciplinary tool against employees. At the same time, threatening rhetoric increases psychological pressure in the workplace and makes employees feel that they lack job security and can be easily replaced. This situation, as Huws (2017) points out, reveals that this workforce forms a homogeneous class of workers who can easily replace each other, becoming a replaceable resource for capital, and, as Yücesan-Özdemir (2014) emphasizes, that the reserve army of labor thus functions as an ideological control mechanism.

"Unemployment is already very high, no matter what your level of education is, they say there are thousands like you, and no one cares about

your education level... There are universities everywhere, thousands of graduates, and the perception is: 'they are all lined up at our door—we're the ones who choose, not you. School administrators offer minimum wage and offer me the same salary as they do to a 16-year-old kid. I've completed my bachelor's degree and have several certificates related to my field, yet they still offer me minimum wage... I applied to İŞ-KUR, and despite my education background and interests, the jobs they suggest are waiter and cleaning jobs. In jobs that require low education levels, they still ask for high education qualifications, they want English... It's a system where people with qualified education are being completely eliminated from both sides." (P1, age 27, construction laborer).

The existence of a reserve army of labour is a major factor that explains the failure of the 'overeducated' to resist the deterioration of their working conditions and wages. This deterioration is clearly measurable in terms of the physical and mental health of the overeducated, longer working hours, low purchasing power of wages and temporary contracts. It seems difficult to avoid undermining workers' bargaining position with employers by the knowledge that workers elsewhere can perform the same tasks (Huws, 2017). The phenomenon of over-education, which can be considered a potential catalyst for social unrest (Bauman, 2020), is a result of the capitalist system's expansion and commodification of education. Education is now seen as a means of providing skilled labour to meet the demands of capital, and the dreams of educated individuals are shaped according to the interests of capital.

4.4. The Return of Non-Meritocratic Criteria

The fundamental basis of liberal social justice theories is meritocracy, which advocates the distribution of social resources according to individuals' work and abilities. This ensures social justice and equal opportunities. According to this theory, an individual's position is determined by their abilities and achievements rather than characteristics such as class, gender or ethnic origin. Education is the key instrument in this system, providing an equal starting point, facilitating social mobility and enabling disadvantaged groups to progress (Torun, 2009). Most empirical studies (Swifth & Marshall, 1997; Duru-Bellat & Ternet, 2012) consider individuals' educational success as an indicator of merit (Arun, 2022). However, this approach has also been criticized (Bowles & Gintis, 1975; Hout, 2006). Using the "Maximally Maintained Inequality (MMI)" approach, Hout (2006) questions the idea that those with a good education earn more, arguing that even if education becomes more widespread, it transforms

and perpetuates class-based barriers. Therefore, the meritocracy discourse obscures structural inequalities because success in education largely depends on family background, parents' educational level, and cultural resources.

Although increased access to education may seem to provide equal opportunities at first glance, inequality persists in different forms. According to Lucas' (2001) "Effectively Maintained Inequality" approach, socioeconomically advantaged groups maintain their privileges through factors such as the type, quality and content of education. In other words, as education becomes more widespread, inequality does not decrease, but only changes its form. The education system, which operates as part of the capitalist system, reproducing inequalities and fuelling class differences, may seem to provide an opportunity for labour from many working class families to move up, but in fact it tends to hide economic inequalities by maintaining and reinforcing the existing hierarchy within the capitalist system.

"For example, there are also staff there who have a car. But what is his/her comfort?... because his/her family is well off, he/she can't get into difficulties or he/she has the luxury to say 'I'm not working' and leave. But you don't have such a luxury... Because at home, my father is a retired civil servant." (P9, age 33, store manager).

"My family is engaged in farming. He receives a three-month old age pension. It is impossible for people who have difficulty in making a living to support me. If there was support, I would do many things for myself. Since I try to do something with my own labour ... you are forced to do many things." (P1, age 27, construction laborer).

"If my family had better financial means, I would have waited until I found a job suitable for my qualifications. Definitely right now, if my family could send me a monthly amount... but I am working at a job because it would be too difficult for them." (P2, age 23, office worker).

"If my family had a good financial situation, I think we could live with one hand in oil and one hand in honey. We don't have such a situation. My father... He is a retired person now...I mean, you think that at least, damn it, I should have enough money in my pocket to feed my mouth, to do small activities when I go." (P10, age 28, call centre employee).

From the mid-20th century onwards, the first generation to believe that social status could be attained through education were university graduates who were raised by parents who expected them to be successful. However, these expectations cannot be met in today's socio-economic conditions; young people are being driven towards an uncertain and insecure future. Although they were taught that individual effort is sufficient, today's graduates are

facing what Bauman (2020:49-50) describes as a 'gloomy darkness' in an environment where gains are devalued, opportunities are narrowing, and repeated failures are becoming normalised. The hope for a better future among over-educated individuals is fading alongside life's uncertainty and insecurity and the distinction between expectation (success) and reality (disappointment) is becoming increasingly blurred. Participants' statements indicate that socio-economic disadvantages prevent higher education graduates from turning their education into an opportunity. This disadvantage discourages them from seeking jobs commensurate with their merit and skills, instead directing them towards jobs with poorer working conditions. As Hout (2006) also points out, even if education becomes more widespread, class background remains a decisive factor. This situation is consistent with the persistence of structural inequalities highlighted by Lucas (2001), with social inequalities being reproduced in the labour market.

"In this workplace, it's not your diploma that matters, it's who you know. You work at a job you don't like for the salary, for support, to help your family, but it doesn't add anything to you. You go to work because you have to... My manager and assistant manager are middle school and high school graduates, and their connections keep them afloat." (P3, age 27, junior accountant).

"There is a peculiar system of favoritism at work in the country; you can't get anywhere if you don't have an uncle." (P4, age 24, sales counsellor).

"After graduation, certain jobs should be done by some people, and certain jobs should not be done by some people without a diploma. Just as a doctor cannot practice medicine without a medical diploma, a person who does not have a diploma in this field in human resources should not be able to do so. But there is no such thing left. It has turned into everyone should be in the job they can be in if they have acquaintances or relatives." (P6, age 33, street vendor (non-food)).

Participant narratives indicate that one of the main reasons graduates are forced to work in jobs below their qualifications is institutionalised favouritism/nepotism in recruitment and employment processes. Family status and social networks filter access to opportunities through 'connections, acquaintances, references,' replacing 'diploma-qualification-success'; this directs graduates towards insecure and low-paid jobs, undermines trust in education, blocks channels of social mobility, and erodes motivation to seek employment. 'Overeducated' individuals are forced to navigate a more uncertain future in this harsh reality where expectations of educational advancement are shattered. Findings theoretically demonstrate that inequality persists only in altered

form; opportunities are redistributed not through formal merit criteria but through informal connections. This continuity is consistent with Lucas's (2001) approach and reveals that the meritocracy discourse, which is the fundamental basis of liberal social justice theories, serves an ideological function that renders inequality invisible. Favouritism, which emerges as a 'meritocracy problem' that undermines equal opportunities in recruitment (Scoppa, 2009), erodes the value of diplomas and qualifications; thus narrowing the possibility of merit-based advancement and weakening graduates' motivation to pursue education. Consequently, the problem transcends a situation that can be overcome through individual effort and takes on a structural nature.

"Only once, I was forced by one of my professors ... to apply to a university as a research assistant. He prepared all my files and documents himself... we sent them... Then something happened, the file was not sent against my name in the university advertisement... After that, I gave up. After that, that university was sued... It was necessary to have a personal connection or acquaintance. They needed someone to vouch for their name. I didn't have anything like that. So I withdrew." (P6, age 33, street vendor (non-food)).

"I got used to it. After a while, I started not to call anymore. It became a bad thing... I gave up. Because no matter how hard you try, if you don't know the right person, you can't get anywhere in Ankara or Turkey." (P11, age 24, Taxi driver).

"...Because there is no hope. Even if you work as much as you want, even if you make an effort, even if you take the exam, there is nothing that you can go and get with your right, with the right of your wrist." (P10, age 28, call centre employee).

Moreover, the impact of criteria unrelated to merit, such as gender, political views, and beliefs, in recruitment processes has serious emotional and psychological effects on everyone, particularly highly educated individuals, and stands out as barriers to qualifications.

"You also have problems because you are a woman... Because of the scarf on my head, there were many times when they looked at my face and said hmmm and filtered. Many people, even though their height scale and weight scale do not match, we have friends who are sick, even diabetic, and they can enter and work right now. We can't work... I mean, like this, if you know someone, even if there is a problem with your health... you come back crying because they enter without being eliminated... I graduated as the valedictorian of the school... Despite this, people should be told that yes, this child is knowledgeable, this child is the valedictorian of the

school... he has a potential, but they say, oh no, he has a scarf on his head, but no. Why?... But where did you end up? Here. Nothing happens. You're not happy in any way. So the money you earn is useless. You're just living as if you're in a vegetative state." (P10, age 28, call centre employee).

P10's experience demonstrates that in today's job market, a university degree or individual achievements no longer provide a decisive advantage; rather, recruitment processes are often shaped by factors unrelated to merit. The systematic exclusion of a participant who was top of her class due to her headscarf highlights how social inequalities and prejudices profoundly affect individuals' life practices. This situation causes graduates to lose hope, give up on job searches, and question the value of their education. Thus, in an environment where personal efforts are disregarded, it becomes commonplace for individuals to live in a state of 'vegetative' passivity and unhappiness towards life. On a theoretical level, these findings align with Bauman's (2020) concept of 'gloomy darkness'; the normalisation of incompetence and injustice pushes individuals into a position of hopelessness and alienation from the social structure.

4.5. 'Hegemony' in Consciousness: Internalisation of the Perception of Inadequacy

Under the influence of neoliberal policies, education has become a market-oriented tool that prepares individuals for employment. According to Bauman, education is an ideological apparatus that renders social inequalities invisible, acting as a 'fig leaf covering naked, obvious inequalities'. This system glorifies individual success and brands those who fail as inadequate. The liberal meritocratic narrative portrays problems such as unemployment and over-education as the fault of individuals who do not try hard enough. Thus, education personalises social failures by emphasising individual responsibility, while concealing structural problems (Bauman, 2020).

"You are also subjected to psychological pressure from the people around you. Have you got a job yet? Can't you do anything? Oh, your own profession... You're already a fire brigade graduate and you can't do it even though you're a fire brigade graduate... At a certain point, are you really... Are you stupid? Excuse me, why can't you do it? Is the problem with me?" (P10, age 28, call centre employee).

"You know the one that starts with 'won't you be a man anymore? You couldn't even become the handle of an axe... Now this is the cruel behaviour of the family. I think this is very cruel... Or maybe there is also this ... I don't want to take money from my family after this age...I mean,

they made me believe that. I couldn't even become the handle of an axe. I'm a failed person, I mean I accept that, I really couldn't.' (P7, age 28, sales counsellor).

"Over time, your family, your relatives, people give the impression that this is not the result of a state policy but the result of your unqualification. Competition conditions are fierce, but they see me as exhausted, they see me as someone who couldn't even become the handle of an axe and they give up on you. This humiliates you in terms of status and makes you look useless in the eyes of the environment." (P1, age 27, construction laborer).

The phenomenon of over-education leads individuals to bear not only an economic burden but also a psychological one. Participants' statements clearly reveal that graduates who cannot find jobs commensurate with their education experience intense pressure from their families and social circles and internalise this pressure as proof of their own failure. Questions such as 'Is the problem with me?' or statements such as 'I couldn't even become the handle of an axe' show how individuals' self-esteem is damaged under social expectations. This situation leads to a decrease in job search motivation, loss of self-confidence, and the constant reproduction of feelings of worthlessness in social relationships. Qualifications gained through education cease to be an opportunity for individuals and become a psychological burden.

Neoliberal ideology produces a framework of consciousness that attributes success to individual effort and links social problems to individual inadequacy. P1's statements concretely demonstrate that individuals face not only unemployment but also loss of social status in the competitive environment created by neoliberal policies. The stigmatisation of individuals as 'useless' or 'failures' by their families and social circles undermines their social identity and deepens their psychological fragility. These findings show that graduates who cannot find positions commensurate with their educational qualifications in the labour market face a loss of status and erosion of self-confidence. In such a system, individuals are stigmatised not as victims of competition, but as inadequate individuals.

Participatory experiences show that the failure of capitalist ideology obscures structural problems by attributing them to individual inadequacies and forces individuals to view their own victimisation as personal shortcomings. Educational institutions also contribute to this process by shaping individuals' ways of thinking in line with neoliberal values, preventing the questioning of alternative social orders (Wayne, 2018). Thus, 'over-education' means not only the devaluation of the labour force but also the production of an internalised perception of failure in people's minds.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

As a fundamental dynamic of capitalism, surplus value production is crucial for economic continuity and profit maximization. In advanced capitalism, the systematic exploitation of labor has made relative surplus value strategies increasingly necessary. Accordingly, education has been reorganized in line with capitalist logic to produce "qualified" labor integrated into production relations. The aim of generating more surplus value from labour power, which is considered as a commodity within the capitalist system, has led to the devaluation of qualified labour and to work in jobs below their level of education. Accordingly, the study analyses the phenomenon of over-education through five main themes.

Findings show that higher education is increasingly instrumentalized to serve the economic goals of capitalism. Participants emphasized that universities have moved beyond individual development and become central to state policy. They also viewed the growth of higher education—and the resulting surplus of educated labor—as a mechanism that depresses wages and postpones unemployment by keeping people in education longer.

The findings of the study show that individuals tend to be employed in jobs below their qualifications in order to make ends meet, and that this situation is experienced as a structural "compelling dilemma"—in other words, the tension between the threat of unemployment and the necessity of sub-qualification employment—generated by capitalist production relations in the neoliberal era. Participants' expressions such as "we have no other choice," "struggle for life," "struggle for bread," "fear of long-term unemployment," "being unemployed," "surviving," and "having a place to live" reflect the emotional and existential dimensions of this dilemma. This situation shows that participants feel an increasing sense of insecurity about the economic value of the qualifications they have obtained through education.

TURKSTAT data supports this fragility: with rapid university expansion, the share of graduates working below their education level rose from 12.5% in 1988 to 36% in 2022 (TURKSTAT, 1988; 2022). Ege and Erdil (2023) likewise report that over 40% of graduates face vertical or horizontal mismatch, suggesting a labor market advantage for employers. Participant narratives describe this as the devaluation of skilled labor and the positioning of graduates as a "reserve labor force." Employer messages such as "the door is open" or "there are plenty of people to replace you" were interpreted as keeping workers compliant through fear of unemployment, functioning as a disciplining mechanism.

The findings of the research indicate that individuals employed below their qualifications are exposed not only to economic pressures but also to forms

of ideological domination. When participants internalize feelings of “failure” and “inadequacy,” combined with narratives of being seen as “worthless” by their families and social circles, it suggests that a mechanism of emotional consent is at work, whereby structural inequalities are perceived as personal inadequacies. This situation reveals that insecurity, which begins at the level of economic relations, creates a multi-layered ideological impact that extends to individuals' sense of self-worth.

Despite quantitative expansion, equal opportunity has not been realized. Participants stressed that non-meritocratic mechanisms—especially connections and references—remain decisive in hiring. This weakens trust in education, reduces job-search motivation, and pushes individuals toward insecure, low-paid work, reproducing inequality and weakening the link between education and social mobility. The findings reveal that over-education is not a homogeneous phenomenon but varies across gender, age, and educational background. Female participants emphasise the emotional and physical dimensions of precarity, whereas male participants experience identity rupture through status loss and the weakening of the “breadwinner” role. Women struggle to assert themselves against external pressures such as harassment and discrimination, while men seek to restore authority through internalised feelings of inadequacy and guilt. Younger participants express early frustration and distrust due to the collapse of the meritocratic system, whereas those in their thirties view over-education as a permanent structural constraint and adopt a more fatalistic stance. Field of study also shapes these experiences: social science graduates display greater structural awareness, while those from applied disciplines frame their mismatch in terms of personal disappointment and economic necessity. Overall, over-education emerges as a multidimensional condition shaped by the intersecting axes of gender, age, and class.

The findings of the research shed light on how participants experience the phenomenon of over-education and the underlying structural dynamics of these experiences. The data obtained indicate that the phenomenon of over-education is experienced in connection with the structural characteristics of capitalist production relations rather than individual preferences or temporary market fluctuations. The participants' narratives highlight perceptions that the education system is becoming increasingly commodified, that reserve armies of labor are forming in the labor market, and that mechanisms that deviate from meritocracy and reproduce inequalities are continuing. This situation is associated with assessments that the relationship between education and employment is shaped by market demands and that higher education has the potential to reproduce social inequalities rather than reduce them.

Overall, the participants' experiences present trends that can be discussed within the theoretical framework of the research; in this respect, the study has the potential to contribute to theoretical discussions aimed at understanding the interaction between capitalist production relations and the dynamics of education, labor, and inequality. However, future studies that examine in depth the collective attitudes developed by the educated labor force against current conditions, forms of union and civil organization, solidarity practices, and resistance strategies will make a meaningful contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of the social and political dimensions of the phenomenon of over-education.

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Appendix 1.

Ethics Committee Decision

MUĞLA SITKI KOÇMAN ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL VE BEŞERİ BİLİMLER ARAŞTIRMALARI ETİK KURULU - 3 KARARI

Protokol No : 210083	Karar No : 40
Araştırma Yürütücüsü	Araştırma Görevlisi MERVE ÇELİK GÖNÜLTAŞ
Kurumu / Birimi	MUĞLA SITKI KOÇMAN ÜNİVERSİTESİ / ÇALIŞMA EKONOMİSİ VE ENDÜSTRİ İLİŞKİLERİ
Araştırmanın Başlığı	TÜRKİYE İŞGÜCÜ PİYASASINDA AŞIRI EĞİTİMLİK VE ÇALIŞMA ALANI UYUMSUZLUĞU
Başvuru Formunun Etik Kurula Geldiği Tarih	28.12.2021
Başvuru Formunun Etik Kurulda İncelendiği Tarih	28.12.2021
Karar Tarihi	29.12.2021

KARAR: UYGUNDUR.

AÇIKLAMA: Beyan edilen veri formlarının dışına çıkılmaması şartıyla araştırmanın uygulanabilirliği konusunda bilimsel araştırmalar etiği açısından bir sakınca yoktur.

Prof.Dr. C. Ergin EKİNCİ
Başkan

Prof.Dr. Serap ÖZEN
Uye

Doç.Dr. Bilgin ŞENEL
Uye

Doç.Dr. Gülce COŞKUN ŞENTÜRK
Uye

Doç.Dr. Erdoğan KELEŞ
Uye

Doç.Dr. Hüseyin ÇEKEN
Uye

Doç.Dr. Hammett ARSLAN
Uye

Doç.Dr. Özgür ULUBEY
Uye

Bu belge elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.
Doğrulama adresi <https://etikkurulbasvuru.mu.edu.tr/dogrulama/MPCD7955>



Appendix 2.

Figure 1. Overeducation (Mismatch) Rates by NUTS-2 Regions in Türkiye

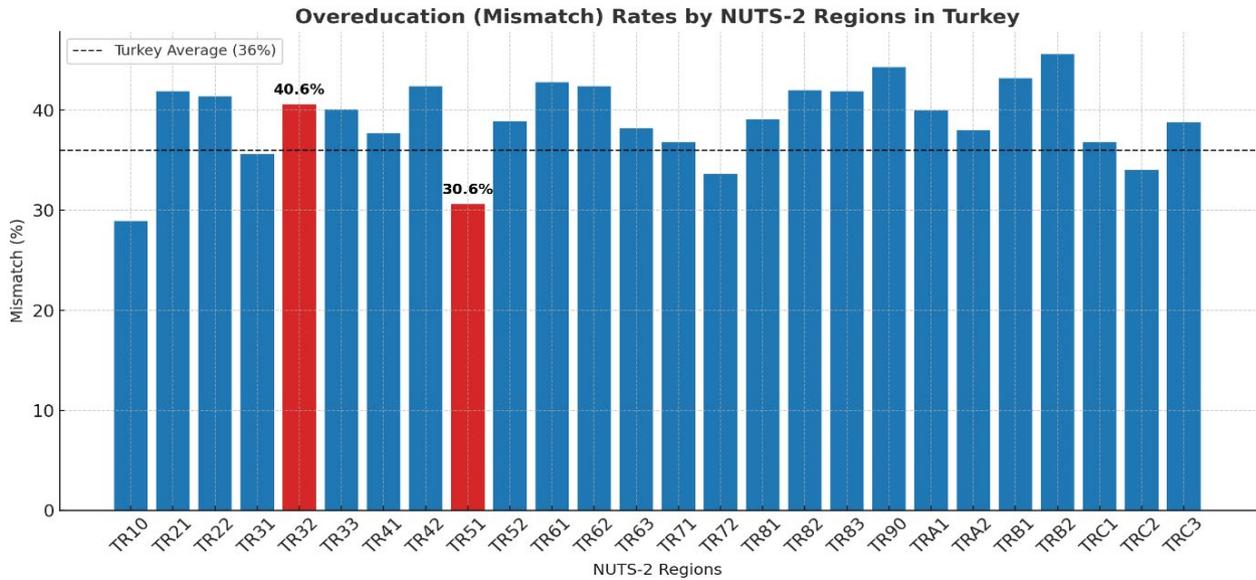


Table 2. Educational Attainment Levels by Region (TR32 and TR51)

Educational Attainment Level	TR32 (Aydın–Denizli– Muğla)	TR51 (Ankara)
No school completed	14.6%	13.6%
Primary school	34.8%	23.6%
Lower secondary / vocational–technical middle school / elementary education	16.0%	16.3%
General high school	9.4%	13.3%
Vocational or technical high school	7.7%	9.4%
Two- or three-year higher education (associate degree)	5.3%	5.4%
Four-year college or faculty	10.3%	14.6%
Five- or six-year faculty, master’s or doctoral degree	1.8%	3.8%
Total higher education	17.4%	23.8%
Total high school and below	82.5%	76.2%