

# The Views of Teacher Candidates about Unemployment and Employment<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This study aims to reveal the opinions of teacher candidates on unemployment, which has been observed more seriously among the young in the society recently, the provision of employment to the individuals in the society, and the links between unemployment and the Turkish education system. In this study, which was designed as qualitative research, it was tried to put forward the anxiety, opinions and solution suggestions of the candidate teachers who are fourth-year students in Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University and Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University Education Faculties about unemployment. In the study, in the approaches of teacher candidates to the concept of unemployment, they perceived unemployment as not being able to find a job or being sentenced to a job that was not suitable for its quality; the candidate teachers were observed to explain unemployment through definitions such as disrepute, seeing no respect in society, living in need of others, being left behind in the struggle for survival. It is seen that participants find the vocational guidance in the education system insufficient and unplanned, and they focus on solutions to increase the quality of education, not to increase the duration of education and the number of educational institutions as a suggestion to create employment. It has been stated that the Turkish education system should be saved from its competitive and rote structure that does not respond to the subjective needs of individuals, that teacher training institutions should be removed from their theoretical, multiple-choice examination-oriented structure, and a qualified teacher training system that gives more space to practise should be established.*

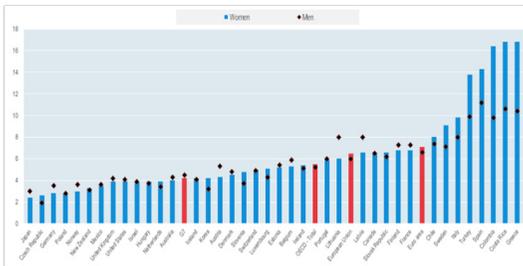
**Keywords:** Unemployment, Employment, Education System, Teacher Candidates, Youth.

## Introduction

Raising the manpower needed by the market is one of the most prominent goals of educational institutions in today's global capitalist world. In the 1980s and 1990s, the effects of technological developments, the deterioration in the ecological balance, demographic changes, the globalization of the market, increase of claims of democratic rights etc. put more pressure on governments on how to structure the economic process. The number of unemployed, which was approximately 800 million in 1995, exceeded one billion at the beginning of the 21st century all over the world. Although employment problems are among the top priorities of political powers in the world today; the unemployment rate continues to rise irreversibly (Bora & Erdogan, 2011, p.13). Today, a significant part of the unemployed comprise a qualified workforce. Rifkin (1995, p.172) says that the job market for college graduates is now the poorest period since World War II. Standing (2011, p.73) draws attention to the enormous increase in the number of "second-rung universities" that train cheap labor. He says that most of the graduates of these universities come from unqualified schools in poor areas and they face the threat of unemployment after graduating from the university.

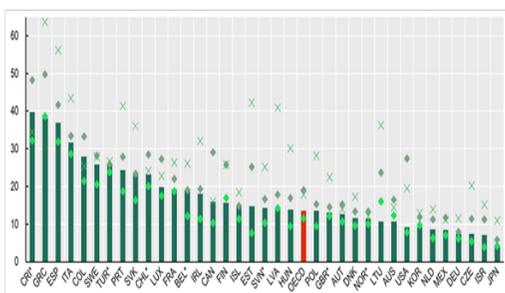
<sup>1</sup> This paper is an extended version of a conference paper presented at the 9th International Conference on Critical Education (ICCE-IX) held in Naples between 3-6 July 2019.

As well as bringing some social consequences, unemployment has negative effects for the individual also. It may lead to a loss of self-confidence and unemployed people may have to cope with despair and fear as long as they live (Gorz, 1999, p.55-60). In this context, unhealthy individuals will form an unhealthy society. Figure 1 shows the unemployment rates according to 2022 data from various countries. Turkey is among the top five countries with the highest unemployment rate (OECD, 2022).



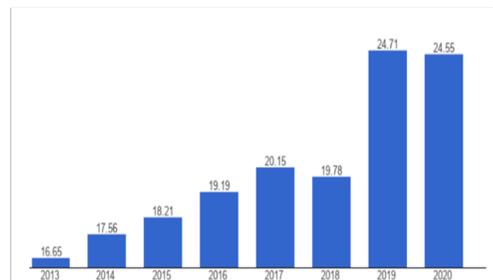
**Figure 1 Unemployment Rates for Women and Men in OECD Countries (January 2022)**

TurkStat (2022) reported 21.2% unemployment for the young population of Turkey. According to the latest United Nations estimates of the world's population, in 2019 youth numbered 1.2 billion persons (16 per cent of the global population) between ages 15 and 24 years, or around one in every six persons worldwide. 2030, the target date for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2019) project the number of youths in the World to grow by 7 per cent to 1.3 billion. Figure 2 shows the youth unemployment rates according to 2021 data from various countries.



**Figure 2 Youth Unemployment Rates by Country (OECD, 2021)**

According to Figure 2, the average value for Turkey is 24.55 per cent. It is understood that this figure is well above the OECD average (11.0 per cent). Figure 3 shows the data on youth unemployment between the ages of 15-24 for the years 2013-2020. Youth unemployment, which was 16.65% in 2013, increased to 24.55% in 2020 (The World Bank, 2022). Figure 3 shows the data on youth unemployment between the ages of 15-24 for the years 2013-2020. Youth unemployment, which was 16.65% in 2013, increased to 24.55% in 2020 (The World Bank, 2022). Besides, the figures show 9% decline in the employment of graduates between 2000 and 2016 (OECD, 2021).



**Figure 3 Youth Unemployment Rates in Turkey (The World Bank, 2022)**

Higher education is an important condition for finding jobs more easily and earning higher wages in the modern world. However, the inability to employ a qualified workforce with higher education is one of the most discussed issues in recent times. In 2022, the employability of the qualified workforce who graduated from higher education, according to the OECD average rate, was 84.5%, this rate remains at 73,6% in Turkey (Turk Stat, 2022; OECD, 2022).

The population aged 15 and over in Turkey is 64 million 405 thousand people. While the labour force participation rate was 52.6%, the employment rate was recorded as 46.5%. The number of young people, neither in employment nor in education, was 3 million 994 thousand persons. The proportion of the young population in the 15-24 age group who are neither in employment nor in education was 21.2% in the first quarter of 2022 (Turk Stat, 2022).

Due to the fear of unemployment in the future, young people in Turkey experience anxiety even

before completing their formal education. Especially among university students, the worry that they cannot find a job after graduation causes an increase in anxiety levels. This increase in the level of anxiety causes young people to wear out spiritually. Young people who are in the process of transition from school life to work-life experience a mental breakdown as they face the risk of unemployment; the complaints about mental illnesses and cardiovascular diseases increase as the unemployment process gets longer, and social problems such as suicidal tendencies increase (Statt, 1994, p. 21).

The ratio of teachers and education faculties in Turkey is well above the market requirements; This makes the teachers the mostly voiced up group of people who complain about and also fear of unemployment. Until today, it is reported that nearly 94 teachers have committed suicide since they could not be employed as teachers (Tiraj Newspaper, 2021). For example, Hasan Songur who could not be appointed as a social studies teacher started working in a factory to make a living. When he lost his life by being stuck in a precision machine in February 2018, it was also a striking agenda in terms of the underemployment of teachers. Fedai Altun, a teacher of physical education, was not appointed though he had a high score at the national exam conducted by the government to select and appoint teachers, died when he was electrocuted while painting the electrical transformer in construction to make a living in 2021 (Güler, 2021).

There are several studies reporting the unemployment problems of educated people in various countries such as studies have been found for example Algeria (Furceri, 2012); Spain (Marzo, Iglesias & Rivera, 2009); Greece (Livanos, 2010; Liagouras, Protogerou & Caloghirou, 2003) and Tunisia (Stampini & Verdier-Chouchane, 2011). In addition, Pelek's (2022) research provides a broad perspective on the education-unemployment relationship in Turkey, and it evaluates the unemployment for graduates from universities through expertise areas in Turkey. According to the research, it is obvious that the employment rates in all higher education fields decreased dramatically in the last five years. In the other quantitative and qualitative academic studies on the relationship

between higher education and employment (ArpatKalfa, Akşit & Çamurdan, 2017; Erdoğan, 2019; Kellevezir & Çakır, 2020; Keskin Demirer, 2016) a high mismatch between higher education and the expectations of the business world have been reported. In addition, it is emphasized that the unemployment of educated youth is an issue that needs to be addressed separately.

Through the discussions in the lessons with their students, the researchers started thinking about the employment of the candidate teachers. They wanted to investigate how the connections between the issues of unemployment, employment, and the education system were interpreted by the prospective teachers. The development of countries depends on the qualification of the junior members of the society and their involvement in further action. For this reason, it is important to reduce youth unemployment below the current levels and to increase employment in society. Seen from another angle, nearly four million people are unemployed in Turkey (TurkStat, 2022) and in particular, the apparent increase in unemployment seen in college graduates leads to questioning the meaning of education and the function of the education system.

### **Aim of the Research**

This study aims to find out the opinions of teacher candidates about the relationship between youth unemployment, employment, and the teacher training system. For this purpose, the following questions have been asked:

1. What does the unemployment concept mean for teacher candidates in Turkey?
2. What are the teacher candidates' beliefs about the relationship between employment and higher education?
3. What are the expectations of the teacher candidates for strengthening the education-employment link and resolving the unemployment problem in Turkey?

### **Methodology**

In this study, which was designed as qualitative research, the researchers tried to put forward the anxiety, opinions, and solution suggestions of the candidate teachers who are fourth-year students in

from two public universities' faculties of education Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University and Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University about unemployment. In this context, 355 candidate teachers studying in the departments of Primary Education, Turkish Language Education, Arts Education and Music Education were asked to share their opinions by answering the questions through a semi-structured interview which consists of five questions. The data obtained were analyzed using content analysis techniques.

In the description of the data, direct quotations from the interviews were included, and each participant was expressed through coding according to the university, department, and gender. In order to enable the confidentiality of the participants, each participant is given a pseudonym. Each pseudonym is formed through a coding: The participants' affiliation is coded as either T (for Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University) or Z (for Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University); their departments are coded as PST (for The Primary School Teaching), AT (for Art Teaching), MT (for Music Teaching), TLT (for Turkish Language Teaching); and the gender of the participants have also been added to the pseudonym as F (for female) and M (for male).

## Findings

### *The Meaning of 'Unemployment' for Teacher Candidates*

Within the context of this research; the concept of unemployment has several meanings for participants such as not getting a job anywhere, getting fired from their current jobs, not being appointed to work, not being able to meet their basic needs, uncertainty, unhappiness, not being able to use the knowledge and skills they have in the field they are in, the inadequate economic status their country is in, injustice, the struggle of life and exclusion from society.

*"Unemployment expresses desperation to me. I think being unemployed is getting a kick out of life when there are so many people making money out of nothing. Of course, it also means a lack of education. But even if we are uneducated, we should not starve." (T#AT#F4)*

Almost all the participants described unemployment as being deprived of financial means, depending on family or environment, and this situation affected individuals morally negatively and claimed that unemployed individuals had no place in society.

*"Unemployment, for me, is the taking away of a person's need to live. Spiritually, a person should feel included in a group and know that he is a part of that group. People suffer the greatest psychological blow by being unemployed." (T#TLT#F4)*

*"Unemployed people find it difficult to decide on their future, emotionally demoralizing. They also depend on someone else because they cannot make a living financially. Since unemployed people do not have financial freedom, their self-esteem may diminish." (Z#PST#F4)*

It is seen that some of the participants consider unemployment as a concept that affects not only the individual himself but also the entire society, the economy of the society, and the development of the society. The statement of the candidates regarding this issue is as follows:

*"The accumulation of unemployed youth in society. The unrest that causes deterioration in the internal structure of the family, which is the smallest structural unit of society, is a socioeconomic and emotional breakdown." (T#AT#M4)*

Almost all the participants regarded unemployment as a phenomenon created by negativity, despair, and external factors, while some participants self-criticized that they should create their opportunities in certain situations. A teacher candidate expressed her opinion as follows:

*"I think unemployment is not only the inability to get a job and get to work but also the inability to create our own business. The unemployment problem is big in our country, but this is due to us. As soon as people make money, their only dream is to buy a house or a car. I think that's ridiculous. Instead, they can make new initiatives to produce things and to provide employment for people." (T#PST#F4)*

## Relationship between Employment and Higher Education

In the study, some of the participants stated that higher education institutions (HEI) do not have any effect on reducing unemployment because they think that the primary function of these institutions is to conduct educational activities and to provide people with knowledge and skills. Few participants stated that the role of HEI is important for reducing unemployment. The principal argument of this opinion also is HEI raise qualified people and these people can come up with new business ideas.

*"I don't think that higher education institutions have much of a role in reducing unemployment. Because the high number of higher education institutions have revealed an important quality problem in our country. The fact that there are universities in every province, and even two or three universities in some provinces, reduces the quality of education and creates a significant surplus of employment. Thousands of graduates every year face the problem of unemployment. No higher education institution has a job guarantee." (T#PST#M4)*

Most of the participants claimed that founding new HEI results in the increase of unemployment. Being a graduate of any faculty is no longer a privileged position.

*"By registering all passers-by in faculties, they reduce the number of unemployed in the country and show them like students. But as graduates increase, unemployment rises." (T#MT#F4)*

When the opinions of participants are evaluated, it is possible to say that the function of today's higher education is to postpone unemployment rates. Hundreds of thousands of graduates from faculties each year give little hope of finding and working for the future. The work anxiety observed in participants prevents them from being attached to the profession and desire for the profession.

*"The number of universities and departments is very large. Purchases at the entrance need to be reduced. Many graduates and unhappy individuals are waiting outside to become teachers." (Z#MT#M4)*

Some candidates state that HEI play a mediating role in the employment of individuals. Based on this,

the candidates point out that individuals with low educational levels face more unemployment than those with higher educational levels. A candidate expressed his opinion as follows:

*"I think that higher education institutions have a significant effect on reducing unemployment. Because job opportunities are higher than graduates of high school and there is plenty of diversity." (Z#PST#F3)*

Nearly all of the participants state that those individuals with a higher level of education have much more chances of finding a job or being employed. The deadlock of the candidates is the existence of individuals who have completed their undergraduate and even postgraduate education but still struggling with unemployment. Most of the candidates are worried that they will face unemployment in a few months and this situation will affect them negatively.

A significant majority of participants regard the government for being responsible for unemployment. However, a significant number of people also stated that the government's ability to provide jobs is limited, and that people are unemployed because they do not educate themselves.

*"First, the head of state is responsible. He/she is the principal person responsible for the development of a country. Certain ministries are also responsible for this. Of course, 'everything should not be expected from the state.' One can create his / her field of work and his / her work. It can establish business and employ itself and others. The state contributes to this issue. But our people are used to it. It's a piece of cake." (Z#PST#M4)*

Seeing employment as only the duty of the state is choosing the easy way and inaction for some participants. In this context, they see employment as a point that the individual himself should be responsible for. Most of the participants agreed that merit is very important in the employment process and drew attention to the importance of being fair in preventing injustice.

Participants stated that the Turkish education system is directly responsible for the widespread unemployment. Participants also emphasized that young people are directed to the wrong professions, the quality of the education system is insufficient,

and an efficient and effective policy cannot be implemented in education. Participants stated that the reasons for this were the insufficient value given to individuals in the education system, the lack of early recognition of interests and skills, the brain drain, and the admission of too many students to universities. Most participants think that the quality of education will increase by decreasing the number of students in faculties.

*"The number of students in the faculty of education should be reduced. So many students should not be admitted." (Z#PST#M3)*

*"The system itself is faulty. First, we should give up the understanding that 'our biggest goal is everyone should study at school [university]'. Everyone should take part in employment. This should be our understanding. We should stop opening universities in every city. The lower-class people in our country have a lot of ideas about the country's problems, but as our people rise in rank, they gradually forget about social problems and personal interests come to the fore." (T#TLT#F4)*

As can be understood from participants' responses, raising qualified individuals in education seems to be the primary concern for young people. The participants think that the Turkish education system and unemployment are directly related to each other, because of the lack of forward-looking planning and a specific policy in the education system. According to the participants, the current Turkish education system cannot raise qualified and need-oriented individuals and cannot provide a future for the millions of people who have already graduated from HEI.

### ***The Possibilities of Resolving the Unemployment Problem in Turkey***

In the research, participants stated that if they were given the authority and opportunity to eliminate unemployment in society, they would create projects that would increase production, reduce dependence on foreign sources, and support employment. It is clearly seen that the participants agree that the prescription to cure unemployment will go through production. Candidates produced solutions by thinking about the disadvantage. What do you mean here? they encounter during their education

and life. For example, making individuals aware of their abilities and raising them accordingly stands out as a solution that will prevent unemployment in the future. Another one is that when choosing a profession, people should consider not only the status of that profession but also their interests and abilities.

*"To eliminate unemployment in society, I would first start by changing the perception in society. I would start with the education to families that show every profession is important, to free their children, to present matters the talents of children and to be with them in every way." (T#AT#F4)*

Undoubtedly, the most severe criticism of participants on unemployment rates is related to the education system and the disruptions it causes. A crucial expectation from Turkish higher education is to educate or train individuals in order to equip them with innovative skills that will enable them to find new opportunities. For most of the participants, raising the education level of the people is not enough to ensure social development and progress. For social development, it is necessary to train a qualified workforce in the areas needed by society and in the required number. Participants argue that, in many faculties and departments, especially in education faculties, individuals are raised far beyond the need, and this situation can be solved only through job analysis.

*"[If I had the authorization] First, I would like to train qualified, willing staff for the job I will offer. I would give them social rights. Maybe there will be few workers, happy workers, and workers with social rights, but at least there will be quality production. Instead of employing 10 waiters for 50 liras in a cafe, employing 5 waiters for 100 liras will increase productivity. ... I would constantly inspect the worksites and the staff. A person who does not deserve it cannot do that job just because he has been educated. And I would try to achieve salary equality. I would remove the concept of worker, officer, and subcontractor. Every worker who works has the same right as everyone else." (Z#PST#F4).*

Besides, participants stated that a solution to the unemployment problem would be found through regulations such as employing people in the areas

where they received their education, lowering the retirement age, establishing a fair taxation system, and changing the examination system completely.

## Results and Discussion

The qualitative research method is used in this research, which aims to reveal the views of teacher candidates on the relationship between youth unemployment, employment, and the teacher training system. The first aim of this research is to reveal what the concept of unemployment means for teacher candidates in Turkey. According to the results got for this purpose, in the approaches of participants to the concept of unemployment, they perceived unemployment as not being able to find a job or being sentenced to a job that was not suitable for its quality; We observed the candidate teachers explain unemployment through definitions such as disrepute, seeing no respect in society, living in need of others, being left behind in the struggle for survival. Some of the teacher candidates who stated that unemployment means material and moral wear stated that long-term unemployment processes would cause psychological collapse. Some theorists have also revealed the effects of unemployment on individuals and social structures. Castel (2003, p.196-206) speaks of “the pauperism” of the unskilled workers and unemployed in the novel forms of work brought about by industrialization. This concept represents a situation that includes the destruction and corruption of moral and mental ability. Standing (2011, p. 130) speaks of graduate communities living on the outskirts of the city, who have derived from rural areas to work in cheap and temporary jobs and have to share their homes and lives. He says that these communities, which he calls the “Ant Tribe”, lead a life caught in the trap of precarity and stuck between their professional skills and low wages. The meaning that participants give to unemployment confirms the statements of these theorists. In a study conducted on teachers who could not be appointed in Turkey (Varışoğlu & Kaşaveklioğlu, 2019), teachers explained their unemployment using some striking metaphors. Some of these metaphors that confirm the feeling of uselessness and depression are: “balloon”, “a photo that fades in a box”, “player who has been removed from the game or in reserve”, “fading rose”, “kitten soaked in the rain”, “skilled slave”, “chicken that wants to fly”.

The second aim of the study is to reveal the beliefs of teacher candidates about the relationship between employment and higher education. In this concept, the participants have brought different approaches to the subject of the link between higher education and employment. Three different perspectives point out that higher education is not a solution to unemployment, it is not sufficient by itself, or it causes unemployment aside from not solving unemployment. (Gorz, 1999, p.57) declares that the work-based society, in which people hope to guarantee attachment to a place and a future, is dead. For him, there are not enough jobs for everyone, and imagining a guaranteed job that only the privileged can have brings desperation that condemns people to obey. Instead of desiring a work-based society that no longer exists; proposes to build alternative lifestyles on solidarity-based and collectivity.

That the purpose of higher education is to train the qualified workforce, but that there are no parallels between the employment requirements and qualified human resources educated in universities in Turkey has been widely stated (Bora & Erdoğan, 2011; Çinkır & Kurum, 2017; Çakır & Kellevezir, 2020). This situation is pointed to as the main reason leading to the unemployment problem among university graduates. The participants stated efforts should be spent to make effective planning by carrying out studies that reveal the relationship between education and employment and that many faculties and departments that educate teachers should be closed or student quota should be reduced.

The participants said that higher education in Turkey cannot grow qualified professional staff, the theoretical aspect of the education outweighs and that the practical aspects of the education and the extent of internship training should be increased. In addition, the participants stated that increasing production, especially in sectors such as agriculture and animal husbandry would decrease both foreign dependency on the country’s economy and the migration from rural areas to urban areas. In this context, it was stated that raising the labour force in work areas that the country needs through vocational workshops instead of higher education would be a more appropriate policy. McLaughlin (1992, p.5-7) states that after the 1980s, unemployment was removed from the responsibility of the state, and it was seen as uncontrollable natural events, such

as hurricanes or snow. He also adds that rising unemployment is seen as a price to pay for lowering inflation and asks: “Even in the short term, is a 2 per cent fall in inflation worth half a million more people joining the registered unemployment count?” Saying that the answer to this question since 1979 is “yes”, McLaughlin argues that unemployment is a state policy carried out with social security losses, the promotion of low-paid work and the deregulation of the employment contract. It seems that neoliberal policies prevent effective planning of relations between education and employment.

The third aim of the study is to reveal the expectations of the teacher candidates for strengthening the education-employment link and resolving the unemployment problem in Turkey. In this context, a significant majority of participants considered that providing employment should be state-handled. However, another significant part said that the state had limited possibilities to provide employment and that individuals faced unemployment because of the lack of qualifications. Some participants stated that finding a solution to the unemployment problem was primarily possible by solving the problems in education. In this context, the participants offer some solutions, such as the elimination of inequalities of opportunity in education; introducing a university entrance system based on the interest and ability of students, not on an exam score and memorization; increasing formal education and free education opportunities offered by the state; raising the quality of public schools; improving the working and retirement conditions of teachers; and lowering the retirement age. It is seen that all these suggestions are related to the social state principle, which is also guaranteed in the Republic’s Constitution of Turkey. The transfer of public spaces to the private, with the effect of neoliberalism that rose after the 1980s in Turkey and the rest of the world, weakened the ties between education and employment and caused significant damage to education. It is understood that the consequences of this, such as unemployment, which threatens social welfare, are not sustainable. Brown (2011, p.44-57) stated that “neoliberal rationality renders every human being and institution, including the constitutional state, on the model of the firm and hence supplants democratic principles with entrepreneurial ones in the political sphere”. There

are many studies in the literature in Turkey, about problems arising from the quality difference between schools in education (Ünal, Özsoy, Yıldız, Güngör, Aylar & Çankaya, 2010), problems in accessing education (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi [ERG], 2021) and the central exams based on the elimination (Aksoy, Akgündüz, Demir, Tunacan, Türk & Uğur, 2014). It is necessary to rethink public and education policies in a way that takes this situation into account.

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