

*Illegitimate Tasks in Academia: A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Social Science Academics**

Nur Ayça Öztürk-Türkmen¹ Ethem Duygulu²

Received/ Başvuru: 19.11.2024

Accepted/ Kabul: 24.12.2024

Published/ Yayın: 31.12.2024

Abstract

The concept of “illegitimate tasks” (ILT) refers to tasks assigned to employees that fall outside their professional role definitions and are perceived as unnecessary or unreasonable. ILT has gained attention as a stress-inducing factor affecting employees’ well-being and sense of self, distinguishing it from other occupational stress sources. This study explores how social science academics in Türkiye perceive and experience ILT, their coping mechanisms, and the individual and organizational implications. A phenomenological study was conducted with 40 academics from various levels and institutions through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Findings reveal that most participants view their profession as encompassing lecturing and research, with irrational tasks being more frequent than unnecessary ones. Research assistants and assistant professors bear the heaviest burden of such tasks. ILT causes were categorized into two groups: those related to human resource capacity and those stemming from organizational processes. ILT results in relational issues (deteriorating relationships, reduced tolerance), physiological effects (sleep problems, fatigue), psychological impacts (anger, worthlessness, depressive moods), and work-related consequences (role conflict, diminished reputation, reduced commitment). Addressing ILT requires supervisors to offer social support through clear communication, define job roles at the institutional level, and ensure fair task distribution. This study contributes to the ILT literature by examining its antecedents, effects, and mitigation strategies in academia.

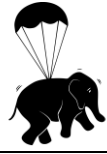
Keywords: illegitimate tasks (ILT), tasks out of professional norms, unnecessary tasks, unreasonable tasks, academia, phenomenology

* This article is derived from the doctoral dissertation titled “An Exploratory Study on the Concept of Illegitimate Tasks” by Öztürk, N. A.

* Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Scientific Research and Publication Ethics in Social and Human Sciences at Dokuz Eylül University, with decision number 2023/6 dated April 25, 2023.

¹ Research Assistant Dr., Dokuz Eylül University, Türkiye, ayca.ozturk@deu.edu.tr, Orcid: 0000-0003-1682-7558

² Prof. Dr., Dokuz Eylül University, Türkiye, ethem.duygulu@deu.edu.tr, Orcid: 0000-0001-5054-5795

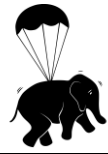


Akademide Meşru Olmayan Görevler: Sosyal Bilimler Akademisyenlerinin Deneyimleri Üzerine Fenomenolojik Bir İnceleme

Öz

Meşru olmayan görevler (MOG) kavramı, çalışanların mesleki rol tanımlarının dışında kalan, gereksiz veya mantıksız olarak algıladıkları görevleri ifade eder. Bu kavram, son yıllarda işle ilgili stres faktörleri üzerine tartışmalarda öne çıkmıştır. Kısaca, MOG çalışanlardan mesleki sorumluluklarının dışında üstlenmeleri beklenen görevleri kapsar ve bu durum, çalışanların iyi oluşlarını etkileyen, benlik algılarına zarar verebilen bir stres faktörüdür. Bu araştırma, Türkiye'deki sosyal bilimler akademisyenlerinin MOG'a bakış açılarını, bu görevleri nasıl deneyimlediklerini, tepkilerini ve başa çıkma yollarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, bu görevlerin bireysel ve kurumsal etkileri araştırılmıştır. Büyükşehir, bölgesel, devlet ve vakıf üniversitelerinden farklı unvanlardaki 40 akademisyenle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelere dayalı fenomenolojik bir araştırma yapılmıştır. Bulgular, katılımcıların çoğunun mesleği ders verme ve araştırma olmak üzere iki boyutta gördüğünü ve mantıksız görevlerle gereksiz görevlere göre daha sık karşılaştığını göstermiştir. En ağır yük ise araştırma görevlileri ve doktor öğretim üyelerinin üzerindedir. MOG'un nedenleri insan kaynağı kapasitesi ile örgütsel süreçlere bağlanmaktadır. MOG, ilişkilerin bozulması, toleransın azalması; uyku sorunları, yorgunluk; öfke, değersizlik hissi, depresif ruh hali gibi sonuçlara yol açmaktadır. Ayrıca rol çatışması, belirsizlik, mesleki itibar kaybı ve örgütsel bağlılıkta azalma gibi işle ilgili etkileri vardır. Amirlerin sosyal destek sunması, görev tanımlarının netleştirilmesi ve adil görev dağılımı, MOG'un etkilerini azaltmada önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: meşru olmayan görevler (MOG), mesleki norm dışı görevler, gereksiz görevler, mantıksız görevler, akademi, fenomenoloji



1. INTRODUCTION

Illegitimate tasks (ILT), conceptualized as tasks expected of employees despite falling outside the scope of their defined roles, have become a focal point in academic discussions within recent literature. In organizational behavior research, ILT represents a relatively new area of exploration, with a key distinction from other occupational stressors: employees perceive these tasks as unreasonable and meaningless, prompting them to question the nature of their work. In other words, ILT are rooted in employees' subjective assessments and perceptions (Semmer et al., 2007, p.43). The concept of ILT is examined in two dimensions—unreasonable tasks and unnecessary tasks. Its theoretical background is grounded in theories such as the Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) model (Semmer et al., 2007, p.45), Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001, p.342), and role theory (Semmer et al., 2010, p.73).

The concept of "illegitimate tasks," which refers to tasks assigned to employees that fall outside their professional role definitions and are perceived as unnecessary and unreasonable, has increasingly become a significant part of the literature on job stress and stress-inducing task elements, particularly in recent years. It has been observed that studies in the literature on this topic often do not address the relational and social dimensions within organizations or their impact on professional perception. Furthermore, research on illegitimate tasks in the local literature remains quite limited. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how social science academics in Türkiye's higher education sector perceive illegitimate tasks, the dimensions in which they experience them, the reasons behind ILT, and the individual and organizational outcomes that result from these experiences. With this aim in mind, the research questions the study focuses on are as follows: how academics working in the field of Social Sciences in Türkiye perceive their professional roles, how illegitimate tasks are perceived and experienced by academics, the reasons for illegitimate tasks based on participants' perceptions, and what the key processes and outcomes of illegitimate tasks are for academics.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. The Concept of Illegitimate Tasks (ILT)

The concept of "illegitimate tasks" (ILT), referring to tasks assigned to employees that fall outside their professional role definitions and are perceived by employees as unnecessary and unreasonable, is defined as a stress factor involving tasks that should not be expected of employees within the norms and accepted standards related to their profession (Semmer et al., 2007, p.43).

Employees who perceive tasks as ILT experience stress due to a sense of threat to their self-concept. This perception leads to role ambiguity or role conflict, fostering a sense of injustice. ILT can pressure employees by hindering their ability to meet desired performance goals (Akyürek and Can, 2021, p.240). Since ILT is inconsistent with employees' pursuit of a positive



self-assessment, it has the potential to pose a threat to their self-perception (Alicke and Sedikides, 2009, p.3).

These conceptual relationships regarding tasks have not been sufficiently discussed in the occupational stress literature (Akyürek and Can, 2021, p.242). Moreover, ILT serve as obstructive stressors because they represent an individual threat source for employees. Voluntary tasks, such as organizational citizenship behaviors, are not considered within the ILT framework (Eatough et al., 2016, p.110). For a task to be perceived as ILT, it does not necessarily have to be inherently negative or detrimental (Akyürek and Can, 2021, p.240). A task perceived as an ILT by one employee may not be viewed the same way by another. Similarly, a task deemed legitimate within one profession may be perceived as illegitimate in another (Semmer et al., 2010, p.73). For example, while changing a patient's bed is a legitimate task for a caregiver, it is not considered legitimate for a nurse.

2.2. Dimensions of Illegitimate Tasks (ILT)

ILT is evaluated in two sub-dimensions: unnecessary and unreasonable tasks (Semmer et al., 2007, p.44). Unnecessary tasks are those that could be completed with minimal effort or may not need to be done at all if better organized. In such cases, employees may think, "There's no need for me to do this" (Öztürk and Duygulu, 2023, p.139). An example of this type of task is filling out documents that no one ever sees or uses (Eatough et al., 2016). A clear example of an unnecessary task would be requiring a specialist doctor to prepare numerous reports on paper and digitally, rather than allowing them to focus on patient care or further research (Basinska and Dåderman, 2023).

Tasks are classified as unnecessary under the following conditions: (1) if the task does not need to be done at all, (2) if the task is meaningless, (3) if it could be completed with less effort through better organization, (4) if it could be done with less effort if others made fewer errors, or (5) if it reflects the supervisor's preferences rather than actual requirements (Jacobshagen, 2006; Semmer et al., 2015).

Unreasonable tasks are those that do not align with the employee's professional role and position, fall outside the acceptable boundaries of the profession, and thus should not be expected of them (Semmer et al., 2010; 2015). Such tasks prompt employees to think, "I shouldn't be the one doing this" (Akyürek, 2020). An example of an unreasonable task would be asking an employee to handle their supervisor's dry cleaning (Pindek et al., 2019, p.232). Unreasonable tasks contradict employees' professional roles and can disrupt the psychological contract between employees and their employers (Björk et al., 2013). For instance, requesting a private school teacher to collect donations from parents exemplifies unreasonable tasks (Akyürek, 2020).

Tasks are classified as unreasonable under the following conditions: (1) if the task should be performed by someone else, (2) if it falls outside the employee's defined responsibilities, (3) if



it places the employee in a difficult position, or (4) if the assignment is perceived as unfair (Jacobshagen, 2006). Unreasonable tasks undermine employees' professional identity by overstepping and eroding professional boundaries and principles (Semmer et al., 2007). A task may also be perceived as ILT if it exceeds the skills and knowledge required for the employee's position (Akyürek and Can, 2021). For instance, a newly enrolled master's student working as a research assistant may be asked to independently teach a course that should be conducted by a faculty member with a PhD in the field.

2.3. Theoretical Background

ILT's theoretical background is grounded in theories such as the Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) model (Semmer et al., 2007, p.45), Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001, p.342), and role theory (Semmer et al., 2010, p.73).

The Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) theory focuses on individuals' efforts to preserve both personal and social self-esteem, with failure to do so resulting in stress (Semmer et al., 2010, p.73; 2015, p.34). Illegitimate tasks undermine employees' self-esteem and social respect by evoking feelings of belittlement and worthlessness, leading to stressful situations (Akyürek and Can, 2021). In the literature, this is referred to as stress through insufficiency and stress through disrespect (Semmer et al., 2007). Unreasonable tasks threaten professional identity, while unnecessary tasks evoke a sense of inadequacy due to their lack of meaning (Eatough et al., 2016). These findings highlight illegitimate tasks as a unique social stressor.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory emphasizes individuals' efforts to acquire, protect, and expand valued resources. Stress arises when there is a threat to resources, a loss of resources, or insufficient acquisition of new resources despite resource utilization (Yürür, 2011, p.109). According to the theory, resource loss is more impactful than resource gain and is strongly associated with emotional stress (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993). Illegitimate tasks (ILT) can cause resource loss by hindering the utilization of essential professional elements and threatening professional identity and task processes, thereby limiting new resource acquisition. Given the interaction between resource loss and gain, ILT may create a context that fosters a loss cycle by preventing the formation of new resources.

Role theory highlights that individuals' social status and expectations are based on roles and that professional roles are a significant part of social identity (Biddle, 1986; Haslam and Ellemers, 2005). Professional roles are integral to one's identity and self, providing a sense of meaning and purpose (Thoits, 1991; Sluss and Ashforth, 2007). According to role theory, undefined or conflicting job roles lead to role conflict, causing stress and negatively impacting productivity (Rizzo et al., 1970; cited in Güğercin and Sığircıkoğlu, 2019, p.154). While the affirmation of professional identity enhances self-esteem and pride, threats to this identity can result in adverse outcomes. Illegitimate tasks (ILT) exemplify "person-role conflict" by reflecting a misalignment between an individual's internal values and the expected role behavior.



3. METHOD

3.1. Research Questions

The fieldwork of this study focuses on academics from various ranks and levels in the social sciences across metropolitan and regional areas, as well as public and foundation universities in Türkiye. The main research problem is to uncover the ILT experiences encountered by these academics. The study's research questions aim to address this problem.

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

- 1) What are academics' perceptions of their professional roles?
- 2) How are ILT perceived and experienced by academics?
- 3) What are the reasons behind ILT?
- 4) What are the consequences of ILT for academics?

3.2. Research Design

The study adopts a phenomenological approach as its qualitative research design. This approach was chosen to understand how academics experiencing ILT within the context of higher education in Türkiye make sense of these experiences. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that allows individuals to express their understanding, feelings, perspectives, and perceptions regarding a particular phenomenon or concept and is used to describe how they experience this phenomenon.

3.3. Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form was used, with some interviews conducted face-to-face and others on online platforms. In-depth interviews included questions on the following topics:

- Professional values and attitudes
- The quality of relationships with colleagues and administrative supervisors
- The participant's experiences with ILT demands
- The effects of ILT on physiological, psychological, and work-related emotions, attitudes, and behaviors
- The causes/sources of ILT

3.4. Study Group

The study group consists of academics working in the field of social sciences within the context of higher education in Türkiye. The sample was narrowed to social science academics because the literature emphasizes that ILT vary across sectors and professions (Akyürek and Can, 2021). This selection was made with the assumption that social science academics are more likely to encounter similar ILT. In this context, participants were invited via email, and in-depth



interviews were conducted with those who responded positively. Subsequently, the sample was expanded using the snowball sampling method. The sample size (40 participants) was determined based on the point of data saturation.

The participants, numbered from P1 to P40, consist of 31 female and 9 male academics. Nearly half of the participants are research assistants and research assistants with doctoral degrees. Additionally, there are 5 lecturers with doctoral degrees, 10 assistant professors, 6 associate professors and 2 professors. Nine participants hold a master's degree, and 31 hold a doctoral degree. While 33 participants work in faculties, 5 work in vocational schools, and 2 work at institutes. Eleven participants hold administrative positions.

3.5. Data Analysis

The interviews lasted between 35 and 120 minutes. They were recorded via audio and later transcribed manually for all 40 interviews. The interviews were conducted in complete confidentiality. The interviews were conducted between November 2022 and March 2023. As a result of the transcription process, approximately 700 pages of data were generated. In large datasets, scanning documents can lead to "drowning" in the texts, and to ensure a more systematic coding process, it is necessary to use computer software (Sığrı, 2018). Therefore, MAXQDA software was used for coding and analyzing the transcribed interviews.

During the data coding process, both a deductive approach, which took into account the literature and theoretical frameworks, and the coding paradigm of Strauss and Corbin (1998) were utilized. The study employed open, axial, and selective coding techniques simultaneously. The method used for analyzing the data was thematic analysis.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Theme 1: Academicians' Perception of Professional Roles

The theme of academics' professional role perception was examined under three different categories (Figure 1). These categories are perspective on the profession, tasks included in the professional role definition, and what academic identity represents in life.

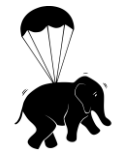
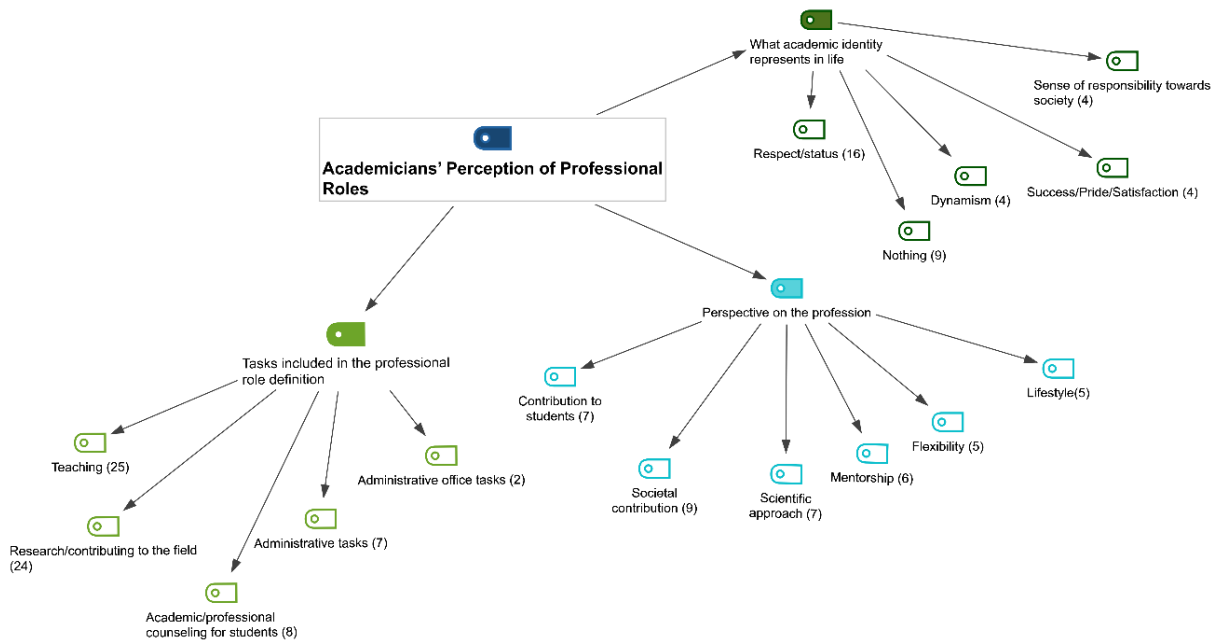
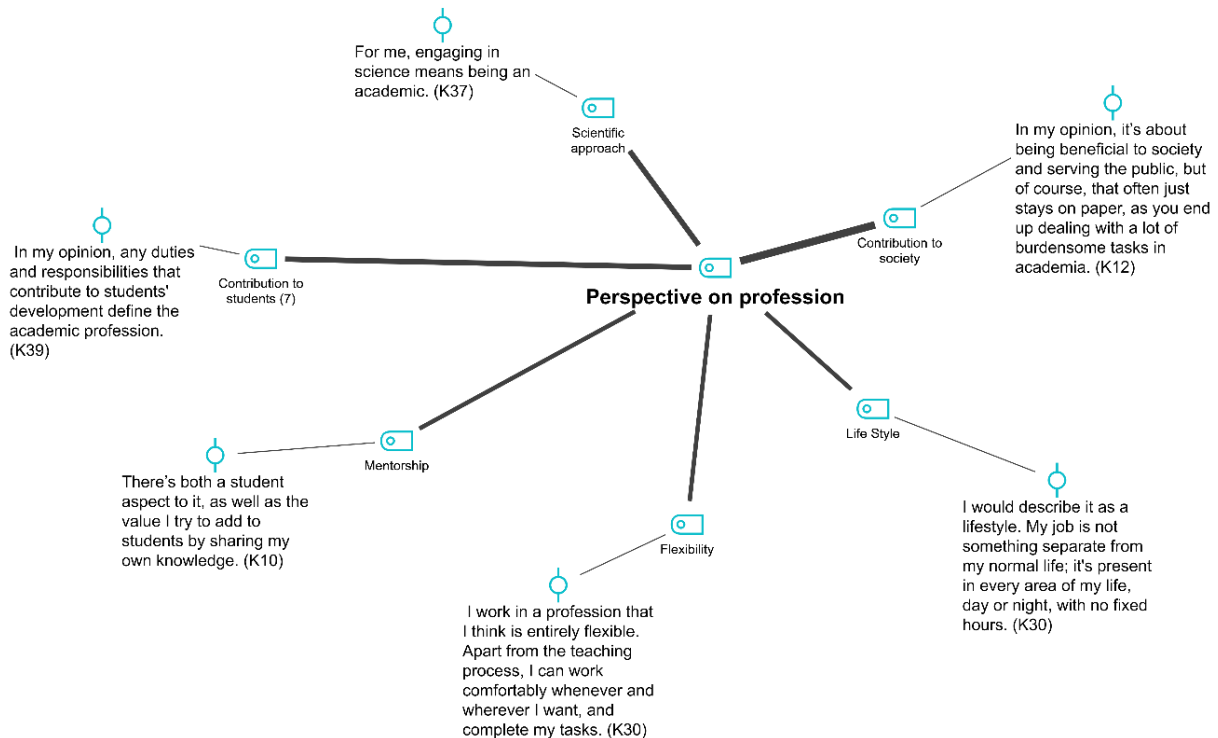


Figure 1. Categories and codes of the theme academics' professional role perception



The category of perspective on the profession is defined by 16 different codes (Figure 2). When asked what academia represents for them, participants predominantly responded with themes of contributing to society, scientific inquiry, and contributing to students' development.

Figure 2. Codes and quotations of the perspective on the profession category

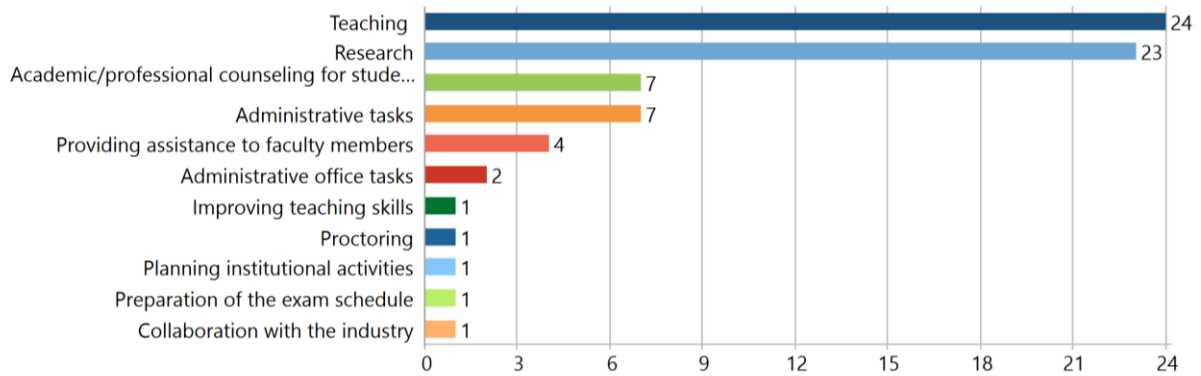


When asked about the tasks included in the role definition of academics, participants predominantly responded with teaching and conducting research/contributing to the field. Many



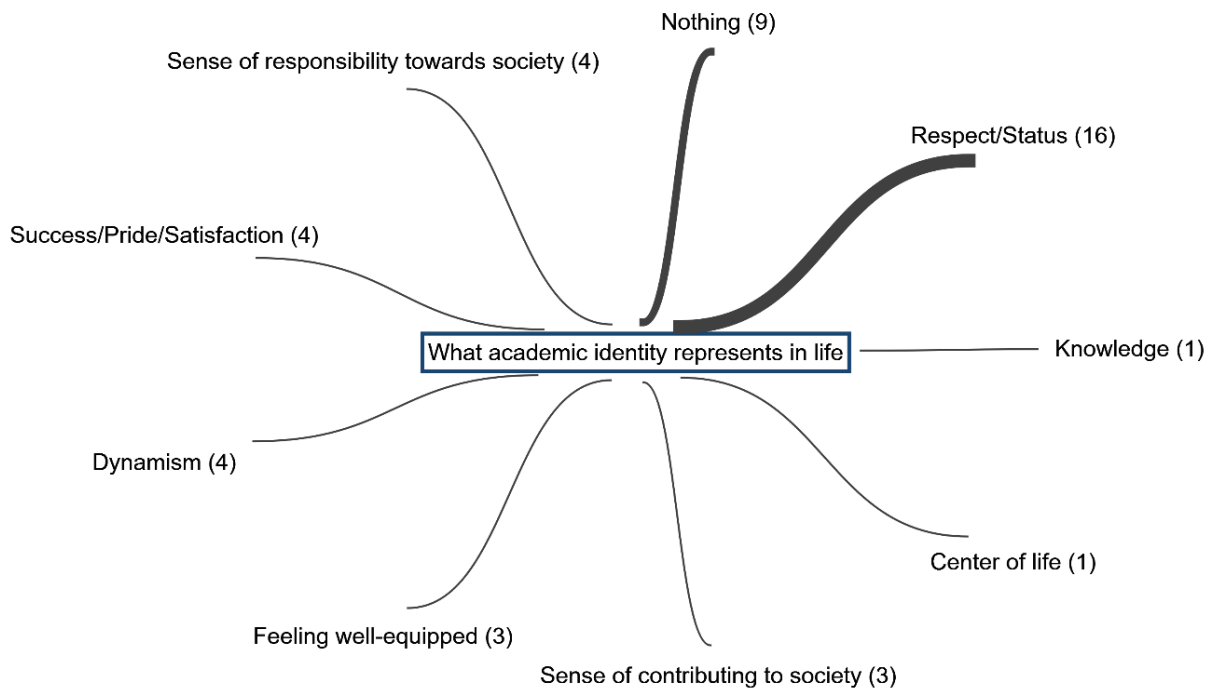
participants believe that the profession consists of two main dimensions: teaching and research (Figure 3).

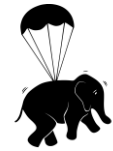
Figure 3. Frequency chart of codes related to tasks included in the professional role definition



When asked what academic identity represents in life, participants predominantly responded with respect/status. Participants who stated that academic identity means nothing in life rank second in terms of response frequency (Figure 4).

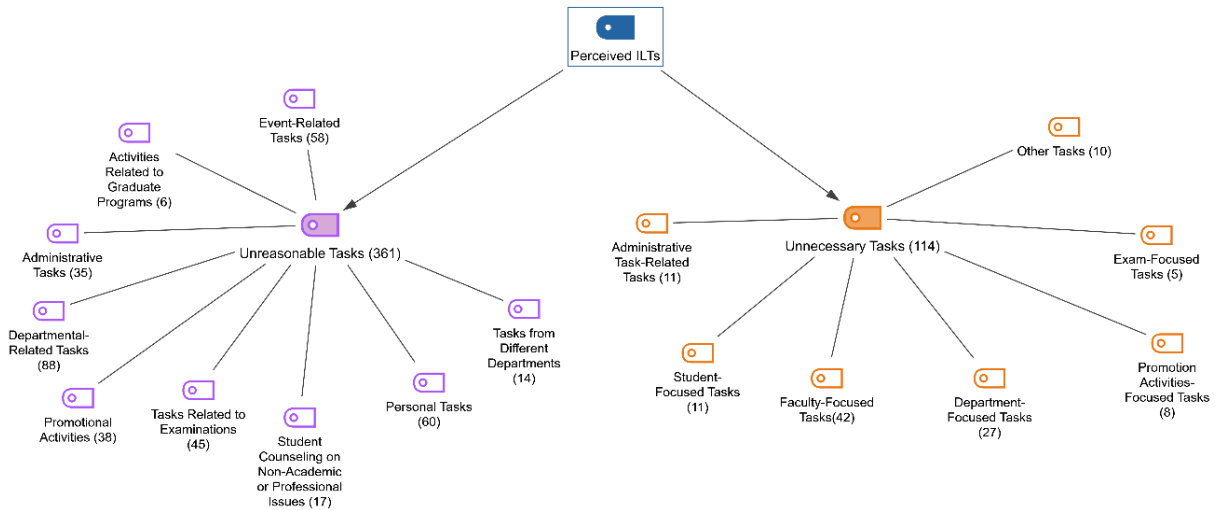
Figure 4. Codes and frequency of what academic identity represents in life





4.2. Theme 2: Perceived ILT

Figure 5. Representation of the frequency of codes for the categories and subcategories of perceived ILT



The theme of perceived ILT is examined under two different categories (unreasonable and unnecessary tasks) and 16 different subcategories. Looking at the frequency of codes, it is evident that participants encounter unreasonable tasks much more frequently than unnecessary tasks.

4.2.1. Category 1: Unnecessary Tasks

Figure 6. Participant-based frequency graph of subcategories for the unnecessary tasks category

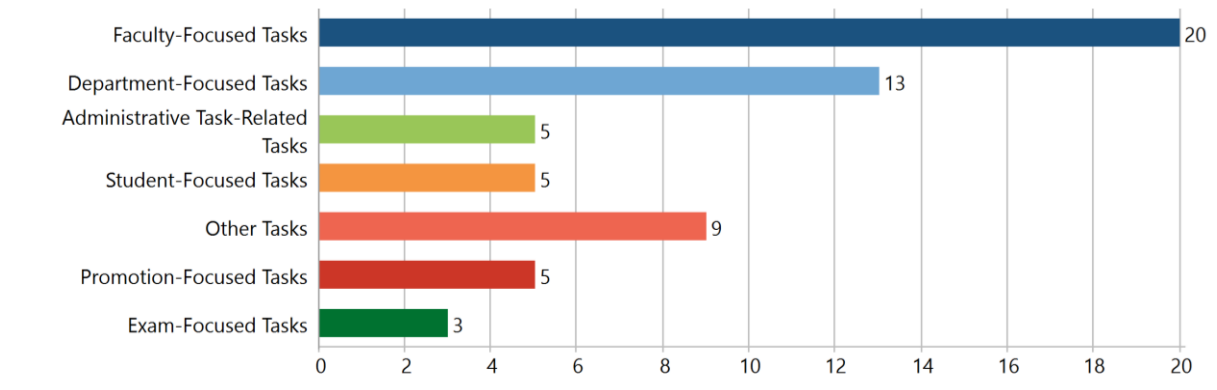
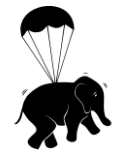


Figure 6 shows that the most encountered unnecessary tasks by participants were faculty-related tasks and department-related tasks. Since the graph in Figure 6 is a participant-based frequency graph, it can also be interpreted that 20 participants mentioned faculty-related unnecessary tasks, while 13 participants referred to department-related unnecessary tasks.



4.2.1.1. Subcategory 1: Faculty-Focused Tasks

The most frequently mentioned task within faculty-focused unnecessary tasks is the repetitive academic data entry requests. Thirteen out of forty participants identified repetitive academic data entries as unnecessary tasks. The participants view the need to input their academic data across multiple platforms, coupled with the frequency of these requests, as a waste of time. P23's views on the matter are as follows:

“These systems never seem to end, they don't interact with each other, and they are not integrated. I believe this is entirely unnecessary and a waste of time.” (P23)

Another unnecessary task mentioned by the participants is unproductive meetings. The participants describe meetings that lack sufficient content or those that could be held online but are instead conducted face-to-face as unnecessary. The frequent requests for performance targets have also been identified as another unnecessary task. P2's views on the matter are as follows:

“But we keep doing this strategic or reporting work, for example, constant quarterly and semi-annual reports. I don't understand it, I mean, we're not a business. How much did we sell this month? How much will we sell next month? Academic work takes much longer. There's a sort of data fetishism here. There's always data being collected.” (P2)

Regarding unnecessary formalization/bureaucracy, P24 states the following:

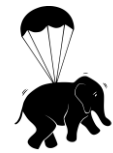
“There are standard, formalities-required writings; I just rewrite and send what I wrote last month. They don't say ‘if nothing has changed, don't write it,’ they say, ‘write it,’ and I have to rewrite it.” (P24)

4.2.1.2. Subcategory 2: Department-Focused Tasks

Thirteen participants provided feedback in the subcategory of department-focused unnecessary tasks. The preparation of department activity tables and Bologna-related paperwork are the most frequently mentioned topics in this category:

“Our activity reports; how many seminars were held in the department? Who conducted how many events? (...) Going back and asking the professor ‘What did you do last year?’ 10 times, or 2 times throughout the year...” (P30)

“The filling out of Bologna packages... First, we fill them out, and then they say, ‘do the upload like this.’ We fill them out again, and this time they say, ‘these are the general errors, fix them this way.’ They don't provide guidelines at first, and after we do it multiple times, it's as if the guidelines are created. Also, constant updates are requested.” (P11)



4.2.1.3. Subcategory 3: Administrative Task-Related Tasks

This subcategory pertains to participants with administrative tasks. The most frequently mentioned topic in this subcategory is the responsibility of attending official events/openings/meetings. P20, who works at a higher education institution located in the district, states that she attends most of the events in the city center on behalf of her superior because she lives in the city center. P23 mentions that she is constantly at an event, opening, or meeting and must dedicate a significant amount of time to these. P34 explains that the openings and protocol visits she is required to attend are completely beyond her control, and she feels her participation in most of these events is unnecessary. P22 shares that she is obliged to attend ceremonies unrelated to her work, such as those on national holidays like April 23, while P25, in his role as assistant dean, describes feeling like the dean's assistant, which provides an interesting perspective:

“When I was in the administrative part, I was supporting the dean, and I couldn’t focus on my academic work. For example, I had to attend an event at the rectorate that had nothing to do with me, at the dean’s request; instead of preparing for my associate professorship, my time was spent there. I was forced to attend events like AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) training or intercultural dinners, which I actually wouldn’t want to attend.” (P25)

P23, who served as assistant dean, mentioned that commissions are constantly being established at the university, and due to the lack of communication between these commissions, she must repeatedly perform the same tasks for different commissions. She also added that as the individuals in charge of the commissions change, the system is restructured according to the new administrator, and the same tasks are requested from the beginning once again.

4.2.1.4. Subcategory 4: Student-Focused Tasks

Another subcategory formed based on the participants’ views is student-focused unnecessary tasks. In this subcategory, the views are grouped under the code “tasks due to indirect communication (acting as a bridge).” Five out of forty participants stated that they have to act as intermediaries in students' communication through various channels. P7’s statement on the matter is as follows:

“(…) When issues like class schedules and paperwork, which should actually be handled by administrative staff or secretaries, are left to us, we end up going beyond academic tasks.” (P7)

4.2.1.5. Subcategory 5: Promotion-Focused Tasks

The most frequently mentioned task in promotion-focused activities is the responsibility of attending promotional days. P4 and P16’s statements on the matter are as follows:



“At university promotional days, in our tourism-oriented city, during a time when there are no students in the summer, they set up an unnecessary promotional booth in a shopping mall and assign research assistants to it.” (P4)

“After I became a doctor, I was assigned to promotional days at both universities; however, I was trying to promote a university that hadn’t even prepared its brochure.” (P16)

The statements of P26, who stated that they had a task to greet students coming from out of town at the station, are noteworthy:

“During registration periods, since students come from outside, and Eskişehir is a very central location, both on the railway and bus routes, professors are assigned to the bus station or train station. A booth is set up, and as a professor, you go there and welcome the students.” (P26)

4.2.1.6. Subcategory 6: Exam-Focused Tasks

The codes in the subcategory of exam-focused tasks, each with a participant-based code frequency of 1, include: preparing answer keys for exams, creating grade distribution charts, initialing exam papers, and unnecessary assignments for exam proctoring.

4.2.1.7. Subcategory 7: Other Tasks

In the subcategory of other tasks, the codes are divided into two categories: printing documents in a way that leads to paper waste and requesting tasks that will not be used or have not been fully assessed for feasibility. Nine participants shared their views on this matter.

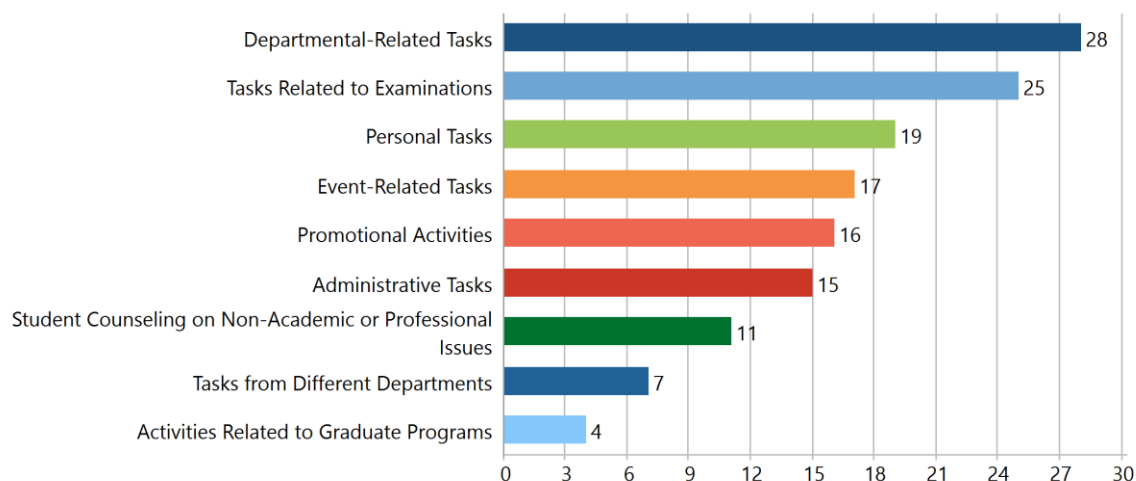
P8 stated that working on paper in a digital environment creates an unnecessary workload. P21 sees printing pages of exam venue announcements when they could be shared digitally, as a waste of time. P25 finds it unnecessary to print and sign documents for online education when the files are already stored in the system. P28 emphasized that keeping multiple copies of graduate student registration slips leads to paper waste and time loss. P29 is surprised that tasks, which are provided in electronic format, still require printing and signing, and cannot be solved with an e-signature.

P9, working at a private university, explained that during the pandemic, due to the perception that research assistants were not working, they were tasked with preparing materials for an elective course that was never offered, and the course was later removed from the curriculum. P22 mentioned that despite putting significant effort into quality-related work, all documents were rendered invalid due to a change in guidelines, and during this process, while they could have written an article or a book, they dedicated all their time to this task. P32 shared that they wasted two months on a task that had not been properly assessed for feasibility, while P40 stated that they believed most commission tasks were done merely to “appear to be completed.”



4.2.2. Category 2: Unreasonable Tasks

Figure 7. Participant-based frequency graph of subcategories related to the category of unreasonable tasks



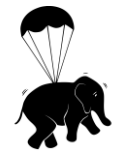
The category of unreasonable tasks is defined by 9 different subcategories. As seen in Figure 7, the most encountered unreasonable tasks by participants are those related to departmental work and exam-related tasks. It is also noteworthy that personal tasks are the third most frequently mentioned subcategory.

4.2.2.1. Subcategory 1: Departmental-Related Tasks

The codes defined by participants as illogical tasks related to the department, along with their participant-based frequencies, are as follows: preparing course schedules (15), exemption/validation tasks (7), teaching a course outside of their expertise (4), preparing departmental activity tables (3), preparing accreditation files (2), curriculum preparation (2), advising on probation students (2), registration approvals (2), validation tasks (2), and translation (2). The most frequently mentioned codes in this subcategory are preparing course schedules and exemption/validation tasks.

Most participants who felt that the task of preparing course schedules was not part of their responsibilities were research assistants. P4, working as a research assistant, stated that they prepared the course schedule for their department, which not only took up a lot of their time but also caused stress due to faculty members' requests for changes during exam periods. Similarly, P7, also working as a research assistant, explained that they were tasked with scheduling the graduate courses of faculty members, along with the faculty's course schedule. They attributed this responsibility to the lack of administrative staff available at the faculty or institute to handle such tasks but noted that it did not align with their job description.

Some participants, despite not being research assistants, are required to prepare course schedules due to their administrative tasks:



“The process of adjusting the course distribution according to everyone’s requests prolongs the task when it should be done by the department or program head. If the program were determined from a single source, no one would be able to say, ‘I didn’t want it like that.’” (P20)

“If it were up to me, I think as the Deputy Head of the Department, I shouldn't be doing so much work. For example, why are we preparing the course schedule? It should be done by the administrative staff.” (P24)

Of the 7 participants who expressed their views on exemption/validation tasks, 5 were research assistants. The consensus among the research assistants is that it would be more appropriate for a faculty member to handle this task.

“For example, exemptions should not be the assistant's job. Because it really should be done by a faculty member, ideally the instructor of the course. The question 'Is this course equivalent to the other course?' is given to us, and I just write whether it is equivalent or not based on the descriptions.” (P11)

The situation of teaching courses outside their area of expertise is another unreasonable task that participants have expressed concerns about. Participants attribute this to staff shortages, but they have stated that it makes them feel inadequate and that students do not receive optimal benefits from these classes.

Regarding the preparation of departmental activity tables, P14’s views are as follows:

“It's not my area, and I don't understand anything about it. For example, it asks, 'How many students have dropped out?' or 'How many students are still enrolled?' To find out this, I would need to contact the student affairs office. So, this task should be given to student affairs, and they should handle it.” (P14)

4.2.2.2. Subcategory 2: Tasks Related to Examinations

The most frequently mentioned tasks in this subcategory are preparing the exam schedule, preparing exam questions, grading exams, and entering grades. Among the 16 participants who found preparing the exam schedule to be illogical but were still required to do it, 8 worked as research assistants. Additionally, there are participants who prepare the exam schedule due to their roles as department heads or assistant department heads. Participants agree that this task should be carried out by student affairs. P16's views on this issue are as follows:

“Yes, the assistants do those tasks as well. And I believe student affairs should handle them. But there seems to be an issue; I think professors often make a lot of changes later, so they have trouble coordinating with the administrative staff.” (P16)

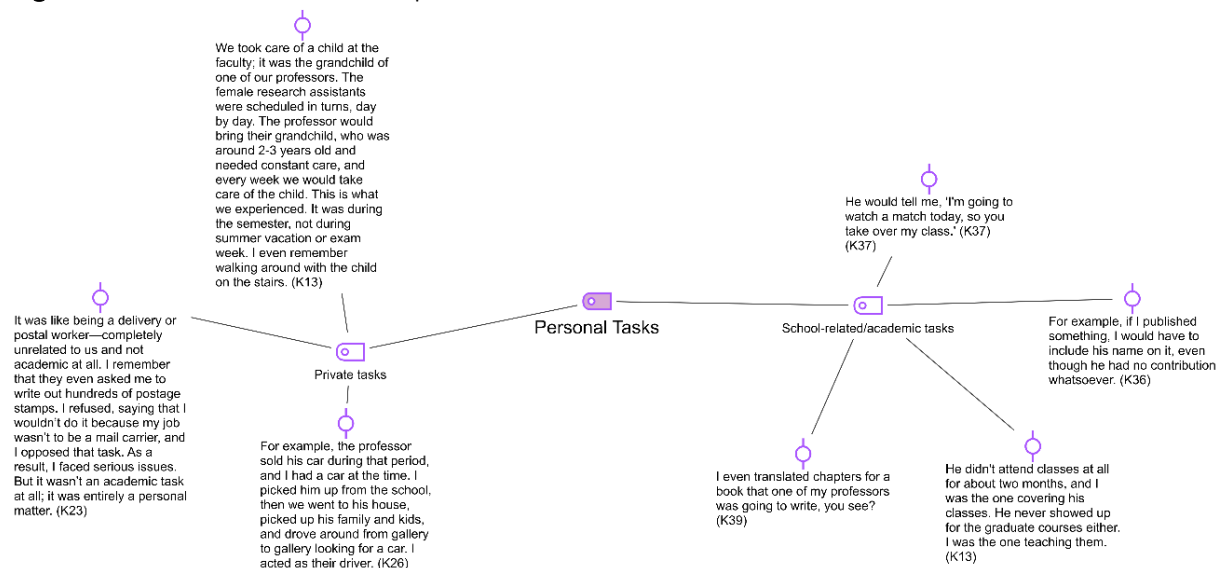
The delegation of tasks such as preparing exam questions, grading exams, and entering grades to research assistants has been frequently mentioned. P1 highlights that the faculty members they assist grade both faculty and institute courses, emphasizing that professors receive extra



compensation for these tasks, making it clear that these tasks belong to them. P9 expresses that while these tasks reduce the workload of faculty members, they hinder their own academic development. P5, on the other hand, mentions that they occasionally enter grades for 1,500-2,000 students.

4.2.2.3. Subcategory 3. Personal Tasks

Figure 8. Quotations related to personal tasks subcodes



One of the most notable subcategories within the category of irrational tasks is personal tasks. The personal tasks subcategory is defined by the codes for private and school-related/academic tasks. Nineteen out of 40 participants have expressed their views on this matter. Some of the quotes related to these two codes are presented in Figure 8.

The participants who shared their experiences regarding personal tasks all reported experiences during their assistantship period, and many of the unreasonable tasks were assigned by the faculty members they assisted. P1 was asked to perform tasks such as picking up medicine from the pharmacy and arranging car repairs, while P6 had to arrange flight tickets for the professors they assisted. P15 was tasked with sending documents by mail for their supervising professor, and P19 had to deal with various tasks, such as collecting the retirement documents when their professor was leaving the university, making photocopies, delivering documents to another department, retrieving the professor's computer tower from their home and bringing it to the university, sending parcels, and cleaning the office. P20 and P22 were asked to guide university visitors around the city on weekends. P22, who responded with "This is not my job," continued by saying, "There are companies in this field that can handle reception services on your behalf. Support should be sought from them." P23, while working as a research assistant, stated that the dean of their faculty frequently assigned such tasks, including once being asked to write hundreds of postage stamps. When P23 expressed that this was not part of their job, they reported facing serious problems as a result. Similarly, P23, during a workshop they attended



as a participant, was asked by the same professor to pick up a guest from the airport and take them to the hotel at 3 a.m. When P23 stated they could not do it, the professor replied, “*You can’t do anything anyway.*” A similar situation occurred when P26, working as a research assistant, was called by their professor at 2 a.m. and asked to pick them up from the bus station at 2:30 a.m. P26, who complied without objection, was told by the professor, “*You research assistants don’t do anything; you earn money while lying down.*” Both P23, who refused the unreasonable task, and P26, who carried it out, ended up facing mistreatment. P26 mentioned that they believed such tasks had become a tool for mobbing by a particular professor and shared their experience as follows:

“I was in my own office, and the professor was in theirs; they called me on the phone and said, ‘Come here.’ I went, and there were students in the office. In front of the students, they handed me their invoice and asked, ‘Could you pay this?’ This is mobbing. (...) Then, at one point, it got even stranger; the professor’s friend’s mother-in-law and father-in-law were coming to the city, and I had to go pick them up from the bus station and take them to the hotel.” (P26)

The experiences of the participants who shared their views on school-related/academic tasks all stem from their assistantship periods, and the illogical tasks they received mostly came from the faculty members they assisted. P1, P13, P15, and P35 do not find it appropriate for faculty members to place all responsibilities solely on them. P15 describes being required to attend a class of a faculty member they assisted, despite feeling unqualified, with the following statement:

“I had just been appointed and was in my graduate studies. I was required to fully teach a production course, which I had never taken before. I don’t think tasks performed without having the necessary qualifications benefit either the students or the assistants; it’s nothing but a menial task.” (P15)

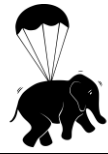
P4 states that academic advising for students has been transferred from faculty members to research assistants, while P7 mentions that the faculty members they assist are required to act as thesis advisors for graduate students. P11’s experiences in this regard are notable:

“Sometimes, very informally, things like reviewing are assigned; for example, faculty members ask to do peer reviews for themselves... Apart from that, sometimes the faculty member asks me to read a master’s thesis and provide an evaluation. Once, they even asked me to evaluate their associate professorship dossier...” (P11)

The statements of participants who were tasked with doing the academic work of the faculty members they assisted are as follows:

“For example, having the assistant do the work related to their own article, an analysis process, or a specific section of it.” (P15)

“We wrote many projects on behalf of the professor.” (P35)



“For instance, in my case, when I publish an article, his name will be on it, without any contribution or effort from him.” (P36)

4.2.2.4. Subcategory 4: Event-Related Tasks

The most frequently mentioned tasks in this category are related to creating technical infrastructure for events and preparing posters. P3 mentions that they were frequently assigned the responsibility of live broadcasting, while P4 has repeatedly been tasked with establishing the infrastructure for presentations at conferences within their institution. P8 highlights the necessity of becoming proficient in Zoom due to online events, and P9 mentions being responsible for checking whether equipment like projectors and computers in classrooms are functioning correctly. P16 and P22 state that they were assigned the task of preparing the conference room prior to events. Except for P22, all participants who shared experiences related to this task were research assistants. Furthermore, research assistants P2, P4, P5, P8, P10, and P16 are responsible for preparing event posters. P4’s views on the matter are as follows:

“When an announcement needs to be made about an upcoming event, a poster is required. This is something that actually requires a professional with graphic design skills or someone who knows how to use software like Photoshop or similar tools. But I’m the one who does it.” (P4)

4.2.2.5. Subcategory 5: Promotional Activities

This category includes tasks coded as managing the unit’s social media (8 participants), attending promotional events (5 participants), and managing the website (5 participants). The most frequently mentioned task in this subcategory is managing the unit’s social media. Regarding this, P8 states:

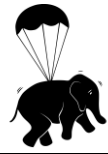
“All social media channels are managed by research assistants, and we use them to an incredible extent. I’m not sure if such extensive use is necessary, but I suppose it’s because we’re a foundation university.” (P8)

All participants who commented on attending promotional events were research assistants. Regarding this, P16 stated:

“A similar assignment was given to us for the promotional days. The event was held inside a shopping mall. (...) We sat at a table waiting for students, and not a single student came. They made us do this for an entire week.” (P16)

P12’s views on managing the website are as follows:

“For instance, I’m not someone with expertise in information systems; I haven’t received any training or guidance on this. Yet, I am working on our faculty’s web committee, which, frankly, defies any logical explanation.” (P12)



P20 and P22, who work at an institution in the district, report that they visited local government officials to distribute graduation invitations. P17 states that orientation activities in their institution are handled by research assistants, a task they find absurd. P36, who had prior experience in advertising, mentions being compelled to participate in the school's corporate image activities due to this background.

4.2.2.6. Subcategory 6: Administrative Tasks

The most frequently mentioned unreasonable task in the subcategory of administrative tasks was performing secretarial tasks or handling secretarial tasks. P4 had an interesting experience with such an unreasonable task. Working at an institute, P4 explained that due to staff shortages, research assistants took turns on weekly shifts over a two-month period, answering phones and assisting visitors next to the institute secretary's office. P4 felt that this task crossed the line from an unreasonable task to outright mobbing, stating the experience as follows:

“At the institute, we were assigned tasks such as filing documents and answering phones because a staff member was not fulfilling their tasks properly. These tasks were directed to us by the institute director, and, in a way, we were also responsible for monitoring whether this person was even at work during office hours. This was the most absurd and pointless task I ever experienced.” (P4)

P8 mentions having served as a department secretary for a period at their institution, while P21 states they had to take over the tasks of their department secretary due to the latter nearing retirement. P21's remark is particularly noteworthy:

“(…) For a long time in our department, we handled these tasks without our professors even being aware of it. What's worse is that we didn't question whether we were supposed to be doing it. In fact, it was something the secretary was responsible for and supposed to do. It was only much later that we realized this.” (P21)

P23, who served as an assistant dean, expressed that their administrative tasks required him to engage extensively in secretarial tasks, leaving them with no energy for his primary responsibilities. Similarly, P24, a department chair, stated that they often had to take over certain tasks from the faculty secretary, dedicating half a day to tasks the secretary could complete in 10 minutes. P26, recalling their time as a research assistant, mentioned that when the department secretary left the faculty, research assistants were assigned to rotate as department secretaries temporarily. P28, an assistant department chair at a well-established university, shared the following reflections:

“Why am I doing this? For instance, I'm acting as a secretary—because we don't have one. The secretary goes on leave for a month, and the assistant department chair ends up doing secretarial work for an entire month!”



P4, who works at an institute but handles inter-departmental correspondence within the faculty, noted that given his position, he may transfer institutions in the future, making his current administrative tasks both illogical and unsustainable. P39, who serves as the head of the department as well as the director of a university center, stated that he manages all administrative tasks himself due to the lack of support staff at the center.

P22 and P28 mentioned that they actively handle procurement tasks for their department. P28 expressed this with, *“I mean, I remember buying things for the department, like a toilet seat... if you know what I mean.”*

P29 and P33, appointed as expert witnesses in investigations, feel this role does not align with their job descriptions. Similarly, P5 and P12 expressed that, due to a shortage of administrative staff, they were required to clean their own offices for a time, finding it unreasonable to spend their time on such tasks.

P28 also mentioned being tasked with tasks typically assigned to administrative staff, such as preparing lists for occupational health and safety certification and creating recycling reminder signs for restrooms. P24, who received training in quality standards, reported being frequently assigned as an internal auditor for various university departments, which significantly limited the time available for their primary responsibilities.

4.2.2.7. Subcategory 7. Student Counseling on Non-Academic or Professional Issues

One of the nonsensical tasks mentioned by participants is providing student counseling on non-academic or professional issues. Eleven participants agree that the boundaries of student counseling tasks have become unclear. Among the most frequently discussed issues in this subcategory is that academics are often required to contact students for various tasks.

Another frequently mentioned task in this subcategory is providing technical counseling to students. P17, who works as a research assistant at a regional university, stated that research assistants handle technical student consultations, attributing this responsibility to the nature of working at a smaller university.

4.2.2.8. Subcategory 8: Tasks from Different Departments

In the subcategory of Tasks from Different Departments, three distinct codes were defined for four participants. P1, who works as a research assistant, mentioned that they also supervise exams for graduate courses taught by the faculty members they assist, which they found unreasonable. Both P1 and P6 indicated that they are sometimes called upon to supervise exams in other departments, which they feel does not align with their role definitions. P1 further noted that the faculty members they assist expect them to also assist in their graduate courses, while P4, despite working in a different unit, was tasked with preparing the course schedule for the faculty.

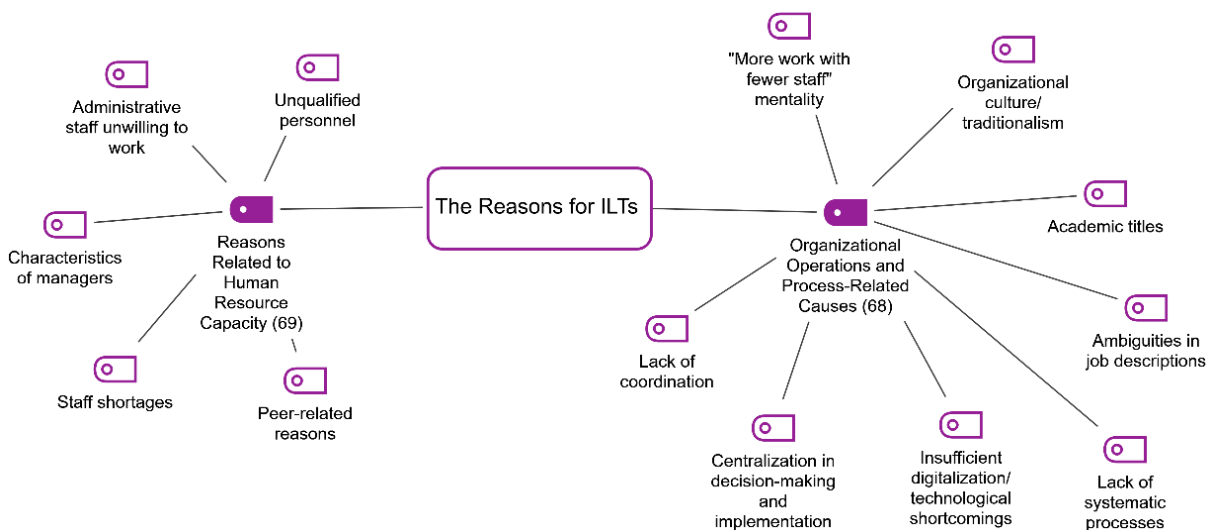


4.2.2.9. Subcategory 9: Activities Related to Graduate Programs

Some participants working in institutes stated that they themselves conduct checks on incoming theses, while three participants mentioned that they were tasked with preparing the files for the upcoming graduate programs.

4.3. Theme 3: The Reasons for ILT

Figure 9. Categories of the theme reasons for ILT



Participants’ views on the reasons for ILT are defined by two distinct categories.

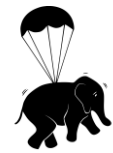
4.3.1. Category 1: Organizational Operations and Process-Related Causes

In the category of organizational operations and process-related causes, the most frequently highlighted issue by participants is the ambiguity in job descriptions. Participants agree that the item "other tasks assigned by the administrative supervisor" creates a legal loophole. Regarding this, P17, who works as a research assistant, shared their thoughts as follows: *"I feel like an academic laborer. What does laborer mean? Whatever job is given, it is done, and it's an unskilled task."* The words of P30, who works as an assistant professor, are as follows:

"In my opinion, the job descriptions and task distributions are unclear for both research assistants and professors. And we pay the price for this ambiguity by having other professors do the work of those who are unable to do their tasks, hiding behind the inability to perform their tasks." (P30)

Another frequently mentioned issue in this category is system inefficiency. Some of the views on this topic are as follows:

"Now, if we move away from the mentality of 'all right on the night' and think more proactively and analytically, perhaps at some point, we could do more efficient work." (P22)



“It shouldn't be something personal, or something that changes from one period to another, depending on who does the job. It's not even legal if you look at it that way. Unfortunately, some things are not being systematized, maybe more so in smaller universities...” (P30)

“System inefficiency. In a proper university, the administrators should have the intention to establish a system.” (P40)

Participants believe that one of the organizational process-related reasons for ILT is organizational culture/traditionalism. They think that some of the illegitimate tasks requested from them have become normalized as part of the culture. Some participants have expressed the following views on this matter:

“I think there's this mentality of 'it's been like this, so it will continue this way.’” (P3)

“For example, the professors can have the assistants grade the exam papers, but technically, according to the law, that's an irregular procedure. What can you do? It's something that has come as a tradition.” (P12)

“Because they're dealing with it, I now think there's nothing to be done. It's a system, it's become embedded in the organizational culture.” (P28)

As research assistants, P2, P6, P8, P14, P15, and P18, who works as an assistant professor, believe that the illegitimate tasks requested from them stem from their academic titles. P2 and P18 expressed the following on the matter:

“For example, I know that when I become an assistant professor or associate professor, I'll be much more relaxed in academia. Therefore, until I reach that point, I think I am expected to do everything at any given moment.” (P2)

“However, depending on my title, being assigned roles in areas where I am not an expert can be really exhausting at times.” (P18)

Centralization in decision-making and implementation, lack of coordination, and the mindset of doing more work with fewer personnel are less frequently mentioned codes in this category.

4.3.2. Category 2: Reasons Related to Human Resource Capacity

The most frequently mentioned issue by participants regarding the human resource capacity-related causes of ILT is the characteristics of the managers:

“Some people in administrative positions in faculties... Some may be very good academics, but not very good administrators. Therefore, this is a significant shortcoming.” (P6)

“They have created a fear mechanism. I mean, let me put it this way: the fear of losing the position should not exist. There should be room to speak out and respond to factors that do not operate within the framework of fairness.” (P22)



“If the system creates these meaningless tasks, it is the management that creates them. Therefore, the characteristics of the managers are very important.” (P32)

Twelve out of 40 participants identified personnel shortage as a reason for ILT. Some participants believe there is a lack of administrative staff, while others attribute ILT to the insufficient number of academic staff. The following are some of the participants' statements on the matter:

“The fundamental issue, I believe, is that tasks that could be done by administrative staff are being carried out by us as assistants.” (P5)

“Personnel shortage is a huge problem for my institution. Since the student affairs office consists of only two people and they can't keep up with anything, many tasks end up falling on me, on us.” (P20)

“I think, in academic life or at the academic level, due to personnel shortage, the lack of specialized staff, or the shortage of specialized administrative staff, these tasks somehow need to be handled, and whatever resources you have at that moment is what you turn to.” (P34)

One of the reasons mentioned by participants in this category is administrative staff who are unwilling to work.

“But there's no one to send, because if he calls the secretary, the secretary says, 'This isn't my job.’” (P14)

“This is also true for administrative staff, and there's the problem of too many administrative tasks being assigned to academics. Especially with events and the technical aspects of these arrangements, it's honestly a burden for us to have to handle them.” (P21)

“But look, even the tasks that the department secretariat is supposed to handle end up being done by the research assistants and us. The department secretaries are also very comfortable; they just say, 'That's not my job.’” (P31)

The following are the participants' statements regarding reasons stemming from peer-related issues and unqualified personnel in this category:

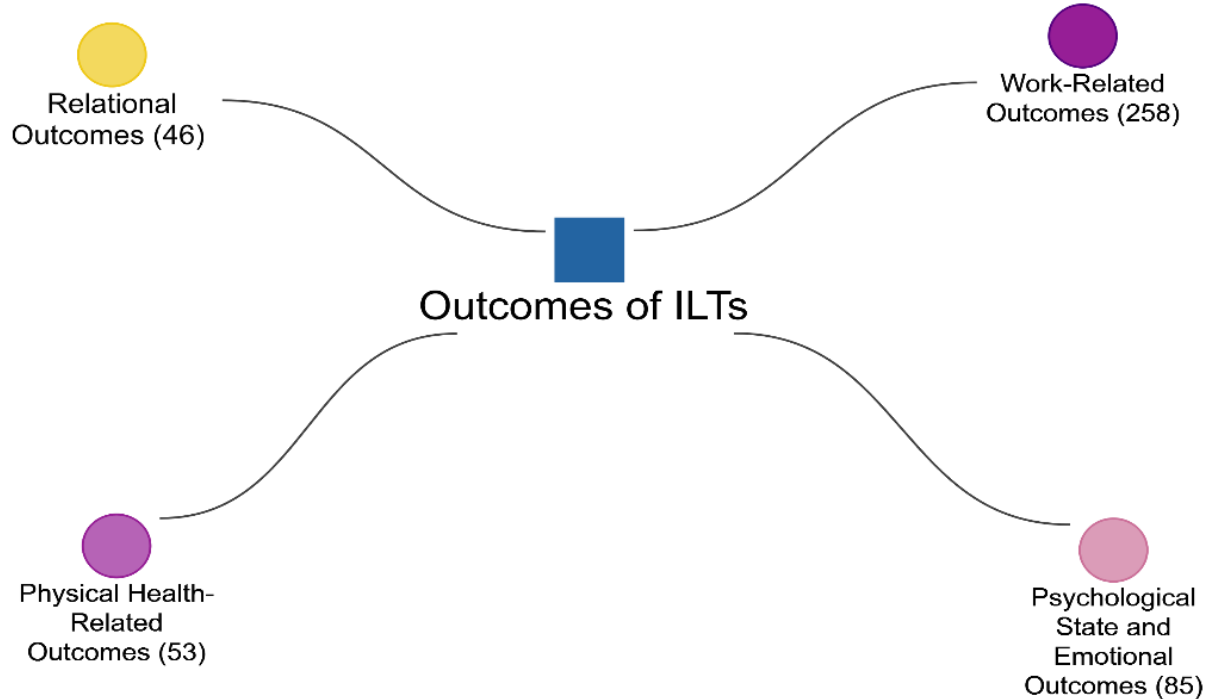
“It's not just the managers; sometimes it's also due to colleagues not taking enough responsibility.” (P38)

“Unfortunately, there are people who just don't know how to do their jobs. For instance, especially in X district, staff who transfer from the Ministry of Education often join as administrative staff, but they don't understand student affairs, can't read regulations, and are unaware of many things. They constantly come to us with questions.” (P16)



4.4. Theme 4: Outcomes of Illegitimate Tasks (ILT)

Figure 10. Categories and code frequencies of the outcomes of illegitimate tasks (ILT) theme



The theme of the outcomes of illegitimate tasks (ILT) is defined in four distinct categories: relational outcomes, physical health-related outcomes, psychological and emotional outcomes, and work-related outcomes.

4.4.1. Category 1: Relational Outcomes

The most frequently experienced relational outcome reported by participants (11 out of 40) is the deterioration of workplace relationships. Participants facing frequent exposure to ILT indicate a decline in workplace tolerance. Seven participants expressed feeling a sense of detachment from colleagues or supervisors as a relational consequence of ILT. Believing that increased visibility results in more ILT assignments, some participants tend to isolate themselves in the workplace. Here are a few statements from participants in this category:

“The risk and potential for conflict between individuals of equal status is created. There is a dilemma, and you start questioning whether the source of the problem is the manager's incompetence or your colleague's skill in avoiding work.” (P12)

“But when some people are exposed to this while others comfortably do only what they want and avoid what they don't want, a serious conflict environment arises. I believe this creates something that seriously disrupts the work environment, something that disrupts work peace.” (P21)



“My tolerance level decreases, of course. For example, when someone asks for something, instead of doing it at a normal time, I might do it with a harsh look or in a sharp tone.” (P3)

“Basically, you hold off toward those who do or don't do the work, or those who deem you worthy of menial tasks. You start to feel devalued, and the other person also becomes devalued.” (P23)

“Everything starts to become bureaucratic. I just come, give my lecture, do my task, and leave. I don't want anyone to bother me, I don't want to see anyone.” (P20)

“(…) That would really upset me. We both have the same title, the same profession, the same salary, and we work at the same faculty, but there is definitely an unfair distribution, and the feeling of injustice would engulf my entire body. Sometimes, I would even feel resentful toward my colleague.” (P1)

4.4.2. Category 2: Physical Health-Related Outcomes

The physical health-related outcomes of ILT have been defined through 12 different codes based on the participants' statements. The most commonly reported issues are sleep disturbances and fatigue. Some participant statements related to this issue are as follows:

“Physically, of course, you face irregular eating habits and sleep disturbances; malnutrition and sleeping disorders as well.” (P6)

“Sleep problems create a situation where it's not insomnia, but rather a desire for more sleep and resting. It's like a form of escape syndrome.” (P34)

“We have academic work, the courses we are teaching. So, when things are suddenly loaded onto you without questioning whether you have time for them, and because you tire yourself trying to keep up with everything, it causes physical exhaustion.” (P21)

P7, P13, and P39 specifically mentioned experiencing muscle pain in the back and neck areas, while P11 stated that frequent muscle tension occurred due to anger. P6 and P7 noted that when illegitimate tasks were overwhelming, their eating habits were disrupted, while P22 expressed that during such times, they had no desire to eat, and P34 mentioned turning to sugary foods. P3, P25, and P28 indicated that the intensity of such tasks weakened their immune systems, leading to frequent illnesses. P23 stated that the stress caused by these tasks resulted in serious health problems. P4 shared that the time pressure of these tasks caused stress, which led to stomach cramps. P22 also reported experiencing stomach issues, while P37, reflecting on their assistantship period, mentioned battling conditions like gastritis and acid reflux due to the perception that ILT were being used as a tool for mobbing. P5 expressed extreme frustration upon learning about the ILT assigned to them, realizing how time-consuming it was, and how, if approached systematically, it would not fall to them. They experienced tremors in their jaw and were unable to stop them. P33 also reported experiencing teeth grinding during times of



high workload. Both P22 and P33 noted that the stress from these periods caused hair problems. Finally, P33 mentioned issues with fluctuating weight, while P28 believed that stress-related forgetfulness had increased during such periods.

4.4.3. Category 3: Psychological State and Emotional Outcomes

ILT create stress for participants due to their inability to dedicate time to their core tasks and their need to perform tasks outside their area of expertise. This situation leads to feelings of anger, unhappiness, anxiety, and a sense of worthlessness. The inability to voice concerns and the feeling of being compelled to comply with these tasks generate a sense of being trapped by the participants. Another emotion felt by participants in response to ILT is frustration, stemming from the conflict between their role expectations and the actual situation they face. Some of the participants' statements on the matter are as follows:

“When I found myself unable to do my own work due to the unskilled tasks assigned to me, I became angrier, reaching the point of wanting to explode, whereas I consider myself a patient person. It led to a change in my character.” (P3)

“When these tasks were assigned to me, I first learned to be excessively angry, and then I learned how to cope with my anger.” (P36)

“It makes me feel worthless, that’s the right word. I feel worthless. I think I don’t deserve that treatment or the task.” (P13)

“Since I’ve been doing so many unreasonable administrative tasks, I can’t publish because I don’t have time for anything else. As a result, I can’t reach my potential, and that creates a sense of being stuck in me.” (P28)

“Or, there’s unhappiness, it’s like a depressive state.” (P39)

“Yes, as a profession, I thought, ‘I didn’t envision academia this way.’ I was deeply disappointed. Like I said, I didn’t see academia like this through my professors. Then, when I encountered this here, I thought, ‘This wasn’t my dream.’” (P26)

“Because an intense anxiety disorder developed. It’s unpredictable when or where something will arise.” (P17)

4.4.4. Category 4: Work-Related Outcomes

The most frequently discussed issues regarding the work-related outcomes of ILT are role ambiguity and role conflict. Thirty-three participants reported experiencing role ambiguity or role conflict because of the ILT assigned to them. The lack of clear role boundaries in academia contributes to the frequent exposure of participants to ILT, leading to role ambiguity:



“I experience a lot of role ambiguity because what happens is, when these menial tasks are assigned to me, I first wonder, ‘Is this something I should be doing? Is this my responsibility? Or is this the responsibility of the administration or the student affairs department, or the instructor teaching this course?’” (P20)

“Sometimes I don’t understand—am I an academic or an administrative staff? Or what exactly am I in this context?” (P28)

“I experience role conflict because on the one hand, there are tasks the institution expects from me, and on the other hand, there are academic tasks... Since these occur simultaneously, I need to create a priority structure, so yes, I experience role conflict. Work-life conflict is also part of this.” (P34)

One of the significant findings of the study is that ILT reduce professional reputation. What is particularly noteworthy is that the decline in professional reputation is not only observed among those who perform this profession but also in their surrounding environment. According to the participants, the reputation of the academic profession is diminishing not only among the participants but also among their close circles, students, and other university staff:

“I think my academic identity has been eroded, degraded, and devalued. In this sense, yes, I would call it a professional reputation assassination. I am experiencing a situation where my professional reputation is being damaged.” (P34)

“There are points where I feel I am being brought down as an academic. As I mentioned, when I call a student, it's as if I'm trying to attract customers to my company. It feels like the value of an academic is somewhat diminished in the eyes of the student. I don't like this.” (P20)

“Also, people's perspective changes. Even officers in the administrative staff view research assistants in that way. They look at them as mere couriers.” (P2)

“Even my spouse says things like, ‘You go to the exam and come back, and that's it.’ Is that something I really want to hear? Apparently, from the outside, they see research assistants as just going to exams or doing menial tasks. If even the closest person to you has such a perception, that's concerning.” (P29)

Participants reported that ILT hindered their ability to focus on their core tasks. Due to the intensity of ILT, participants not only felt devalued but also believed that these tasks were taking away time from their primary tasks, leading to a decrease in their sense of organizational commitment and loyalty. Over time, participants began to perform tasks that they did not view as part of their core responsibilities with less diligence. Those who felt that the majority of their time was consumed by ILT expressed that they were falling behind academically compared to their colleagues:



“Because the work I should actually be doing, such as teaching or writing articles, I don't have enough time for. This becomes a more challenging factor for me; it can be psychologically demanding.” (P22)

“But here, there is so much bureaucracy, so many administrative tasks, that I can never dedicate time to my academic work. For example, even if you're an administrator, it's like a front desk here.” (P39)

“There is a situation where my sense of belonging to the institution decreases. Yes, there is a ceremonial sense of belonging to the institution, or it seems like there is. But ceremonially, I question the real sense of institutional belonging.” (P34)

“I could have done much more productive things in that time, and so, because I'm not doing the task that's not my core responsibility with high motivation, I am just doing it to say I've done something.” (P3)

“During the reappointment periods, the questions asked were not about the ILT I took on, but about the academic publications I made...” (P25)

“I feel left behind academically while dealing with these menial tasks. I experience this sense of academic stagnation every day.” (P31)

Another effect of ILT observed in participants is the intention to leave the job. Participants expressed thoughts of silent resignation, moving to another institution, quitting the profession, or pursuing an academic career abroad:

“I might one day really say, 'I'm resigning,' or I might say, 'Goodbye, I've found a position abroad, I'm leaving.' I feel this way right now.” (P28)

“I've started looking for positions, having interviews, and if nothing works out, I'm thinking of resigning and entering the NGO project sector. I still have some time for that.” (P17)

“Do this, do that, do everything, but none of them provide financial satisfaction, and that leads to what they call silent resignation.” (P9)

“There could be a break. Quitting the profession is also a possibility.” (P22)

Participants reported that, due to ILT, they are forced to carry out their academic work during time they had set aside as personal time, leading to a disruption of work-life balance. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of tasks outside of role definitions, with these tasks consistently assigned to the same individuals, leads to a deterioration in participants' perception of organizational justice:

“Because the time I want to reserve for myself—meaning personal time, but in an academic sense—gets eaten up by tasks that I don't consider part of my main job. My academic work ends up at home. I no longer want to bring work home.” (P39)



“People with the same status and salary, although they claim to be part of the profession, do not contribute to the work produced. This undermines the sense of fairness.” (P21)

Participants also reported experiencing a loss of motivation and professional alienation:

“It breaks your personal motivation in some areas. After all, you’re wasting time, and I think the most valuable thing in academia is time.” (P30)

“It distances you from the profession. It breaks your motivation. Actually, it creates a motivation problem, I would say.” (P38)

“Professionally, you become alienated because instead of working on what you’re supposed to be doing, you’re dealing with irrelevant tasks. Since the work you really want to do always takes a backseat, this causes you to become disconnected from the profession and yourself.” (P34)

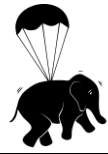
5. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

5.1. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

In the study, ILTs negatively impact professional identity and occupational prestige by causing role conflict and ambiguity. Expecting academics to perform tasks beyond professional norms fosters occupational alienation. Academics entering the field with distinct expectations feel devalued when faced with tasks outside their roles, undermining their sense of self-worth within the SOS theory framework.

One of the significant findings of the study is that ILT diminish occupational prestige. Notably, this decline in prestige is observed not only among those in the profession but also within their surrounding circles. The prestige of the academic profession is perceived to be decreasing among participants' close circles, students, and other university staff. Within the framework of role theory, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that employees facing excessive work demands due to unnecessary tasks and experiencing conflicts related to their roles because of unreasonable duties can lead to a diminished sense of purpose and meaning. A similar finding was also presented in the study by Akyürek (2024, p.212). Moreover, this situation may be interpreted as a micro-level outcome of the broader process of devaluation of academia at a macro level.

It can be inferred that academics ascribe positive meanings to the profession, reflecting a favorable perception of their professional role. An interesting finding is that participants who report that their academic identity holds no personal significance are typically younger academics. The majority of participants view their profession as having two primary dimensions: teaching and conducting research. Within the framework of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study reveals that academics who encounter ILT experience



significant losses of vital resources, such as time and energy, as they are unable to perform tasks they consider their primary responsibilities.

When evaluating how academics perceive and experience ILT, it was found that participants encounter unreasonable tasks far more frequently than unnecessary ones. The highest burden of unreasonable and unnecessary tasks falls on those in the early stages of an academic career, including research assistants, doctoral research assistants, and assistant professors. Notably, “personal tasks” emerged as the third most frequently mentioned subcategory among unreasonable tasks. All participants who reported experiences with personal tasks described these tasks as part of their assistantship period, with most unreasonable requests originating from the faculty members they assisted. Similar findings were reported by Yılmaz and Şahin (2016) and Uğuz and colleagues (2020) in their qualitative studies on research assistants. The reason research assistants, who are most frequently exposed to ILT, endure these tasks can be explained through the lens of social exchange theory. Social exchange involves the expectation that contributions made will be reciprocated in the future, with an anticipation of gains (Ertürk, 2014, p.15). It can be suggested that research assistants, positioned at the initial rung of academia, undertake ILT assigned by their superiors in the hope of climbing the academic steps more easily. However, it is crucial to note that social exchange, even when based on expectations, fundamentally relies on the principle of voluntariness. Additionally, according to Anskär et al. (2019) and Thun et al. (2018), administrative tasks can divert time and focus away from core responsibilities, thereby leading to perceptions of these tasks as unreasonable. The frequent mention of administrative duties among unreasonable tasks may be explained by this factor. Tasks labeled by participants as illegitimate differ from their core responsibilities, such as publishing academic work and teaching. This finding aligns with previous research (Semmer et al., 2015), which suggests that illegitimacy primarily occurs within auxiliary tasks rather than fundamental ones. Similar to the findings of Ma and Peng (2019), these tasks contribute to a decline in perceived job quality, motivation loss, and decreased productivity. According to van Schie and colleagues (2014), unnecessary tasks in particular reduce employees' motivation, while unreasonable tasks decrease their intention to remain in their position. Our study also revealed that some participants expressed intentions to leave their institutions as a result of ILT. The key point here is that academics express a desire not to leave their profession but to change institutions. As seen in Theme 1, participants assign positive meaning to their profession and view illegitimate tasks as obligations imposed by their institutions rather than intrinsic parts of their roles. Only a few participants regard administrative duties as part of their role; others categorize these duties as unreasonable tasks. The extent to which academics should assume administrative responsibilities remains an open question.

Empirical studies in the literature have found, in line with the results of this study, that ILT negatively impact employees' psychological and physical health (Stocker et al., 2010; Semmer et al., 2015; Fila and Eatough, 2020; Munir et al., 2017; Minei et al., 2018; Pindek et al., 2019; Meier and Semmer, 2018; Akyürek, 2020; Kottwitz et al., 2021).



It is noteworthy that in-depth research on the antecedents of ILT remains limited. To date, most studies have focused on the outcomes of ILT, with only two studies (Faupel et al., 2016; Björk et al., 2013) addressing their antecedents. In Faupel and colleagues' (2016) study, which is recognized as the first qualitative research on illegitimate tasks, ILT antecedents are categorized into structural and social conditions. A comparison of studies suggests similarities in codes related to factors such as lack of planning and organization, disorganization, additional efforts required due to colleagues' inefficiency or underperformance, unwilling administrative staff, lack of supervisor support, and managerial attributes. In Björk et al.'s (2013) research, concepts such as insufficient staffing and organizational control deficiencies—positively associated with ILT in administrative roles—align with the codes of personnel shortages and disorganization.

On a practical level, transparent communication from supervisors demanding ILT in terms of social support could help mitigate the effects of ILT. Clarifying the job descriptions of academics at every level, at least on an institutional basis, would also be a beneficial approach. Additionally, ensuring the fair distribution of unavoidable ILT within the institution could reduce their negative impacts. Issues related to administrative staff unwilling to perform their duties or peers avoiding ILT responsibilities could be addressed through the establishment of a more effective monitoring mechanism.

5.2. Recommendations for Future Studies

Numerous empirical studies in the literature have investigated the negative impact of ILT on employees' psychological and physical health (Stocker et al., 2010; Semmer et al., 2015; Fila and Eatough, 2020; Munir et al., 2017; Minei et al., 2018; Pindek et al., 2019; Meier and Semmer, 2018; Akyürek, 2020; Kottwitz et al., 2021). These studies have explored the mediating variables through which these effects occur and the factors that moderate these impacts. However, despite the significant results of these predominantly quantitative studies, the concept of ILT requires further support through both theoretical and empirical studies based on qualitative methods specific to sector, industry, and context. The use of data collected from multiple sectors and professions in published studies may hinder the identification of profession-specific ILT, as all occupations are measured with the same scale. This approach leaves unanswered questions regarding how or why perceptions of ILT may vary across professions. Future studies focusing on job- and profession-specific ILT could enable more accurate comparisons. Developing specialized scales tailored to specific jobs and professions through qualitative research designs would offer a valuable contribution to the ILT literature. Additionally, no studies examining the relational outcomes of ILT have been identified in the literature. Based on this finding, it can be suggested that ILT disrupt long-term workplace harmony, emphasizing the need for more empirical research in this area.

Moreover, examining the full range of antecedents causing ILT, which lead to negative individual and organizational outcomes, would provide a valuable contribution to the literature.



Finally, examining the moderating factors that mitigate the adverse effects of ILT, focusing on academics' strategies for coping with ILT, and investigating whether the ILT faced by academics differ between public and private universities would contribute significantly to the literature.

5.3. Limitations

The study is limited to the responses provided by a sample group of 40 participants. A key limitation of the sample is the impossibility of examining the entire research population. Another limitation is the assumption that the responses given by the participants are accurate and sincere.

References

- Akyürek, S. S. (2020). *A cultural & relational approach to illegitimate tasks: A study from education sector* [Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation]. Yaşar University.
- Akyürek, S. S. (2024). Teachers' political skills diminish the negative effects of illegitimate tasks on professional identification: The case of Türkiye. *Sosyal Mucit Academic Review*, 5(2), 195-222.
- Akyürek, S. S., & Can, Ö. (2021). Illegitimate tasks as a new concept: A literature review. *Pamukkale University Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, 42, 238-260
- Alicke, M. D., & Sedikides, C. (2009) Self enhancement & self-protection: What they are & what they do. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 20(1), 1-48.
- Anskär, E., Lindberg, M., Falk, M., & Andersson, A. (2019). Legitimacy of work tasks, psychosocial work environment and time utilization among primary care staff in Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care*, 37(4), 476-483.
- Basinska, B. A., & Dåderman, A. M. (2023). Psychometric properties of the Bern illegitimate tasks scale using classical test and item response theories. *Scientific Reports*, 13, 7211.
- Biddle, B. J. (1986). Recent development in role theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 12, 67-92.
- Björk, L., Bejerot, E., Jacobshagen, N., & Härenstam, A. (2013). I shouldn't have to do this: Illegitimate tasks as a stressor in relation to organizational control and resource deficits. *Work & Stress*, 27(3), 262-277.
- Eatough, E. M., Meier, L. L., Igic, I., Elfering, A., Spector, P. E., & Semmer, N. K. (2016). You want me to do what? Two daily diary studies of illegitimate tasks and employee well-being. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 37(1), 108-127.
- Ertürk, E. (2014). *The impact of power distance and organizational justice perceptions on the organizational citizenship behaviour in the context of social exchange theory* [Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation]. Selçuk University.



- Faupel, S., Otto, K., Krug, H., & Kottwitz, M. U. (2016). Stress at school? A qualitative study on illegitimate tasks during teacher training. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1410.
- Fila, M. J., & Eatough, E. (2020). Extending the boundaries of illegitimate tasks: The role of resources. *Psychological reports*, 123(5), 1635-1662.
- Gügerçin, U., & Sığırcıkoğlu, E. B. (2019). Role ambiguity and cyberslacking: An empirical study. *Journal of Academic Researches and Studies*, 11(20), 152-161.
- Haslam, S. A., & Ellemers, N. (2005). Social identity in industrial & organizational psychology: Concepts, controversies, & contributions. *International Review of Industrial & Organizational Psychology*, 20, 39-118.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (2001). The influence of culture, community, and the nested-self in the stress process: Advancing conservation of resources theory. *Applied Psychology*, 50(3), 337-421.
- Hobfoll, S. E., & Lilly, R. S. (1993). Resource conservation as a strategy for community psychology. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 21(2), 128-148.
- Jacobshagen, N. (2006). *Illegitimate tasks, illegitimate stressors: Testing a new stressor-strain concept* [Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation]. Bern University.
- Kottwitz, M. U., Otto, K., Elfering, A., Vásquez, M. E. G., Braun, S., & Kälin, W. (2021). Why do illegitimate tasks cause pain? Qualitative job insecurity as an underlying mechanism. *Scandinavian Journal of Work & Organizational Psychology*, 6(1), 1-12.
- Ma, J., & Peng, Y. (2019). The performance costs of illegitimate tasks: The role of job identity and flexible role orientation. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 110, 144-154.
- Meier, L. L. & Semmer, N. K. (2018) Illegitimate tasks as assessed by incumbents and supervisors: Converging only modestly but predicting strain as assessed by incumbents, supervisors, and partners. *European Journal of Work & Organizational Psychology*, 27(6), 764-776.
- Minei, E. M., Eatough, E. M. & Cohen-Charash, Y. (2018) Managing illegitimate task requests through explanation and acknowledgment: A discursive leadership approach. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 32(3), 374-397.
- Munir, H., Jamil, A., & Ehsan, A. (2017) Illegitimate tasks & their impact on work stress: The mediating role of anger. *International Journal of Business & Society*, 18(S3), 545-566.
- Öztürk, N. A., & Duygulu, E. (2023). A systematic literature review on illegitimate tasks: A proposed conceptual model. *Sosyal Mucit Academic Review*, 4(2), 133-163.
- Pindek, S., Demircioğlu, E., Howard, D. J., Eatough, E. M., & Spector, P. E. (2019). Illegitimate tasks are not created equal: Examining the effects of attributions on unreasonable and unnecessary tasks. *Work & Stress*, 33(3), 231-246.
- Rizzo, J. R., House, R. J., & Lirtzman, S. I. (1970). Role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 15(2) 150-163.



- Semmer, N. K., Jacobshagen, N., Meier, L. L., Elfering, A., Beehr, T. A., Kälin, W., & Tschan, F. (2015). Illegitimate tasks as a source of work stress. *Work & Stress*, 29(1), 32-56
- Semmer, N. K., Tschan, F., Meier, L. L., Facchin, S., & Jacobshagen, N. (2010). Illegitimate tasks and counterproductive work behavior. *Applied Psychology*, 59(1), 70-96.
- Semmer, N. K., Jacobshagen, N., Meier, L., & Elfering, A. (2007). Occupational stress research: The stress-as-offense-to-self perspective. In J. Houdmont, & S. McIntyre (Eds.), *Occupational health psychology: European perspectives on research, education and practice (Vol. 2)* (pp. 43-60). Nottingham University Press.
- Sığrı, Ü. (2018). *Nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Beta Basım.
- Sluss, D. M., & Ashforth, B. E. (2007). Relational identity & identification: Defining ourselves through work relationships. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(1), 9-32
- Stocker, D., Jacobshagen, N., Semmer, N. K., & Annen, H. (2010). Appreciation at work in the Swiss armed forces. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 69(2), 117-124.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques*. Sage Publishing.
- Thoits, P. A. (1991). On merging identity theory and stress research. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 54(2), 101-112.
- Thun, S., Halsteinli, V., & Løvseth, L. (2018). A study of unreasonable illegitimate tasks, administrative tasks, and sickness presenteeism amongst Norwegian physicians: An everyday struggle?. *BMC Health Services Research*, 18, 407.
- Uğuz Arsu, Ş., Sunman, G., Oruç, Ş. & Tekindal, M., (2020). Experience of research assistant at the developing university in Turkey: A qualitative research. *Beyond the Horizon of Scientific Journal*, 20(1), 109-152.
- van Schie, S., Güntert, S. T., & Wehner, T. (2014). How dare to demand this from volunteers! The impact of illegitimate tasks. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations*, 25, 851-868.
- Yılmaz, K., & Şahin, T. (2016). An examination of the professional experience of research assistants serving in college of education: a phenomenological study of the meaning of being a research assistant. *Marmara University Atatürk Education Faculty Journal of Educational Sciences*, 44(44), 143-168.
- Yürür, Ş. (2011). The role of learned resourcefulness, seniority, and marital status in emotional exhaustion: An analysis within the framework of the conservation of resources theory. *Atatürk University Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences*, 25(1), 107-126.



Declaration of Contribution Rate: The authors have contributed equally.

Declaration of Support and Appreciation: The research did not receive any support from any institution or organisation.

Declaration of Conflict: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

In this study, the rules stated in the “**Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive**” were followed.

This article has been screened with **similarity** detection software.