

Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Youth Poverty from the Perspective of Teachers: A Qualitative Study on the Poverty Experiences of Unappointed Teachers



Sedat Polat¹  

¹ Non-affiliated, Tekirdağ, Türkiye

Abstract

As a historical phenomenon, poverty has been shaped by economic and social transformations. In countries with a high youth population, such as Türkiye, the level of economic development, labor market problems, and disruptions in the transition from education to employment create significant problems for young people. The study examined youth poverty through the experiences of unassigned teacher candidates. To this end, the economic and social deprivation, perceptions of poverty, coping strategies, and efforts to escape poverty of unappointed pre-service teachers were examined. The study is qualitative, and a phenomenological research design was used. The findings showed that poverty is not only caused by economic reasons, but that lack of social participation, lack of political proximity, lack of access to resources, lack of capability, and lack of time are also part of this phenomenon. As a result, it is emphasized that in the fight against youth poverty, education policies should be revised, solutions for the labor market should be developed, and solutions should be developed to ensure that the transition from education to work takes place on the same plane.

Keywords

Youth Poverty • Deprivation • Unemployed Teacher Candidates • Employment

Author Note

This study was produced from the author's PhD thesis titled "The Evaluation of Teacher Candidates in the Context of Youth Poverty: The Sample of Tekirdağ."



- “ Citation: Polat, S. (2026). Youth poverty from the perspective of teachers: A qualitative study on the poverty experiences of unappointed teachers. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (73), 31-49. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2026-1725022>
- © This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. 
- © 2026. Polat, S.
- ✉ Corresponding author: Sedat Polat sedatpolat1984@gmail.com



Youth Poverty from the Perspective of Teachers: A Qualitative Study on the Poverty Experiences of Unappointed Teachers

The phenomenon of poverty, which has accompanied the historical trajectory of societies, has persisted to this day, shaped by historical and social transformations. In contemporary post-industrial societies, where social structures have undergone significant changes, poverty has solidified its existence as a multidimensional phenomenon. Affecting various population groups in multiple respects, poverty also impacts the youth demographic. Youth is defined as the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood. The development, progress, and advancement of societies depend largely on the strength, energy, and innovative and liberatory potential of their youth. By cultivating this dynamism through education, young individuals contribute as qualified members to the reproduction of social life. However, despite changing production relations and consequently evolving labor market conditions, educated youth increasingly face employment challenges. In Türkiye, where the proportion of young people is relatively high, the youth unemployment rate was recorded at 15.4% (TÜİK, 2025a), a figure notably higher than the youth unemployment rates in OECD countries (OECD, 2025a). This employment problem is progressively intensifying even for educated young individuals. Particularly for graduates of teacher education faculties, the path toward poverty is being laid. Disruptions in the transition from education to employment and the multifaceted difficulties encountered by youth during this phase directly contribute to the emergence of youth poverty.

The issue of unemployed teacher candidates, first raised in the early 2000s, has increasingly become a growing problem due to the addition of new graduates and the limited number of available appointment quotas. As teacher candidates awaiting permanent positions in public schools drift further away from these expectations each day, they also contribute to the expansion of youth poverty. The problem of unemployed teacher candidates has thus far been addressed under topics such as youth unemployment, employment challenges, and economic crises and has been the subject of interdisciplinary studies. This study fundamentally focuses on youth poverty, examining it within the context of the poverty experiences of unemployed teacher candidates. The primary focal points of youth studies include education, employment, health, sports, crime, nutrition, psychosocial development, and moral development. Among these topics, youth poverty has been discussed alongside family poverty, low educational attainment, unemployment, lower-class affiliation, political orientations, leisure activities, youth culture and identity, generational conflict, and youth politicization (Yaman, 2013). However, the poverty of unemployed teacher candidates has been primarily linked to their failure to secure appointments. Moreover, studies that autonomously address and analyze youth poverty as an independent phenomenon within youth research remain exceedingly scarce. The aim of this study is to fill this gap in the literature by analyzing the poverty experiences of unemployed teacher candidates through the lens of youth poverty.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

In this section, to discuss the poverty experiences of unemployed teacher candidates within the context of youth poverty, the concept of “youth poverty” will first be examined, followed by an analysis of the “Status of Youth in Türkiye.”

Youth Poverty

The problem of poverty, which emerged alongside the concept of property ownership, has transformed into a persistent issue affecting various population groups at both global and local levels through neoliberal political transformations and the globalization of capitalism. Particularly over the past half-century, global transformations have significantly influenced the social position of youth. The repercussions of economic recessions and crises experienced during this period are evident in the lives of young people. The global financial crisis created an environment characterized by limited opportunities and employment based on insecure and flexible labor for youth. The prevalence of contracts with undefined working hours and under-employment has undermined the fundamental security of young people, making it increasingly difficult for them to establish a new life (Furlong, 2016: 3). While the capitalist system flexibilizes the labor market and passes the cost of its crises onto it, the burden of this cost has become increasingly heavier for young people. As a result of these crises, unemployment rises, generating insecurity, uncertainty, and anxiety about the future among the youth, effectively paving the way for their social exclusion (Benlisoy, 2003: 286-287).

The length of young people’s education varies according to levels of economic development, welfare policies, and employment opportunities. Following the 2008 crisis, rising youth unemployment was reframed by governments as an issue of individual skill deficits through “lifelong learning” policies rather than a structural labor market problem. As Valiente, Capsada-Munsech, and de Otero (2020) note, this “education-alization” strategy obscures structural inequalities. Prolonged education generates higher debt burdens and limited job opportunities (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2015; ILO, 2022), reducing social mobility for youth from poor households and reinforcing intergenerational poverty (Stiglitz, 2018; Esping-Andersen, 2011). Low-value diplomas push young people into insecure, low-paid jobs, and youth unemployment remains three times higher than adult unemployment, with disadvantaged conditions even among employed youth (Bilgen Susanlı, 2016; Yassine and Bakass, 2023).

Driven by profit maximization, the capitalist system deepens inequality by concentrating capital while expanding the ranks of the poor. Classical and neoliberal economics attribute poverty to individual failure, lack of entrepreneurship, or irresponsibility, portraying the poor as a social burden (Aksan, 2012: 14). Recent scholarship shows that youth poverty has only recently been treated as a distinct phenomenon, yet remains under-researched; young people have long been subsumed under family or class poverty, preventing a clear conceptualization or measurement of youth poverty, including consensus on the boundaries of the youth period (Lüküslü, 2014).

Status of Youth in Türkiye

Türkiye is described as a country with a rich youth population, where young people constitute 14.9% of the total population, compared to the EU average of 10.7% (TÜİK, 2025b). However, this demographic advantage is increasingly turning into a social problem due to unemployment and poverty. Eurostat (2024) reports that 21.2% of young people in Türkiye are at risk of poverty—close to the EU (21.4%) and Eurozone

(21.7%) averages. Despite this, youth unemployment remains high, recorded as 17.4% in 2023 and 16.3% in 2024 (TÜİK, 2025a).

Although young people represent a large share of society (OECD, 2024: 71), unemployment and poverty persist particularly among educated youth. Teaching graduates face severe barriers in entering the labor market, and as the transition from education to employment is delayed, many young people fall into despair, experience rising anxiety, and remain financially dependent on their families. Since youth poverty is calculated within family poverty, the situation becomes analytically obscured. Therefore, revealing the poverty conditions of young people—independently from their families—is essential to conceptualize the problem, make it visible, and provide policy recommendations, especially in relation to the crisis of unassigned teachers.

In Türkiye, which is categorized among developing countries, the proportion of young population is high. The high rate of youth and the lack of employment planning for them cause young people to face challenges during what could be their most productive years. Vehbi Bayhan (2006: 567-569) identified these problem areas under five main headings. The first is the migration from rural to urban areas resulting from the development of the industrial sector in cities, easier transportation, and mechanization in agricultural production. The second is the normlessness and anomie experienced as a result of rapid changes in material culture suppressing the spiritual culture due to social change. The third is the intergenerational conflict brought about by the changes led by modernization. The fourth is unemployment and poverty caused by insufficient employment opportunities and injustices in income distribution. The last is the unhappiness and anxiety caused by problems in the education sector. The issues in education have grown like an avalanche, under which unemployed and impoverished youth remain in the short term. In the medium and long term, it is likely that the country's future will be adversely affected by this situation. This is because the idleness of educated yet unemployed and impoverished youth negatively impacts economic growth, democratic stability, and social cohesion. With the "one university per province policy," foundation universities were established in the 1980s, followed by state universities from the 2000s onward (Yalçıntaş and Akkaya, 2019: 791). The lowering of the minimum scores required for university entrance exams led to an explosion in the number of university students. In places where everyone goes to university, the increase in the number of university graduates causes diploma inflation (Yi and McMurtrey, 2013). Young people who remain unemployed despite holding university degrees tend to pursue further education and foreign language learning in order to find jobs. Today, an unemployed group receiving graduate education is emerging. Education policies implemented without considering the correlation between the country's labor force and employment planning lead to the emergence and growth of an unemployed university graduate population. These unemployed and impoverished youth remain dependent on their families. These young people, considered within the poverty of their families (Erikli, 2016: 286), are covered with a cloak of invisibility. Those who turn to the private sector, where work and employment ethics have not been established, are subject to the arbitrary work and wage policies of employers. The country's efforts to integrate its underdeveloped capitalism into neoliberal global capitalism create conditions of ruthless capitalism for young people.

Research Methodology

Aim of the Study and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to understand and explain how teacher candidates who have not been appointed experience poverty within the context of youth poverty. Considering the literature on youth sociology and poverty, this study seeks to identify the shared meanings emerging from the subjective experiences of young people and to fill the gap observed in the field of youth poverty. The poverty experiences of unappointed teacher candidates, evaluated within the context of youth poverty, constitute the central problem of this study.

Supporting the main research problem, the sub-questions of the study are as follows:

- **Q1:** Poverty, in its broadest sense, is the inability to meet basic needs. Accordingly, what are the views of unappointed teacher candidates regarding the phenomenon of poverty?
- **Q2:** Poverty is a complex phenomenon defined in various ways. Which type of poverty do unappointed teacher candidates emphasize when defining poverty?
- **Q3:** According to unappointed teacher candidates, what are the causes that lead to their impoverishment?
- **Q4:** What methods do unappointed teacher candidates employ to escape poverty?
- **Q5:** According to unappointed teacher candidates, who holds responsibility in the struggle against poverty?

Method

In this study, an interpretive approach was adopted to understand young people's experiences of poverty. Unlike the explanatory logic of the natural sciences, the interpretive tradition—rooted in Dilthey's concept of *Verstehen*—seeks to uncover the multilayered meanings behind human actions, including the thoughts, motivations, and intentions that shape social behavior (Financy and Sitorus, 2024: 23–24). From this perspective, social phenomena are not treated as objective facts but as meaning-laden experiences (Vergin, 2008: 172).

Accordingly, the research employed a phenomenological design within the qualitative paradigm. Phenomenology involves a systematic process of defining the research problem, selecting participants, collecting data, analyzing meaning, and reporting findings (Baş and Akturan, 2013: 89–94). All stages of this phenomenological process were followed in the study and are summarized in [Figure 1](#)

Figure 1

Phenomenological Research Design

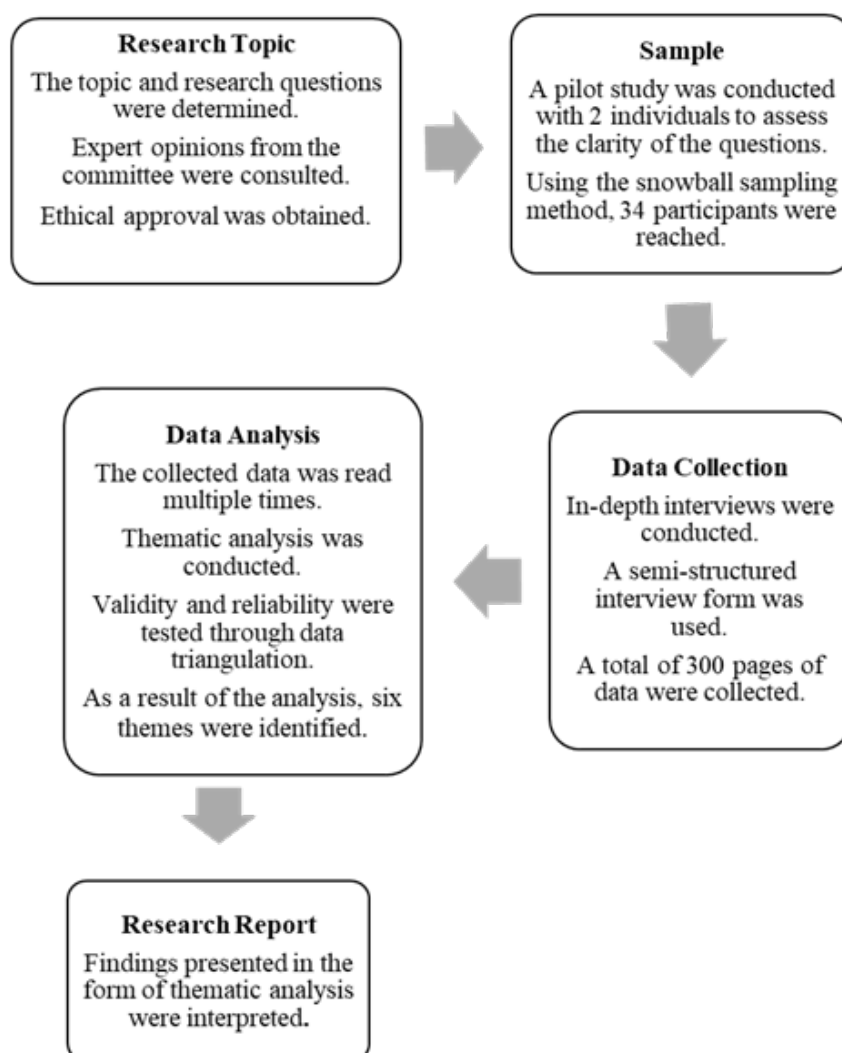
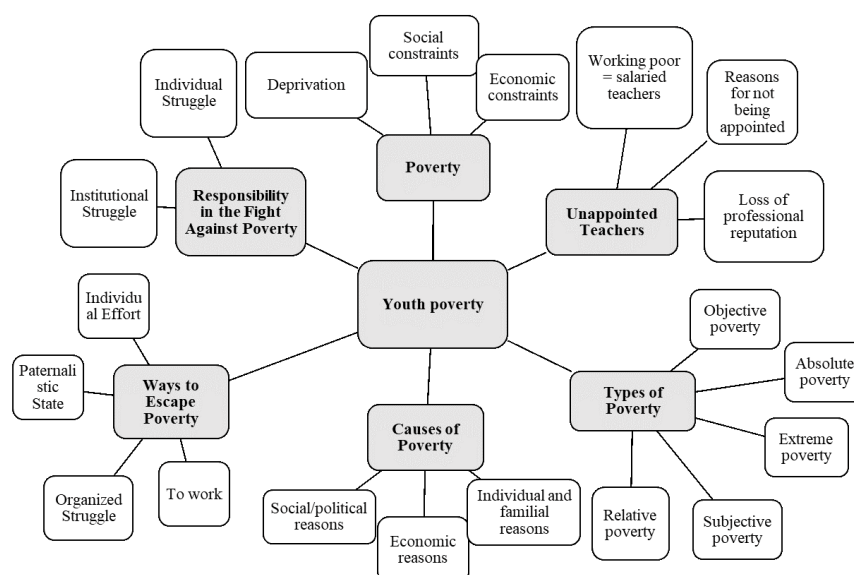


Figure 2*Thematic Network on Youth Poverty*

After determining the research topic and questions, they were submitted for review by experts on the thesis committee. Based on the experts' feedback, a semi-structured interview form consisting of nine sections was prepared. Subsequently, an application was made to the Atatürk University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee for the ethics approval report. The interviews conducted within the scope of this study lasted approximately 45–120 minutes. Interviews were held at locations preferred by the participants. Participants chose venues such as universities, private tutoring centers, cafés, public education centers, non-governmental organizations, as well as online platforms and telephone calls for the interviews.

In this study, the snowball sampling method, one of the purposive sampling techniques, was used to reach 34 participants. Within the scope of the qualitative research, it was determined that the findings reached the “saturation point” with these 34 participants, and the interviews were concluded at this stage. A total of 300 pages of data were collected.

The data subjected to thematic analysis yielded six themes. The first theme defines poverty in terms of economic constraints, social limitations, and deprivation in access to social resources, opportunities, and forms of social participation. The second theme analyzes the types of poverty mentioned by participants, including absolute, relative, objective, subjective, deep, as well as rural and urban poverty, based on their income status. The third theme focuses on the causes of poverty, encompassing economic reasons, individual and familial factors, and social and political causes. The fourth theme addresses the ways to escape poverty, such as individual effort, organized struggle, working, and the concept of the “father state.” The fifth theme concerns responsibility in the fight against poverty, distinguishing between institutional and individual responsibility. The sixth and final theme is the issue of paid teaching, which includes the loss of professional prestige, working poor, and the problem of not being appointed as a teacher.

Research Findings

The findings of the study are presented as demographic and qualitative data.

Demographic Data

This study was conducted in Tekirdağ between October and December 2021 with 34 unappointed teacher candidates reached through snowball sampling. Of the participants, 25 were women and 9 were men; 21 were employed (mostly as paid teachers), while 13 were unemployed. The majority held a bachelor's degree ($n = 32$) and lived with their families ($n = 33$). Household income varied: Nine participants earned at or below the minimum wage, 10 between the minimum wage and 5,000 TL, and 13 above 5,000 TL.

The gender imbalance does not stem from sampling bias but reflects the social dynamics of the field. The findings also relate to ongoing debates on the definition of youth. Although international institutions commonly define youth as ages 15–24 (UN, 2003; WB, 2007), the sociological literature has introduced the concept of “extended youth,” as the transition from education to employment is prolonged (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007) and dependency on the family continues, expanding the youth category to ages 25–35 (Bayhan, 2017: 317). Therefore, youth is not defined solely by chronological age but also by life-cycle transitions and social position; even individuals of older ages who remain dependent on their families and have not achieved stable employment may fall within the category of youth.

Qualitative Data

Theme 1: What Is Poverty?

Interviews revealed that participants defined the poverty they experience in a way consistent with global understandings. As the World Bank notes, poverty reflects both insufficient income to meet basic needs and limited access to infrastructure, resources, and employment opportunities (World Bank, 2000). Beyond material deprivation, the inability to use or develop one's capabilities also constitutes a form of poverty (Levine, 2004). In this context, participants associated poverty with unemployment, unfair income distribution, inadequate labor policies, and a market system that undervalues labor. It was also observed that even spouses working in various jobs remained poor, as arbitrary private-sector practices and limited job availability weakened workers' bargaining power and pushed them into minimum-wage employment.

P30: “Because there is income inequality in the country. Because labor is not valued in the country. Because the country is exploited. Can you imagine, the potential of teachers in the state to give private lessons has increased a lot. Why? Because people cannot catch up. Teachers are poor too, look, even if they work as husband and wife (...) they are poor too...”

When defining poverty, participants include economic indicators based on material factors, such as insufficient income, as well as intangible factors, such as time poverty. Subthemes within their definitions of poverty include lack of capabilities, time poverty, lack of psychological well-being, and spiritual deprivation. Neoliberalism's fragmented, insecure, and flexible market system forces young people to pursue diachronic jobs, leading them to spend most of their time at work. It has been observed that young people experiencing material poverty due to the low wages they receive in these jobs also become deprived of time.

P30: "...If a person cannot meet their social and physical needs, if they cannot meet even one of them, they are poor. If he/she cannot meet them in terms of time, that is poverty. You know, I work, I earn 20,000 liras, but I don't have time. However, regarding poverty in the economic dimension, if you cannot access the basic items we need and you are struggling to access them, this is poverty..."

Today, when education, transportation, communication, and production are realized through technology, poverty has gone beyond the daily calorie intake of a person or a household. What distinguishes human beings, who are social agents, from biological creatures is that their needs must be determined according to the needs of the age. In a world of digitalization, not being able to have a phone/computer and the internet is also defined as poverty. Participants stated that the work they can do depends on the phone/computer and internet base, and that the absence of these would lead to poverty.

P31: "...I don't think poverty is not that a person doesn't have bread, I mean, I think not having a phone is also poverty. Because under the conditions of the country, if I handle all my transactions related to the school, then all my transactions related to the bank, all my transactions related to government institutions through the phone and the internet, I think having bread but not having a phone is poverty under these conditions. Not having internet is poverty..."

Theme 2: Types of poverty

People participate in the society they live in to the extent of their capital. The complaint of "when you're young, you'll eat, drink, and travel" was among the problems highlighted by participants in the interviews. The assessments of poverty by young people who lack objectively measurable income point to both the objective and subjective dimensions of poverty. While difficulties in meeting basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing, and education are included in the literature as multidimensional poverty indicators, these indicators also reveal the extent to which participants perceive and experience poverty. In this context, participants' statements should be considered subjective statements stemming from their own social positions, rather than a definition of poverty based on objective criteria.

P9: "...I mean, when we talk about poverty, the difficulty of a family, that is, a family consisting of parents and children, to meet their needs is poverty in my opinion. What are these needs, such as the need for rent, the need for food, or the cost of education of the child? Nowadays, you are obliged to pay for material things at every level from primary school to kindergarten, so as a parent.... And perhaps, the fact that the parents allocate something that they would perhaps avoid from the need for food to the education of their child is something that can be considered as poverty in my opinion..."

The fact that the participants are educated reveals that they have a relatively broader perspective on poverty. As a self-reflexive practice, it has been observed that they have the ability to understand their own experiences of poverty as well as the poverty/wealth of the social environment in which they live. The phenomenon of poverty, which is described with nutrition, shelter, and living in a safe environment, has been narrated in the statements of the participants as falling behind the welfare level of today's modern societies. Since each individual is the subject of his/her own life, everyone's needs become personalized, differentiated, and subjective. Participants who considered excessive needs as luxury stated that not meeting any of the minimum needs was considered poverty.

P33: "...According to me, the criteria of poverty are the following: I don't think of it as food, I think of it as everything. And if I can't go and buy something I want, if I can't go and get something I need, something that I need to the extent that it is not a luxury, if I can't go and get something I need instantly, then I am poor..."

The basic needs for human survival—food and shelter—are defined as absolute poverty. However, humans are not simply organisms that subsist on minimal living but social beings with diverse characteristics. Therefore, they may have various needs beyond basic survival. Participants described these needs, which have diversified today, as a lack of capabilities, such as the inability to do what they want or access resources.

P8: "...Poverty, of course, the first thing that came to my mind at first was people who had problems with eating and drinking. You know, people who can't buy anything for themselves, who can't find food, or who don't have a house or something, but I don't think we can only call them poor. Because sometimes there are things we want to do and we cannot do them. I think they can also be poverty. I mean, as I said, I think people who have difficulty in accessing things are poor, so I think so..."

While the liberal approach maintains that poverty is temporary and can be overcome through work, historical and contemporary examples do not support this claim. While Smith, Malthus, Ricardo, Hayek, and Friedman argue that economic growth will create social welfare, participants with lifelong poverty experience that structural conditions perpetuate poverty. Young people who adapt to this situation in their environment are confronted with the harsh face of poverty when they venture out into the world. Indeed, Kenworthy (1998, 14) emphasizes that increasing national wealth does not eliminate poverty and its inter-generational transmission.

P6: "...Poverty for me is when you reach for something you want and you cannot get it. Because I have experienced this all my life and this is the most basic poverty. Not having money with you or realizing that you cannot buy something you really want. That hard wall is troublesome. Yes, this is my poverty criterion... When we go to a place, that is, when we are one step above financially, our difference is obvious. From the clothes we wear to the food we eat to the drinks we drink..."

There's a common misconception in the literature that poverty is difficult to measure. However, some participants commented on this statement, stating that an absolute criterion for poverty and poverty can be established. This criterion, established through the concept of need, purports to provide an absolute definition of poverty.

P24: "An absolute criterion for poverty can be established through the concept of need. I think for me to call someone poor, that person must be dependent on outside help. They shouldn't be able to meet any of their needs on their own. They should be able to provide even their most basic needs with the help of someone else..."

Participants cited their social environment as a primary reference point when defining poverty. It was stated that poverty, passed down from family, determines children's futures, and that these children will become the impoverished youth of tomorrow. Primary schools were considered the most visible places of

poverty, embodying this situation in malnutrition, hygiene problems, and lack of appropriate clothing. These conditions will negatively impact children's future lives.

P11: "...I work in a village school and the children have no shoes on their feet. They don't have boots, I should say, they don't have coats on... it is already obvious the poverty level and situation of the children. In terms of cleanliness, in terms of health, in terms of nutrition, and in terms of the child's clothing, it is already very visible.... In terms of nutrition, the situation of children is already obvious..."

Participants also resorted to subjective evaluations when describing poverty. Since there is no clear definition and measurement of poverty, young people try to understand their own poverty by comparing it with others. Young people stated that poverty is a situational phenomenon and can be evaluated relatively.

P13: "...I compare it to my friends I talk to because I didn't know much. I mean, frankly, as we talk, I say that I am not. Actually, psychology is very different; I have always seen myself as poor. What I do is very, very inadequate; we earn very little as a family, and so on. Then I look around me and I see that people live on wages like 2500-2700. When I hear them, I realize that I am not actually very poor..."

In the statements of the participants interviewed, it was determined that the phenomenon of poverty was experienced more dominantly in the following types: absolute poverty, relative poverty, objective poverty, subjective poverty, and urban poverty.

Theme 3: Causes of Poverty

According to the participants, the cause of poverty is not personal inertia or fate, but the capitalist system of production rips people out of their natural state and impoverishes them by usurping their labor. The fact that people are unorganized and do not struggle results in capital owners buying their labor cheaply. According to the participants who stated that people who are free in the natural state become poor by selling their labor cheaply between the wheels of capitalism, the lack of social organization has also led to impoverishment.

P10: "...the most important reason for poverty is the system we live in. The great injustice in income distribution. It is not individual effort, but the fact that I earn so much money despite all my individual efforts cannot be explained; it cannot be fate. Poverty cannot be fate. There is no such fate. Nature offers everything to people equally. But if there is extortion, there is poverty. I think poverty is caused by extortion, and extortion happens because we allow it. It has happened so far because we have not been able to organize and raise our voices because we have bowed down..."

According to the participants, in an environment where capitalism designs politics, the perpetrators of poverty are the owners of capital and the political power at their service. They stated that even natural events and social crises in today's world, where liberal economic policies are in effect, serve the capital class and further impoverish the poor masses.

P16: "... In my opinion, the causes of poverty are entirely systems. In my opinion, it's entirely governments (...). I'm one of those who believe that the real cause of poverty is capitalism and the liberal economy. I'm one of those who believe that a liberal economy increases income inequality. I observe that capital

owners are constantly getting richer, while the working class is constantly getting poorer. No matter what happens in the country or the world, be it a pandemic, war, famine, hunger, earthquake, or fire, somehow, capital owners are getting richer, while at the same time, the working class, the poor class, are getting poorer..."

Participants stated that unemployment, lack of income, or insufficient income leads to poverty. They stated that in inflationary economies, while product prices rise, stagnant incomes continually deepen poverty. They argued that the country is experiencing an economic crisis, pushing vast segments of the population into poverty.

P2: "...Unemployment. There is not enough income. Furthermore, now there is too much increase in everything. Everything is constantly increasing, prices are going up and up, you know, even if they receive a salary that they can live on under normal conditions, they cannot meet their situation in any way due to the increasing prices..."

Social welfare policies implemented by governments play a decisive role in reducing poverty. The relative poverty rate in OECD countries, which was 27% before social assistance and transfers, fell to 11% after these measures (OECD, 2025b). The same report stated that the decline in Türkiye was only -3.7%. Participants stated that social welfare policies are not adequately implemented in the country and that this represents a management problem.

P25: "...In my personal opinion, the country's conditions are, of course, one of the primary reasons for this. Frankly, I cannot comprehend these things, and I favor speaking openly about them. This is a reality that the world has witnessed. I believe our most fundamental problem lies in the governance of the country. Although the term "social state" is frequently mentioned, we are neither governed nor living in a way that aligns with the concept of a social state..."

According to some participants who attribute poverty to individuals' personal inertia, the primary cause of poverty is not working. They argue that if a person seizes the opportunities presented to them at a young age, works hard, and leaves the outcome to the Creator, they may find a way out of poverty.

P3: "...First of all, professor, not working. If a person does not work when they are physically capable and only starts looking for a job at an older age, they may struggle to secure and maintain employment. A person must always use the opportunities available to them. God opens doors for people; it is up to the individual to take advantage of them..."

According to the findings, the causes of poverty fall into three categories: sociopolitical, economic, and individual-family. Participants particularly highlighted sociopolitical factors, including structural problems in the education system, incompatibility of the curriculum with the labor market, populist and unstable policies, clientelism, and a widening income gap. Unemployment, low-wage and precarious employment, income-wealth inequality, and inflation were cited as economic causes. The inheritance of poverty from families, fatalistic approach, and individual inertia were cited as individual-family causes.

Theme 4: Ways to Escape Poverty

Young people from lower-class families repeatedly emphasized that the way out of poverty is through work and securing employment. Due to low wages and the fact that teachers' salaries remain below the officially determined poverty threshold, they indicated that even if they are appointed to positions, they may need to take on additional jobs. The belief that employment can lift them out of misery, while taking on extra jobs would allow them to break free from the cycle of poverty, stands out as a significant finding.

P11: "...Of course, working extra jobs and securing a government appointment are the top priorities. I want to be appointed and have a permanent position to ensure my social security. At least, a better salary with payments every 3 months would be an improvement. Even a slightly higher salary would still not be sufficient. Besides that, working extra jobs is a necessity—I believe we have no other choice..."

Some participants, referring to the proverb "hope is the bread of the poor," explained that they play lottery games as a potential escape from poverty, despite the extremely low chance of winning. Leaving their future to luck offers little real possibility of socioeconomic mobility, and a few even believed that such games are manipulated.

P16: "Maybe I would play the national lottery. I might have considered becoming a millionaire, but we have already seen the corruption there. The lottery balls were rigged, and the winnings ended up going to their own officials. I lost faith in it entirely..."

Although male participants were reluctant to admit it due to their masculine identity, they showed a willingness to marry a wealthy spouse. Female participants, on the other hand, openly and explicitly stated that they would consider marrying a rich partner to escape poverty and establish their own families.

P2: "...finding a rich husband (laughing). It would be great if I had a rich husband. It doesn't have to be extremely luxurious, but at least he should earn around 10 billion so that I can meet my personal needs, spend only on my child, and at least contribute to the household expenses together..."

Findings indicate that holding a good position in the private sector is associated with higher salaries. However, concerns about the private sector's lack of job security and permanent employment contracts have made participants uneasy. On the one hand, some participants set their sights on private sector jobs, while on the other, they sought employment in the public sector, which is considered more stable but suffers from unpredictable and irregular hiring policies.

P13: "...I take the Public Personnel Selection Exam from time to time because you never know what our government will do. One year, they hire 300 people, and the next year, they might hire 1,000. So, I will always take that exam regularly. But if you ask me if I have a more realistic goal outside of this, I would say I want to work in a better institution. When you compare, there are much better schools and colleges than government schools..."

Each year, the number of unappointed teachers grows like a snowball with the influx of new graduates. While many village schools are being shut down due to a lack of teachers, students are being transferred to overcrowded classrooms in district centers. The paradox of schools closing due to teacher shortages while

many disappointed teachers remain idle has pushed participants to take action. They expressed their belief that they could secure the positions they deserve through solidarity and organization.

P10: "...I have a union-based social plan. A world where workers can live comfortably is entirely possible. I have a solidarity plan—or rather, we have a plan. It is not just mine; it benefits me too, but it's a plan that will benefit all of us..."

One of the fundamental duties of the state is to combat poverty. Through the competence of the ruling government, the state is expected to create employment opportunities either by establishing businesses itself or by incentivizing the private sector. However, participants argued that these employment opportunities are allocated to political allies rather than being distributed fairly. With very few available job opportunities, and the limited ones being handed out based on favoritism and nepotism rather than merit, millions of people are left unemployed and impoverished. A key finding is that while the state plays the role of a "father figure" in poverty alleviation, it acts as a "real father" to political allies and an "adoptive father" to ordinary citizens.

P12: "...What can be done, you ask? (laughing) I don't know, our government officials know that. I guess something should be done—more workplaces should be opened. Or at the very least, instead of hiring only people they know, they should hire those who truly deserve it. This applies to municipalities and even civil service positions because nepotism is rampant in regional government jobs as well. Job opportunities should definitely be increased..."

As always, governments have been accused of protecting the wealthy during crises while abandoning the poor to their fate. Participants expressed frustration that while the state erases tax debts for the rich and provides them with financial support, it withholds assistance from the poor. They pointed out that in a legal system where everyone pays taxes, forgiving the debts of the rich while collecting every possible tax from the poor establishes a system that takes from the poor and gives to the rich.

P20: "...The rich always get privileges, while the poor get nothing. The state supports the wealthy because they engage in bigger businesses—at least, that's what I think based on what I see in the news. For example, Turkish Airlines' tax debts are erased, or major construction companies' tax debts are forgiven. But a poor person or a small shop owner doesn't even get rental support for their business..."

Theme 5: Responsibility in Combating Violence

According to the findings obtained from the field, the responsibility for combating poverty should lie with the state. When considering the revenue components that form the state budget and the total taxes paid by citizens, the proper and fair use of this budget would eliminate poverty as an issue. According to Article 2 of the Constitution, the Republic of Türkiye is defined as a democratic, secular, and social state governed by the rule of law. Due to these characteristics, it must be emphasized that the state bears the primary responsibility in the fight against poverty.

P1: "...It is quite obvious whose duty it is to deal with poverty. We do not elect these people for no reason. If they have been elected, it is their duty. We elect them to represent and manage such problems. Even if a poor person worked 32 hours a day—let's exaggerate and say 32 hours—they would remain poor..."

Labor migration from Türkiye to the West has historically been largely irregular; population growth, division of property, and the desire for a better life have been the primary drivers of this migration. While previously seen as an outflow of unskilled labor, the recent departure of educated and professional young people, driven to unemployment and poverty, is noteworthy. The poverty experiences of prospective teachers who were denied state appointments were reflected in their outraged statements, which they held the government responsible for. Participants emphasized the state's obligation to combat poverty and provide a prosperous life for its citizens.

P16: "...Have we considered going abroad? Yes, we have. During the teacher appointment process, I told myself that if I did not get appointed after receiving my exam score, or if my desired quota was not available and I ended up unemployed, I would really say, 'I'm leaving this country for good..."

Discussion and Conclusion

While youth studies have increased in recent years, research directly addressing youth poverty is limited; most studies address poverty indirectly through unemployment or family poverty. The literature primarily explains youth poverty through two approaches: The first view considers low education, unemployment, and low wages as determinants, while the second emphasizes the risks of growing up in unemployed or single-parent families (Erikli, 2016). Erikli (2016) stated that employment does not lift young people out of poverty unless it qualifies as "decent work." Kapar (2023) found evidence of poverty and social exclusion among working youth; however, this study found that the level of deprivation among educated youth was relatively low. Yentürk and Başlevant (2007) demonstrated that youth employment is characterized by insecurity and short-term employment; similar results were obtained in the current study, but harsh work conditions were not found to be a determining factor. Aktaş (2020) demonstrated that young people gravitate toward low-wage, insecure jobs; this study confirmed that unemployed teachers are forced into the same work patterns. While Usanmaz and Kahraman (2020) stated that young people turn to seasonal work to cope with poverty, this study found that young graduates work both temporary jobs and prepare for the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS). Finally, while Bal (2024) explained consumption patterns through the lifestyles in television series, this study revealed that young people associate consumption with the essential needs of daily life.

The most critical issues for educated youth in our country are poverty and rising unemployment. Among the primary causes of increasing youth unemployment are the ongoing devaluation of professions in the construction, manufacturing, and service sectors, low wages, job fatigue, and concerns over social status. In response to this deterioration, families from the lower-middle and lower classes have encouraged their children to pursue teaching as a profession, seeing it as a relatively secure source of income and a respectable career. The underlying reason many young people choose teaching despite the lack of job placements is precisely this expectation.

The exploitation and near-servitude conditions in the manufacturing and service sectors push young people into schools, ultimately creating future waves of unemployed, impoverished, and hopeless youth. Government intervention in the labor market to improve financial conditions and expand workers' social

rights is crucial to preventing youth unemployment and poverty, which are essential for social stability. Reforms in the education system must ensure that unappointed teachers are placed in jobs to rescue young people from the vicious cycle of unemployment and poverty.

Planning and organization are crucial in public administration. The successful coordination between the human resources needed in various sectors and the available workforce determines overall success; any miscalculation in this equation leads to failure. Indeed, there is a significant mismatch between the labor force demand in different industries and the general population distribution in our country. Despite having a large youth population, which could be an advantage, Türkiye has failed to achieve the expected level of development due to poor planning. The inability to train qualified workers based on labor market needs and the constant changes in educational curricula are the most concrete indicators of this failure.

The excessive student quotas in faculties such as Science and Literature, Economics, and Administrative Sciences have caused an influx of students into these fields. However, job opportunities for graduates of these faculties remain limited, leaving many young people unemployed. Many of these unemployed graduates pursue additional pedagogical training in hopes of securing a teaching position. Consequently, an army of unemployed teachers has emerged—on one side, those who graduate from education faculties, and on the other, those who qualify through pedagogical formation programs. This mismanagement of the education system devalues diplomas and prevents these young people from seeking alternative career paths.

Poverty, when defined in terms of needs, manifests at various levels. The concept of need itself remains ambiguous, as expressed by participants in different ways. While some define needs in terms of basic survival requirements, most participants describe them in the context of human attributes such as intelligence, will, choice, and motivation. Families with limited financial means push their boundaries to support their children's university education, often relying on scholarships from various institutions. However, when these young graduates fail to secure jobs, they find themselves in an almost inescapable situation. As these young individuals, prepared to enter society as skilled professionals, remain unappointed, they not only disappoint their families but also suffer psychologically due to their inability to meet these expectations.

Additionally, the financial support required to prepare for competitive exams and the obligation to repay student loans place them in economic distress. Many unemployed graduates are forced to move back in with their parents, further burdening their already fragile family finances. Scholarships and student loans provided to impoverished youth should not be discontinued upon graduation; instead, they should be extended until these young people secure stable employment or an income sufficient to sustain themselves. This is because, after finishing their education, young people face poverty more intensely.

Participants identified multiple causes of poverty, all of which stem from the broader social system and capitalist modes of production. The key findings include problems of unemployment and employment, income inequality, low wages, flaws in the transition from education to employment, prolonged education periods, and the oversaturation of university admissions to prevent a visible surge in youth unemployment rates. Several contradictory factors intensify this issue.

One such factor, according to many participants, is that political affiliations matter more than academic credentials in accessing employment opportunities. Another observation is that poor children disproportionately choose professions such as teaching—despite the lack of job security—as a temporary solution to “postpone youth poverty.”

Many participants stated that escaping poverty depends on multiple conditions, with job appointments being the primary prerequisite. However, even with an appointment, they believe they will not completely escape poverty, as teacher salaries remain below the poverty line. As a result, participants have expressed plans to take on additional jobs or marry working spouses after being appointed. A significant number of them also consider emigrating abroad if they are not appointed.

On the one hand, schools are closing due to a lack of teachers; on the other hand, the increasing number of unappointed teachers highlights the mismanagement of human resources, serving as a concrete example of the waste of human capital. Although this study focused on a small sample group residing in Tekirdağ, the findings indicate that young people's experiences of poverty extend beyond this specific sample. Educated youth, who are effectively pushed into invisibility after completing their education, are observed to be seeking alternative ways to escape their predicament through their own efforts.

In modern states, governments rule by securing the votes of the people through elections. However, the financial elite lays the groundwork for determining which political faction will come to power. Therefore, in modern nation-states, invisible yet insurmountable ties exist between the government and the economic elite. Although the capitalist nation-state owes its existence to protecting the interests of the financial elite, it also has responsibilities toward the poor, as capital itself is generated through the labor of the working class.

Therefore, the state must address the problems of unemployed and impoverished youth. Combating youth poverty requires significant effort and comprehensive measures. Proper definitions and measurements must be established to assess youth poverty accurately. Evaluating young people's poverty solely through their family backgrounds or class identities can lead to long-term social issues that are difficult to rectify.

Educated yet impoverished youth, when pushed into invisibility within a crisis environment and abandoned to their fate at their family homes, risk becoming socially excluded. Every society faces urgent problems that need to be addressed, and usually, the most pressing issue is given priority. Youth unemployment and poverty are among the most critical issues in our country and must be addressed immediately. If Türkiye successfully facilitates the transition of young people from education to employment, it will not only resolve unemployment and poverty in the short term but also achieve economic development in the medium term and create a prosperous and socially harmonious society in the long term.



Ethics Committee Approval	Ethical approval for the semi-structured interview form used in the interviews was obtained from the Atatürk University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Date: 29.11.2021, Decision: 227).
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.
Acknowledge	I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Mevlüt Özben, for his contributions throughout the thesis process.

Author Details	Sedat Polat (Dr.)
	¹ Non-affiliated, Tekirdağ, Türkiye
	0000-0002-6071-7252 sedatpolat1984@gmail.com



References

- Aksan, G. (2012). Yoksulluk ve yoksulluk kültürünün toplumsal görünümü. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 27, 9–19.
- Aktaş, G. (2020). Kentsel yoksulluk ve gençlerin yoksulluğu deneyimleme biçimleri üzerine bir alan çalışması: Denizli örneği. *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 44(1), 1–18.
- Baş, T. ve Akturan, U. (2013). *Nitel araştırma yöntemleri: NVivo ile nitel veri analizi*. Seçkin Yayıncılık.
- Bayhan, V. (2006). Türkiye’de gençlik: Sorunlar, değerler ve değişimler [Youth in Turkey: Challenges, Values and Changes] In M. Zencirkıran (Ed.), *Dünden bugüne Türkiye’nin toplumsal yapısı* [Turkey’s social structure from the past to the present] (pp. 561–583). Nova Yayınları.
- Bayhan, V. (2017). Gençlik ve kuşaklar: Kuşaklara göre gençliğin değer ve davranışları [Youth and generations: The values and behaviours of young people across generations] In M. Zencirkıran (Ed.), *Davranış bilimleri* [Behavioural sciences] (2nd ed.), (pp. 311–342). Dora Yayınları.
- Benlisoy, F. (2003). Öğrenci muhalefetine güncelliği. *Toplum ve Bilim*, 97(2), 281–300.
- Bilgen Susanlı, Z. (2016). Understanding the NEET in Turkey. *Eurasian Journal of Economics and Finance*, 4(2), 42–57. <https://doi.org/10.15604/ejef.2016.04.02.004>
- Erikli, S. (2016). Genç yoksulluğunun temel belirleyicileri: Eğitim ve düzgün iş. *Gazi Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 18(1), 283–302.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (2011). *Tamamlanmamış devrim: Kadınların yeni rollerine uymak* (S. Çağatay, Çev.). İletişim Yayınları. (Orijinal eserin basım tarihi 2009)
- Eurostat. (2025). *At-risk-of-poverty rate by poverty threshold and educational attainment level*. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_li07/default/table?lang=en.
- Financy, F., Sitorus, F. K. (2024). Wilhelm Dilthey’s thoughts on understanding, hermeneutics, and communication. *Asian Journal of Philosophy and Religion*, 3(1), 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.55927/ajpr.v3i1.9360>
- Furlong, A. (2016). The changing landscape of youth and young adulthood. In A. Furlong (Ed.), *Handbook of youth and young adulthood* (2nd ed., pp. 3–11). Routledge.
- Furlong, A., ve Cartmel, F. (2007). *Young people and social change* (2nd ed.). Open University Press / McGraw-Hill Education.
- International Labor Organization [ILO]. (2020). *Global employment trends for youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs*. Geneva: Author.
- International Labor Organization [ILO]. (2022). *Global employment trends for youth 2022: Investing in transforming futures for young people*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-employment-trends-youth-2022-investing-transforming-futures-young>
- Kapar, R. (2023). Türkiye’de çalışanların yoksulluğu, yoksunluğu ve sosyal dışlanmaları. *Reflektif Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 4(2), 279–308. <https://doi.org/10.47613/reflektif.2023.106>
- Levine, D. P. (2004). Poverty, capabilities and freedom. *Review of Political Economy*, 16(1), 101–115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0953825032000145481>
- Lüküslü, D. (2014). *Türkiye’de gençlik miti: 1980 sonrası Türkiye gençliği*. İletişim Yayınları.
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2024). *Society at a glance 2024: OECD social indicators*. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/society-at-a-glance-2024_08001b73/918d8db3-en.pdf
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2025a). *Youth employment and social policies*. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/youth-employment-and-social-policies.html>
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2025b). *Government at a glance 2025: Poverty and inequality*. OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/government-at-a-glance-2025_0efd0bcd-en/full-report/poverty-and-inequality_5f7b56a0.html
- Stiglitz, J. E. (2018). *Eşitsizliğin bedeli: Bugünün bölünmüş toplumu geleceğimizi nasıl tehlikeye atıyor?* (O. İşler, Çev.). İletişim Yayınları. (Orijinal eserin basım tarihi 2012)
- Sukarieh, M., ve Tannock, S. (2015). *Youth rising: The politics of youth in the global economy*. Routledge.
- Türkiye Today. (2024, May 15). Half of young job seekers in Türkiye live on \$96 a month during rising costs: Report. *Türkiye Today*.



- Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK]. (2025a). *İşgücü istatistikleri, Mayıs 2025*. <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Isgucu-Istatistikleri-Mayis-2025-54063>
- Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK]. (2025b). *İstatistiklerle gençlik, 2024*. <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Genclik-2024-54077>
- United Nations [UN]. (2003). *World youth report 2003: The global situation of young people*. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/worldyouthreport.pdf>
- United Nations Development Program [UNDP]. (2008). *Human development report: Youth in Turkey*. Ankara: Author.
- United Nations Development Program [UNDP]. (2014). *UNDP youth strategy 2014–2017: Empowered youth, sustainable future*. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP_YouthStrategy-2014-17_Web.pdf
- Usanmaz, A., ve Kahraman, F. (2020). Güvencesizlik, gençlik ve inşaat: İnşaatın eğitilmiş gençleri üzerine bir araştırma. *Gençlik Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 8(20), 106–128.
- Valiente, O., Capsada-Munsech, Q., ve de Otero, J. P. (2020). Educationalisation of youth unemployment through lifelong learning policies in Europe. *European Educational Research Journal*, 19(6), 525–543. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904120908751>
- Vergin, N. (2008). *Siyasetin sosyolojisi*. Doğan Yayıncılık.
- World Bank. (2007). *World development report 2007: Development and the next generation*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Yalçıntaş, A., ve Akkaya, B. (2019). Türkiye’de akademik enflasyon: “Her ile bir üniversite politikası” sonrasında Türk yükseköğretim sistemi. *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 74(3), 789–810. <https://doi.org/10.33630/ausbf.551330>
- Yaman, Ö. M. (2013). Türkiye’de gençlik sosyolojisi çalışmalarına dair bibliyografik bir değerlendirme. *Alternatif Politika*, 5(2), 114–138.
- Yassine, A., ve Bakass, F. (2023). Youth's poverty and inequality of opportunities: Empirical evidence from Morocco. *Social Sciences*, 12(1), 28. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12010028>
- Yentürk, N., ve Başlevent, C. (2007). *Türkiye’de genç işsizliği* (Araştırma Raporu No. 2). İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Gençlik Çalışmaları Birimi.
- Yi, G., ve McMurtrey, M. E. (2013). The impact of academic inflation on the labor market: If everyone has a PhD, who will be the custodian? *International Journal of Electronic Finance*, 7(3–4), 250–262. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEF.2013.058605>

