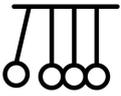


The Unemployment Problem Among Young Graduates Resulting from the Decline in the Value of Diplomas Caused by the Excessive Increase in the Number of Universities in Turkey

ECONOMICS

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Abstract

The policy launched in Turkey since the 1980s with the aim of “one university in every province” has reached an unpredictable point today, with the number of universities exceeding 200. The increase in the number of students from 1.5 million in 2001 to 8 million today has turned a university diploma from a criterion of success into an ordinary necessity. As a result of this unplanned growth, diplomas have lost their value in the labor market, while the gap between the number of graduates and job opportunities continues to widen every day. An examination of TURKSTAT data shows that, despite the massive increase in graduation rates, the graduate unemployment rate, at 9.2%, remaining above the general unemployment average proves that the problem is not only numerical but also structural.

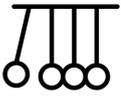
Today's business world no longer seeks only a diploma; it demands technical skills, digital competence, and field experience. However, an education system overwhelmed by theoretical courses has fallen behind in keeping pace with the new generation of working life transformed by technology and artificial intelligence. This situation causes young graduates to be caught in the “experience” barrier, forcing them either to work outside their fields or to join the ranks of the unemployed. The fact that the many years of investment by the state and families yield no return leads to the waste of Turkey's human capital and pushes qualified minds to seek solutions abroad, creating a “brain drain.”

In conclusion, Turkey must urgently change this system that merely postpones unemployment by four years. We young people are not just numbers to be kept in classrooms; we are the potential to build the country's future. Unless a model is established in which quotas are determined according to market needs and education is aligned with the business world, the young population advantage we possess will continue to turn into an unresolved social crisis rather than a source of wealth. Turkey will attain its real economic power only to the extent that it can use the young minds it has raised in the right fields and at the right time.

Increase in the Number of Universities and the Graduate Crisis

The “one university in every province” policy that has been implemented in Turkey since the 1980s has today reached an unpredictable level. While there were only 74 universities in 2001, the number has now exceeded 200. Although this policy was introduced with the aim of supporting education, the steadily increasing number of graduates has also affected job opportunities. The rise in the number of students from 1.5 million to 8 million has turned a university diploma into a necessity rather than a mark of success. This sharp increase in the number of schools and students has caused diplomas to lose their value.

In the past, when gaining admission to a university was considered an achievement and diplomas were rare, having a diploma provided individuals with a reliable start in



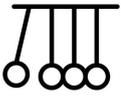
professional life. However, due to the uncontrollable increase in the number of universities, it has now become much easier for students to be placed in a school. The growing number of graduates each year leads to an ever-increasing accumulation of young people seeking jobs in the labor market. The fact that many university graduates with diplomas are unable to find employment shows that diplomas have lost their value and are no longer a privilege but a necessity. According to TURKSTAT data, while the graduation rate was 13.5% in 2008, it rose to 31.7% in 2016 and reached 44.9% in 2024. After the 2001 university policy, the increase in graduation rates is impossible to overlook. The unemployment problem that grows alongside the number of graduates also creates anxiety for young people.

When we look at unemployment rates, the general unemployment rate is 8.8% according to 2024 data. So, what is the unemployment rate among graduates? In an average country, the graduate unemployment rate is expected to be lower than the general unemployment rate; however, contrary to this common situation, in Turkey the graduate unemployment rate is higher, at 9.2%. This clearly reveals the unemployment problem among graduates.

Unfortunately, being a university graduate is no longer a distinctive expectation among employers when hiring new employees. In fact, they already expect their workers to hold a degree. This situation has become a necessity rather than a priority. In today's labor market, experience and skills are now more prominent than ever. Companies seek technical skills, field experience, and digital competence. One of the biggest obstacles encountered in job applications is the "experience requirement" imposed on young people because companies are looking for "ready-trained employees." Requiring experience for a graduate to obtain their first job, while also needing a job in order to gain experience, creates a vicious cycle. This situation stems from the excessive number of graduates in the market; as the number of options increases, employers choose the most prepared and well-equipped candidates.

Moreover, the rapid development of technology and the entry of artificial intelligence into workplaces have completely changed employers' expectations and their demand for employees. Workers are now expected to perform complex analyses that machines cannot and to use technology practically and with expertise. In this new era referred to as the "information society," the tools of production have changed, and brain power has replaced physical labor. However, the education system has failed to keep pace with this change, causing what is taught in schools to fall far behind the needs of the new generation in the labor market. This leaves young people unprepared for technological progress and increases the risk of unemployment due to changes in the labor market.

This intense competition in the market strengthens the perception that a university education is insufficient for entering professional life. Young people who struggle with theoretical courses for four years find it difficult to adapt when they enter the workforce and, feeling inadequate, turn to professions outside their field. As a result, thousands of young



graduates who lack the field experience expected by employers are left facing the reality of unemployment after graduation.

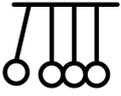
Unemployment among young university graduates not only makes their lives more difficult, but also has a significant impact on Turkey's overall economic strength. The expenditures made on a young person's education from primary school through higher education represent a major and costly investment for both families and the state. The time, effort, and money spent during this process are intended to ensure that the individual will contribute to the country in the future. However, when a graduate is unable to find a suitable position in their field of expertise, the return on this long-term investment cannot be achieved. Well-educated individuals then begin working in different, inefficient positions instead of in their own professions. This prevents Turkey from growing economically at a faster pace and leads to a major waste of capital.

Young people who believe they cannot receive the reward for their efforts in their own country and who feel that their diplomas have no value in the labor market find the solution in going abroad. This situation, referred to as "brain drain," means that Turkey is handing over the population that will shape its future to other countries. When these young people contribute to another economy instead of Turkey's, it slows the country's long-term development.

In addition, the rise in graduate unemployment also undermines trust in the education system. Students who believe they will remain unemployed after graduation do not make sufficient efforts to improve themselves during their years at school. This further reduces the quality of education in Turkey and creates a vicious cycle. As education ceases to be a means of social mobility and prosperity, the dreams of young people become limited. Each day that Turkey wastes its young population advantage in this way, it moves closer to the risk of falling further behind in global economic competition.

To solve this problem, it is necessary to go beyond simple solutions such as merely increasing the number of universities. The state and educational institutions must identify which professions the labor market truly needs and determine student quotas accordingly. Universities should move beyond being buildings that provide only theoretical knowledge and, by offering internship programs integrated with industry and the world of technology, help young people overcome their lack of experience while they are still in school.

In conclusion, although we young people are often described as Turkey's greatest wealth, how this wealth is actually utilized in real life remains a major question mark. While opening a university in every province may appear to have expanded educational opportunities, in reality we have become part of a system that merely postpones unemployment by four years. As the number of diplomas increases, the value they carry decreases, showing that the years of effort and resources invested are being quietly wasted. The fact that the brightest minds we raise spend their energy in job application lines or in positions outside their fields of expertise is one of the greatest harms our country inflicts



upon itself. We must remember that we are not just numbers, and that behind every diploma lies a hope for the future. Turkey will grow stronger not by keeping us on school benches, but by proving that it truly needs us once we leave them.

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