

FƏLSƏFƏ və SOSİOLOGİYA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30546/25194011.2026.201.2.4.5069>SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT IN VOCATIONAL
SPECIALTIES

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SUMMARY

This study examines the social problems faced by young people in the process of finding employment in their professional fields within the context of Azerbaijan. The main objective of the research is to evaluate the difficulties of young people with higher education and vocational training to find jobs in their areas of expertise, their tendency to seek employment outside their fields, and the resulting social effects. The study addresses the issue not only within the framework of unemployment indicators but also in terms of education-employment mismatch, skill mismatch, fulfillment of professional expectations, social status, and the process of young people's adaptation to the labor market. Descriptive-statistical method was used in the research, based on official statistical data from Azerbaijan. The findings show that despite the increase in participation in higher education and the number of graduates in the country, the labor market's capacity to employ all graduates in their areas of expertise is limited. This situation creates professional dissatisfaction among young people, a tendency towards low-income jobs, a longer job search period, and a mismatch between social expectations and actual market conditions. In conclusion, the employment of young people in their professional fields should be considered not only an economic issue but also a significant social problem in terms of education policy, social planning, and labor market regulations.

Keywords: *youth employment, vocational specialization, skills mismatch, higher education, labor market.*

1. Introduction

With modernism, the understanding developed that professional knowledge and skills could be acquired through education, and that access to high-level professions was only possible by remaining in education for longer periods. Accordingly, those who sacrificed labor, time, and cost by remaining in education for many years would be able to rea-

ch high-level professional positions; those who did not show the necessary diligence in their education would either perform lower-level jobs requiring few skills or remain unemployed [18, pp. 106-108]. In this context, modernism popularized the understanding that individuals could only become employable if they received an education, and therefore, the solution to finding a job lay within the individual. This understanding still holds true today. However, the context has changed. Indeed, today, educated and qualified individuals face the problem of unemployment. Receiving an education is not enough to find a job. The education system creates a large number of unemployed young people, or at least those who cannot find employment in their fields of study.

The unemployment of educated individuals emerges as a modern threat as a result of developments in communication, transportation, and information technology, and therefore stems from structural factors. Companies prioritize investment in automation over labor because machines can achieve the same level of production with fewer workers, are cheaper than paying workers, and enable the creation of economically valuable things that humans cannot. This leads to the phenomenon of labor unemployment. Until the 1990s, machines were only used in mechanical jobs, so automation primarily led to unemployment in manual labor. However, advancements in computers and microelectronics have gradually impacted the service sector, causing white-collar unemployment [11, pp. 8-9]. New technological developments such as information technology, computerization, robotics, and electronics are taking over mental jobs and reducing the number of mid-level jobs available for educated individuals. The new jobs and job sectors created by these technologies are insufficient to offset the jobs lost due to technology [11, pp. 132-135].

Changes in the global labor supply also contribute to unemployment among educated individuals. Transportation and communication technologies provide capital with unprecedented freedom of movement, freeing it from dependence on labor and location. Capital can now easily move to regions it finds more favorable in terms of environment, regulations, and especially labor. This is causing jobs to shift from countries with high wages to lower-wage economies that have skilled, and sometimes even highly qualified, workers. However, technological advancements are also eliminating location dependency for workers. Internet technology allows white-collar workers to work in jobs in different parts of the world without having to move from their country of residence; transportation technology enables them to carry their skills globally. This is homogenizing middle-class labor into a single labor market and creating global labor competition. Educated individuals face problems not only from unemployment but also from the changing employment structure [8, pp. 216-219].

Literature Review

Until the late 1970s, employment meant lifelong, full-time work; work and non-work were clearly separated in terms of time and place. Thanks to the long-term perspective, workers felt secure in remaining in their jobs for the rest of their lives. Their jobs were protected by unions, and they worked under rules of employment, promotion, and retirement that were almost identical every day and unchanging. This allowed them a linear life flow, free from surprises, and protected them from the anxiety that uncertainty could create. However, waves of automation based on new technologies have eroded the employment structure, leading to the flexibilization of its three fundamental pillars: labor law, workplace, and working hours. Consequently, the boundaries between work and non-work have become more fluid; flexible and underemployment forms have become widespread. Flexibility has emerged as one of the most fundamental concepts defining our present day. The concept indicates that the long-term, secure concept of work has lost its validity. In this context, work now means short-term and insecure employment [2, pp. 147-155].

Working life is fraught with uncertainties. Rules regarding promotion and dismissal can be eliminated or altered during the process. Consequently, traditional careers, progressing step-by-step within one or two organizations, are disappearing. People are forced to change jobs many times throughout the-

ir working lives. Insecurity, instability, and fragility are the most prominent characteristics of today's living conditions [14, pp. 21-24]. People experience "insecurity" regarding their position, rights, and livelihoods in the workplace, "uncertainty" regarding their continuity and future status, and "insecurity" regarding property, the environment, and community). This situation, expressed by the concept of precarity, deeply affects people. It prevents rational future expectations and eliminates faith and hope in the future. It is seen in the private sector as well as in the public sector, where temporary and seasonal jobs are increasing [15, pp. 18, 39-41]. It also affects the skilled workforce with the increase in the number of graduates. White-collar workers are losing the security provided by their diplomas day by day. They are employed under low-wage, sometimes unpaid, insecure, and arbitrary conditions. They are deprived of temporary jobs and exposed to a fragile and uncertain employment regime between work and unemployment. Therefore, white-collar workers are experiencing a class decline due to structural problems. This decline stems from the failure of capitalism, which promises class advancement if they receive education. However, white-collar workers are left alone in the face of these socially produced problems and are expected to find personal solutions to their problems.

Young people with higher education degrees are experiencing the pains of this change today. They face a high risk of unemployment. The increase in the number of graduates increases the risk of unemployment. In addition to unemployment, they also face various employment problems. For today's young graduates, the transition from higher education to employment has become more uncertain and problematic than in the past [6, p. 12]. Young people with higher education degrees remain unemployed for longer periods and experience a skills mismatch when they find a job. Compared to young people in the past, they face greater difficulties in finding their first job and in ensuring that it is a 'good' job. In addition, they are exposed to precarious, part-time, contract, and short-term employment, especially in the first few years after graduation. Therefore, young people with higher education degrees, despite investing the effort, time, and energy required for training that would equip them with the skills specific to upper and middle-level professions, often struggle to access the promised earnings [7].

Young people pursue higher education with the aim of accessing the professions and achievements promised by education. However, they cannot escape

unemployment or precarious, temporary, low-wage, and underemployment. Despite this, the blame and responsibility for their unemployment and employment problems are placed on young people themselves. They are accused of being unemployed because they "don't like the jobs" available. Unemployment or low employment among young people is attributed to their graduating from higher education without learning a foreign language, without studying abroad, without developing their professional skills, or without being aware of global developments [14, pp. 125-128].

Thus, unemployment or low employment is presented as a problem stemming from the individual's failure to invest in their human capital. However, when the problem is individualized, the solutions also become individualized. Individuals focusing on themselves and increasing their competencies and skills becomes the solution. However, in this case, the structural elements and deficiencies that cause the problem are overlooked. This hinders the solution [19]. In this context, examining the issue from a structuralist and critical perspective is crucial. The Relationship Between Education and Social Mobility: The concept of social mobility is defined in the sociology dictionary as "a term describing the movement of individuals—usually individuals, but sometimes entire groups—between different positions within a system of social stratification in any society." There are two types: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal social mobility refers to movement between positions within the same social stratum; vertical social mobility refers to movement between different social positions that are above or below each other. The degree of social mobility varies according to the social structure and stratification system. In this context, the possibility of social mobility can change both between societies and in different periods of a society. Societies are characterized as open when the degree of social mobility is high, and as closed when it is low. For modern societies, which have a more open character in terms of stratification systems, education constitutes one of the main dynamics of social mobility. With industrialization, the qualifications expected from the workforce have become attainable through education. This situation has increased the importance given to education, given rise to efforts to ensure equal opportunities for different classes, and has relatively softened the transition between social categories [9, pp. 296-299]. It has popularized the concept of inclusive education. However, in practice, inequalities persist when it comes to access to education. Indeed, middle and upper-class parents place

greater importance on their children's education, demand quality education, and support their children with private tutoring and courses. Their knowledge of the educational process enables them to make informed decisions about their children's education. In this context, the social class of parents continues to determine children's access to education, the quality of that education, and consequently, their future professional and social standing [5, pp. 71-74].

Education has long remained a fundamental basis for accessing acquired positions. Until the 1980s, it also facilitated social mobility. However, after these years, with integration into the global economy, the labor market was restructured, the education-occupation relationship changed, and education ceased to be a factor enabling social mobility. Over time, it began to fall short of its function in providing employment. Unemployment has become a significant problem for educated people with the economic crises experienced. Indeed, the 1994 economic crisis caused mass unemployment among skilled workers, bringing white-collar unemployment to the forefront. White-collar unemployment became more visible with the 2001 crisis. The 2009 crisis dealt a major blow to the educated skilled workforce with unemployment. Since then, the proportion of higher education graduates among the unemployed has increased day by day [13, pp. 83-86].

Microeconomic factors contributing to youth unemployment include: youth-specific characteristics, educated unemployed individuals, differences in youth work habits, high expectations of young people entering the market for the first time, and factors stemming from ethnicity. In addition to its microeconomic effects, youth unemployment also has macroeconomic impacts affecting the entire society. The most important of these is the inability of young people to participate in production due to their lack of employment, resulting in significant losses and underemployment in national production. Besides these economic effects, the inability to integrate young people into the labor market due to youth unemployment poses a threat to countries' future development and prosperity expectations. Young workers, a potential productive force, are a vital resource for national development. Transforming this resource into a skilled workforce that meets the needs of the labor market creates an advantage for societies. Otherwise, this situation can become a source of socio-economic problems. Rising youth unemployment means a decrease in government tax revenues and a decline in consumption. Ultimately, it's not just

economic growth that is at risk. Social security systems, where younger generations bear the burden of the elderly, can also be negatively impacted by these adverse conditions. One of the terms used to examine the problems young people create in the labor market is the "inertia rate." This rate, which includes individuals who are neither in education nor employment, is used to describe the situation of young people in the labor market [10, p.139].

Theoretical Framework

According to Gary Becker, Theodore Schultz, Michael Spence, Kenneth Arrow, and others, skills mismatch is as important as unemployment in today's labor markets. Skills mismatch refers to the educational level of individuals in the labor market that is incompatible with the jobs they are doing, and is expressed as mismatch. The importance of the issue stems from the fact that instead of hiring according to the required skills and competencies, the surplus of labor and high unemployment rates lead to employment being achieved by setting high skill requirements. This situation necessitates questioning the extent to which new graduates acquired the necessary skills, abilities, and competencies at their educational institutions, and what skill requirements employers expect from them [7]. Skills mismatch occurs when the jobs individuals work in require less or more skills than their educational level. If individuals are working in jobs requiring less skill than their education level, there is a significant skills mismatch; if they are working in jobs requiring higher skills than their education level, there is a deficient skills mismatch [19]. Although there are differences in almost all European countries, both over-education and horizontal mismatch have been observed.

Methodology and methods

In this study, the social problems of youth employment in vocational specialties were analyzed in the context of the Azerbaijani labor market and higher education system. The main purpose of the study is to determine the social consequences of young people's inability to find suitable jobs in the labor market for their profession and specialty, working in areas outside their specialty, and this. The topic was examined not only as a quantitative indicator of unemployment, but also in terms of education-employment compatibility, real application of the specialty in the labor market, social adaptation of young people, and the realization of professional expectations.

From a methodological point of view, the study

is based on a descriptive-statistical and comparative analysis approach. In this approach, the youth employment problem is assessed not only as a question of "finding a job or not", but also from the perspective of "whether the job found is suitable for the specialty". In the Azerbaijani example presented regarding higher education graduates, the qualification mismatch is explained as the difference between the graduate's level of education and skills and the level of skills required by the job he or she is working on; this approach also creates a suitable methodological basis for analyzing the social essence of vocational-specialty employment in the Azerbaijani context.

The information base of the study is formed by statistical materials of the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the labor market, youth and higher education, higher education indicators provided in the publication "Azerbaijan in Figures, 2025", as well as open statistical data on unemployed people with higher education. The presentation of the demographic situation of youth, education, employment and unemployment indicators in separate sections in the publication of the State Statistical Committee "Youth of Azerbaijan-2025" shows that this topic is a relevant socio-statistical direction for Azerbaijan. The same source notes that according to Azerbaijani legislation, youth are considered as the 14–29 age group and constitute 22.5 percent of the country's population.

The main limitation of the study is that in Azerbaijan, the indicator "graduates work in their specialty / work outside their specialty" is not systematically and completely presented in open official statistical databases for all specialties. Therefore, the analysis was conducted on the basis of indirect indicators: the number of admissions to higher education institutions and graduates, the number of unemployed people with higher education, the share of unemployed people with higher education among the total unemployed, and social problems arising from the transition of young people to the labor market. This method allows for a more realistic assessment of the topic, since professional-specialty mismatch is not only a statistical mismatch, but also a problem of social expectations, family investment, income level, social status, and professional identity.

Results and Discussion

The analysis shows that there is a certain structural tension between higher education and employment in vocational specialties in Azerbaijan. On the one hand, the number of young people receiving

and graduating from higher education is increasing, and on the other hand, the labor market is not able to provide all graduates with jobs appropriate to their specialization. This situation creates social problems among young people, such as employment outside their specialization, orientation to low-paying jobs, prolonged job search periods, and weakening professional expectations.

Table 1. Admission to higher education institutions and graduation of highly educated specialists in Azerbaijan

Years	Students admitted to higher education institutions	Graduated specialist with higher education
2022	50 522	46 039
2023	52 880	48 421
2024	57 391	49 941

Source: *State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Azerbaijan in Figures, 2025".*

Table 1 shows that in 2022–2024, the number of people admitted to higher education institutions increased from 50,522 to 57,391. Over the same period, the number of graduates with higher education reached 49,941 from 46,039. These indicators indicate an increase in the flow of young people with higher education to the labor market. However, this increase does not automatically mean that they will be provided with jobs in their professional specialty. On the contrary, if the number of graduates increases faster than the number of suitable jobs, young people may be forced to work in areas that do not correspond to their specialty.

Table 2. Unemployed and unemployed with higher education in Azerbaijan

Years	Total unemployed (thousand people)	Unemployed people with higher education (thousand people)	Share of unemployed people with higher education in total unemployed people
2019	252,1	34,4	13,6%
2020	368,7	46,0	12,47%
2021	310,5	38,5	12,39%
2022	293,3	36,4	12,41%
2023	286,4	34,8	12,15%

Source: *Open data provided based on the indicators of the State Statistics Committee.*

Table 2 shows that the proportion of unemployed people with higher education remains stable at around 12–14 percent of the total unemployed po-

pulation. This fact shows that, despite the fact that higher education creates an advantage in the labor market, it does not guarantee employment in the profession for all graduates. In 2020, the number of unemployed people with higher education increased to 46 thousand people, and although a decrease was observed in subsequent years, the fact that 34.8 thousand people with higher education were still unemployed in 2023 indicates that the problem continues.

These results show that the main problem in the employment of young people in their professional specialty is not only unemployment, but also the weak match between the specialty and the workplace. When a young person cannot find a job in their specialty, they either remain outside the labor market or work in areas requiring lower skills. In this case, the person may appear in official statistics as “employed”, but from a social point of view, his educational potential is not fully utilized. Therefore, the problem of employment in a professional specialty has a broader social meaning than the unemployment indicator.

From the point of view of discussion, the main social problem for Azerbaijan is the lack of full coordination of planning between higher education and the labor market. Young people often choose a specialty based on family expectations, the social prestige of the diploma, and university admission opportunities, rather than on real demand in the labor market. As a result, the number of graduates in some fields increases, but jobs suitable for the specialty in those fields remain limited. This leads to young people entering the labor market late, needing additional courses and certificates, settling for low-paid jobs, and weakening their professional identity.

The social problems of youth employment in their professional specialty in Azerbaijan are concentrated in three main areas: first, there is a gap between the increase in the number of graduates with higher education and the increase in suitable jobs; second, a higher education diploma does not fully guarantee that a young person will be provided with a job in their specialty; third, employment outside their specialty negatively affects the social status, income expectations, and professional motivation of young people. Therefore, the problem of employment in a professional specialty should be considered not only as an economic issue, but also as a serious social planning and educational policy issue.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that the employment of young people in their professional specialization should be considered not only as a labor market indicator for Azerbaijan, but also as an important social problem. As the number of young people receiving higher and vocational education increases, the issue of providing them with jobs in the labor market that match their specialization becomes even more urgent. However, the current situation shows that the transition from the education system to the labor market does not always occur in a stable and appropriate manner. In many cases, young people are forced to work not in the specialization they received, but in broader or completely different fields. This leads to the incomplete realization of their professional skills, a decrease in the efficiency of resources spent on education, and the formation of social dissatisfaction in the labor market.

The results of the study show that professional-specialty mismatch affects not only the economic opportunities of young people, but also their social position, future plans, and professional motivation. When a young person cannot find a job in his specialty, a contradiction arises between the expectations formed during his education and the real labor market conditions. This contradiction is accompanied by long-term job search, employment in low-income and unskilled fields, limited professional development opportunities, and problems of social adaptation.

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GƏNCLƏRİN PEŞƏ İXTİSASLARI ÜZRƏ MƏŞĞULLUĞUNUN SOSIAL PROBLEMLƏRİ

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Bu araşdırma Azərbaycan kontekstində gənclərin öz peşə sahələrində işlə təmin olunma prosesində üzləşdikləri sosial problemləri araşdırır. Tədqiqatın əsas məqsədi ali təhsilli və peşə hazırlığı olan gənclərin öz ixtisas sahələri üzrə iş tapmaqda çətinlik çəkdiklərini, öz sahələrindən kənarda iş axtarmağa meyllərini və bunun nəticəsində yaranan sosial təsirləri qiymətləndirməkdir. Tədqiqat məsələni təkcə işsizlik göstəriciləri çərçivəsində deyil, həm də təhsil-məşğulluq uyğunsuzluğu, bacarıq uyğunsuzluğu, peşəkar gözləntilərin yerinə yetirilməsi, sosial status, gənclərin əmək bazarına uyğunlaşma prosesi baxımından da əhatə edir. Tədqiqatda Azərbaycanın rəsmi statistik məlumatlarına əsaslanan statistik-təsviri metoddan istifadə edilmişdir. Nəticələr göstərir ki, ölkədə ali təhsildə iştirakın və məzunların sayının artmasına baxmayaraq, əmək bazarının bütün məzunlarını öz ixtisas sahələri üzrə işlə təmin etmək imkanları məhduddur. Bu vəziyyət gənclər arasında peşə narazılığı, aşağı gəlirli işlərə meyl, iş axtarışına daha çox zamanın sərf olunması, sosial gözləntilərlə faktiki bazar şərtləri arasında uyğunsuzluq yaradır. Yekun olaraq qeyd edək ki, gənclərin öz peşə sahələri üzrə işlə təmin olunması təhsil siyasəti, sosial planlaşdırma, əmək bazarının tənzimlənməsi baxımından təkcə iqtisadi məsələ deyil, həm də mühüm sosial problem kimi qiymətləndirilməlidir.

Açar sözlər: *gənclərin məşğulluğu, peşə ixtisaslaşması, bacarıq uyğunsuzluğu, ali təhsil, əmək bazarı.*

СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ ЗАНЯТОСТИ МОЛОДЕЖИ ПО ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНЫМ СПЕЦИАЛЬНОСТЯМ

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РЕЗЮМЕ

В данном исследовании рассматриваются социальные проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются

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ся молодые люди в процессе поиска работы по своей специальности в контексте Азербайджана. Основная цель исследования – оценить трудности, с которыми сталкиваются молодые люди с высшим образованием и профессиональной подготовкой при поиске работы по своей специальности, их склонность к поиску работы вне своей области и вытекающие из этого социальные последствия. Исследование рассматривает проблему не только в рамках показателей безработицы, но и с точки зрения несоответствия образования и занятости, несоответствия навыков, соответствия профессиональным ожиданиям, социального статуса и процесса адаптации молодежи к рынку труда. В исследовании использован описательно-статистический метод, основанный на официальных статистических данных Азербайджана. Результаты показывают, что, несмотря на рост участия в высшем образовании и числа выпускников в стране, способность рынка труда трудоустроить всех выпускников по их специальностям ограничена. Эта ситуация порождает профессиональную неудовлетворенность среди молодежи, склонность к низкооплачиваемой работе, более длительный период поиска работы и несоответствие между социальными ожиданиями и реальными рыночными условиями. В заключение следует отметить, что трудоустройство молодежи по профессиональным направлениям следует рассматривать не только как экономическую проблему, но и как важную социальную проблему с точки зрения образовательной политики, социального планирования и регулирования рынка труда.

Ключевые слова: *занятость молодежи, профессиональная специализация, несоответствие навыков, высшее образование, рынок труда.*

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