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SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Prof. Verda CANBEY-ÖZGÜLER¹

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Abstract

Many employment studies refer to the period between the end of compulsory education and the transition to constant employment as the 'transition process from school to working life'. Evaluations of this time period from college graduates' points of view show that their better jobs and more money expectation levels regarding the labour market are higher than those of vocational high school/high school graduates. The transition process from school to working life—a complex period that lacks a specific beginning and end—is a time in which a young person generally encounters the labour market for the first time, evaluates his/her own abilities and qualifications and makes a realistic evaluation of the education that he/she has received as it pertains to job opportunities. While completing the transition period substantially depends on looking for a job with an awareness of one's qualifications, other important issues include both the number and qualifications of businesses in the economy. Increasing unemployment rates and changing working conditions are affecting youth as well. As a consequence, youth unemployment rates have reached high levels in general worldwide, although they vary from country to country. The lack of employment opportunities in Turkey and the resulting loss of positive motivation and hope for the future are critical challenges for the current generation of young people. Overall, 1 in every 5 Turkish youths aged 15–34 in the labour force is unable to find a job during the transition from education to work life, while only 19% had their first job (longer than 3 months) after completing 3 or more years of education.² Two surveys were conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) on the transition of young people to working life: The 2009 survey was the Transition to Young People's Labour Market and the 2016 survey was The Entry of Young People into The Labour Market. Because these surveys contained different questions, the current study was based on only the 2016 survey. In addition, this paper reviews recent policy innovations for improving youth employment prospects.

Keywords: School-to-Work Transition, Youth Unemployment, Youth Employment in Turkey, Education

1. INTRODUCTION

During the transition from school to working life, which has three aspects, including youth, schools and employers, the human capital level, the signal effect of degrees and the network effect are prominent issues. Maintaining communication between schools and graduates via graduate unions helps strengthen the signal effect. While the issue of transition from high school, including vocational schools, to working life is discussed widely in the literature, in this study, the concept is mainly discussed as the transition to working life after university education (i.e. transition to forms of work in which regular employment records are available).

¹ PhD, Anadolu University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Labour Economics and Industrial Relations, vcanbey@anadolu.edu.tr

² <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=21865>

The adaptation of youth to the labour market is also a factor of the transition from school to working life, which is a multidimensional and important issue. Similarly, youth unemployment and 'job/work compatibility with human dignity' as well as 'proper job/work' concepts are among prominent topics in this area of study.

While the transition from school to working life in the past mainly examined vocational high school graduates, examination of the transition after a university education has begun attracting increasing attention. One of the main reasons for this interest may be the increasing tendency of youth to participate in working life after vocational school (Richard and Baum, 2002: 3).

In addition to allowing youth to earn wages, their employment is important for socialisation and providing opportunities to contribute to society. Even if a youth has been working during his/her education period, the transition to full-time employment after graduation is a significant life step and therefore has also been evaluated within the frame of transitioning from school to working life (Mare, Winship, and Kubitschek, 1984: 327).

In labour markets, the process of finding a new job is important not only for the seeker but also for policymakers and academicians. In recent years, especially regarding individuals with a higher education degree, high unemployment rates have increased interest in this issue. Policymakers, especially in countries with high unemployment rates, support educational programmes through legal regulations that allow individuals to meet their potential employers, which assists employers in placing those individuals in jobs that match their qualifications.

The reason that some companies fail to find labour that suits their requirements may result from inadequate information in the labour market, incompatible individual knowledge and skill levels with the labour market's requirements, lack of development of optimal job seeking strategies and companies' unwillingness to provide occupational education for workers. In education activities that include a significant cost, if the information gained is oriented towards bringing skills that are valuable to not only that company but the entire market, companies are reluctant to pay education costs. Active labour market policy tools, such as occupational education, employment support and job-seeking support, have positive effects in terms of labour (Bergemann and Berg, 2006: 9).

It is difficult to obtain the expertise required by the labour market, sufficient information on employment opportunities and information on employment preferences to find employment with a satisfactory wage and to reach the carrier's goals. Therefore, labour market agents have significant responsibilities (McEwen, 1978: 250).

Difficulties that youth experience during their transition from school to working life are also related to the activities that they perform while unemployed; being committed to activities that will prepare individuals for constant employment will help them manage the transition process successfully (Ryan, 2001: 37).

2. SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

School-to-work issues vary by country. There are two primary foci in the United States (US): structural joblessness amongst disadvantaged non-white youth, which is the traditional concern of economists, and vocational preparation for non-college-bound youth, which is the traditional concern of educationists. Although analogous issues arise in other countries, elsewhere, socio-economic disadvantage tends to be less damaging, while vocational preparation is more highly developed. Moreover, other problems are often more pressing in other countries. For example, France has mass youth unemployment, Japan suffers from defective job-worker matching and Germany struggles to sustain mass apprenticeship (Ryan, 2001: 34).

Germany, Japan, US, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK) and the have been the most studied countries regarding the transition from school to working life. However, recent years have seen studies on low-income countries, such as Mongolia, and other developed countries, such as Canada and Australia.

The German dual system is based on a complex system of responsibilities that are characterised by a high level of joint decision making at the federal, provincial and local levels. Furthermore, employment in occupations that are covered under the apprenticeship system in Germany requires formal credentials. Although there are no official entry requirements for the dual system, who is allowed to enter it and into which occupations they are placed are defined by Germany's heavily streamed three-tier school system (Lehmann, 2005: 326).

In addition, school-employer relations in Germany are stronger than in the US; Germany includes institutional arrangements for disadvantaged groups that are in the process of entering post-graduate labour markets, which helps young people find work (Rosenbaum et al., 1990: 281). Germany also does not assign a student status during the internship period; conversely, student status during the internship period in Canada is continued so that the schooling rate is low in an attempt to reduce market failures. Most young people in Canada work in non-standard, part-time and low-paying jobs in the sales and service sectors (Heinz and Alison, 2005: 848), but Canadian colleges provide students with traditional part-time internships in which 125 hours equal 1 school credit. Every student can earn eight credits this way during his/her period of study. At the employer's request, the internship student can also work outside of school time. Notably, it has been shown that students prefer to complete internship courses in their first years of school (Lehmann, 2005: 329).

Japan is also an example of an active model for transition from school to working life; the connections between employers and schools have a strong institutional structure. In the Japanese education system, institutional links between school and work are effectively established. In addition, job offers are assessed by the school and matched with appropriate students. Unlike the freedom afforded in the American system, Japanese students must obtain permission from the school committee before applying for jobs. Employers are not able to choose from all relevant students; rather, they must

select from students that have been approved by the school's management (Rosenbaum and Kariya, 1991: 85). The insider-outsider approach of the dual labour market theory, which influences the entry of school dropouts into the labour market, has emerged as a model that allows the transition to labour markets without ever entering the category of young people outside Japan (Marteen and Wolbers, 2007: 191).

While the transition from high school to work can be difficult for American youths and employers, single theories fail to conceptualise the reasons for these problems. Therefore, this paper reviews four theories: segmented labour market theory, human capital theory, signalling theory and network theory. In addition, this review contrasts the American transition system with the transition systems in Japan, West Germany and the UK to reveal practices and theoretical issues that are neither salient nor well studied in American literature. We extend signalling theory to examine youths' use of signals, employers' use of dubious signals (e.g. age) while ignoring promising ones (e.g. grades) and signals that are efficient in the short term only. We extend network theory to include both personal contacts and institutional linkages and note how poor signals may affect youths' plans and motivations, which then make them unresponsive to market demands. In addition, we review the ways in which institutional networks may affect schooling and work entry in the US. Implications for theory, policy and future research are also considered (Rosenbaum and Kariya, 1991: 80).

Until the late 1960s, secondary schools were more tiered than in the past, but the new regime has undergone a significant change, especially in secondary education. The British system has a structure that is more academic than its predecessor. Since World War II, vocational education has decreased in importance at the secondary level, and there has been an increase in polytechnic schools at the university level. The British system falls between the German and American systems. Depending on the education system, there is also a system based on the increase of institutional links in the transition from school to working life (Kerckhoff, 2000: 473). Educational stratification should be considered in the introduction of the labour market, and policies should be developed for the transition from school to working life that support career advancement.

In France, the education system is standardised, less rigid and less layered, yet more layered than the US system (Kerckhoff, 2000: 473). France is an example of an internal labour market. The skill requirements of the company are more preliminary, while apprenticeship training is not important. Notably, France's vocational training and apprenticeship system has been modernised in recent years (Brauns et al., 2001: 1–6).

In 2006, Mongolia began to increase its knowledge of the youth labour market. By using the transition from school to working life survey developed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), researchers found that young people aged 15–29 received significant labour as well as labour supply. Regarding human capital accumulation and

income distribution, education, employment expectations, labour market entry barriers and support and entrepreneurial tendencies were investigated.³

Notably, Turkey lacks corporate restructuring, which is associated with the transition from school to working life. Graduate associations and schools have narrow-scale studies but no comprehensive practices. Good governance of the transition from school to working life can lead to a decrease in youth unemployment rates. In Germany, youth unemployment rates are lower because the process is effectively managed. Of course, education and employment policies are also important in this context.

3. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Youth unemployment constitutes only one aspect of the difficulties that youths encounter in the labour market. Many young people are involuntarily underemployed in part-time, temporary and/or low-wage jobs (Seçer, 2006: 80). To solve youth employment/unemployment problems, an education system that meets labour market requirements, institutional arrangements that ease the transition from school to working life and active labour market policies that support entrepreneurship policies should be applied. Applications, such as analysing the labour market properly, dialogue between social partners, including labour unions and employers, and flexicurity are considered regulations that will increase the effectiveness of youth employment policies (Seçer, 2006: 90).

In all countries, youth employment is based on two factors: an education system that produces skilled youth and a labour market that creates successful businesses (OECD, 2008: ii). Preparation of youth for the labour market, with an emphasis on the function of education during the transition from school to working life (Gündoğan, 2005: 105), and guidance regarding entrepreneurship have been principle aims of most contemporary societies.

During crisis periods, groups affected by fluctuations in the conjuncture and structural properties of the markets are mostly youths in socio-politically disadvantaged groups. Both the slowing and ceasing of employment during economic contraction periods are among the main causes of this situation. In many developed and developing countries, youth employment problems have a tendency to increase. While unemployment ranks first among these, a series of other significant problems, such as underemployment, unregistered employment and incompetence of job creation in the economy, also affect youths at the beginning of their working lives (Kabaklarlı and Gür, 2011: 5).

Per the Global Tendencies Concerning Youth Employment report published by the ILO in 2006, while the number of unemployed youth between 15 and 24 during the previous decade was 74 million in 1995, that number reached 85 million in 2005, which reflected a 14.8% increase. More than 300 million young people, which is approximately

³ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_105100.pdf;
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/publics/ed_emp/emp_policy/documents/publication/wcms-166

25% of the world population, live below the poverty line of 2 USD/day. Per the findings of the same report, 1/3 of the 1.1 million youths between ages 15 and 24 are looking for jobs and are either unable to find one or have given up looking. Although there was a 13.2% increase in the youth population from 1995 to 2005, youth employment increased by only 3.8% during the same period and reached 548 million. In today's market, employment does not guarantee sustainable economic opportunities in the future; for example, 56% of youth work in irregular jobs for wages that place them below the poverty line and have little to no room for advancement (Aslantepe, 2007: 53).

During the globalisation process, while employment of youths in the labour market in paid positions is a preferred outcome, in developed and developing countries, this process does not occur spontaneously and smoothly. Although a youth's education level regarding employability is an important variable, many other factors, such as the presence of institutions concerning the transition, social and cultural values and businesses created in labour markets and sectors in which they are needed, also play significant roles.

4. THE LABOUR MARKET AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN TURKEY

Both unemployment and employment problems began to appear on Turkey's agenda in the 1950s. Unemployment increased along with rapid population increases, and it remains at the high level that it reached in the 1970s (Oğuzlar, 2007: 103).

Per the definition used by TurkStat, among persons unemployed during the reference period that the Household Labour Survey was conducted, individuals who had used at least one of the job-seeking channels in the past four weeks were considered unemployed. In line with this, youth unemployment was related to individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 who were not employed yet were seeking a job. In addition, the unemployment rate was 13.2% for the 15–34 age group; this ratio was 16.8% for two- and three-year graduates of higher education and 13.3% for graduates of higher education with four-year degrees. When this rate was 15.5% in high school graduates, it was 12.3% in vocational or technical high school graduates.

By referring to these numbers, it can be said that youth unemployment has decreased. However, in Turkey, dimensions of youth unemployment are so complex that it cannot be discussed merely via the unemployment rate, as it is in many parts of the world. In terms of Turkey, the complexity of the youth unemployment problem is indeed quite different from other young individuals' conditions developed countries in the world. In a general sense, in developed countries, youth unemployment seems to be an important issue among other employment problems, and policies seek to solve the complex structure of youth unemployment. Each country tries to implement many solutions, such as education, entrepreneurship and career consultancy, to actively and effectively integrate youth labour with production processes, which youth see as the most valuable human resource.

In Turkey, the education system has been insufficient in supplying the labour market's needs. In addition, the unemployment rates of educated individuals have not decreased significantly. New mechanisms that will respond to economies' and labour markets' demands as well as increase youth's employability are needed. Within the scope of relieving education programmes, in the Ninth Development Plan Period (2007-2013), studies regarding switching to a modular system were aimed at making vocational education flexible enough to respond to developments in the labour market (DPT, 2007: 39). One strategy is the evaluation of flexibility and assurance together. Many reports and studies have examined establishing the effects of supplying a strong connection between education systems and labour markets in Turkey on youth to develop opportunities for them while they transition from school to working life (UNDP, 2008). The report in question suggests that second-chance programmes, effective career consultancy, job-seeking assistance and flexicurity should be established for the country's youth (Belen, 2008: 3). Turkey's strong economic growth in the last period has not brought an employment increase that is parallel to this growth (Yeldan and Ercan, 2011: 2).

In Turkey, the advantages of having the young population in the workforce cannot be benefited from properly. According to TurkStat, the non-institutional population aged 15–34 years was 24,263,000 in 2016, 13,685,000 of whom were in the labour force in the second quarter of that year. Hence, the labour force participation rate of this age group was 56.4%, and the employment rate was realised as 48.9%. This ratio was 30.1% for those who did not complete any schooling, 42.4% for those who had less than a high school education and 73.7% for those with four or more years of higher education. By contrast, the employment rate was 43.6% for high school graduates, while it was 60.6% for vocational or technical high school graduates⁴. When the results and data of the studies performed in this area were examined, among the country's youth, which is one of the most disadvantaged groups in socio-political terms, females were found to be more disadvantaged (Canbey-Özgüler, 2007: 68). In addition, young females experience more difficulties than young males while looking for a job, and they are excluded from labour markets. In studies on disadvantaged groups, there may be confusion regarding which individuals will be included. For example, the difficulties that a young, disabled female experiences in labour markets cannot be exhibited clearly because disadvantaged groups are classified as youth, females, the elderly and the disabled. While there are extensive policies for youth and youth employment in Turkey, the Reinforcing Employment and Vocational Education Relation Action Plan (2014-2018)⁵ is a concrete sign of the importance attached to youth employment. The action in question has defined the following nine priority areas:

- Forming a National Sufficiency Frame

⁴ <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=21865>

⁵ https://unevoc.unesco.org/network/up/TVET_STRATEGY_PAPER_2014-2018.pdf

- Harmonising education programmes in line with national professions' standards
 - Performing periodical analyses for the needs of the labour market
 - Enhancing vocational and technical education environments, increasing qualifications of trainers and designing a new school management system
 - Accreditation of vocational education institutions
 - Cooperation with application of the tools developed by the European Union (EU) for mobility, qualification and vocational education
 - Increasing the effectiveness of labour training classes
 - Establishing necessary promotion mechanisms for employment and entrepreneurship of vocational and technical education graduates and vocational proficiency certificate holders
 - Developing cooperation in vocational information (knowledge), guidance and consultancy services

When these priorities are examined, it is seen that, if they are applied, they establish an extensive map for youth employment in which their qualifications meet the needs of the labour market.

5. SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION RESEARCH IN TURKEY

A 2016 module survey—The Entry of Young People into The Labour Market—was applied together with the Household Labour Force Survey during the second quarter of 2016 (April, May and June). The first week of each month, starting with Monday and ending with Sunday, was used as the reference period for LFS. However, the reference period for the questions on employment asked was defined as being larger, and the respondents were asked whether they were employed in a job with a duration of more than three months after leaving formal education for the last time.

The aim of this module, which was conducted within the scope of harmonisation with the EU, was to build up a comprehensive and comparable data set on the entry of young people into the labour market to monitor progress towards the common objectives of the European Employment Strategy and of the Social Inclusion Process. This subject is fairly important for Turkey considering the high density of the young population and that population's high unemployment rate. The target population of this research was determined as 15–34 years of age, which is an increase from the previous definition of the young population (15–24 years).

The non-institutional population of Turkey was 70,435,000 in the second quarter of 2009, of which people between 15 and 34 years of age constituted 33.5% (22,627,000). In the second quarter of 2016, the non-institutional population aged 15–34 years was 24,263,000, with 13,685,000 in the labour force. Therefore, the labour force participation rate of this age group was 56.4%.

Table 1. Educational Attendance of 15-34 Age Groups, 2009

Age Group	Total	Attending School	Not Attending School	
			No School Completed	
	2009	2009	2009	
Total	23627	5428	2256	Total
15-19	6144	3507	362	15-19
20-24	5360	1277	750	20-24
25-29	6301	456	476	25-29
30-34	5822	187	398	30-34

Source: <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr>

During the period concerned, 23% of the 15–34-year-old population (5,428,000) received a formal education. The share of that population that did not receive a formal education but had at least a primary school education (which also defines the target population of this research) was 67.5% (15,943,000).

Table 2. Non-institutional Population by Education and Labour Force Status (15-34 age group) (Thousand person) (2016)

Educational attainment	Non-institutional population	Labour force	Employed	Unemployed	Labour force participation rate (%)	Employment rate (%)	Unemployment rate (%)	Not in labour force
Total	24 263	13 685	11 875	1 810	56,4	48,9	13,2	10 578
No school completed	2 019	695	608	87	34,4	30,1	12,5	1 324
Less than high school	11 765	5 676	4 986	690	48,2	42,4	12,2	6 090
High school	3 191	1 645	1 390	255	51,6	43,6	15,5	1 547
Vocational high school	2 618	1 810	1 587	223	69,1	60,6	12,3	808
Higher education 2 or 3 years	1 594	1 250	1 040	210	78,4	65,2	16,8	345
Higher education 4 years and over	3 075	2 611	2 265	346	84,9	73,7	13,3	465

Source: <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/>

In total, 35.9% of the people aged 15–34 years' old who completed at least one educational level had either paid or unpaid work experience during the highest level of education completed. For the reference week, while the rate of having work experience during the highest level of education in the labour force was 47.6%, this rate was realised as 48.2% for employed and 43.1% for unemployed persons. In addition, 19.7% of the

individuals not in the labour force had work experience during their highest level of education.

During the transition from education to work life, while 19% of the people aged 15–34 years had their first job (of more than 3 months) after completing more than 3 years of education, 14.1% of those had employment within the first 6 months after graduating. In addition, 7.4% of young people had their first job between 7 months and one year, 8.6% found employment within 1–2 years and 5.8% found it within 2–3 years.

By contrast, 16.3% of the people aged 15–34 declared that they had their first job (of more than 3 months) while continuing their education.

After leaving formal education, 23.3% of employees worked in their first job (worked more than three months) as service and sales workers, 16.9% worked in elementary occupations, 16% were in crafts and related trades and 12.2% worked in professional occupations.

These data from 2016, when taken alone, is not enough to understand working life after school. It is also necessary to compare these data with the work done by the ILO. The first SWTS questionnaires were developed by the ILO in 2003 to conduct structured surveys on the question of gender equality in youth employment. These surveys were implemented in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam to inform the preparation of youth national action plans. In 2004, the ILO developed an analytical framework that underpinned the concept of transition to decent work and reshaped the data collection instruments. The new framework was applied between 2004 and 2006 to conduct surveys in ten countries—Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal and the Syrian Arab Republic.⁶ Implementation of the survey module instead of the school-to-work ILO survey in Turkey is important in terms of comparability of results, and the transition of young people to the labour market should be followed annually.

6. RESULTS

Today, the increasing frequency of economic crises affects macroeconomic balances as well as social problems in many developed and developing countries. Unemployment, which is among the most important of these problems, affects socio-politically disadvantaged groups, such as females, youth, the elderly and the disabled. Among these groups, youth employment is an important area to investigate because it is vital that youth integrate with society and determine their social status via their ambition, skill and effort regarding employment in real terms (i.e. employment of an individual in a job that is suited to this/her physical and mental properties and desires). However, in many countries, youths have difficulty obtaining employment. Youths are an important human resource, and their effective usage during the production process produces competitive advantages. Therefore, their skills should match the market's

⁶ http://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/work-for-youth/WCMS_191853/lang--en/index.htm

current requirements. For this reason, education policies are a critical dimension of youth employment. The transition to the labour market after education and the beginning of paid labour is another important step. While not thought of as apart from education, institutional cooperation and policies that both allow and support student participation in employment directly affect that transition's success. In addition, a student's graduation level affects how difficult it is to transition to working life; however, it is not the only variable. Many factors, such as the presence of institutions related to the transition, social and cultural values, businesses created in the labour market, including in which sectors they are created, are important.

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