



TRENDS IN ADULT EDUCATION RESEARCH IN TURKIYE: A DESCRIPTIVE SYSTEMATIC MAPPING REVIEW OF GRADUATE THESES (2023–2026)

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Abstract

This study presents a descriptive systematic mapping review of graduate theses produced in the field of adult education in Türkiye between 2023-2026. Data were collected from the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education (YÖKTEZ) and reviewed using a PRISMA-guided selection process. A total of 273 theses were chosen and analyzed using a coding form developed by the researchers. Thematic categories were formed through content analysis, and the study primarily employed a quantitative descriptive approach based on frequency and percentage distributions. The findings reveal that thesis production in adult education remained high and stable during the study period. The field remains concentrated in a limited number of institutions, and most theses were produced outside dedicated adult education programs, which reflects an increasingly interdisciplinary nature. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed at comparable rates, indicating a shift from the quantitative dominance reported in earlier reviews. Correlational designs, case studies, scales, and interviews were the most frequently used methodological tools. Thematically, lifelong learning dispositions, competencies, and attitudes constituted the dominant focus, followed by adult education programs and digital learning. However, theoretical studies, andragogy, and research involving marginalized groups remained limited. The study offers an updated overview of the field in Türkiye and points out important gaps for future research.

Keywords: Adult education, lifelong learning, graduate theses, systematic mapping review, descriptive analysis, Türkiye.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, where knowledge production is accelerating, technological transformations affect every aspect of life, and individuals are expected to continuously acquire new knowledge and skills, learning is no longer an activity confined to childhood and youth. The knowledge and skills acquired during the early stages of life are often insufficient throughout one's professional and social life. This situation has made adult education and lifelong learning fundamental components of contemporary educational systems. Knowles (1980) argued that the lifespan of knowledge is becoming increasingly shorter and that this development has transformed continuous learning from an individual choice into a structural necessity. This perspective has also been widely adopted by international organizations. The CONFITEA (International Conference on Adult Education) frameworks organized by UNESCO have positioned adult education as a cornerstone of lifelong learning policy and consistently emphasized its



importance for social cohesion, economic participation, and democratic citizenship (Ireland, 2022). Similarly, Zmeyov (1998) maintained that lifelong learning has ceased to be an option in modern societies and has become a defining characteristic of adult life, making adult education increasingly important both as a field of practice and as a subject of scientific inquiry.

The recognition of adult education as an independent field has been closely associated with the development of the concept of andragogy. Henschke (2011) documented that the concept has a history of nearly two centuries. He noted that andragogy was first introduced by the German educator Alexander Kapp in 1833, later revived by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, and subsequently incorporated into adult education discourse through Eduard Lindeman. A decisive moment in the contemporary development of the concept occurred in 1966 when the concept was introduced to Malcolm Knowles, who later popularized it within the North American context. Knowles defined andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn and built its framework around the principles of self-direction, experiential learning, intrinsic motivation, readiness to learn, and the educator's role as a facilitator rather than a director. However, Henschke (2011) warned that reducing andragogy solely to Knowles's formulation overlooks the broader international tradition from which the concept emerged and the theoretical contributions that enriched it over several decades.

European and North American understandings of andragogy differ in important ways. Loeng (2018) argued that Knowles's understanding of andragogy focuses primarily on self-directed learning, learners' prior experiences, and individual development, whereas the European tradition approaches andragogy as an independent scientific discipline encompassing social, civic, and transformative dimensions. While the North American model emphasizes individual self-actualization, the European tradition highlights collective responsibility, social transformation, and citizenship (Loeng, 2018; Zmeyov, 1998). This difference goes beyond theory and reflects different views about the purpose of adult education and the role of adult learners in society. When considered together, these traditions suggest that andragogy is not a single unified theory but rather a multilayered and internationally contested perspective on adult education shaped by historical, philosophical, and social influences.

Beyond andragogy, the field of adult education relies on a rich diversity of theoretical perspectives. Elias and Merriam (2005) identified multiple philosophical orientations that shape adult education practice and research, including liberal, progressive, humanistic, critical, and analytical traditions. Mezirow's transformative learning theory, Freire's critical theory, and Gramsci's concepts of organic intellectual and cultural hegemony have provided distinctive perspectives on the aims and processes of adult learning in relation to power, consciousness, and emancipatory practice. This theoretical diversity reflects the interdisciplinary breadth of adult education and explains its intersections with other academic disciplines. At the same time, as Elias and Merriam (2005) noted, such diversity also creates ongoing challenges for systematically mapping knowledge production within the field.

Although the concepts of adult education and lifelong learning are sometimes used interchangeably in literature, they are not theoretically synonymous. Lifelong learning provides a broader framework encompassing learning processes that occur throughout all stages of life and across diverse learning environments, whereas adult education focuses specifically on the learning experiences, educational activities, and learning needs of adult individuals within this broader framework (Elias & Merriam, 2005). In recent years, however, the influence of the lifelong learning approach on adult education research and practice has increased considerably, and adult education programs in many countries have been organized under lifelong learning policies (Ireland, 2022). For this reason, in this present study lifelong learning is considered as one of the institutional and theoretical extensions of adult education, and studies directly related to lifelong learning have been included within the scope of the research.



In the Turkish context, Alpaydın (2022) noted that adult education practices can be traced historically to the Seljuk and Ottoman periods. During these periods, religious and moral development was largely provided through madrasas and dervish lodges, which also served as centers of scholarly and community education. Adult education initiatives aimed at enlightening the public during the late Ottoman era were later transformed into a citizenship-building project following the establishment of the Republic. Unique institutions such as Halkevleri (The People's Houses), Millet Mektepleri (Nation Schools), and Köy Enstitüleri (Village Institutes) played a significant role in building the human capital of the new state (Duman, 2007). In the following decades, public adult education expanded through Public Education Centers operating under the Ministry of National Education. Today, a substantial portion of non-formal adult education services in Türkiye is provided through Public Education Centers affiliated with the Directorate General for Lifelong Learning (DGLL) of the Ministry of National Education (DGLL, 2025). In addition, Sürekli Eğitim Merkezleri (Continuing Education Centers) established by universities, courses organized by municipalities and non-governmental organizations (NGO) constitute important components of adult education practice in Türkiye (Duman, 2007).

From an academic perspective, adult education research in Türkiye has a relatively recent history. Yıldız (2004) documented that the first master's thesis in adult education was completed in 1978 and the first doctoral dissertation in 1983, signaling the formal entry of the field into Turkish higher education. Although the academic body remained concentrated in a limited number of universities for many years, the field has expanded considerably since then, with graduate programs in lifelong learning and adult education being established at various universities. In recent years, adult education has increasingly become an interdisciplinary area of research associated with lifelong learning, professional development, active ageing, migration, digital learning, and various social policy issues (Eyyubova, 2023; Sirem, 2024; Yenil & Şahan, 2024). This development has contributed both to the quantitative growth of scholarly production and to the diversification of research topics within the field.

Within the framework of the CONFINTEA VII process, Ireland (2022) emphasized that adult education exhibits a highly diverse structure characterized by multiple theoretical orientations, fields of practice, and policy contexts. Similarly, Elias and Merriam (2005) highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of adult education by noting its interaction with disciplines such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, and political science. While this diversity demonstrates the theoretical and practical richness of the field, it also makes it more difficult to systematically monitor and evaluate general trends in the research produced within it. Therefore, synthesis studies examining the bibliographic and content-related characteristics of graduate theses are considered important for identifying developmental trends in the field and guiding future research.

Review of Literature

Although bibliographic and systematic studies focusing on adult education in Türkiye remain limited in number, they constitute an important body of work within which the present study is situated. Each of these studies has approached the field from a different perspective. The first systematic review of Turkish adult education theses was conducted by Yıldız (2002) as a master's thesis in the field. The study examined 110 graduate theses produced at Ankara University and Boğaziçi University between 1978 and 2001. Seven thematic groups were identified, including literacy, community development, participation, and vocational education. Yıldız observed that quantitative approaches were dominant, while qualitative research remained considerably underrepresented. He also emphasized that a substantial proportion of the theses contained serious deficiencies regarding sample selection and methodological reporting. Finally, this study remains a key reference for understanding the early academic institutionalization of adult education research in Türkiye.



Eldeleklioğlu Onuk (2019) narrowed their focus by examining 25 theses published in the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education (YÖKTEZ) between 2007 and 2018 that explicitly included the term “adult education” in their titles. Using a qualitative single-case study design, the author found that course and program evaluation was the most frequently studied theme. More striking was the methodological picture pointed out by the study. Nearly half of the theses did not report their research methods in the abstract section, validity and reliability analyses were inadequately presented, and approximately half of the citations listed in the references were not cited within the main text.

It could be claimed that Eyyubova (2023) provided the most comprehensive overview of adult education research in Türkiye to date. The study examined 266 theses published between 1988 and 2021 through a systematic review approach, and revealed three remarkable findings. First, research production was concentrated in only a small number of universities. Second, quantitative studies based primarily on surveys and scales were dominant. Third, program evaluation emerged once again as the most frequently studied topic, whereas areas such as the psychological dimensions of adult learning, the relationship between migration and adult education, and andragogical theorization remained relatively neglected.

Erdoğan and Öğdem (2023) expanded their scope further by examining scholarly production in the field of lifelong learning through a bibliometric perspective. They analyzed 1,031 international articles and 34 articles from Türkiye indexed in the Web of Science database, and demonstrated that the field began to emerge during the 1980s and experienced major growth after the 2000s. Although Türkiye's position among the top fifteen countries in terms of citation performance is a positive finding, the majority of Turkish studies were found to focus on preservice teachers' lifelong learning tendencies and scale development. It could be argued that while the Turkish literature has established a presence internationally, it remains concentrated within a relatively narrow thematic area.

Sirem (2024) analyzed 147 theses produced between 2019 and 2024 that explicitly included the term “lifelong learning” in their titles through document analysis. The findings presented a pattern largely consistent with those of the present study, including the predominance of master's theses, the dominance of Turkish as the language of publication, the widespread use of correlational designs, and the extensive reliance on scale-based data collection instruments.

Yenil and Şahan (2024) turned the focus from theses to journal articles by examining 125 research articles published between 2013 and 2023 in Turkish academic journals indexed in DergiPark within the context of lifelong learning and adult education. Their findings indicated that publication number had increased in recent years and that adult competency development and in-service training were among the most frequently studied themes. The study also identified an important gap: European lifelong learning policy frameworks have received almost no attention in the Turkish literature.

Tecimer Altınel and Hamalosmanoğlu (2025) systematically reviewed 73 theses and articles produced in the field of lifelong learning between 2014 and 2024. Their findings showed that the majority of studies were conducted at the master's level and that academic interest in the field increased significantly after 2021. While themes related to lifelong learning tendencies, competencies, and perceptions dominated the literature, studies focusing on educational policies, active ageing, and practice-oriented interventions remained limited.

Sadiç and Çeliköz (2026) narrowed the focus further by systematically reviewing 17 studies related exclusively to the professional development of adult educators in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. Despite its relatively small scope, the study provided valuable insights. Andragogy remained the dominant theoretical framework in the field, while the majority of studies focused on needs assessment and



situation analysis. Intervention- and implementation-oriented studies were found to be almost non-existent. The authors summarized this situation by arguing that the field appears capable of growing through identifying problems but has not yet moved sufficiently toward producing solutions. Their call for more systematic review studies in adult education supports the rationale for this study.

When considered together, these seven studies demonstrate that each has contributed to the field from a different perspective. However, most of them focused on specific periods, sub-themes, or publication types and left a gap for the implementation for this present study. The most comprehensive thesis review conducted by Eyyubova (2023) ended in 2021, and theses produced after this date have not yet been the subject of a comprehensive synthesis study. Building on this gap, the present research aims to examine graduate theses completed between 2023 and 2026 and to provide an up-to-date picture of adult education research in Türkiye. Accordingly, theses registered in the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education and completed between 2023 and 2026 were analyzed in terms of year of completion, university, thesis type, research method, research design, sampling approach, data collection instruments, and thematic focus.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine graduate theses produced in the field of adult education in Türkiye between 2023 and 2026 through a systematic mapping review and to identify their general characteristics.

Research Question

What are the characteristics of graduate theses produced in the field of adult education in Türkiye between 2023 and 2026 (as of May 23, 2026)?

Sub-Research Questions

1. How are the theses distributed across years?
2. In which languages were the theses written?
3. What is the distribution of the theses by degree type (master's thesis/doctoral dissertation)?
4. How are the theses distributed across universities?
5. Are the theses situated within adult education and lifelong learning programs, or within other disciplinary fields?
6. What research approaches were adopted in the theses?
7. What research designs were employed in the theses?
8. What data collection instruments were used in the theses?
9. Which participant groups and data sources were utilized in the theses?
10. What is the thematic distribution of the theses?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a systematic mapping review (SMR) design to examine graduate theses produced in the field of adult education in Türkiye between 2023 and 2026 (as of May 23, 2026). Systematic mapping reviews aim to provide a structured overview of a broad research field by identifying, categorizing, and describing existing studies rather than synthesizing their findings to answer a narrowly defined research question (Soaita et al., 2020). Unlike conventional literature reviews, which focus primarily on the substantive findings of studies, mapping reviews examine the characteristics and distribution of research activity across a field (Cooper, 2016). Their primary purpose is to map the



quantity, type, and distribution of research within a field and to identify publication trends, thematic concentrations, and research gaps (Petersen et al., 2008).

Therefore, the study does not involve the synthesis of empirical findings or the statistical aggregation of effect sizes required in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Rather than evaluating the outcomes of adult education research, it aims to map the structural characteristics of the field by examining the bibliographic, methodological, and thematic features of graduate theses. In this respect, the study is consistent with the fundamental purpose of systematic mapping reviews, which is to provide a broad overview of research activity and identify trends and gaps within a research domain.

Scope of the Study

Document analysis was employed as the data collection method. Within the scope of the study, graduate theses registered in National Thesis Center (YÖKTEZ) database were systematically examined. A coding form developed by the researcher consisting of 18 categories was used in the analysis of the theses, and all data were recorded through this form.

To ensure methodological transparency and systematicity in the identification of theses to be included in the study, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were drawn upon as a reporting framework (Page et al., 2021). Accordingly, a search was conducted in the YÖKTEZ database using predetermined keywords. The keywords used during the screening process are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Keywords used in the database research.

Key Word	English Equivalent	Status
Yetişkin eğitimi	Adult education	Included
Hayat boyu öğrenme	Lifelong learning	Included
Yaşam boyu öğrenme	Lifelong learning	Included
Andragoji	Andragogy	Included
Halk eğitimi	Community/non-formal education	Included
Yaygın eğitim	Non-formal education	Included
Sürekli eğitim	Continuing education	Excluded – primarily yielded studies in medical fields
Üçüncü yaş	Third age	Excluded – primarily yielded studies related to tourism and health
Yetişkin öğrenmesi	Adult learning	No relevant results obtained

As shown in Table 1, the keywords “adult education,” “lifelong learning,” “andragogy,” “community education,” “non-formal education,” and “adult learning” were used during the screening process. However, searches conducted using the keywords “continuing education” and “third age” primarily brought studies in health, nursing, and tourism, and were therefore excluded from the study. In addition, no recent study meeting the inclusion criteria was identified through searches using the keyword “adult learning.” 338 theses were identified after the initial search. A total of 45 duplicate records detected through different keywords were removed from the dataset, and two theses with restricted access were also excluded. The remaining theses were examined at the title, abstract, and full-text levels and evaluated according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria which were predetermined by the researchers. At this stage, 18 additional theses that did not meet the criteria were excluded. As a result, a total of 273 theses were included in the final dataset. The inclusion and exclusion criteria used during the evaluation process are presented in Table 2.

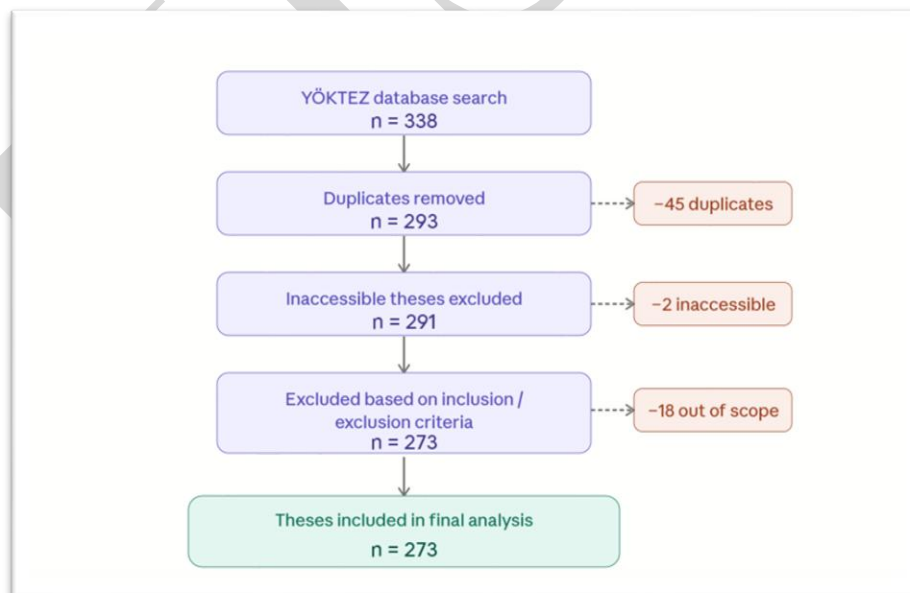
**Table 2.** Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1. Directly addressing adult learning.	1. Studies focusing exclusively on child and adolescent education.
2. Focusing on adult learners as the primary research participants.	2. Studies selecting only primary or secondary school students as participants.
3. Establishing a theoretical connection with concepts such as lifelong learning, andragogy, community education, active ageing, or non-formal education.	3. Studies using the concept of lifelong learning only in a rhetorical or superficial manner.
4. Examining adult learning processes such as in-service training and professional development of educators, teachers, and other non-formal education personnel.	4. General educational studies without a direct connection to adult education.
5. Being publicly accessible.	5. Studies in fields such as health or tourism that do not place adult learning at their center.
	6. Theses closed to public access by their authors.

The identification of theses included in the study was not based solely on keywords. The purpose, sample, theoretical framework, and relevance to adult learning were also considered based on predefined criteria. Accordingly, studies directly addressing adult learning, focusing on adult learners, establishing theoretical links with concepts such as lifelong learning, andragogy, community education, and non-formal education, as well as theses examining in-service training and professional development processes of educators and other non-formal education personnel, were included in the study.

In contrast, studies focusing exclusively on child and adolescent education, studies selecting only primary or secondary school students as participants, studies employing the concept of lifelong learning only superficially, general educational studies without a direct connection to adult education, and studies in health or tourism that did not place adult learning at their center were excluded. Theses with restricted access were also excluded from the dataset.

To ensure transparent reporting of the entire selection process described above, a PRISMA flow diagram was prepared and is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** PRISMA flow diagram of the thesis selection process



Data Analysis

The data analysis process was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, a content analysis approach was employed to identify categories such as themes, sub-themes, and participant groups/data sources. During this process, the theses were systematically reviewed, coded, and organized into categories. In the second stage, frequency (*f*) and percentage (%) distributions were calculated for the identified categories, and the findings were presented in tables. The whole analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel. The categories used in the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Categories used in thesis analysis.

Categories Used in Thesis Analysis	
1) Thesis ID and Thesis Title	10) Department/Program
2) Author	11) Purpose of the Study
3) Supervisor's Academic Title	12) Theme
4) Supervisor	13) Sub-themes
5) Year	14) Research Approach
6) Language of the Thesis	15) Research Design
7) Thesis Type	16) Data Collection Instruments
8) University	17) Participant Group/Data Source
9) Institute/Faculty	18) Researcher's Notes

All 18 categories included in the coding form were utilized during the data collection process. However, only those categories directly related to the objectives of the study were reported in the findings section. Categories such as the supervisor's academic title, supervisor's name, and the purpose of the thesis were not included in the findings, as they did not provide meaningful analytical value. The category of researcher's notes was not treated as a formal finding; rather, it served as a basis for the interpretive discussions presented in the discussion section.

The coding form was developed by the authors and finalized through discussion and expert review. To establish the reliability of the coding process, 30 theses, representing 10.9% of the dataset, were independently coded by the researcher and the supervisor. The coding results were then compared using the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994):

$$\text{Reliability} = \text{Agreement} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}) \times 100$$

The level of agreement between the coders was calculated as 93.3%. This value points out a high level of reliability and demonstrates that the coding categories were applied consistently throughout the analysis process. Cases involving disagreement appeared during the coding of categories such as *Themes*, *Sub-Themes*, *Participant Groups/Data Source* and *Researcher's Notes*. These discrepancies were re-examined by the researchers and final coding decisions were reached through discussion and consensus.

RESULTS

1. Distribution of Theses by Year

The distribution of the graduate theses examined within the scope of the study by year is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of theses by year.

Year	Number of Theses	Percentage (%)
2023	95	34.8
2024	76	27.8

**Table 4 (Continued).** Distribution of theses by year.

Year	Number of Theses	Percentage (%)
2025	92	33.7
2026 (until May 23)	10	3.7
Total	273	100.0

As shown in Table 4, the distribution of the 273 graduate theses included in the study appears relatively balanced across years. The highest number of theses was completed in 2023 with 95 studies (34.8%), followed by 2025 with 92 theses (33.7%) and 2024 with 76 theses (27.8%). Since the year 2026 had not yet been completed at the time the study was conducted, only the 10 theses (3.7%) accessible up to May 23, 2026, were included in the analysis. The findings indicate that graduate thesis production in the field of adult education remained at a high level during the 2023–2025 period and did not display a clear upward or downward trend across years.

2. Languages Used in Thesis Writing

Table 5 presents the frequencies and percentages of the languages used in the graduate theses examined within the scope of the study.

Table 5. Language of the examined theses.

Language	<i>n</i>	%
Turkish	247	90.5
English	25	9.2
German	1	0.4
Total	273	100.0

Table 5 presents the distribution of the theses included in the study according to their language of publication. The findings indicate that the vast majority of the theses were written in Turkish. Of the 273 theses examined, 247 (90.5%) were written in Turkish. The number of theses written in English was 25, accounting for 9.2% of the total. Only one thesis (0.4%) was written in German. These findings suggest that graduate research produced in the field of adult education in Türkiye is conducted predominantly in the national language.

3. Distribution of Theses by Type (Master's Thesis / Doctoral Dissertation)

The types of graduate theses examined within the scope of the study are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of theses by type.

Type	<i>n</i>	%
Master's Thesis	222	81.3
Doctoral Dissertation	47	17.2
Medical Specialization Thesis	4	1.5
Total	273	100.0

Table 6 presents the distribution of the theses included in the study according to thesis type. The findings indicate that graduate research in the field of adult education is concentrated largely at the master's level. Of the 273 theses examined, 222 (81.3%) were master's theses, 47 (17.2%) were doctoral dissertations, and 4 (1.5%) were medical specialization theses. These findings suggest that knowledge production in the field is carried out predominantly through master's degree programs.



4. Distribution of Theses by University

The universities at which the graduate theses examined within the scope of the study were conducted, together with their frequencies and percentages, are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Distribution of Theses by University

University	<i>n</i>	%
Ankara University	32	11.7
Bartın University	10	3.7
Atatürk University (Erzurum)	10	3.7
Anadolu University (Eskişehir)	9	3.3
Sakarya University	8	2.9
Necmettin Erbakan University (Konya)	8	2.9
Kocaeli University	8	2.9
Gazi University	8	2.9
Other Institutions (<i>n</i> < 8)	180	65.9
Total	273	100.0

As shown in Table 7, Ankara University produced the highest number of theses in the field of adult education (*n* = 32). It was followed by Bartın University and Atatürk University (*n* = 10), Anadolu University (*n* = 9), and Sakarya University, Necmettin Erbakan University, Kocaeli University, and Gazi University (*n* = 8). The findings indicate that although thesis production in the field of adult education is distributed across many universities, Ankara University continues to maintain its leading position in the field.

5. Disciplinary Affiliation of Theses: Adult Education Programs vs. Other Fields

A total of 38 theses were produced in departments directly related to adult education. The institutions that produced theses within the field are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Theses produced in adult education-related programs.

Institution	<i>n</i>
Ankara University (Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Department)	24
Kocaeli University (Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Program)	6
Sakarya University (Lifelong Learning Program)	5
Marmara University (Public Education Program)	2
Bartın University (Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Program)	1
Total	38

As shown in Table 8, only 38 of the 273 theses included in the dataset (13.9%) were produced directly within Adult Education, Lifelong Learning, or Public Education programs. In contrast, 235 theses (86.1%) were completed in a variety of other disciplines, including Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Sciences, Computer Education and Instructional Technology, Educational Administration, Sociology, Nursing, Gerontology, and English Language Education.



The findings suggest that Ankara University bears a substantial share of the academic workload within the discipline that formally carries the name of adult education in Türkiye. Furthermore, a considerable proportion of the theses examined were found to be institutionally registered under Educational Sciences, Curriculum and Instruction, or other education-related disciplines, despite being closely associated with adult education in terms of subject matter.

6. Research Approaches Adopted in the Theses

The research approaches adopted in the theses examined within the scope of the study are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Research approaches adopted in the theses.

Research Approach	<i>n</i>	%
Qualitative	116	42.5
Quantitative	111	40.7
Mixed Methods	46	16.8
Total	273	100.0

As shown in Table 9, the qualitative approach was the most frequently employed research approach in the theses examined ($n = 116$, 42.5%). The number of theses adopting a quantitative approach was 111, accounting for 40.7% of the total. A further 46 theses (16.8%) were conducted using mixed methods. The findings indicate that qualitative and quantitative research approaches were employed at relatively similar rates, whereas the use of mixed methods remained more limited.

7. Research Designs Used in the Theses

The research designs employed in the master's theses and doctoral dissertations examined within the scope of the study are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Research designs used in the theses.

Research Design	<i>n</i>
Correlational Design	92
Case Study	44
Document/Content Analysis	24
Phenomenology	20
Descriptive Survey Design	18
Explanatory Sequential Design (Mixed Methods)	14
Design-Based Research	11
Convergent/Parallel Mixed Methods Design	10
Basic Qualitative Research	8
Experimental Design	8
Literature Review / Systematic Review	6
Structural Equation Modeling / Advanced Quantitative Analysis	4
Action Research	4
Other	4
Historical Research	3
Scale Development	2
Program Development	1
Total	273



As shown in Table 10, the most frequently employed research design in the theses examined was the correlational design ($n = 92$, 33.7%). This was followed by case study ($n = 44$, 16.1%) and document/content analysis ($n = 24$, 8.8%). Phenomenology ($n = 20$) and descriptive survey design ($n = 18$) were also among the commonly preferred research designs.

Among the mixed methods designs, the explanatory sequential design ($n = 14$) was used more frequently than the convergent/parallel design ($n = 10$). Design-based research ($n = 11$) and basic qualitative research ($n = 8$) were represented at a moderate level, whereas experimental design ($n = 8$), structural equation modeling/advanced quantitative analysis ($n = 4$), action research ($n = 4$), and historical research ($n = 3$) appeared relatively infrequently. Scale development ($n = 2$) and program development ($n = 1$) emerged as the least frequently employed research designs.

8. Data Collection Instruments Used in the Theses

The distribution of the data collection instruments employed in the theses is presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Data collection instruments used in the theses.

Data Collection Instrument	<i>f</i>
Scale / Inventory	119
Interview	115
Document Analysis ¹	57
Questionnaire	43
Observation	15
Test	5
Other	1
Total²	355

Note. ¹Document analysis appears in both Tables 10 and 11 because it can be used both as an independent research design and as a data collection instrument. ² The total exceeds the number of theses ($n = 273$) because some theses employed more than one data collection instrument.

As shown in Table 11, the most frequently used data collection instruments were scales/inventories ($f = 119$) and interviews ($f = 115$). The close frequencies of these two instruments suggest that quantitative and qualitative data collection practices are represented in a relatively balanced manner within the field. Document analysis ($f = 57$) and questionnaires ($f = 43$) were used at a moderate level, whereas observation ($f = 15$) and tests ($f = 5$) were employed relatively infrequently. The fact that 355 instrument assignments were identified across 273 theses indicates that a considerable proportion of the studies adopted multiple data collection strategies.

9. Participant Groups and Data Sources

The participant groups and/or data sources utilized in the theses are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Frequency distribution of participant groups and data sources.

Participant Group / Data Source	<i>f</i>	Participant Group / Data Source	<i>f</i>
Teachers	68	Employees / Workers	8
Adult Education Trainees	41	Various Professional Groups (Lawyers, Architects, etc.)	8
Reports / Policy Documents / Legislation	32	Refugees / Migrants	7
University Students	29	Nurses / Physicians / Healthcare Personnel	5
Educational Administrators	26	Newspapers / Journals / Print Media Archives	5

**Table 12 (Continued).** Frequency distribution of participant groups and data sources.

Participant Group / Data Source	<i>f</i>	Participant Group / Data Source	<i>f</i>
Adult Educators / Course Instructors and Administrators	23	Digital Content	2
Preservice Teachers	18	Religious Officials / Imams / Preachers	2
Faculty Members / Academics	16	Prisoners	2
Parents	15	High School Students	1
Other	15	LGBTQ+ Individuals	1
Older Adults	12		
Total			336

As shown in Table 12, teachers ($f = 68$) were the most frequently used participant group and data source in the theses examined. This group was followed by adult education trainees ($f = 41$), reports, policy documents, and legislative texts ($f = 32$), and university students ($f = 29$). Educational administrators ($f = 26$) and adult educators/course instructors ($f = 23$) also appeared frequently among the participant groups.

On the other hand, studies focusing on refugees and migrants ($f = 7$), nurses, physicians, and healthcare personnel ($f = 5$), prisoners ($f = 2$), high school students ($f = 1$), and LGBTQ+ individuals ($f = 1$) were found to be relatively limited. Considering that some studies relied on more than one participant group or data source, a total of 336 category assignments were identified across 273 theses.

It should also be noted that studies focusing exclusively on primary and secondary school students were excluded in accordance with the exclusion criteria. The single study classified under the high school student category in Table 12 included this group as part of a broader participant structure consisting of teachers, school administrators, parents, and subject-matter experts. Since high school students did not constitute the primary focus of that study, the thesis was included in the dataset in accordance with the established inclusion criteria.

10. Thematic Distribution of the Theses

When the theses were classified through thematic content analysis (a single thesis could be coded under more than one category), the distribution presented in Table 13 emerged.

Table 13. Thematic distribution of the theses (A thesis may be coded under more than one theme).

Theme Category	<i>f</i>
Lifelong Learning Tendencies, Competencies, and Attitudes	113
Adult Education Institutions, Programs, and Processes	56
Digital Learning, E-Learning, and Distance Education	45
Public Education / Non-Formal Education	41
Teacher Education and Professional Development	29
Ageing, Active Ageing, and the Third Age	16
Women-Focused Studies	12
Arts, Music, and Creative Education	9
Religious Education / Non-Formal Religious Education	8
Migration, Refugees, and Foreign Language Education	7
Andragogy and Theoretical Studies	6
Total	342



As shown in Table 13, the largest number of theses was clustered under the theme of lifelong learning tendencies, competencies, and attitudes ($f = 113$). This was followed by adult education institutions, programs, and processes ($f = 56$), digital learning, e-learning, and distance education ($f = 45$), and public education/non-formal education ($f = 41$).

A total of 29 theses were identified under the theme of teacher education and professional development, while 16 studies focused on ageing, active ageing, and the third age. Women-focused studies were represented in 12 theses. In contrast, arts, music, and creative education ($f = 9$), religious education/non-formal religious education ($f = 8$), migration, refugees, and foreign language education ($f = 7$), and andragogy and theoretical studies ($f = 6$) were represented to a more limited extent within the dataset.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, and RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Growth of the Field and Its Institutional Structure

The findings of this study indicate that graduate thesis production in the field of adult education in Türkiye remained at a high level between 2023 and 2026. Eyyubova (2023) identified 266 theses produced during the 33-year period between 1988 and 2021. The fact that the sample of the present study, covering a period of approximately three and a half years, approaches this number suggests that scholarly production in the field has accelerated considerably. This trend coincides with the finding of Tecimer Altınel and Hamalosmanoğlu (2025), who also reported increasing academic interest in the field since 2021.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that this growth has not been distributed equally across universities. Ankara University alone accounted for 11.7% of all theses, while the limited number of universities identified as having independent graduate programs in adult education or lifelong learning produced only 38 theses, representing 13.9% of the total. Yıldız (2004) documented a similar institutional concentration for the 1978–2001 period, focusing on two universities with a long-established tradition in adult education. Eyyubova (2023) reported a similar pattern for the 1988–2021 period. The fact that three independent studies consistently identified this pattern across a period of nearly half a century suggests that adult education in Türkiye continues to be concentrated within a limited number of institutions.

On the other hand, the finding that 86.1% of all studies were produced outside adult education departments, particularly in disciplines such as educational sciences, sociology, nursing, and gerontology, points out that the field possesses an interdisciplinary dimension. As emphasized by Elias and Merriam (2005), this reflects the structural interdisciplinarity of adult education. At the same time, the fact that adult education programs at many universities are organized within broader educational sciences structures rather than as independent academic departments results in many theses related to adult education being registered under different disciplinary units. Therefore, the low level of institutional representation observed in Table 8 should not be interpreted as evidence of limited scholarly production. Rather, it should be understood as an indication that adult education research in Turkish academia is distributed across disciplines and structurally embedded within broader academic fields. In conclusion, adult education research in Türkiye has moved beyond the boundaries of any single academic department and has acquired an interdisciplinary character. This development indicates both the intellectual expansion of the field and the continuing questions around its academic identity.

2. Methodological Transformation and Continuing Research Habits

One of the notable findings of this study is the balance observed between qualitative (42.5%) and quantitative (40.7%) research approaches. Yıldız (2004) observed that quantitative approaches were



clearly dominant during the 1978–2001 period, while Eyyubova (2023) found that this tendency continued until 2021. The present findings suggest that this pattern has begun to change. In addition, during the coding process it was observed that the reporting of research methods in theses appeared to be more consistent than in previous periods. Although this observation may indicate that some of the methodological reporting deficiencies identified by Eldeleklioğlu Onuk (2019) for the 2007–2018 period have diminished, the scope of the present study does not allow this claim to be tested directly.

Nevertheless, a closer examination of the findings related to research designs reveals several continuing patterns. The correlational design alone accounted for 33.7% of all studies, while scales and inventories ($f = 119$) ranked first among the data collection instruments used. When considered together, these findings suggest that although methodological diversity has increased, certain research habits continue to persist. Sirem (2024), and Erdoğan and Öğdem (2023) documented a similar pattern in the Turkish literature. The observation made by Yıldız (2004) nearly twenty years ago still appears to be valid today. Furthermore, as emphasized by Sadıç and Çeliköz (2026), the field appears successful in identifying problems but has not yet sufficiently shifted toward intervention-oriented and practice-based research.

3. Thematic Transformation and Research Gaps

The thematic findings reveal that the theme of lifelong learning tendencies, competencies, and attitudes clearly dominates the field with 113 theses, accounting for more than one-third of all studies examined. The theme of digital learning, e-learning, and distance education ranked third with 45 theses. This finding is directly related to the fact that the study covers the post-COVID-19 period and provides concrete support for the observation of Tecimer Altınel and Hamalosmanoğlu (2025) that academic interest accelerated after 2021. At the same time, it was observed that the majority of these theses focused on digital readiness and individual adaptation, whereas studies addressing digital inequalities or the structural dimensions of digital learning remained relatively limited.

In contrast, andragogy and theoretical studies were represented in only six theses. This finding is consistent with Eyyubova's (2023) observation that andragogical theorization remains a relatively underdeveloped area. Similarly, Yenil and Şahan (2024) found that European lifelong learning policy frameworks are almost entirely absent from the Turkish literature, suggesting that the research agenda in Türkiye remains noticeably disconnected from international policy discourse. Considering that early adult education research in Türkiye was largely shaped by concerns related to literacy, citizenship, and social development (Yıldız, 2004), the increasing emphasis of contemporary studies on the measurement of individual competencies points to a noteworthy thematic shift.

4. The Question of Inclusiveness

The findings related to participant groups and data sources point to a systematic imbalance in representation within the field. While teachers constituted the most frequently studied group with 68 theses, groups such as prisoners ($f = 2$), LGBTQ+ individuals ($f = 1$), refugees ($f = 7$), and older adults ($f = 16$) occupied a much more limited place in the research agenda. This pattern reveals the tradition of using convenience sampling that shape the research culture in Turkish academic circles. Researchers appear to rely primarily on participant groups that are most readily accessible within institutional settings. This tendency, which is a common feature of educational research more generally, is also evident within the adult education literature. As a result, the research agenda appears to be shaped largely around accessible participant groups. This finding suggests the continuation of a pattern that does not fully align with the principle of inclusiveness emphasized by Ireland (2022) within the framework of CONFINTEA VII.



Finally, in order to evaluate the findings of the present study comparatively with previous period-based syntheses of the field, a summary table prepared using the findings of Yıldız (2004) and Eyyubova (2023) is presented below.

Table 14. Period-based comparison of adult education research in Türkiye.

Dimension	Yıldız (1978–2001)	Eyyubova (1988–2021)	Present Study (2023–2026)
Thematic Focus	Literacy, community development, participation	Program evaluation, lifelong learning tendencies	Lifelong learning tendencies, digital learning, competencies
Research Approach	Predominantly quantitative	Predominantly quantitative	Balanced use of qualitative and quantitative approaches
Research Design	Descriptive studies dominant	Survey- and scale-based studies dominant	Correlational and case study designs dominant
Theoretical Emphasis	Public education and social development	Program and process evaluation	Individual tendencies, competencies, and digital learning
Structure of the Field	Concentration within educational sciences	Concentration in a limited number of universities	Interdisciplinary expansion and institutional dispersion

When Table 14 is considered as a whole, it becomes evident that adult education research in Türkiye has undergone thematic, methodological, and institutional transformation. The early research agenda, which was largely shaped by literacy and social development concerns, appears to have gradually given way to themes focusing on individual competencies, lifelong learning tendencies, and digital learning. From a methodological perspective, a transition can be observed from the dominance of quantitative approaches toward a more balanced use of qualitative and quantitative methods. At the same time, certain established research habits appear to persist.

With regard to the institutional structure of the field, the findings suggest that the pattern of concentration has changed in form while continuing to exist. A centralized concentration has gradually been replaced by a more interdisciplinary distribution; however, this distribution has also brought with it a degree of uncertainty regarding the institutional identity of the field.

Conclusion

This study examined 273 graduate theses produced in the field of adult education in Türkiye between 2023 and 2026 through a descriptive systematic mapping review of their bibliographic and content-related characteristics. The findings revealed that graduate theses produced during this period displayed distinct methodological and thematic trends. When considered as a whole, the findings indicate that academic production in the field has continued and gained momentum. At the same time, this growth appears to have occurred alongside the reproduction of certain structural patterns.

Thesis production remained high and relatively stable during the 2023–2025 period. The volume of research produced within this approximately three-and-a-half-year period exceeded the number identified by Eyyubova (2023) for a 33-year timespan. The studies examined demonstrate an interdisciplinary character; however, this expansion has occurred alongside patterns of institutional concentration and uncertainty regarding the field's institutional identity. The balance observed between qualitative and quantitative approaches points to increased methodological diversity compared with



earlier periods. Nevertheless, the continued dominance of correlational designs and scale-based data collection practices suggests that established methodological habits remain influential, while intervention-oriented and practice-based research continues to be limited. Thematically, lifelong learning remains the dominant discourse, whereas theoretical and critical studies continue to receive relatively limited attention. Research focusing on disadvantaged groups also appears to remain insufficiently represented, reflecting a pattern that is not fully aligned with the principle of inclusiveness within the field.

This study is limited to theses registered in the YÖKTEZ Database and does not cover the entirety of 2026. Given these limitations, the findings should be considered a contemporary snapshot of adult education research in Türkiye and a starting point for more comprehensive and longitudinal synthesis studies in the future.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed.

For researchers

More attention should be given to studies grounded in theoretical frameworks such as andragogy, transformative learning, and critical pedagogy. Research designs that move beyond correlational surveys and scale administration, particularly experimental, action research, and intervention-based approaches, are likely to make important contributions to the field. Priority should also be given to studies focusing on groups that remain underrepresented within the current research agenda, including refugees, prisoners, older adults, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Strengthening the connection between adult education research in Türkiye and the global research community through international policy frameworks and comparative studies also emerges as an important need.

For program developers and policymakers

The institutional visibility and capacity of independent graduate programs in adult education and lifelong learning should be strengthened. It is also important that the research agenda does not remain limited to the measurement of individual competencies, but expands to address structural inequalities, digital exclusion, and social participation.

For future research

Considering that the present study is limited to theses registered in the National Thesis Center database and does not include the entirety of 2026, future studies may benefit from examining longer time periods, incorporating additional data sources, and adopting international comparative perspectives.

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Ethics and Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles. Since the study is based exclusively on publicly accessible master's and doctoral theses retrieved from the National Thesis Center database, ethics committee approval was not required. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to this study.



Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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