

## Exploring the Antecedents of Perceived Over Qualification and its Effects

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### Abstract

A situation when people work unwillingly below their qualifications, abilities or skills and are low paid is known as underemployment. People prefer to be underemployed instead of unemployed for the sake of livelihood and stability. It is social problem that affects job growth, poverty level, business accession, career progress and emotional health of the employee. Underemployment also leads to certain psychological problems that the employee faces in day to day life which often leads to perceived over qualification. **Objectives:** The study aims to identify the antecedents of perceived over qualification and its effects through a comprehensive literature review. **Methods:** A comprehensive literature review was carried out on the papers published in various reputed journals, to understand the antecedents of perceived over qualification and its effects. **Results:** Literature reveals that the consequences of perceived over qualification depends on several variables, such as organizational setting, job autonomy, and intrinsic motivation. The findings of this study expands and enriches the literature on perceived over qualification and human resource management strategies aiming at improving employee retention and organizational performance. **Conclusions:** It is concluded from the analysis of the literature that the perceived over qualification can have a variety of effects on employees' behavior in the workplace, affecting everything from positive activities like leadership emergence, enhancement of employee creativity, increased knowledge sharing to bad ones like unsatisfied work force with the job, decreased information sharing and low inventiveness.

**Keywords:** Underemployment, perceived over qualification, mental health, employee turnover, HRM strategies

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### 1. Introduction

In the context of Indian economy, unemployment is seen as one of the challenging issues due to large population of the country and decreasing job opportunities. Consequently, people with higher skills are competing for the limited positions and unwillingly prefer to work in low-skilled and low-paid jobs. Perceived over qualification (POQ) in recent years has become major problem for businesses across the world. According to the data of Organization for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD), the rate of overqualified employees vary across OECD nations from a low value of 7.8% in Finland to a high of 37.7% in Mexico, with an average of 16.8% for all OECD countries (OECD, 2021). The problem of overqualified workers is more severe in developing nations.

Perceived Over qualification is a state in which education, skills, experience, and abilities of an employee are higher than the minimum requirements for an employment and are not fully used at work (Maynard et al., 2006; Erdogan et al., 2021). The POQ describes how other people perceive or understand a person's aptitudes, experience, education, and talent, particularly about employment prospects, advancements, and social recognition. Perceived qualifications are subjective and influenced by things like societal conventions, biases, and individual experiences, in contrast to actual qualifications, which are founded on verifiable credentials or competence.

It is a special form of under employment where under employed people often suffer from complex feelings. This state of feeling can have both beneficial and detrimental effects on workers and companies. The complex nature of POQ has been shown in large number of researches, which depicts how it affects work place relationships, motivation, and employee behavior. Job happiness is greatly influenced by perceived qualification, which frequently has detrimental effects on personnel. Several studies have shown that the POQ has positive impact on the performance and

actions of employees (Chu et al. 2021; Liu et al. 2024; Luksyte & Carpini 2024; Ma et al. 2024; Ma et al. 2023; Zhang et al. 2016; Zhang et al. 2021). On the other hand, some studies revealed that POQ is associated with the negative outcomes (Harari et al., 2017; Luksyte et al., 2020).

Arashad et al. (2024) found that the perceived over qualification can have several detrimental effects on one's career. POQ can have a detrimental effect on proactive behavior and job satisfaction and is influenced by elements including perceived organizational politics and boredom proneness. Pan, R., & Hou, Z. (2024) observed that the POQ as the employees' perception that their qualifications beyond job requirements, which affects their job happiness. This perception is especially influenced by both internal and external employment options. Workers feel underutilized as they believe their qualifications surpass job requirements (Mah et al., 2023). Likewise, study of Shang et al. (2024) demonstrated that the public employees' deviant actions and organizational citizenship may be impacted by the POQ, which can also change workplace behavior by fostering sentiments of entitlement and control. According to Allan et al. (2024), perceived over qualification is the belief that one has more training, education, or experience than is necessary for a certain job or activity. This might result into a decrease in the significance of the task and possibly unfavorable attitudes toward the employment. This dichotomy signifies the complex nature of perceived over qualification. Considering the mixed evidence of the consequences of perceived over qualification, further studies are warranted. Present study is focused to enrich the research on the impacts of POQ through extensive review of literature.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Antecedents of POQ**

#### **2.1.1 Individual factors**

##### **2.1.1.1 Experience and Education Mismatch:**

POQ occurs when workers feel that they possess specialist certifications or higher degrees that go beyond what is needed for the position. A PhD holder in an entry-level role, for instance, could feel underutilized. Harari et al. (2017) named overqualified employees as the “big fish in a small pond.” Chong et al. (2022) states that the feelings of deprivation resulted from repatriates' perception of over qualification as a result of differences in how they used their improved foreign experiences back to home. When compared to alternative forms, this impression led to low affective commitment and high continuation commitment, especially among traditional repatriates. However, according to Yaşar & Alakuş (2024), the main determinants of perceived over qualification are experience, education, and fluency in a foreign language. These characteristics make workers feel different from their peers, and many of them think they are overqualified for their positions. Susaeta et al. (2013) identified under utilization of talent as the important cause of perceived over qualification in Spanish firms. They also found that there is a significant skills mismatch among the 16–24 age cohort in Spain which further affects competent workers not being completely committed to their jobs.

##### **2.1.1.2. Long Work History:**

People who have worked in more difficult tasks for years may feel that their current position does not fully utilize their skills. Organizational duration has an impact on perceived over qualification; employees with longer tenure were less affected in terms of growth need unfulfilled. This implies that having a longer work history could lessen perceptions of over qualification at work (Ma et al; 2023).

##### **2.1.2. Economic Downturns:**

Because of downturns in economic activity worldwide, there aren't adequate jobs available, talented

professionals may take occupations below their credentials during recessions or times of high unemployment, which might make them feel overqualified (Lin & Chung, 2020). Moreover, the rapid shifts in industry demand may result in highly skilled people being placed in positions that are not a good fit for their skill set.

### **2.1.3 Clarity of Roles**

#### **2.1.3.1 Ambiguity in Responsibilities:**

The job characteristics such as ambiguity in responsibilities may also affect to degree to which the employee feels overqualified. Workers may feel their abilities are not being used to their full potential if job descriptions are unclear or if the organization does not have clear expectations. Zhang et al. (2022) states that the lack of interest can result in perceived over qualification, where people believe their job duties don't align with their desired outcomes. This can cause discontent and the perception that their skills aren't being used to their full potential, which can ultimately lead to POQ experiences.

#### **2.1.3.2 Restricted Work Behaviour:**

Employees who believe that their skills are underutilized frequently experience perceived over qualification, which can result in disengagement behaviors and unfavorable job attitudes (Li, 2017). They may feel disengaged in their roles which affect their general well-being and performance.

### **2.1.4 Professional Goals**

#### **2.1.4.1 Desire for Advancement:**

Workers who expect to hold specialized or leadership positions may feel unchallenged or stagnate in their current responsibilities. Ma et al. (2022) states that when there is a significant desire for increased employment opportunities, perceived over qualification is positively correlated with the extra effort. This extra effort then results in more selfless helpful behavior.

#### **2.1.4.2 Professional Objectives:**

Feelings of over qualification may worsen if personal career objectives and job reality are not aligned. The study of Arvan et al. (2019) contradicts the conventional beliefs about the effects of over qualification. They found that the perceived over qualification results from job dissatisfaction and the employees may feel overqualified not only because of their actual qualifications or job roles but also because of unmet professional objectives.

### **2.1.5 Culture of the Organization**

#### **2.1.5.1 Absence of Support for Development:**

Workers may feel that their abilities are being wasted in cultures that place little value on skill or professional development. In a study of Sawyerr (2018), the survey unfolds that new teachers felt overqualified since they thought that the instructional support and professional development provided to them were inconsistent and inefficient. Their capacity to acquire the required educational skills and job satisfaction was hampered by the absence of pertinent support.

#### **2.1.5.2 Opposition to Change:**

Businesses that are sluggish to innovate or adjust may not be making the most of the skills of their workforce. Liao et al (2024) observed that the employees who believe their skills surpass employment requirements—often as a result of mismatches between personal qualifications and professional roles—are said to be perceived as overqualified (POQ). Cultural, economic, socio demographic, and methodological traits are some of the factors that affect POQ and act as boundary conditions for its impacts.

### **2.1.6 Limited Prospects for Promotion**

**2.1.6.1 Career Paths that are Stunting:**

Employees may believe their abilities are not valued or acknowledged in settings with unclear or non-existent promotion pathways. Maynard & Parfyonova (2013) state that a powerful incentive is the desire to use and develop one's skills; workers who value these features are more likely to look for other employment chances when they feel overqualified.

**2.1.6.2 Internal Rivalry:**

Employees may get dissatisfied with their current positions as a result of intense rivalry for the few available promotions. According to Menon et al. (2016), internal rivalries cause people to feel overqualified and secure, which make them avoid learning from internal rivals because they see a threat to their position and identity. This is in contrast to external competitors, whose perceived risks motivate them to learn more.

**2.1.7 Comparing Oneself to Others****2.1.7.1 Peer Assessment:**

Workers frequently compare their abilities to those of their coworkers. Feelings of over qualification may result if people believe they are more qualified.

**2.1.7.2 Team Dynamics:**

Individuals with higher credentials may feel out of sync with the group's general capabilities if there are people with different skill levels in the team. Zhang et al. (2022) examined that social comparison, in which workers assess their credentials against those of their colleagues, can lead to perceived over qualification. An inverted U-shaped relationship between over qualification and knowledge sharing behaviors may result from this view, which may cause knowledge concealing, especially when psychological contract violations take place.

**2.1.8 Design and Use of Jobs****2.1.8.1 Under-utilization of Skills:**

Workers may feel redundant if they discover that their particular knowledge or skill sets are not needed for their jobs. The study of Chomg et al. (2022) revealed that when returnees believe their foreign experiences are being underutilized, they experience perceived over qualification, which results in low affective commitment and high continuation commitment. The necessity for organizations to address repatriate deprivation is highlighted by the fact that this disparity is especially noticeable among traditional returnees. The study of Green & McIntosh (2007) finds a mismatch between workers' qualifications and job needs, pointing out that perceived over qualification frequently results from under utilization of capabilities, especially in sectors that do not value advanced communication, planning, and problem-solving abilities.

According to Paolo & Mañé (2016), as the many PhD graduates work in positions that do not require their advanced training or abilities, perceived over qualification among them is associated with under utilization of skills, which results in discontent with job content and a sense of wasted potential.

**2.1.8.2 Monotonous Chores:**

Boredom and discontent can result from performing repeated or low- skill chores. Khan et al. (2022) investigated that the employee under utilization results from perceived over qualification, which occurs when workers believe their talents and abilities surpass job requirements. The association between perceived over qualification and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is mediated by job boredom, which might be caused by this misfit.

**2.1.9 Individual Aspirations and Self-Concept****2.1.9.1 High Self-Expectations:**

Perceived over qualification, which is frequently associated with high self- expectations, occurs when workers feel their skills beyond the standards of their jobs (Sun & Qiu, 2022). When trust is present, this perception may

encourage innovative activity, but it can also have negative effects like decreased engagement.

#### 2.1.9.2 Impostor Syndrome:

It is ironic that people who feel over qualified may also experience emotions of inadequacy, which can cause a discrepancy between their pleasure with their jobs and how qualified they think they are. Tang & Fu, (2024) asserted that career shocks lead to perceived over qualification, which is impacted by personal resources including job embedded and career adaptability. Furthermore, this association is mediated by relative deprivation, underscoring the psychological effects of job difficulties in the post- COVID-19 economy.

### 2.2 Effects of Perceived over qualification

A growing body of literature suggests that the POQ leads to a series of beneficial and detrimental effects on workers and companies. Key literature is given below.

#### 2.2.1 Positive effects of POQ

Author	Key Findings
Jiang et.al.(2024)	The study is focused on the impact of POQ on employee innovative performance in the workplace. The findings establish that the employee innovation performance is positively impacted by POQ. Moreover, self-oriented perfectionism and job crafting partially mediates the relation of POQ and innovation performance, indicating that employees with high perfectionism and who actively reshape their roles may channel their over qualification in increased innovation outputs.
Yi(2024)	The findings of the study reveal that time banditry behavior is positively impacted by perceived over qualification; and this relation is partially mediated by leader- member exchange (LMX) perception, and the organizational climate moderates this mediating effect.
Zheng et.al.(2024)	According to this study, the perceived over qualification fosters leadership emergence and creative deviance from a positive perspective, and job autonomy media test his relationship. Individuals with POQ when possess greater level of job autonomy, they are more likely to engage in innovative behavior.
Ma et al. (2023)	Perceived over qualification is associated with the two contrasting motivational processes i.e. differentiation and assimilation. POQ leads to positive outcomes by motivating employees towards proactive performance through differentiation or affiliative performance through assimilation, depending on their self-construal.
Khan et al.(2023)	Authors examined the positive impact of POQ on employee knowledge sharing and career planning. They asserted that both the employees and organizations may be benefited when the perceived over qualification has a favorable impact on career planning and knowledge sharing which are mediated by career identity. Findings indicated that leader humility act as moderator for this mediation.

Zhang et al.(2022)	The study is aimed at how POQ is positively affected by personal brand equity. It further underscores the importance of personal brand equity and its implication in career outcomes. The study indicates that POQ enhances by personal brand equity, which in turn favorably influences career outcomes of employees.
Shang et al. (2024)	On the basis of Conservation of Resource Theory (COR), authors found that the OCB is influenced by POQ, mediated by perceived control. The results further revealed that the POQ of the public sector employees' is positively associated with the perceived control, which is positively linked with the OCB. Furthermore, POQ and workplace deviance behavior are positively mediated by psychological entitlement.
Liao et al.(2024)	The study investigates why, where, and for whom POQ is advantageous or negative. The consequences, mechanisms, and moderators of POQ were also undertaken and a theoretical framework was developed by considering cultural, economic, socio demographic and methodological factors as moderators/boundary conditions. Findings revealed that the POQ induces differential work consequences. Depending upon the contextual circumstances and individual characteristics of the employees involved, POQ improve job satisfaction and job performance, which can benefit both the employees and organizations.
Liu et al.(2024)	The study investigates how POQ influences task performance and employee creativity through cynicism and constructive deviance. Research highlights that POQ can lead to cynicism toward the job which negatively impacts the task performance and creativity of employee; and through the constructive deviance it can enhance performance and employee creativity.
Sesen et al. (2024)	Drawing upon the cross-cultural adaptation theory, authors investigated the relationship between POQ and leisure crafting in the immigrants living in Cyprus and moderating role of acculturation. They found that POQ has a significant positive impact on leisure crafting. Assuming that acculturation plays a moderating role, positive effect of POQ increases in cases of higher level of positive acculturation and eventually improves the well-being and organizational commitment of overqualified immigrants.
Bang& Suh(2017)	The study aimed to determine the positive effects of POQ along with moderating effect of peer based POQ on the relationship between perceived over qualification and organization based self-esteem. Findings reveal that POQ has positive consequences and has an indirect effect on job crafting through the mediation of organization-based self-esteem.
Aslam et al.(2022)	Authors explored the effect of POQ on career success through the mediation of proactive behaviour and relative deprivation. They observed that the career success is positively impacted by POQ because it encourages proactive behavior and lessens feelings of relative deprivation. Overall, findings show that employees with high achievement needs will show more proactive behaviour with POQ and lower relative deprivation.
Abozaid et al. (2019)	The POQ strongly influence on the workplace deviance and helping behaviour through interpersonal influence. It enhances helpful behavior and decreases

	workplace deviance behavior of employee. Moreover, findings revealed that the increased performance and constructive relationships inside the organization result from the promotion of inter personal influences especially when coupled with pro social incentive and relational skill abilities in the form of job autonomy.
Dar et al. (2022)	The outcomes of the study indicate that the POQ raises the level of employees' creative self-confidence, which in turn improves the innovative behavior at work. Moreover, this relationship is even stronger in settings with strong psychological safety, indicating that over qualified workers might spur innovation when they feel comfortable and encouraged in their positions.
Sangar et al.(2022)	The study is focused on POQ and daily work behaviors of subordinates. Results revealed that the positive social behaviors among subordinates might result in improved in-role work behaviors when leaders are perceived as being overqualified by the subordinates eventually lead to workplace productivity.

### 2.2.2. Negative effects of POQ

Authors	Key Findings
Liao et.al.(2024)	Study explains the positive and negative impacts of POQ through dual paths framework i.e. cynicism toward the job and constructive deviance. Findings reveal that cynicism toward the job significantly mediates the negative effect of POQ which has a negative indirect impact on task performance and employee creativity.
Liu, et. al.(2024)	The study indicates that POQ can foster cynicism toward the job which negatively impacts the task performance and creativity of employee, which in turn leads to disengagement and reduced performance.
Xu, et.al.(2024)	By applying the person-organization fit theory, the study demonstrates that detrimental effect of POQ on students' well -being. It reduces their organizational identification, study engagement, and sense of personal accomplishment.
Yi,(2024)	This study discusses the impact mechanism of POQ on time banditry behavior. Results show positive influence of POQ on time banditry behavior. Therefore, an increased time banditry behavior due to POQ leads to negative effect on employee and organizational performance because of the negative emotional experience of employees.
Shang, et al. (2024)	On the basis of conservation of resource theory (COR), study highlights that POQ and workplace deviance behavior of the public employees are positively mediated by psychological entitlement. Negative effects of perceived over qualification include intense psychological entitlement, which further lead to workplace deviance behavior among the public employees.
Khassawneh et al. (2022)	The findings indicate that the relationship between POQ and job-related outcomes such as employee turnover, job satisfaction, and performance evaluation is moderated by manager envy. When the managers report high envy, POQ is negatively related to employee job satisfaction and has a positive relation with job turn over.
Bao & Zhong, (2023)	In this study authors examined the relationship between POQ among public employees and their turn over intentions. Analysis of the data from 418 Chinese



	public employees reveals that POQ has negative influence on the turn over intention which can led to negative emotions in employees to leave the job.
Debus et.al. (2023)	Following person-environment fit theory, authors explored the influence of POQ on performance and well-being outcomes. They found that POQ is resulted in an indirect and sequential relationship to decrease in task performance, job satisfaction and OCB via anger toward employment situation.
Luksyte & Carpini (2024)	The study is aimed to examine the role that work passion plays in shaping the nature of the relationship between POQ and subjective career success. The results demonstrate that negative relationship between POQ and work meaningfulness for the lower harmonious work passion, which inturn corresponds to higher intents to quit job.
Amira & Febrianti (2022)	The findings underscores that the POQ has negative impact on the career satisfaction and positively influences turnover intention. Negligence of POQ will eventually stimulate the employees to leave their organization.
Zhang et al.(2024)	They examined the behavioral pattern of the employees when they experience POQ by applying person-job fit theory. Results indicate that employees who experience POQ are more likely to engage in withdrawal behavior than in counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs). According to the study, relations of POQ with both CWB and withdrawal is mediated by anger.
Wassermann et al. (2017)	Aim of the study was to find how POQ influences job satisfaction and career satisfaction among the Italian and Spanish immigrant employees. Results indicate that POQ has negative impact on job satisfaction of employees in a shorter duration of six months.
Wu et al.(2017)	Authors investigated the relationship between POQ and adaptive work behavior. Findings reveal that POQ influences negatively the employees' adaptability at work place. The workers who feel overqualified could behave less adaptive at work, especially in settings where job autonomy is low.
Jiang & Dong (2022)	Based on social cognitive theory, study examines the how perception of leaders' to overqualified team affects their cognition and follow-up behavior. Findings demonstrate that leaders' perception of team over qualification negatively influences the leadership self-efficacy. This in turn hinders leaders' empowering behavior.
Uddin et al. (2023)	In an study on impact of POQ on employee work performance in public and private organizations of Bangladesh, authors found that the Job crafting (JC) is negatively influenced by POQ in female corporate workers, where as it has significant positive effect on work performance. Furthermore, shows a mediating effect on the relationship of over qualification and work performance.
Alfes et al.2016	The study showed that the over qualified employee are not only dissatisfied with the job but also can have negative ramifications of it on work environment like high leader member exchange and team cohesiveness.
Peng et al. (2023)	Findings demonstrate that the POQ enhances the workplace ostracism via psychological entitlement. Further, task interdependence safeguards the positive effect of POQ on psychological entitlement. Overqualified workers may feel socially excluded, which can have a detrimental effect on their job satisfaction and the dynamics of the work place as a whole. This is especially true when task



	interdependence is minimal, which exacerbates feelings of loneliness.
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### 3. Research gap

After going through various research papers it was found that no studies have shown the antecedents of the perceived over qualification. There have been so many researches on the impacts of perceived over qualification on other variables but no paper gave the overall summary of the positive and negative effects of POQ.

### 4. Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to identify the antecedents of the phenomenon perceived over qualification and its effects. It aims to provide a better understanding of the antecedents, and consequences associated with POQ through synthesis of existing literature.

### 5. Research Methodology

An extensive literature review was carried out to find the antecedents and effects of POQ. For the purpose, various published book chapters and research papers over the few decades have been summarized. The paper which were chosen for the review was based on the thematic analysis taking key variable POQ from the database-google scholar. From the selected papers full text was reviewed to find the antecedents and the effects of POQ on the employees and the employers.

### 6. Results & Discussion

After review of so many papers we find that POQ has presented complex challenges before the employer and employee both in facets of today's competitive environment and the rapid development of emerging technologies. From the analysis of existing research we found that the perceived over qualification has a significant negative effect, and also positive effect under certain conditions. Depending upon the contextual circumstances and individual characteristics of the employees involved, POQ improve leadership emergence, innovative work behaviour, increased knowledge sharing, job satisfaction and job performance, which can benefit both the employees and organizations. Moreover, we found that the POQ influence negatively the employees' behavior in the workplace and can result in decreased job satisfaction, increase turnover intention, decreased information sharing and low creativity. The paper is in a summary form that shows the various faces of POQ. The findings of this study would help to extend the knowledge about the POQ and enrich the literature on perceived over qualification & human resource management strategies.

### 7. Implications

Through this paper, we explored the antecedents of perceived over qualification and its effects. This review has highlighted one of the major causes for dissatisfaction in employees which will be helpful for the employer and the organization. Organizations would be aware that POQ has negative effects; so managers will be able to determine the factors that will be helpful in hiring and even after hiring to retaining the employees, as the retaining is more important in the organizational parlance. Organizations will be able to implement certain techniques or leadership styles that may help employees to come out of the feeling of perceived over qualification.

### 8. Conclusion

Perceived over qualification can have a variety of effects on employees' behavior in the workplace, affecting everything from positive activities like leadership emergence, enhancement of employee creativity ,increased knowledge sharing to bad ones like unsatisfied work force with the job , decreased information sharing and creative deviance behaviour. Literature reveals that the consequences of perceived over qualification depends on several variables, such as organizational setting, job autonomy, and intrinsic motivation. By utilizing leadership philosophies,

job-creating techniques, and intrinsic motivation, organizations can successfully manage the dual nature of perceived over qualification (POQ) by encouraging good behaviors while reducing negative ones. This comprehensive strategy can assist in maximizing the potential of highly qualified workers. The literature on POQ yielded research findings that demonstrate promising relevance to the recruitment and selection of employee. Therefore, in order to reduce the perception of over qualification and underemployment, organizations should strive for seeking suitable talents, while recruiting talents, as per the needs of the position rationally rather than only paying attention to educational background.

## 9. Limitations and Future Research

This paper is based on extensive review of literature on the antecedents of POQ and its positive and negative outcomes. There are few limitations of this paper. The first limitation is that the present study is a review paper; one can go with the analysis of various variables of POQ. Secondly, the paper is limited to the reasons, factors and outcomes of the perceived over qualification but there are certainly other aspects of over qualification which may be focused by the organizations. Future research may therefore encompass different demographics to get the clearer concept of the POQ. The study can also be undertaken to identify other mediating and moderating variables and factors that effect POQ.

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