

THE TRAINING OF FUTURE TEACHERS AND THE SEDUCTION OF THE EXTREME RIGHT WING

La formación del futuro profesorado y la seducción de la extrema derecha

Gustavo GONZÁLEZ-CALVO* and Enrique-Javier DÍEZ-GUTIÉRREZ**

*Universidad de Valladolid. Spain.

**Universidad de León. Spain.

gustavo.gonzalez@uva.es; ejdieg@unileon.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4637-0168>; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3399-5318>

Fecha de recepción: 17/04/2025

Fecha de aceptación: 12/06/2025

Fecha de publicación en línea: 01/01/2026

How to cite this article / Cómo citar este artículo: González-Calvo, G. & Díez-Gutiérrez, E. J. (2026). The Training of Future Teachers and the Seduction of the Extreme Right Wing [La formación del futuro profesorado y la seducción de la extrema derecha]. *Teoría de la Educación. Revista Interuniversitaria*, 38(1), 85-104. <https://doi.org/10.14201/teri.32590>

ABSTRACT

This study delves into the reasons why young university students in training, immersed in the precariousness and uncertainty of a cancelled future, may be attracted by radical right-wing extremist discourses that are currently on the rise. Using a qualitative-interpretative methodology, extensive semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve university undergraduate students of Education using visual elicitation techniques and analysing the data by means of narrative thematic analysis. The main results reveal a sense of stagnation and hopelessness in the face of an uncertain future, exacerbated by job insecurity, difficulty of access to housing and social pressure. This seems to generate anxiety and political scepticism, making young people training to

be future teachers vulnerable to messages from the far right that capitalise on discontent. The final conclusions suggest that the rise of these extremist movements is due to the lack of alternative political projects and the exploitation of youth anger at the uncertain future, although there is still a will to mobilise and a need for education that fosters hope and collective action. It is discussed whether initial teacher training at university should rethink its objectives and logic from the pedagogy of hope: not only to train to participate in a changing society and workplace, but also to respond collectively and empathetically to the social, political, economic, cultural and environmental challenges that shape the present of young people.

Keywords: teacher training; future cancellation; far right; radicalization; social transformation.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo profundiza en las razones por las cuales jóvenes universitarios que se están formando, inmersos en la precariedad y la incertidumbre de un futuro cancelado, se pueden sentir atraídos por discursos radicales de extrema derecha que actualmente están en auge. Mediante una metodología cualitativa-interpretativa, se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas extensas con doce estudiantes universitarios de Grados de Educación utilizando técnicas de elicitación visual y analizando los datos por medio de un análisis temático narrativo. Los principales resultados revelan una sensación de estancamiento y desesperanza ante un futuro incierto, exacerbada por la precariedad laboral, la dificultad de acceso a la vivienda y la presión social. Esto parece generar ansiedad y escepticismo político, volviendo a los jóvenes que se están formando para ser futuros profesores y profesoras vulnerables a mensajes de la extrema derecha que capitalizan el descontento. Las conclusiones sugieren que el auge de estos movimientos extremistas se debe a la falta de proyectos políticos alternativos y a la explotación de la rabia juvenil ante ese futuro incierto, aunque persiste una voluntad de movilización y la necesidad de una educación que fomente la esperanza y la acción colectiva. Se discute si la formación inicial del profesorado en la universidad debe repensar sus objetivos y su lógica desde la pedagogía de la esperanza: no solo formar para participar en una sociedad y un espacio laboral cambiante, sino también para responder de manera colectiva y empática a los retos sociales, políticos, económicos, culturales y ambientales que modelan el presente de la juventud.

Palabras clave: formación docente; cancelación del futuro; extrema derecha; radicalización; transformación social.

1. INTRODUCTION

We are living through times of complex ideological reconfiguration, in which ultraliberal and anarcho-capitalist political movements have ceased to occupy a place on the margins and have instead forcefully positioned themselves at the center

of the debate (Betancor, 2025). Appealing to emotions such as fear of the other, disenchantment, and nostalgia for the past, populist leaders have seized control of the present—and, with it, of the future world (Giroux & Proasi, 2025). This crisis of democracy reflects a process of extinction of the models we have built within the framework of industrial societies and nation-states (Forti, 2021), leaving current political institutions overwhelmed and ill-adapted.

Today's political institutions seem unable to effectively translate the rights and freedoms enshrined in international treaties and constitutions into policies and measures that address current challenges in a fair and effective manner for the social majorities (Renault & Vega, 2025). The crises that surround us—from the genocide in Gaza to the war in Ukraine, or the conflicts in Syria, Libya, and the Congo, not to mention the global ecological and climate crisis or the recurring economic and housing crises—make it difficult to envision a hopeful long-term future. This absence of perspective contributes to a sense of vulnerability and exhaustion in the face of what appears to be the disintegration of democratic systems as we have known them. The latest report by the Oxfam-Intermón, *Multilateralism in an Era of Global Oligarchy*, warned that global efforts to respond to the planet's greatest challenges—such as the climate crisis or persistent levels of poverty and inequality—are being jeopardized by the concentration of power in the hands of the ultra-rich and megacorporations (Oxfam, 2024).

Although we find reasons for mobilization and protest (Rigal et al., 2023), we seem less successful at identifying effective strategies to build, propose, and unite in a shared and solidarity-driven manner in pursuit of the common good. As a result, the political dimension of civic action sometimes appears to be reduced to dissent and protest or, to a large extent, to advancing more individualistic proposals invoking a “save yourself if you can” mentality that is gaining ground among an increasingly significant sector of the population (Rocamora Pérez & Espinar-Ruiz, 2021). This dimension has managed to attract a growing number of young people, drawn to narratives that promote extreme conservatism, xenophobia, the return to a mythical past (where “our tribe” ruled over others), antifeminism, and neoliberal ideology—including the rollback of social rights (Díez Gutiérrez & Jarquín, 2025). This dynamic is linked to the absence of shared responses and the exploitation of collective discontent to identify scapegoats (Innerarity, 2024).

When the future is perceived as a closed horizon—without utopias or transformative collective projects—political proposals flourish that, instead of looking forward, offer a return to traditional values or an easy enemy to blame for contemporary ills. If politics fails to impact our daily lives, does not connect with our concerns, and disregards our needs and those of future generations, what purpose does it serve? What is its use value? This is the starting point reflected in popular culture in the episode *The Waldo Moment* from the series *Black Mirror*. In it, an animated character, born as a media joke, strikes a chord with a disillusioned electorate, despite the complete absence of political or social proposals. The eccentric, grandiose gestures,

frenzied chainsaw movements (as showcased by Argentine President Javier Milei), the shouting, and the stigmatization and criminalization of adversaries (“shitty leftists,” as Milei calls them) shape the current political struggle of the far right. This, in turn, has influenced the positions and narrative of the right, and even significant sectors of liberals and social democrats (Lordon, 2025; Tanuro, 2025). We are no longer witnessing a diversity and confrontation of ideas, but of personalities, where the most eccentric has the greatest chance of being elected (Mudde, 2019) in an increasingly grotesque society of the spectacle.

Thus, in the face of disillusionment with traditional elites, extremist movements offer simple, emotionally charged responses: by identifying certain groups (e.g., immigrants, ethnic minorities, feminists, and/or environmental activists, among others) as external enemies, they promise to restore a supposed lost greatness and present a strong, exclusionary identity. From this perspective, the far right has successfully channeled the discontent generated by a voracious and predatory capitalist system, appropriating the rebellion against the system (Brown, 2019; Mouffe, 2018). Their anti-system rhetoric, however, masks the perpetuation of harmful, unjust, and unequal power structures. Thus, individualistic and tribal responses ultimately become a means of settling scores with presumed culprits, while the appeal of authoritarian models—prized for their alleged efficiency—grows at the expense of democratic substance (Rizzi, 2025).

This paper seeks to delve into the reasons why youth, immersed in precariousness and the uncertainty of a cancelled future, may feel drawn to far-right political discourses, focusing on the structural and emotional factors that fuel such affinity.

1.1. *The cancellation of the future and the inability to imagine alternatives*

In his work *Capitalist Realism*, Fisher (2016) argues that capitalism has generated a sense of stagnation and repetition, where the future is no longer imagined as a space for radical transformation, but rather as an indefinite extension of the present. Culture, politics, and the economy seem trapped within a logic that prevents new possibilities from emerging.

This feeling that the future has been cancelled arises as a response to a context in which late capitalism is configured as the only possible logic, and young people perceive a future closed off by job insecurity, ecological crises, and the dismantling of social protection, among other factors (Adam, 2023; Bazzani, 2022; Hickman et al., 2021; Standing, 2011). As capitalism becomes consolidated as an immovable horizon, any project of radical transformation appears utopian and unattainable, relegating initiatives for change to the dimension of the individual and atomized (Fisher, 2016; Han, 2024). No longer do revolutionary projects of social transformation inspire hope in a horizon of emancipation and social justice. The shadow of capitalism as the “only possible reality” spreads like a shroud, seizing even the possibility of imagining alternatives and utopias.

For decades, school and university were regarded as a pathway to social mobility and progress; today, however, skepticism prevails, as academic training no longer guarantees the opportunities of the past but is instead inserted into an increasingly fragile labor market. Various authors warn that in this new hyper-accelerated environment, the old democratic structures fail to adapt, provoking a sense of institutional “dislocation” that reinforces the climate of uncertainty (Forti, 2021; Innerarity, 2024). This phenomenon unfolds in the context of the growing omnipresence of catastrophe (Fisher, 2016; Han, 2024), reflected in the proliferation of media narratives that reinforce the perception of a permanent crisis—economic, climatic and ecological, political—further hindering the construction of shared horizons (Han, 2024). All of this crystallizes into a scenario of existential precarity that heightens anxiety and chronic stress, especially among young people (Åkerstrøm & Grønbaek, 2023; Michael, 2017).

The temporal dimension of this process is key to understanding the absence of a future. Various studies on temporality (e.g., Adam, 2023; Bazzani, 2022; Berardi, 2019; Facer, 2016) describe how young people experience their present as conditioned by uncertainty and the impossibility of imagining a stable tomorrow. Material and emotional precarity establishes a rupture in the timeline: there is no past to return to, nor a promising future to aspire to, imposing the urgency of surviving in a volatile present. In this state of permanent precarity, young people are subjected to pressures that undermine their mental health and limit their capacity for collective agency (Ask & Abidin, 2018; Coleman & Lyon, 2023), making them more susceptible to seeking easy and/or extremist solutions.

For those of us engaged in training future teachers, the contradiction becomes even more acute: educating new generations implies projecting a future that, in the eyes of many students, appears closed off. We are thus immersed in constructing a present that seems to present itself devoid of hope for the future. The neoliberal productivist logic has permeated education, turning the teaching vocation into a space of anxiety and instability (Díez Gutiérrez, 2018; González-Calvo, 2025), generating a “sense of a world in ruins” where young people, despite arguably being the “most educated generation,” find no certainties or effective channels for political participation. As Facer (2016) argues, education retains a connection to the future; however, today it is forced to contend with a market that demands hyper-flexible profiles, a present saturated with media catastrophes, and an uncertain future (Berardi, 2019).

In this climate, the far right can present itself as an escape route from despair, offering identity-based “solutions” in the face of daily frustration (Mudde, 2019). With the promise of a retrotopia or return to an idealized past (Bauman, 2017), such discourses exploit the anxiety and exhaustion of a youth unable to envisage democratic, institutional, participatory, and inspiring alternatives. This disenchantment strengthens the cancellation of the future (Fisher, 2016) by reinforcing the notion that there is no room for transformative collective projects—only for nostalgic reaction or individualist retreat. However, the literature on temporality and precarity also

identifies spaces of resistance and rupture (Åkerstrøm & Grønbaek, 2023; Pors & Kishik, 2023). Student activism, youth associations, and intergenerational community action can become focal points of opposition to capitalist “pragmatism” and seeds for imagining another possible future (Betancor et al., 2024).

Youth, particularly university students, embody the paradox of constant competition and widespread anguish: education, once a shield against uncertainty, is now trapped in the neoliberal logic that demands meritocracy and “entrepreneurship” while blocking the possibility of a stable horizon (Díez Gutiérrez, 2025). The effect, as our study highlights, is the experience of anxiety, loneliness, and a lack of collective reference points. Understanding this phenomenon requires recognizing that precarity is not a transitory state but a structural condition that colonizes time and reinforces the temptation of extremist, authoritarian solutions. At the same time, it invites us to explore those cracks where hope and mobilization renew the student experience, reopening political imagination and the possibility of a future that is not cancelled (Giroux & Fillippakou, 2021).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study forms part of the teaching innovation project *SPAU: Exploring the Socio-Psychological Distress of Loneliness, Precarity, and Anxiety among University Students*, developed at the University of Valladolid during the 2024/2025 academic year. The research is grounded in approaches that combine visual methods and creative narrative, aligned with recent work on temporality and precarity in the fields of sociology and education (e.g., Adam, 2023; Bazzani, 2022; Pors & Kishik, 2023).

2.1. Participants

Twelve students (7 women and 5 men) participated in the study, all enrolled in the Social Education, Early Childhood Education, and Primary Education degree programs at the University of Valladolid, with ages ranging from 19 to 24 years. Participants were selected through purposive sampling (Suri, 2011) to ensure diversity of profiles (gender, academic background, professional motivations). All participants were informed about the aims of the study and provided written informed consent, with their privacy and confidentiality fully safeguarded. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the first author’s institution (code: PI 22-1995-NO HCUV), in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2. Data collection

The study design was qualitative-interpretative, aiming to explore participants’ experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding their future and the sociopolitical conditions that surround them. Semi-structured interviews were conducted,

using visual elicitation techniques (Chateau, 2020; Robb et al., 2020)—particularly memes and other graphic materials—to facilitate reflection and dialogue.

In the semi-structured interviews, participants were invited to reflect on questions such as: *What is your vision of the future—professional, social, and personal? What are your professional expectations? How would you describe the working and social conditions of young people today? Is there anything that worries you about your future? What do you think youth mobilizations are for? When was the last time you felt the urge to change something in your immediate environment?*

The interviews lasted between 40 and 70 minutes, and verbatim transcripts were produced for data analysis. Prior to the interview, participants were asked to bring an image or meme they considered relevant to their current perception of the future. This strategy fostered free expression and the co-construction of meaning (Julien, 2022).

The questions were designed based on a thematic guide structured around three key conceptual dimensions: (a) representations of the future and youth agency; (b) experiences of material and symbolic precarity; and (c) links between distress and political perception. These dimensions were grounded in the theoretical framework of Fisher (2016), Han (2024), and Berardi (2019) on the cancellation of the future and emotional collapse. The guide was previously validated through informal piloting with two students external to the study.

Regarding the visual elicitation techniques, the graphic materials provided by participants (memes, images, and screenshots) were coded as qualitative data, as they were considered symbolic expressions that complemented the oral accounts. Each image was analyzed within its discursive context during the interview, allowing exploration of the connections between visual language, projected emotions, and narrative construction. Thus, the memes did not merely serve as conversational stimuli, but as meaningful inputs in shaping the thematic and affective analysis (Chateau, 2020; Julien, 2022).

2.3. Data analysis

A narrative thematic analysis was conducted, an approach that enables the identification and examination of patterns or themes within the stories shared by participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This method combines elements of narrative analysis with a thematic approach, integrating both the explicit content and the implicit dynamics within the stories. Narrative thematic analysis allowed us not only to identify the main themes but also to explore the affective and embodied depth underlying the narratives (Chadwick, 2017). This approach values the complexity of individual narratives while revealing shared patterns that provide a more holistic view of the participants' lived experiences.

The narrative thematic analysis was grounded in the methodological contributions of Chadwick (2017), who highlights the power of this strategy to capture the emotional, performative, and structural dimensions of narratives. This approach

is particularly well-suited when seeking to interpret how individuals shape their experiences within broader social contexts—in this case, precarity, uncertainty, and political radicalization.

Data analysis was carried out in five successive phases. First, a comprehensive and repeated reading of the full transcripts was conducted to achieve deep familiarization with the corpus. Second, an initial open and inductive coding process was undertaken, without predefined categories, allowing units of meaning to emerge directly from the accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the third phase, the codes were grouped into preliminary themes, taking into account both their recurrence and their semantic density. The fourth phase involved the iterative construction of thematic categories through triangulation among researchers, integrating criteria of internal coherence and thematic differentiation. Finally, narrative matrices were developed to reconstruct individual trajectories and collective patterns while preserving the integrity of the narrative meaning.

To ensure the qualitative reliability and validity of the study, various strategies were employed. Analytical triangulation among researchers was used for cross-validation of the emerging codes and categories, supporting the consolidation of an intersubjective and reflexive perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the technique of analytical memos was used throughout the coding process to record theoretical decisions and methodological reflections. Finally, partial feedback of results was provided to volunteer participants, enabling comparison of the interpretation of the findings with their lived experience.

Table 1 presents the categories that emerged from the narrative thematic analysis, as well as the associated emergent themes.

TABLE 1
CATEGORIES IDENTIFIED THROUGH NARRATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Category	Emergent themes
Expectations for the future in the sociopolitical context	Sense of stagnation and no-future Omnipresence of catastrophe and proliferation of hate speech Increase in anxiety and political skepticism Vulnerability of youth to radical and simplistic messages
Expectations and concerns about the future	Job precarity and difficulties in accessing housing Generational fracture (academic education no longer guarantees stability) Meritocratic discourse questioned due to lack of opportunities Prolonged family dependence and “extended childhood”
Impact of social expectations regarding success and productivity	Demand for hyper-productivity and competitiveness Constant comparison (achievements, followers, CV) Pressure to achieve success at an early age Chronic stress and normalization of anxiety

Category	Emergent themes
Links to distress and mental health	Lack of mental health resources in universities and the public system Individual medicalization of problems (going to therapy without addressing structural causes) Self-care discourses that overlook material conditions Gap between institutional discourse and real practice (exams, demanding schedules, etc.)
Attitudes toward social transformation and youth mobilization	Ambivalence between skepticism and willingness to act Youth mobilizations as catalysts for visibility (e.g., climate activism) Lack of clear leadership or concrete proposals in protests Volunteering and student associations as pathways for small-scale change

Source: Authors' own work

3. RESULTS

We present the results of our study in accordance with the categories mentioned above.

3.1. *Expectations for the future in the sociopolitical context*

The study participants express a wide range of emotions that reflect the sense of stagnation and cancellation of the future described by Fisher (2016):

“I feel like society is becoming increasingly empty. They say we are the snowflake generation, but in reality what’s happening is that we’ve realized everything is against us, that no matter what we do, things aren’t going to get better” (L., 23 years old).

This statement connects with the idea that neoliberal culture offers no horizons of change, and young people perceive the social structure as hostile. Extreme individualism, a consequence of the neoliberal system, reinforces the feeling of loneliness and powerlessness (González-Calvo, 2025):

“I am troubled by so much hate speech in all the media. I hear that outsiders are taking our jobs, that women have gone too far with feminism, that scientists are trying to scare us with climate issues [...], and I feel like we are going backwards” (G., 24 years old).

These uncertainties may intensify frustration due to the absence of clear identity references or stable social models, adding an emotional layer to the sense of disillusionment. All of this leads to a state of anxiety and hopelessness among participants that can be politically capitalized and instrumentalized in order to direct collective frustration toward vulnerable groups (Brown, 2019):

“The news is increasingly negative and seems to exist only to make us feel bad, to make us grateful just to live one more day and feel lucky with what we have today, because

tomorrow there will be nothing left [...]. They talk about precarity, climate crisis, wars, and... How could we not be depressed and anxious? [...] At least, they try to tell us who's to blame for all this and who we should fight against" (M. C., 21 years old).

This complaint relates to the omnipresence of catastrophe (Fisher, 2016; Han, 2024). When the media narrative reinforces a vision of constant collapse, collective paralysis is deepened:

"The idea that we won't live like our parents did, that we won't have pensions, security, or stable jobs is repeated over and over... It's as if we were doomed" (M., 24 years old).

"I don't know what is expected of us (young people) or what we're supposed to do to improve things, to leave behind a legacy based on sustainability and prosperity [...]. I feel like, as a community, we've lost our way and our critical sense of what is important and necessary" (J. E., 19 years old).

"I feel like the political situation is a repetitive cycle in which no matter who is in power, the same decisions are always made and people's problems don't change" (J., 19 years old).

The above quotations reflect the crisis of meaning and the lack of direction perceived by young people. As Fisher (2016) notes, capitalist realism has blocked the capacity to imagine collective alternatives, leaving society in a state of uncertainty and disorientation. This feeling of being adrift is crucial for understanding some of the reasons why the far right can capitalize on youth disillusionment, offering narratives that appeal to a supposed restoration of a lost "idyllic" order (Bauman, 2017).

In this section, we see how the "over-diagnosed" democratic crisis fuels a perception of collapse (Forti, 2021; Innerarity, 2024), suggesting that institutions have fallen behind in relation to the speed of social and technological change. When everything around seems to project a dark vision of the future, pessimism takes deeper root. That sense of a "cancelled future" (Fisher, 2016) is a key root of youth distress and can be one of the elements used by far-right discourses and narratives to attract young people.

3.2. *Expectations and concerns about the future*

Job insecurity, difficulty accessing housing, and the realization that education and academic degrees no guarantee social mobility are recurring themes among our participants:

"Even if you study, work hard, do internships [...], everything is so saturated that you might end up in a job that has nothing to do with what you studied and is badly paid" (M. C., 21 years old).

This experience exemplifies what Berardi (2019) describes as *cognitive precariat*: the paradox of intense training and effort only to end up in precarious or undervalued positions, generating feelings of disappointment and frustration:

“I’m afraid that even with a university degree and good grades, I won’t achieve job stability. I feel like everything is against me, from low wages to impossible rents” (M. S., 24 years old).

“Even if I get good grades, I feel that access to the job market is based more on connections and luck than on actual effort” (J., 19 years old).

The above quotation highlights the crisis of meritocracy (Brown, 2019). The perception that professional success is no longer linked to equal opportunity and fair outcomes, but rather to networks of contacts, reinforces distrust in the system and fuels feelings of injustice. This kind of frustration may lead to a rejection of conventional politics and the search for extremist and authoritarian solutions (Mudde, 2019).

Precarization contributes to the breakdown of traditional institutions, which barely manage to adapt to a hyper-accelerated reality (Forti, 2021); the world inhabited by industrial democracies is disappearing, leaving young people increasingly unprotected. The breakdown of opportunity, already glimpsed in the previous category, is amplified: whereas in past decades academic training was a guarantor of social advancement, today there are no guarantees of progress on the social ladder—not even with the accumulation of degrees and certifications. This situation fuels young people’s sense of powerlessness and injustice (Fraser, 2010) and, in cases like the one presented below, prompts the search for explanations based on the material and symbolic conditions in which these experiences arise:

“I’ve seen people kill themselves studying and working, and I almost mean that literally. But despite everything, without contacts and without money, they don’t move forward. [...] I feel like everything is rigged” (P., 23 years old).

The official meritocratic discourse collapses in the face of reality (Brown, 2019; González-Calvo, 2025). When effort is perceived as insufficient, the temptation grows to embrace solutions that blame “others” (e.g., immigrants, women, etc.) for one’s own precarity:

“With how expensive everything is, and even though I don’t live in an expensive or large city, I don’t know when I’ll be able to become independent. I feel like an eternal teenager because I can’t even afford to imagine starting my own life. And I don’t know whose fault this is—whether it’s the system’s, or those who come from outside to steal from those of us born here, or... But I don’t care; what I want to know is whether there will be any solution” (G., 24 years old).

Participants see themselves as genuinely struggling to move toward an independent and fulfilling adult life. When that difficulty is self-attributed (I am incapable), or when blame is placed anonymously on a vague and amorphous “system,” or

when the focus is solely on seeking personal or group scapegoats among the most precarious communities, attention is diverted from the deeper, structural causes. This reinforces the xenophobic narratives promoted by the far right and exacerbates the feeling of personal powerlessness, giving the impression that the “system is rigged” and there is no escape (Innerarity, 2024). The result is greater frustration rather than solutions rooted in transformative political action.

3.3. *Impact of social expectations regarding success and productivity*

The participants’ accounts contain references to the cult of extreme productivity and competitiveness—factors that shape today’s neoliberal capitalist system and from which youth are not exempt (González-Calvo, 2025; Mavelli, 2024):

“On social media you see ads of people who, at 20, claim to have businesses, travel all over the world, speak several languages perfectly, and be entrepreneurs. They make you feel like you’re behind in everything, like you’re not enough” (J. E., 19 years old).

“Today, many young people suffer from depression and anxiety because we live in a society of immediacy, where there is no patience and everything must happen instantly. This causes people who need to take a little more time or aren’t as fast to worry about meeting goals” (A., 19 years old).

The capitalist logic imposes a permanent race toward success (Zafra, 2017, 2021), fueled by the aspirational aesthetic and expectations promoted by social media and mass communication. This situation generates continuous stress that undermines mental health (Han, 2024; Zafra, 2021), while reinforcing the idea that failure is almost an individual choice—a personal problem:

“I’ve gone to therapy for anxiety. They expect everything from you: good grades, a master’s degree, languages, work experience [...]. All this, for what? How do you achieve it without going crazy?” (M. C., 21 years old).

The demand to exploit one’s capabilities to the fullest, to go beyond one’s own limits, to continuously perform, leads to anxiety, depression, and chronic stress (Berardi, 2019; Moreno, 2018):

“It’s as if everything in life were a competition. Who has better grades, who has more achievements, who has more followers? [...]. If you don’t play that game, you’re out of the system, you don’t count” (A., 19 years old).

This competitiveness further fragments structures of social mediation (Forti, 2021), making it harder to build shared interests and widening the gap between individualized success and collective well-being. In situations of unemployment, precarity, and the lack of a professional future or stability, people affected tend to attribute it more to personal failure than to social and economic conditions, filling psychiatrists’ offices rather than union memberships (Carmona & Padilla, 2018).

3.4. *Links to distress and mental health*

Despite this, it is essential to acknowledge the need for integral health, particularly within a social system like capitalism. In a society oversaturated with superficial stimuli, fleeting relationships, failed expectations, and constant pressure to produce, self-actualize, and achieve success, mental health has become an increasingly present and necessary element in any comprehensive approach to human and societal development. In fact, mental health appears insistently in the testimonies collected. On the one hand, participants recognize that the topic is more widely discussed today; on the other, they denounce the lack of resources and structural solutions:

“These days there’s a lot of talk about mental health and how mental health problems among young people are growing. [...]. I waited months for an appointment with a psychologist in the public health system, and in the end I had to pay for a private psychologist” (L., 23 years old).

This participant’s statement highlights the growing demand for psychological help and, at the same time, the lack of a solid health system capable of responding to that demand. In this regard, it is necessary to establish state policies that can strengthen public services (Brown, 2019; McNamara et al., 2024).

Mental health, within the capitalist framework, is often approached as a personal matter, ignoring the systemic causes that generate distress (Davies, 2021):

“It’s no use telling us to take care of ourselves if there are no working or social conditions that allow it. It seems like the solution is for each person to get by however they can” (G., 24 years old).

This illustrates how the logic of hyper-individualization and the absence of collective or institutional responses can create conditions that make young people and student teachers susceptible to far-right discourses that supposedly offer a sense of “security, order, belonging, and visible culprits” in the face of psychosocial suffering—instrumentalizing such distress and directing it toward authoritarian, identity-based, and reactionary proposals.

Transformation should involve questioning the competitive logic that underlies both education and work (Zafra, 2021). It is not enough to explicitly mention mental health while maintaining structures based on hyper-productivity and the self-management of distress (González-Calvo, 2025; Zafra, 2021), which ultimately undermine social cohesion and deepen individualism:

“There’s more and more talk about mental health, but what we really need is not just to be heard, but for the conditions that cause us anxiety to change” (J., 19 years old).

This statement points to the gap between the growing awareness of mental health and the lack of structural change. Thus, for young people themselves, the solution does not lie merely in treating anxiety and depression individually, but in questioning the system that produces them.

3.5. *Attitudes toward social transformation and youth mobilization*

In addition to uncertainty and emotional tension, participants explored their willingness to change their immediate environment and the role of youth mobilizations. Overall, the responses reveal a mix of skepticism combined with a certain desire for action:

“The last time I felt like changing something was when we weren’t allowed to present our complaints at the faculty about the internship workload. I thought it was unfair and, although I talked to classmates, it all came to nothing. We’re afraid to complain because they might lower our grades or take away our chance to do internships” (E., 20 years old).

This attitude reflects, on the one hand, a desire to improve conditions in their environment through education, and on the other, a fear of reprisals that can inhibit activism. Within Fisher’s (2016) framework, it can be interpreted as another manifestation of *capitalist realism*: the perception that protesting will not change anything and could even bring negative personal consequences.

On the other hand, the idea of mobilization as a catalyst for visibility can serve to reignite democratic passion and pressure political institutions to respond to concrete demands (Mouffe, 2018):

“I think mobilizations are necessary to show that young people aren’t as asleep as they say. [...]. When hundreds of young people take to the streets to protest about climate change or the housing crisis, it shows that we’re not as passive as people claim” (M. C., 21 years old).

Other participants, while recognizing the symbolic value of protest, question its effectiveness—something that could be interpreted as difficulty imagining that collective actions lead to real transformations:

“Sometimes I’ve wanted to join demonstrations, but I feel they don’t achieve much. There’s a lack of leaders or clear proposals. Still, I think it’s a first step to show that we’re not okay with things as they are” (P., 23 years old).

This lack of projects that mobilize hope may translate into isolated protests without a long-term strategic framework. Other participants are more convinced of the possibilities for change through youth associations:

“I’d like to get involved in volunteer projects or student associations. I think that, even on a small scale, we can change the situation for young people, for example by demanding paid internships and more scholarships” (H., 19 years old).

This perspective points to the path of local and concrete engagement to combat inertia. The sum of micro-initiatives and collective momentum could shape new forms of counter-hegemonic organization (Fraser, 2010). The participants’ responses suggest that the cancellation of the future (Fisher, 2016) has not completely annulled

the will to influence reality. However, the sense of powerlessness and the absence of effective participation structures weaken confidence that efforts can translate into tangible change (Berardi, 2019), which can lead to an attraction to far-right options that present themselves as “anti-system” and promise to change the entire system—whatever that may mean (Gil & Iordache, 2023; Weber, 2024).

Despite everything, we find hopeful testimonies among some participants:

“I’d like to stress that, although I alone can’t change the world, I can do my small part when it’s needed. If we all did that, we’d live in a much fairer world” (J., 19 years old).

This view aligns with the call for rebuilding structures of solidarity and collective organization (Fraser, 2010; Giroux & Figueiredo, 2025). Although the participant recognizes that their individual impact is limited, their emphasis on joint effort highlights the importance of community participation to counteract the isolation and fragmentation promoted by neoliberalism (Brown, 2019). This has been extensively developed by student movements, particularly in Latin American contexts, through forms of student organization and protest linked to emancipatory projects, critical pedagogies, and resistance to neoliberalism (Cortés-González et al., 2020; McLaren, 2015; Saura & Moreno, 2016).

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The aim of our study has been to understand the reasons that explain why young people—immersed in the precarity and uncertainty of a cancelled future—may feel drawn to far-right political discourses, by examining the structural and emotional factors that feed this affinity. In this sense, we have seen how the participants in the study waver between uncertainty and the search for meaning to address their social and psychological distress.

As we noted at the outset, the episode *The Waldo Moment* from the series *Black Mirror* depicts a political landscape occupied by a character who, at first glance, is merely a media joke. Yet his success rests on collective anger and disillusionment—the very forces that, from the perspective of capitalist realism (Fisher, 2016), create fertile ground for those on the far right or in neo-fascism (Díez Gutiérrez, 2022) to capture young people eager for certainty in an uncertain world. The rise of far-right movements can be understood, in part, as a consequence of the absence of alternative political and educational projects capable of articulating the demands of a youth stripped of a horizon of hope, justice, transformation, and the common good. At the same time, job precarity, uncertainty, loneliness, and the continual succession of crises generate a climate of discontent and rage that explodes “against everything” and aligns with far-right proposals (Forti, 2021; Moreno, 2018; Pors & Kishik, 2023).

Like Waldo’s proposals, in real life, the ideological platforms of far-right politics offer spectacle and hostility instead of solutions. They appropriate the pain of a generation that perceives the future as a blocked horizon, selling the illusion that

mockery and empty rupture will suffice to change the situation or, at least, to channel anger. But, as the participants' accounts reveal, this shock effect lasts only as long as the shout of rage; in the end, precarity, anxiety, and the absence of real alternatives return, confirming the lack of emancipatory projects, as Brown (2019) denounces.

In this way, the idea of the cancellation of the future (Fisher, 2016) and the temptation of retrotopia (Bauman, 2017) are reinforced: young people who join these far-right proposals tend to take refuge in an idealized past as an alternative to an unstable present and a future without promises—one that, far from addressing systemic inequality, would reinforce authoritarian solutions and social division (Rizzi, 2025).

However, there is a counterweight to Waldo's cynicism and frivolity. The voices of young people also reveal a desire to overcome resignation: they yearn for a future that reclaims empathy, collective care, and the promise of genuine transformation. Although they encounter rigid structures and a present saturated with catastrophes (Adam, 2023; Berardi, 2019), we continue to see their determination to mobilize (climate activism, housing protests, solidarity initiatives), which shows that paralysis and hopelessness are not the only possible destinies. These cracks in "capitalist realism" demonstrate, as Mouffe (2018) argues, the potential of democratic passion to reopen political imagination.

Within this tension—between Waldo's dangerous, absolutist drift and youth mobilization—beats, ultimately, the pulse of our time. If reality is reduced to a sarcastic spectacle that dazzles but does not transform, we risk surrendering entirely to the logic of no-future (Bazzani, 2022; Fisher, 2016). On the other hand, if the critical energy of youth can be articulated into effective networks of participation, the fissures of the present could open towards a tomorrow that, far from being a mere noisy joke, recovers the value of the common good and the strength of hope. In short, the future is not closed off as long as there are those willing to imagine and claim it—even when everything around seems to lack meaning. In that sense, the last word does not belong to Waldo and his mockery: it belongs to those who defend and strive for a future of hope and solidarity.

Along these hopeful lines, higher education must rethink its goals and logic through a pedagogy of hope, turning learning spaces (courses, fieldwork, pedagogical references) into arenas of ideological contestation and critical construction—not only to train for participation in a changing society and labor market, but also to respond collectively, in solidarity, justly, and empathetically to the social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental challenges shaping the present of young people (Giroux & Proasi, 2025). If the far right has managed to capitalize on frustration and the lack of expectations, it will be essential to reopen political imagination and offer, through teaching and critical reflection, horizons that acknowledge precarity and distress but are oriented towards building a common future based on solidarity, social justice, and the common good (Saura, 2021). Making room for hope and commitment is

not naïve; it is a necessity to counteract the pull of resignation and cynicism. In this way, we can restore to young people the certainty that “another world” is still possible (Giroux & Figueiredo, 2025).

REFERENCES

- Adam, B. (2023). Futures Imperfect: A Reflection on Challenges. *Sociology*, 57(2), 279-287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385221113478>
- Åkerstrøm, N., & Grønbaek, J. (2023). Transformation and potentialization: how to extend the present and produce possibilities? *Kybernetes*, 52(12), 5893-5908. <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-03-2022-0315>
- Ask, K., & Abidin, C. (2018). My life is a mess: Self-deprecating relatability and collective identities in the memification of student issues. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(6), 834-850. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1437204>
- Bauman, Z. (2017). *Retrotopia*. Polity Press.
- Bazzani, G. (2022). Futures in Action: Expectations, Imaginaries and Narratives of the Future. *Sociology*, 57(2), 382-397. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385221138010>
- Berardi, F. (2019). *Futurability: The age of impotence and the horizon of possibility*. Verso.
- Betancor, G. (2025). Del ciclo 15M a la extrema derecha. Un análisis de las dinámicas de movilización en la última década en España (2015-2024). In *Sociedades en acción: Contienda política y movilizaciones en tiempos de incertidumbre* (pp. 59-89). Tirant Humanidades.
- Betancor, G., Gómez, E., & Agudo, Y. (2024). Activismos juveniles: debates para abordar la acción colectiva juvenil en un mundo en transformación. *Recerca*, 29(2). <https://doi.org/10.6035/recerca.8436>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brown, W. (2019). *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. Columbia University Press.
- Carmona, C., & Padilla, J. (2018, septiembre 16). Usted lo que necesita no es un psicólogo sino un sindicato. *El Salto*. <http://bit.ly/43G1cyg>
- Chadwick, R. (2017). Embodied methodologies: challenges, reflections and strategies. *Qualitative Research*, 17(1), 54-74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794116656035>
- Chateau, L. (2020). “Damn I didn’t know Y’aa was sad? I thought it was just memes”: Irony, memes and risk in Internet depression culture. *Journal Media Culture*, 23(3), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1654>
- Coleman, R., & Lyon, D. (2023). Recalibrating everyday futures during the COVID-19 pandemic: Futures fissured, on standby and reset in mass observation responses. *Sociology*, 57(2), 421-437. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385231156651>
- Cortés-González, P., Rivas-Flores, J. I., Márquez-García, M. J., & González-Alba, B. (2020). Resistencia contrahegemónica para la transformación escolar en el contexto neoliberal. El caso del instituto de educación secundaria Esmeralda en Andalucía. *Izquierdas*, 50, 2351-2377.

- Davies, J. (2021). *Sedated: How modern capitalism created our mental health crisis*. Atlantic Books.
- Díez Gutiérrez, E. J. (2018). *Neoliberalismo educativo*. Octaedro.
- Díez Gutiérrez, E. J. (2022). *Pedagogía Antifascista*. Octaedro.
- Díez Gutiérrez, E. J. (2025). *Emprendimiento o emprendedurismo educativo: Educar en las reglas del capitalismo: la nueva guerra cognitiva neoliberal en educación*. Miño y Dávila.
- Díez Gutiérrez, E. J., & Jarquín, M. (2025). Políticas educativas de la extrema derecha en Europa: ¿La conformación de una Internacional de Ultraderecha en Educación mediante una agenda común? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 33. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.33.8848>
- Facer, K. (2016). Using the Future in Education: Creating Space for Openness, Hope and Novelty. In H. E. Lees & N. Noddings (Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Alternative Education* (pp. 63-78). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Fisher, M. (2016). *Realismo capitalista: ¿no hay alternativa?* Caja Negra.
- Forti, S. (2021). *Extrema derecha 2.0: Qué es y cómo combatirla*. Siglo XXI.
- Fraser, N. (2010). Injustice at Intersecting Scales: On 'Social Exclusion' and the 'Global Poor'. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 13(3), 363-371.
- Gil, J., & Iordache, L. (2023). Entre el neofascismo y el populismo. La derecha antisistema en España, 1976-2022. *Estudios-Centro de Estudios Avanzados. Universidad Nacional de Córdoba*, 49, 75-93.
- Giroux, H., & Figueiredo, G. (2025). Fascismo neoliberal e mercantilização das universidades norteamericanas: repressão à liberdade de expressão e os movimentos de resistência estudantil. *Práxis Educativa*, 20, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.5212/PraxEduc.v.20.24156.001>
- Giroux, H., & Fillippakou, O. (2021). El papel de la educación contra las políticas fascistas en tiempos difíciles. In *Educación crítica e inclusiva en una sociedad poscapitalista* (pp. 197-211). Octaedro.
- Giroux, H., & Proasi, L. (2025). La necesidad de la pedagogía crítica en Tiempos Oscuros. *Revista de Educación: Argentina*, 34, 37-42. https://fh.mdp.edu.ar/revistas/index.php/r_educ/index
- González-Calvo, G. (2025). Teacher Identity and Neoliberalism: An Auto-Netnographic Exploration of the Public Education Crisis. *European Journal of Education*, 60(1), e12910. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12910>
- Han, B. C. (2024). *El espíritu de la esperanza*. Herder.
- Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, R. E., Mayall, E. E., ... van Susteren, L. (2021). Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(12), e863-e873. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00278-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00278-3)
- Innerarity, D. (2024). *Política para perplejos*. Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Julien, K. (2022). Using Memes as an Elicitation Tool: The interview prompt you didn't know you needed. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(9), 1816-1827. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5640>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

- Lordon, F. (2025). Fascismo, una definición: Ascenso de la extrema derecha. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 354, 25.
- Mavelli, L. (2024). The unbearable lightness of neoliberalism: Monsters, ghosts, and the poetics of neoliberal infrastructures. *Political Geography*, 111, 103108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2024.103108>
- McLaren, P. (2015). Pedagogía crítica y lucha de clases en la era del terror neoliberal. *Revista Internacional de Educación para la Justicia Social*, 4(2), 29-66. <http://doi.org/10.15366/riejs2015.4.2>
- McNamara, M., Barondeau, J., & Brown, J. (2024). Mental Health, Climate Change, and Bodily Autonomy: An Analysis of Adolescent Health Policy in the Post-Pandemic Climate. *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, 71(4), 729-744. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2024.05.004>
- Michael, M. (2017). Enacting big futures, little futures: Toward an ecology of futures. *The Sociological Review Magazine*, 65(3), 509-524.
- Moreno, J. (2018). *No tengo tiempo: Geografías de la precariedad*. Akal.
- Mouffe, C. (2018). *For a Left Populism*. Verso.
- Mudde, C. (2019). *The Far Right Today*. Polity.
- Oxfam (2024). *Multilateralism in an Era of Global Oligarchy*. Oxfam
- Pors, J. G., & Kishik, S. (2023). Future-making in an Uncertain World: The Presence of an Open Future in Danish Young Women's Lives. *Sociology*, 57(2), 398-414. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385231156065>
- Renault, E., & Vega, S. (2025). Democratizar el trabajo para radicalizar la democracia. *Las Torres de Lucca: revista internacional de filosofía política*, 14(1), 131-140. <https://doi.org/10.5209/ltld.99123>
- Rigal, L., Zinger, S., & Patagua, P. E. (2023). Pedagogías críticas: el desafío de la formación de subjetividades rebeldes. *Revista Práxis Educativa*, 19(50) e12043. <https://doi.org/10.22481/praxisedu.v19i50.12043>
- Rizzi, A. (2025). *La era de la revancha*. Anagrama.
- Robb, A., Jindal-Snape, D., & Levy, S. (2020). Art in my world: Exploring the visual art experiences in the everyday lives of young children and their impact on cultural capital. *Children & Society*, n/a(n/a). <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12392>
- Rocamora Pérez, P., & Espinar-Ruiz, E. (2021). Nuevos discursos en el neofascismo: un análisis cualitativo de la organización española Hogar Social. *Política y Sociedad*, 58(2), e67922. <https://doi.org/10.5209/poso.67922>
- Saura, G. (2021). Políticas aceleradas/mundo ensamblado. Ritmos, contextos y actores en educación. *Foro de Educación*, 19(1), 135-158. <http://doi.org/10.14516/fde.892>
- Saura, G., & Moreno, J. L. (2016). Prácticas neoliberales de endo-privatización y nuevas formas de resistencia colectiva en el contexto de la política educativa española. *Revista Educación, Política y Sociedad*, 1(2), 43-72. <https://doi.org/10.15366/rep2016.1.2.002>
- Sparkes, A., & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative Research Methods in Sport, Exercise and Health: From Process to Product*. Routledge.
- Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 11(2), 63-75. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ1102063>

- Tanuro, D. (2025). Ecología reaccionaria y extrema derecha. *Mientras Tanto*, 242.
- Weber, S. (2024). La paradoja de la apropiación del discurso antisistema por la extrema derecha brasileña: análisis de la argumentación en el discurso político de Jair Bolsonaro. *Signo y seña*, 46, 151-170. <https://doi.org/10.34096/sys.n46.14358>
- Zafra, R. (2017). *El entusiasmo. Precariedad y trabajo creativo en la era digital*. Anagrama.
- Zafra, R. (2021). *Frágiles: Cartas sobre la ansiedad y la esperanza en la nueva cultura*. Anagrama.