Mapping of VET educational policies and practices for social inclusion and social cohesion in the Western Balkans, Turkey and Israel

Country report: Turkey

A project implemented with the support of LSE Enterprise

AUTHORS

Prof. Serdar SAYAN
Professor of Economics and Director of the Centre
TOBB University of Economics & Technology
Center for Social Policy Studies
E-mail: serdar.sayan@etu.edu.tr

Dr Basak YAVÇAN
Assistant Professor of Political Science amd Vice Director of the Centre
TOBB University of Economics & Technology
Center for Social Policy Studies
E-mail: basakyavcan@etu.edu.tr

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TURKEY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the field study conducted in Turkey as part of a comparative study titled "Mapping of VET educational policies and practices for social inclusion and social cohesion". In order to understand the main issues in Turkish Vocational Education system in relation to social inclusion, this research team maps the state of VET in Turkey regarding general education system and in relation to different school. The focus of this research project is Vocational High Schools, which incorporate Technical Schools, Tourism Schools, Trade Schools, and Preacher Schools. Upon laying out the main framework and main issues in relation to social exclusion, the report outlines its methodology in detail and lays out the results of about (90) ninety interviews conducted with local and national level policy makers including members of the Turkish Parliament, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, National Ministry of Education, Turkish Employment Agency, NGOs, research think tanks, schools, several focus groups and student and teacher surveys. Based on the main problem areas and suggestions of the policy makers, the report points out to the possible ways these issues could be ameliorated.

The mixed methods analysis conducted point out that while all national and local policy makers set the goal of improving the quality and reputation of VET in Turkey, they foresee different methods to this end resulting in different groups to be socially excluded. Therefore the main debates on this vision centre around 1) how and how much to involve the business, 2) where to convey VET, 3) how to improve guidance mechanisms and 4) where to make policy –whether locally or centrally.

The results of the extensive interviews point out that like in many countries where this research is conducted, the poor reputation of VET in Turkey stems from VET students being from lower socio-economic backgrounds and mostly with poor academic performance. With regards to selection, this is coupled with a lack of centralized skills test before entering into VET schools and lack of proper guidance. With regards to placing students in specialized departments, while there are some indicators/tests utilized by some schools for some fields, there is a lack of centralized policy to ensure tracking. With regards to minimizing dropouts, the new education law of 4+4+4 obliges drop outs to enrol in open high school, yet it does not involve any specific actions to prevent high risk students from quitting. Here again, our interviews indicate some model policies developed by some schools and NGOs based on ensuring better guidance and coaching these students. Finally, with regards to apprenticeships

and job placement, VET students and graduates have some hardships due to the high social value placed on university education and lack of stronger ties between their schools and local businesses.

In the light of these findings, in our conclusions we suggest various policy options for schools, NGOs, and government and local policy makers. Specifically, we point out the possible ways to increase efficient guidance and coaching for students both locally and nationally. We also propose empowering local policy makers as they are better suited with dealing with their specific advantages and disadvantages resulting from diverse geographies and levels of economic development. Finally, we propose closer, long lasting and mutual ties between business and schools to address the skills mismatches.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational Education Training is of historical importance for Turkey and dates back to the Ottoman Empire where vocations were taught in the traditional way from master to apprentice. With the impact of the industrial revolution, while still uncentralized, vocational education was brought within a schooling discipline. However the actual underpinnings of the current centralized system of vocational training were implemented with the creation of the Turkish Republic.

The National Ministry of Education of the new republic assumed responsibility for efforts to standardize the vocational education system across the country in 1926. These efforts were augmented with a government act requiring the central state authorities to pay all of the expenses of the vocational schools across the country. In 1923 the existing 20 schools had about 2,558 pupils. Following a gradual yet major increase, there are currently 5,155 schools educating about two million students.

The emphasis put on domestic industrial production in achieving economic development in Turkey added special importance to vocational training. A major jump in opening vocational training schools took place during the 1940's and 1950's as a way to educate technical personnel for newly opened factories across the country. As a result of this historical perspective, vocational education carries a symbolic importance for the public and decision makers. This is evident in every attempt to change the system, resulting in controversial public debates. A fine example of this discourse is the motto of a project providing funding to vocational schools and promoting participation in a nationwide innovation competition, called "Meslek Lisesi, Memleket Meselesi", which translates as "Vocational High Schools are a Homeland Matter".

This report will evaluate the current structure of education in Turkey in relation to where Vocational Education stands in relation to social inclusion. Currently, a large majority of vocational training is offered by the Vocational Education High Schools. Therefore, this report will exclusively focus on these institutions. The following figure illustrates the vocational high school as well as other tracks of the vocational and technical education system. It is also worth mentioning that lately, some private courses as well as joint initiatives of various government and local agencies assume some vocational training activities.

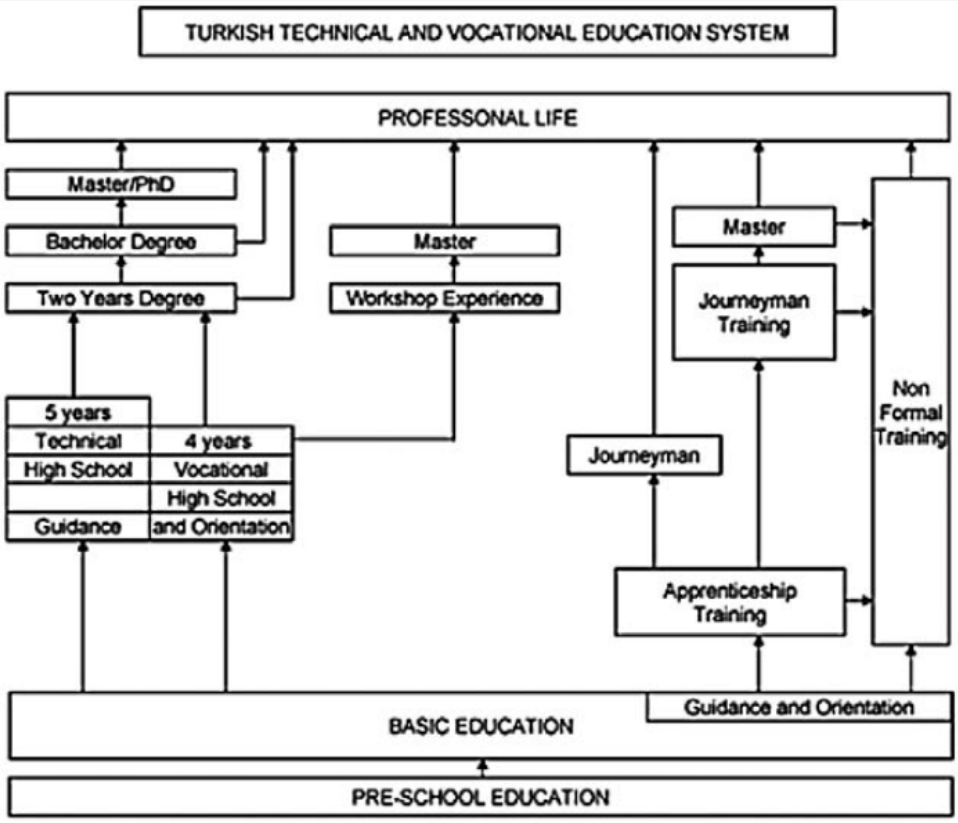


FIGURE 1: TURKISH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the remainder of this report, the current state of VET in relation to the challenges posed will be evaluated, followed by the analysis of the institutional framework for vocational education. Upon evaluating the current policy debates on reforming the system, the methodology for this project will be laid out in relation to the specific research goals. Following that, the findings of the field research regarding the 5 research tasks will be evaluated. Finally, policy recommendations for institutions at various levels will be made based on the findings of this research project.

1. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND THE POLICY PROCESS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

1.1 Situation analysis

Despite its historical importance and recent efforts for its reform, VET in Turkey suffers from major issues. Some of these relate to a larger set of problems affecting all secondary education institutions such as short-sighted government policies and frequent changes in the education system affecting both students and teachers. Several reports by independent organizations as well as interviews conducted with the national level policy makers point out to this issue and complain about the sudden changes of the system without pilot applications. The following sections will evaluate specific issues in the light of these changes.

1.1.1 Problems of Basic Education

As evaluated further in section 1.2 in relation to the institutional framework, there are major deficiencies in the delivering of basic education skills to students in many vocational schools. This has to do with their emphasis on vocational training, which naturally takes place at the expense of academic training. There is a shortage of competent science and mathematics teachers. Furthermore, due to the selection process at the end of 8th grade, more prestigious and academically oriented high schools recruit students with better skills, leaving the rest to the vocational high schools. Being deprived of basic skills in these areas, students have a hard time building higher skills. This creates a major problem for their career enhancement as the scarce quality higher education institutions and young population in Turkey require a national level placement examination. Unfortunately, vocational school students generally score badly in this exam and end up not being placed in a university.

1.1.2. A poor relation between education and employment i.e. skills mismatch

Another problem of vocational training in Turkey is due to skills mismatch between the skills students have to offer upon graduation and the skills firms demand for recruitment. One reason for this is the lack of resources and technologically advanced equipment at the vocational schools. Another reason is the lack of up-to-date training of the educators. A more systematic reason is the lack of flexibility in adapting to the changing national comparative advantages resulting from globalization. For instance, Turkey's comparative advantage in textile industry changed dramatically once China entered the global market, leaving those Turkish firms and trained labour force at odds with the new market structure. Unfortunately, the heavy and centralized machinery of the Turkish VET system has not been quick to adapt to these changes. However, several national and international projects aim at instilling this dynamism into the system by allowing schools to establish closer ties with their

community, as well as with local trade and commerce unions, and initiate their own teaching modules and curricula.

1.1.3 The reputation problem

One of the important problems of the VET system in Turkey is that of reputation. Academic knowledge and education is generally better appreciated by the public and this perception informs the opinion of many parents, students and educational guidance teachers. University education is considered the most preferred career option regardless of the student's actual skill set and career aspirations. As vocational schools do not give students sufficient academic education, they are seen as inferior and as a last resort for weaker achieving school students. This is also why only 35% of high school students attend these schools, which is quite low compared to many EU countries.

1.1.4 Social exclusion

While the aforementioned issues afflict most vocational training high schools including teachers and students at different levels, there are certain groups within these schools that face additional problems. The students who receive vocational training tend to come from low-income families, who need immediate employment to remedy their financial needs. As a function of this low-income status, these schools become a refuge for the children of separated families, orphans, and disabled students. In other words, these schools are overpopulated by disadvantaged groups, which either lack a community support network or resourceful immediate relatives. This creates: firstly, a group of uninterested students who would rather be at a different school; and secondly, an unhealthy environment for their concentration due to an environment with higher ratio of acts requiring disciplinary action.

The changes introduced by the central government further add to these groups. Women are one of these groups. For instance, until recently, the graduates of the Child Development and Education Programme were allowed to become pre-school teachers after a two-year higher education training where they used to get preferential placement. This is a programme mostly preferred by female students. With the new changes introduced into the education system, only four-year university graduates were allowed to practice pre-school teaching. This change not only blocked one of the popular tracks for future students, but with its immediate application to all students, it heavily disadvantaged the current students who had already chosen this track.

To sum up the vulnerable or socially excluded groups we identified within the Turkish VET case are:

1. Persons with low socio-economic status; expected to have hard time with selection and maintaining studies
2. Persons with special need; have special quotas yet hard time maintaining studies and internships
3. Those without a family; expected to have hard time with guidance and maintaining studies
4. Women at selection and maintaining studies due to social gender role based education system

It is important to note that, throughout the desk and field research of this study, the research team was aware of the possibility of other ethnic or religious groups such as Kurdish, Alevi or Roma population to be social excluded. Therefore, interviewees were reminded of these groups with regards to their possible social exclusion in the VET system. Due to confirmation from various policy makers across the political spectrum, it is confirmed these groups are not particularly excluded in the VET high schools, rather the particularly vulnerable groups are the abovementioned four.

1.2 The institutional framework for vocational education

Currently, formal education in Turkey is governed by the Ministry of National Education, which includes pre-school education, primary education and secondary education. The secondary education system can be classified as General High Schools, Social Science High Schools, Anatolian[1] High Schools, Anatolian Teacher High Schools, Anatolian Arts and Sports High Schools, Science High Schools, Vocational and Technical High Schools, as well as Private High Schools. Currently all vocational schools are governed by the Vocational and Technical Education Directorate under the Ministry of National Education. This directorate is responsible for curriculum development, course book preparation and providing various education tools needed in Vocational Schools.

Students in Turkey may choose vocational high schools after completing the 8-year-long compulsory primary education. However, most students take a National Placement Exam in order to continue their education in more prestigious Anatolian or Science High Schools which are selective in their recruitment and base their judgement solely on students' scores from this national exam. This first led to most vocational schools being populated with students with very low scores and low school

[1] The term "Anatolian" refers to the special emphasis put on foreign language education

performance. To deal with this, some vocational schools opened sub-category schools within their premises such as Anatolian Vocational High School, which try to amalgamate vocational training with academic training. This way they could recruit students with somewhat higher scores. Nevertheless, students with low or no scores still constitute the majority of their students.

Vocation high schools operate in five major groups:

- Male Technical Education High schools including Industrial Vocation and Technical High schools with common departments such as Information Technologies, Automotive, Civil Structure, Electronics, Electric, Levelling, and Moulding
- Female Technical Education High schools with common departments such as Child Development and Education, Graphics and Photography, Food Technology, Tailoring, Leather Technology
- Trade and Tourism Education High schools focusing on trade, finance, accounting, marketing
- Religious Education Schools focusing on Imam and Preacher education as well as Quran Course teachers.
- Health Education Schools with departments focusing on Nursing, Midwifery, Health Clerk education.

There is a compulsory internship every year except during the freshmen year (9th grade) of high school. To be able to graduate, students should complete a total of 300 hours of internship at various companies and be evaluated on their internship reports by schoolteachers.

Upon completing their education, vocational high school graduates may pursue two-year polytechnic courses or may continue with a related tertiary degree. However, their focus on vocational training, which requires long hours teaching time in workshops, results in fewer hours of classes for basic courses such as maths and sciences. This in return heavily affects students' National University Entrance Exams (YGS) and results in lower scores, which aggravates their higher education placement. Nevertheless, if these students want to pursue higher education in the 2-year polytechnics corresponding to their high school specialization areas, it is only based on their high school grades.

As mentioned earlier, the Ministry of National Education is heavily involved in decisions and policies affecting the operation of the Vocational School System including curriculum, placement, teacher training etc. There are recent developments that created some level of decentralization by giving the local units and vocational schools some autonomy in interacting with their community. One of these

is the implementation of a European Union (EU) funded project called "Strengthening Vocational Education and Training". This project aims at establishing a more qualified VET through various activities ranging from developing training standards and VET modules to training school principals, teachers as well as students. Being implemented in a total of 145 pilot institutions in 30 provinces with a budget of 58.2 million Euros, this project allowed High Schools with a more flexible module selection and up-to-date training.

1.3 The policy process and the policy debate

The historical importance of vocational high schools together with the challenges Turkish VET faces creates a vivid policy debate at the national level. While some of the policy priorities relate to improving the quality of education at these schools, others address ways to situate these schools vis-à-vis other educational institutions. The following points evaluate the most visible policy issues currently discussed in the media, among academics and policy makers.

1.3.1 Problem of Lower Status

Solving the reputation problems of VET schools is not an overnight endeavour. There is an awareness of the importance of this aspect and the priority to this end of the need for multiple levels of governance and private sector need to be involved in this quality improvement goal. Current debates for increasing the status of the VET system in Turkey centre around achieving this by adopting the German and Austrian VET systems as a model where commerce unions assume a big responsibility in the process. Indeed, all the policy makers interviewed for this project had visited model institutions (vocational schools) in these two countries. Regardless of party affiliation/ideology, for all politicians interviewed, the collaboration between the business and education is seen as a prerequisite for an efficient labour market and exchange between vocational education institutions and industry. This vision is also supported by various national and EU projects across the country. This trend can not only remedy the low status and bad reputation problems but it should also bring Turkish and EU VET closer, thereby better integrating their labour markets.

1.3.2. Life-Long Learning

The fast pace of today's world, changing technology and production processes as well as merging world markets require all members of the society to be well educated and equipped to deal with changes. The days of spending a lifetime with one vocation, one job, in one company seem to be over.

Hence, vocational training should adapt to this dynamic structure. The current trend in Turkish vocational training debates and policies is to find ways to create this adaptation. More and more vocational high schools are cooperating with industry for acquiring new equipment in return for training potential or existing employees that would suit the employer's needs. This takes vocational training to a new dimension of lifelong training, benefiting those whose skills are either out of date or no longer in need.

One of these cooperation schemes called UMEM (Specialized Vocational Training Centres Project) is partnered by TOBB ETÜ Centre for Social Policy Research, with TOBB (Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges), İŞKUR (Turkish Employment Agency), and vocational high schools as part of the MEB (Ministry of National Education). Following the collection by this project of data regarding the skill sets required by TOBB member firms, vocational high schools announced the opening of new courses to be attended by unemployed people registered at İŞKUR. During their theoretical and practical training of a total of about 6 months, unemployed students are incorporated into the Turkish Social Security system, are paid about 25 Turkish Lira per day (equivalent of 10 Euros), and are offered guaranteed employment. Vocational schools get new equipment and laboratories as well as extra pay for their teachers and finally firms get a 3 to 5 year waiver from their Social Security system contributions. In the 18 months since the beginning of implementation, about 25,000 unemployed were included in the labour force. The success of this and similar projects not only increases the importance of vocational training and life-long education, but also creates a collaboration norm much needed to improve labour standards.

1.3.3. Problem of Imam Hatip (Preacher) Schools

In Turkey, Imam Hatip schools are considered a part of the vocational education system and are governed by the same structure as the secular VET schools. First of all, the purpose of education in these schools is to train religious personnel for various private and public institutions. Therefore, substantially their training is neither vocational nor technical and this makes this categorization questionable. Furthermore, the secularist/Islamist polarization in Turkish politics highly reflects on the issue due to the government-funded structure of these public schools and their increasing numbers. Situating Imam Hatip Schools together within the VET complicates all efforts to change or reform the system. Currently, there are efforts to disentangle these two issues in order to save VET from this deadlocked and politicized policy area.

2. VET PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SOCIAL COHESION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

This section sets out the main research findings from the participatory action research at the level of the three case study schools/localities

2.1 Methodology

Per overseen by the LSE research team, the general methodological approach incorporates in-depth face to face interviews, focus groups with dropped out students and surveys with teachers and students. [2]

With regards to the in depth interviews, upon identifying the main actors, the research team divided the pool of potential interviewees into 3 levels and yielding to a total of 88 interviews. The first level consists of policy makers whose action towards VET is targeted at the national level. While some of these actors are ministry officers, the team also interviewed officials from the Turkish Chamber of Commerce and Commodity exchanges, several think tanks, and representatives of large companies involved in social responsibility projects concerning VET. Last but not least, taking advantage of our location in the capital of Turkey and considering the high politicization of the issue of VET reform, we interviewed a member of the Turkish Parliament from each party in the National Assembly.

[2] Due to the change of the Turkish Minister of National Education, the permissions for the surveys took longer than expected. Therefore, we will only be able to include their analysis in the second draft.

1st LEVEL		2nd LEVEL		3rd LEVEL -Schools			
	Ministry of National Education		**Provincial National Education Directorate**		**Alumni Association**		**Dropped-out Students**
1)	Mr. Yaşar	**1)**	Ankara, Mr. Fikret	**1**	K.Yali VET, Mr. Ramazan	**50**	Ceyda (K.yali)
2)	Ms. Özlem	**2)**	Istanbul, Mr. Erol		**VET Center**	**51**	Kara Esengül(K.yali)
	Members of the Parliament		**Local T. Emp. Office Branches**	**2**	Director, Mr. Tamer	**52**	Songul (AKM)
3)	Justice and Development Party(AKP)	**4)**	Istanbul, Mr. Erol	**3**	Director, Mr. Turgay	**53**	Mirac (AKM)
4)	Republican People's Party (CHP)	**5)**	Istanbul, Mr. Selçuk		**The Cham Craftsmen and Artisans**		**Graduate Students**
5)	Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)	**6)**	Ankara, Ms. Oya	**4**	Director, Mr. Yunus	**54**	Ümit
6)	Peace and Democracy Party (BDP)		**Local Chamber of Trade**	**7**	**Principals (3 total)**	**55**	Remzi
	Union of Chambers (TOBB)	**7)**	Dep. Secretary General, Mr. Selçuk	**10**	**3 Counselors from each school**	**56**	Eda
7)	Vice Specialist, Mr. Saygın		**Local Chamber of Industry**	**40**	**Teachers (10 from each school)**	**57**	Ezgi
8)	Specialist, Ms. Esin	**8)**	Dep. Secretary General, Ms. Oya		**Interns' Workplace of schools**	**58**	Rukiye
	Education Reform Initiative (ERG)	**9)**	ISO Specialist, Mr. Hakan	**41**	Hairdresser, Mr. Özgür	**59**	Büşra
9)	Coordinator, Batuhan		**Turkish Employment Organization (İŞKUR)**	**42**	Prosthetist, Mr. İlhan		**Existing Students**
	Economic Policy Research Fnd.(Tepav)	**10)**	Provincial Director (IST), Mr. Muammer	**43**	Industrialist, Mr. Nusret	**60**	Koc Scholar Kyali
10)	Researcher, Ms. Idil		**Training Managers and Professionals Assc.**	**44**	Automotive, Manager Mr. Metin	**61**	Intern Motor
	Koç Holding	**11)**	Mr. Adem	**45**	Automotive, Headworker	**62**	Koç Scholar student
11)	Specialist, Ms. Burcu		**Ostim The Center of Education Counseling(ODEM)**	**46**	Automotive, Worker		**School Family Union**
	Turkish Industry and Business Assc.	**12)**	Ms. Burcu	**47**	Shoemaker, Volkan	**63**	K.yali
12)	Ms. Ebru			**48**	Florist, Muhammer	**64**	AKM
				49	Automotive, K.yali		

Our second level is defined as those involved in the policymaking at the province level in Ankara and Istanbul. These actors include local branches of Ministry of National Education, Employment Agency, teachers' unions, chambers of trade and industry. The research team allocated maximum effort to identify and interview the key actors including members of Province Employment and Vocational Education Boards and governors of organized industry sites.

Finally, our third level consists of those associated with the selected schools. Naturally, principles, teachers, counsellors are the primary interviewees. Nevertheless, based on the desk research and advisory board meetings conducted by the research team, we also interviewed alumni associations, graduates of the selected schools, and members of the school family unions. In addition, as dropout is the major part of social exclusion, in addition to the focus groups we conducted with dropped out students, we also held a few face-to-face interviews with them. One of the career tracks dropouts pursue upon quitting school is getting enrolled in apprenticeship schools, the so-called "VET Centres". We therefore interviewed principles of those centres. Finally, in order to gain a better insight of the schools' connections with businesses as a way provide their students with internships and a smoother transition to the work place, we interviewed owners, interns, and workers –with a degree from the designated school, of the affiliated companies.

As briefly mentioned above, our next methodological tool was focus groups. While initially considered for bringing together government officials with schools and businesses, the reluctance of actors to participate in an open discussion as such as well as to reveal their true opinions under pressure from other actors made the research team believe that face-to-face interviews better fit to this endeavour. Focus group methodology on the other hand, appeared to be a better fit to be conducted with groups consisting of peers in this cultural context. As reasons for drop out and schools' methods for coping with it is considered one of the five research tasks and none of the overseen data collection tools targeted drop outs, when possible, focus groups were conducted with students who dropped out. Two of them being in Istanbul and the other two in Ankara, altogether four focus groups were conducted with these former students. The sizes of these groups varied between 5-10 individuals. Dropped out students were encouraged to engage in a conversation with their past experiences at their respective institutions, their reasons for quitting, their current life, and reflect on their past behaviour.

Finally, the student and teachers surveys provided by the LSE Enterprise were translated and implemented to the national setting. Thirty teachers' surveys were conducted in each school yielding to a total of 90. With regards to the students, 100 surveys with students at different years of schooling were conducted in each school yielding to a total of 300 surveys.

2.1.1 Choice of schools

For the fieldwork of this study three vocational schools have been selected. Two of these schools are located in Ankara. Considering the different and more advanced nature of the labour-industry relations in more developed parts of the country, one school is selected from Istanbul. It has been noted that Many think tanks and big industries dealing with VET are located in Istanbul and there is a large variety of businesses actively engaged with VET. Furthermore, in order to capture the different challenges faced by female and male students, one of the schools is populated predominantly by girls, while the other two are populated predominantly by males.

These 3 schools are:

1. Girls' Vocational School, Ankara (Ataturk Kiz Meslek Lisesi)
    - Well performing school
    - Variety of departments, ranging from design to food processing
    - Well integrated with the industry and internationally
2. Industrial Vocational School, Ankara (Kecioren Endustri Meslek Lisesi)
    - Medium to poor performing school
    - Medium integration with the industry and internationally
3. Boys' Industrial Vocational School, Istanbul (Kucukyali Endustri Meslek Lisesi)
    - Well performing school
    - Very well integrated with the industry and internationally (approximately 20 projects being coordinated at the moment)

As noted above two of the schools are well performing schools in terms of placement of graduates and naturally resulting in a high demand from the graduates of basic level education. These schools are important in terms of their proactive efforts to ensure social inclusion, patterns of their relations with the private sector, efforts to increase their quality of education, international collaboration and ways to promote high-level social activities for their students. Of these schools, Girls' Vocational School has very low dropout rates and Boys' vocational school in Istanbul has various policies to deal with drop out.

Regarding their inclusion policies, these schools constitutes pioneers for the other schools in their region and their practices are being adopted by local branches of National Ministry of Education to be improved and spread to other schools. To sum up, in order to analyse what they do right to ensure this high performance and how they in return deal with a fair selection process, it was essential to select these well performing schools.

With regards to the Boys' Industrial School in Ankara, it is a rather poor performing school with regards to inclusion and maintaining high standards. Nevertheless it is well connected with industry. This school has high rates of drop out and faces challenges regarding institutional capacity and infrastructure. The inclusion of this school is essential to create variation on inclusion as well as provides avenues for further investigate issues facing the students.

Finally, these schools provide diverse areas of specialization ranging from more industrial fields such as welding, furniture making, and motor in Industrial schools to more design oriented fields such as flower cutting, shoe design in the Girls' school.

In terms of their similarities, these schools show great interest in international cooperation to increase the quality of their education. They are also all located in what may be called, rough neighbourhoods of the city with major socioeconomic rooted criminal tensions. Therefore, their selection ensured a chance to observe their coping as well as integration mechanisms with their surrounding areas

2.1.2 Formation of advisory boards at national and local level

At the beginning of the project, upon selecting the schools, National Advisory Board has been formed and held its first meeting on December 6th 2012. This board consisted of a representative of Ministry of Education Directorate General for Vocational and Technical Education, Principles of Selected Schools[3], a representative from Turkish Chambers of Commerce and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), Department of Vocational Education, an external researcher working on the topic (Assistant Professor Dr. Adem Cilek), as well as the entire research team.[4]

The board held 3 meetings at the premises of TOBB University of Economics and Technology and every meeting lasted about 3 to 4 hours. In these meetings the board;

- Helped canvassing the system and important actors involved in the policy making process
- Reviewed major issues to be focused on

[3] Videoconferencing has been arranged for the participation of the Principal of the Vocational School in Istanbul
[4] In addition to the Board meetings, several meetings have been held with ministry representatives and school principles to get advice for the research methodology and recruitment of interviewees.

- Advised on coping with major challenges
- Reviewed interview questionnaires
- Reviewed student and teacher questionnaire in relation to their context appropriateness
- Reviewed/advised on contact points for interviews,
- Helped collecting national level data
- Helped recruit teachers, students, drop-outs

2.2 Situation analysis (in the case study areas)

As elaborated in detail in the aforementioned section, the three schools the research team selected are located in two different big cities in Turkey. One of them is in the most industrialized part of the country, Istanbul, while the other two is in the capital, Ankara. In both cities, local skills development system is occupied by similar actors. Due to the more industrialized nature of Istanbul, the businesses in this city are a lot more involved and demanding in vocational training.

The Boys' Industrial School in Istanbul is located in the Asian side of the city, close to many industrial developments. It is surrounded by companies such as technical services for the major car companies, chemical, food production and processing factories, construction areas as well as smaller enterprises. In terms of its neighbourhood, the school is close to the city centre, yet, surrounded by a newly developed residential area mostly populated by internal immigrants from other parts of the country as well as some Roma. The school is very actively engaged with the local chambers of commerce, industries, artisans and craftsmen. It has also close ties with the business and apprenticeship schools. There are about two thousand students specializing in fields within one of the following main areas: Information Technologies, Electric and Electronic Technologies, Vehicles with Engines Technologies, Chemical Technologies, and Construction Technologies. The school has an Anadolu Meslek Lisesi (Gymnasium VET) track, Technical track, and a General Vocational School track.

The Girls' Technical and Vocational School of Ankara is located in one of the most central parts of the old city. It is in a rather rough neighbourhood surrounded by a small number of arts and crafts companies and several adult nightclubs and bars. It is one of the oldest vocational schools in Turkey established in 1928,with a very strong institutional culture. It has about 130 teachers and 1214 students. As a result of this historical role, the school is well integrated with its community and neighbourhood, well connected especially with the local branch of the chamber of trade. Established as an arts school initially, in addition to technical fields such as Information Technologies, Electric and Electronic, this school specializes in artistic fields such as Graphical Design and Photography,

Shoemaking, Handcrafts, Food Processing, Clothing Technologies, Beauty and Hair Design, Printing Industries, Gardening and Flower Design, and Pre School Education and Child Care.

The Boys' Industrial School is located in very low-income populated part of the city that is also not much industrially developed. The neighbourhood is a very high crime area. The school has some connection with the surrounding businesses but it is rather limited. The school has connections with the main Organized Industrial Zone in Ankara, which are used for internships for students. The school has about 178 teachers and 2000 students (most of which are boys) concentrating in the following fields: Information Technologies, Biomedical Appliances Technologies, Electric and Electronic Technologies, Construction Technologies, Goldsmith Technologies, Machinery Technologies, Metal Technologies, Furniture making and Interior Design, Engined Vehicles Technologies, Plumbing.

The main actors in these local contexts involved in the policy making are:

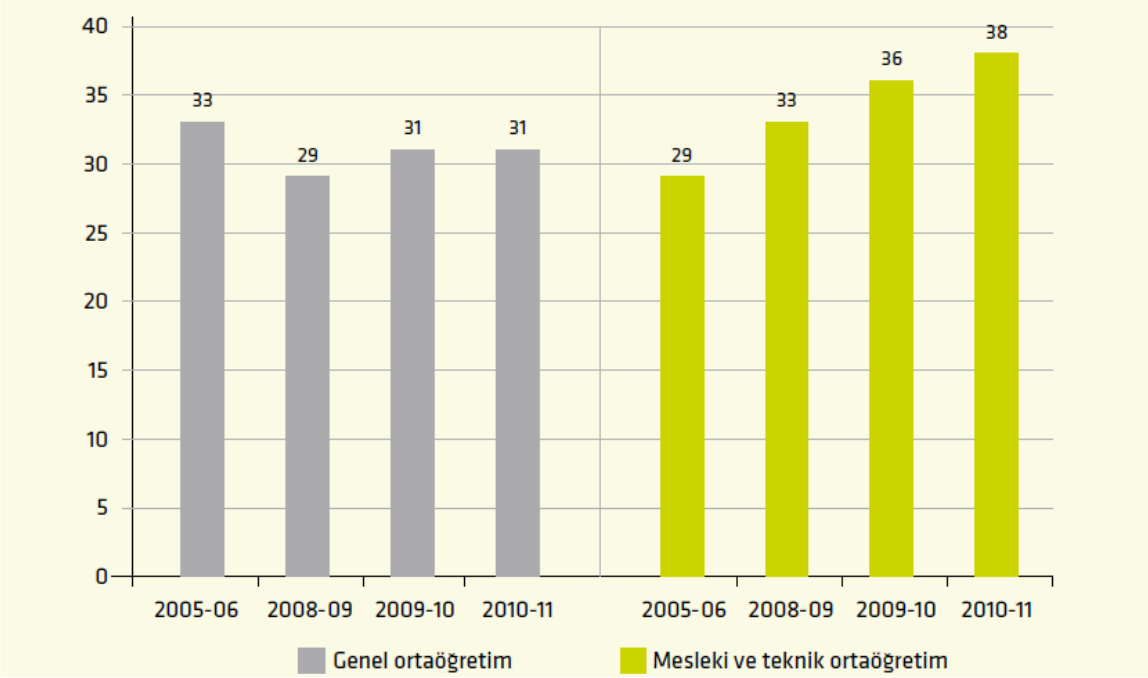
- Main National Actors
  - Government
  - Ministry of National Education (centralized)
  - Ministry of Employment
  - Business
  - NGOs
- Main Local Actors
  - National Branches of Govt. Institutions
  - Province Employment and Vocational Education Boards
  - Schools
  - Business

2.3 PAR research process and research findings

This section will set out the findings of the participatory action research at the local level in the three case study areas, and show how the research has provided insights into the issues relating to the main research tasks at the local level. First, the issue of selection and tracking will be discussed. Following that, the issue of social inclusion in relation to dropouts will be discussed. In doing that, the results of in depth interviews with experts will be analysed vis-a-vis the focus groups with students. First, the reasons for drop out will be laid out, followed by a discussion of the strategies in each locality.

2.3.1 Selection and Tracking

According to the officers at the National Ministry of Education, theoretically schools should accept all applicant students. However as evidenced by research study conducted by ERG the average number of students per classroom is way above the 30 students advised by the ministry. More importantly, as Figure 2 illustrates clearly, this number is above regular high schools. Considering the regional heterogeneity especially with regards to high urban population in Turkey, in order to meet the maximum thirty students per classroom, more that 70 thousand classrooms are needed across the country.



This statistic suggests that schools should somehow find a compromise between small classroom sizes to ensure quality of education and Ministry requirements for being inclusive. This results in a situation where popular schools can afford to be more selective in their entry requirements. As noted by the School Family Union president in Istanbul, selection procedures in practice depend on the quality of the school.

This point is confirmed by school principals in each of our cases. According to them, accepting every student is simply impossible due to classroom sizes and unfair to better performing students. Instead, they are ranked based on grades and accept from the list until the schools quota is full. This issue was evident in both Istanbul and Ankara with high urban populations. According to our interviews, there is especially high demand to the Boys' Industrial High School in Istanbul and Girls' School in Ankara. The only exception to this situation is the integration students. There is a Ministry requirement that a set number of low performing or disabled students are accepted into these schools to avoid their

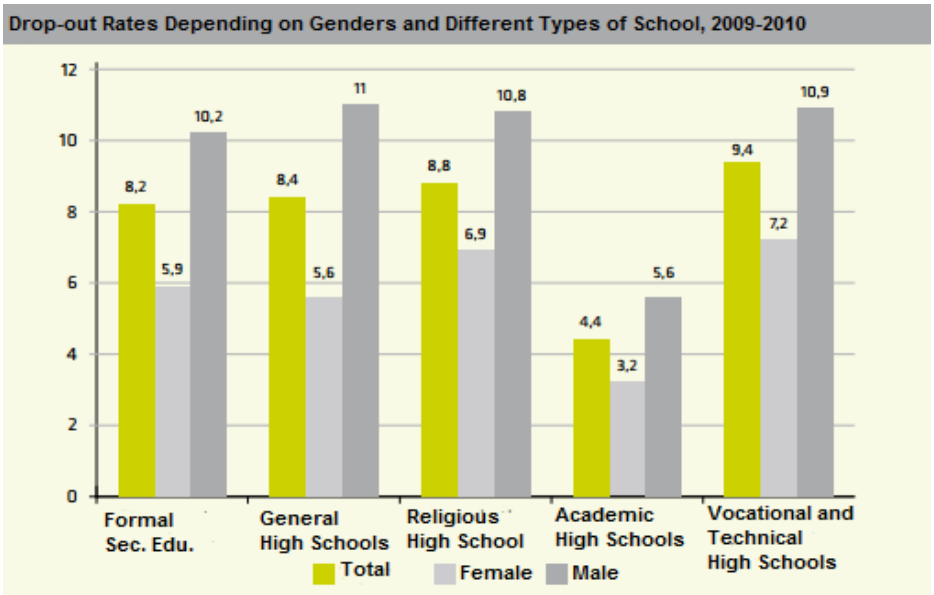
exclusion from education. However, this sometimes requires a Ministry order from the local branch to the school, as schools are usually reluctant to accept these students.

It should be noted that this practice also depends on the school type in question. As the Figure illustrates there are a variety of different VET schools in Turkey. The Anatolian schools and Technical schools are known for higher academic aspirations. While student' national placement exam scores are mostly important for the former group of schools, students' grades on the 9th grade are important for the latter.

In addition to the stratification of students based on performance, prioritizing students' grades has a second consequence. As also argued by several ministry officials, local chamber of industry representatives and local branch officers of Turkish Employment Agency, that is the problem of choosing a school based on students' grade point average not their abilities. Accordingly, students' abilities and interests are not taken into consideration and instead selection should be according to students' ability and capability, however currently this is not a policy of Turkey. Several policy makers emphasized the need for better guidance and even skill tests prior to 9th grade to direct students to the right kind of school.

This performance based evaluation system continues after the 9th year, at the selection of different tracks. There is no centrally required test measuring the skills of students in placing them into their specialized fields. Instead, most of the time, teachers and school principles advise students with better performance to go into harder fields, and poor performance to go into easier fields. Rarely and only for some fields, we see schools adapt some skill tests out their own discretion.

2.3.2 Dropouts – Source of the Issue



As the Figure illustrates, compared to average rates of drop out in the formal secondary education in Turkey, the drop out rates in Vocational and Technical High Schools are higher both for male and female students. In fact, the drop out rate is the highest for these schools as compared to all other school types. With regards to gender dimension, male drop out rate is higher than females for all school types. As indicated by most policy makers, teachers, and students themselves, the issue of the drop outs is most pronounced for the 9th grade.

The literature on drop out points out to various possible reasons for it. Most of them focus on students' problems in their family life (*Cilek 2010).* This expectation is confirmed during our interviews with teachers and principals. School officials point out that vocational education is preferred more by students with separated or dysfunctional families (some even from orphanages) and the problems in the family distract students from coursework. Furthermore, as these students mostly come from low-income families, sometimes economic hardships lead students to having to leave school to work in order to financially support their families. Teachers also mentioned the lack of interest of students, probably because they are not actually interested in the skills they are acquiring. These partly explain as to why dropout rates in vocational schools in Turkey are higher than other schools.

As mentioned earlier, the research team also conducted focus groups with former students who dropped out. While economic and familial problems were also brought up by them, students emphasized another factor relating to their social networks. This is also an issue evaluated by guidance teachers in that, when a peer in the student's social group drops out, this has a diffusing impact to other members of that social group. Usually, it is because quitting school becomes a cool thing and in support for each other, students have more motivation to drop out. This issue came up in all three focus groups conducted in different settings. In other words, regardless of the school in question, the peer influence seems to have a strong impact on the decision to drop out. Furthermore, the way students go about it is by simply stopping coming to school. This way, their absenteeism, not their lack of performance becomes the ground for their leaving school.

A last point that needs to be added regarding dropping out is the role of guidance in persuading the student to continue education. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section however it is worth noting that most students who dropped out indicated that they did not inform a teacher or their counsellor about their intentions. It was very clear that students were not well informed about their alternatives or the consequences of drop out. Once aware, most regretted this decision and tried to enrol in some sort of formal education, such as open high school.

2.3.3. Dropouts – Strategies

With regards to the strategies regarding drop out, our interviews revealed some important issues. At the national level, the officials mentioned ministry sponsored guidance booklets but acknowledged a lack of serious and centralized policy aiming at preventing dropout. Instead what we see with the 4+4+4 education law is the assumption that drop-puts will enrol in open high school immediately, because they have to.

In all three schools visited, teachers and counsellors were aware of the importance of the issue and all mentioned that most students regret the decision afterwards. However, with regards to developing strategies, schools were on their own both financially and policy wise. This results in different practices with different rates of success.

The most common way to detect high-risk students is by following their attendance rates. All schools inform students' parents when there is continuous absenteeism. Another indicator of high risk for the schools is undisciplined behaviour. Nevertheless, while all schools have some ways to detect the high risk, their lack of resources especially regarding guidance limits their room for action. Some schools have strong mechanisms for prevention if the high-risk student becomes visible. In Ankara Girls' school this is created through a friendly environment at school. The incident of drop out is almost

non-existent and students are over alert to high-risk students. When they feel the risk, they do counselling hours with the student and house visits to the student's family.

Here counselling capacity plays an important role. One issue that has been raised in all school except the aforementioned Girls' school is the lack of counselling teachers. Even though the ministry has slots for four counselling teachers in all the schools in our sample, only one of them is filled in both of our schools. The reason for this issue is stated to be related to the low prestige of vocational schools and heavy disciplinary caseload. According to counselling teachers and principals, these issues make vocational schools least attractive for appointment. Even the counsellor at Industrial Boys' School in Ankara did not hesitate to state her desire to transfer to a different kind of school.

Nevertheless, sometimes schools find creative ways to deal with limited resources. One very good example is the practice implemented by the Industrial Boys' School in Istanbul. In this school, towards the end of each semester, high-risk students are detected among all grades and each student is appointed to a teacher coach. These teachers are simply volunteers in participating in this guiding program and also matched with a high performance student for every high-risk student they guide. According to the teachers and principal of the school, the evaluation made based on students' grades reveals that for 60% of the students in this program, there was increased performance. The success of this individual policy came to the attention of the local branch of the National Ministry of Education and the strategy is now being implemented in a pilot area in Istanbul.

It is worth noting that most of these strategies work when the student becomes somewhat visible, in other words, makes his or her intentions to drop out public. Our interviews with the dropouts revealed that not all of these students became visible as such. One example was from the school in Istanbul. Her exact words were:

> "I didn't tell any teachers about my intentions. If I had known of all the implications of drop out, I would have continued."

2.3.4. Apprenticeship System and Social Inclusion

The system of apprenticeship is another issue of constant debate both in the national and local contexts. The major issues about apprenticeship relate to the quality of apprenticeship and the age at which apprenticeship begins. Here again, there are various forms of inequalities stemming from the resources of schools in relation to teacher hours allocated to apprenticeship arrangement and monitoring. Another issue that comes up is the quality of the training students receive at school. According to national policy makers, there are inequalities across different regions in Turkey with regards to all those issues. The lack of sufficient number of industries around schools in some

underdeveloped parts, poses additional issues with regards to the completion of a successful apprenticeship.

Across national and local interviews there is consensus that apprenticeship is very useful in adapting the student to the job and in motivating the student to complete her studies, but this is so only if it is done properly. According to several school officials, the firms are to blame for the poor apprenticeship experiences of students. In their words: “They should be taught the job not told to bring tea”. Several national policy makers went as far as saying that “Companies want to exploit cheap labour”, and that they should be prevented from doing this through tough regulation.

According to most of the representatives of the firms and chambers of commerce and industry, the poor apprenticeship experience is a function of the poor quality of education in schools. They point out that the machinery used in production is very delicate and high tech, and when students come from theoretical training at school they do not possess the necessary skills to operate this machinery. As a result, the employer finds is sometimes hard to trust the students with these expensive machines. According to them, part of this issue relates to the lack of high tech equipment in schools and the other parts relates to lack of up to date training of the teachers, both issues requiring more collaboration between school and industry.

2.3.5. Transition from education to work

Some of the issues creating problems for transition from vocational schools to work are similar to issues regarding apprenticeships. Poor quality of education, both formal and education in vocational schools is one of these. However, there are additional systemic and local level obstacles that complicate the job placement for the graduates.

According to many policy makers on the issue “the obsession with higher education” creates the most important obstacle, delaying transition to work. One of the largest companies in Turkey, Koc Holding, initiated a social responsibility project providing scholarships and coaching to VET school students. As stated by the foundation representative, all of those they provided scholarships, ended up going to higher education. Note that this covers the period when VET schools had a major disadvantage in the university entrance exams, called “the coefficient problem”. The foundation representatives were torn about whether to interpret this statistic as a success or a failure.

This inclination towards higher education was raised by many of those interviewed. According to the principals, parents pressure students into high education as they see having a university diploma a sign of their social status. One parent even raised concern that without a university degree, she would not be able to find a proper wife for her son. This issue was brought up by VET graduates as well. The

words of a graduate of the Industrial Boys' School in Istanbul provide quite an insight into the reasons.

> "My foreman during internship told me that I was ready for work and that I shouldn't waste time with higher education. Yet, I still went for a 2-year higher education institution, where I haven't learned all that much as my high school provided better education. In the end, I started working at the same company upon graduation. I still think being a university graduate increases my status in life."

Unfortunately, this transition to higher education is not so easy even without the coefficient problem. In the words of the representative of the Foundation for Educational Reform this is because of the poor quality of formal education of basic sciences in the VET system. As a result, most graduates of VET high schools continue to higher education in two-year institutions rather than the better perceived four-year institutions.

This inclination towards higher education creates additional challenges for the employers who want to hire their apprentices/interns right upon graduation. This becomes highly unfeasible when the student wants to pursue higher education. Nevertheless, several employers we interviewed agreed that they prefer VET school graduates when hiring. They agree that the graduates may not be up to date with all equipment yet, they add that VET graduates know how to use basic tools, protect the material, have the right work ethic. The National Employment Agency provides several tax incentives to firms for hiring VET graduates. From our interviews, it was clear that most firms did not know of these advantages.

In terms of transition to work and placement at jobs some fields fare better than others depending on the local context. Supported by several interviews conducted with local chambers and businesses, in Istanbul, where there is a large variety of businesses, this is less of an issue, however in less-developed parts of the country this problem is more pronounced. Both national policy makers and school teachers agree that some fields attract a lot of students even though there is not much demand for those jobs at the level of a high school graduate such as IT jobs. Some jobs such as welding or motor mechanic have a lot of employment potential yet students do not find these jobs "cool". Regarding incentives for hiring VET graduates, businesses and teachers suggest that there are not enough incentives for firms by the government or lack of information regarding the existing incentives.

With regards to career development and later integration to social life, firms and chambers did not see any disadvantages for VET graduates. They named several high-ranking officials in their respective

firms who are VET graduates. The only issue they raised was that, while being a VET graduate did not raise an issue for career advancement, if the area is non-technical, in the competitive global environment the lack of a university degree may constitute an obstacle.

2.4 Comparative analysis of vocational education, social inclusion practices and social cohesion

There are various similarities and differences across selected schools with regards to social inclusion. The main differences across schools in terms of their capacity and collaboration with industry have been elaborated before. Due to their varying specializations, location, and social inclusion strategies there are further differences and similarities across these schools with regards to social cohesion at the level of selection, tracking, tackling dropouts, apprenticeships, as well as transition to work.

It is important to start with the note that both the Boys' Industrial School in Istanbul and the Girls' School in Ankara are rather well performing schools and are pioneers in many areas in their respective regions. As a result they have rather developed methods as compared to most other schools in Turkey as well as the Boys Industrial School in Ankara. Their high performance and good reputation results in stricter criteria for admission into these schools. As mentioned earlier, selection depends on the school sub type in question. But speaking for the general VET schools, the grades of the students until the 8th grade are an important criterion for these schools. The schools also give priority to students who live in the same neighbourhood as well as the so-called *integration* students coming from other institutions.

As mentioned earlier, notwithstanding the diversity of institutions, the 9th grades of all institutions employ the same general education courses. The purpose of this is to allow the students to transfer to other institutions and make up their mind about their departments. At this point, with regards to tracking, all schools direct students with better performance to areas requiring better math or science knowledge such as „food processing industries" or „information technologies", whereas those with poor performance are advised to specialise in areas that involve less of this background. Furthermore, regarding some departments such as graphical or fashion design, all schools try to employ some sort of a skills test. The most elaborate form of the test is employed in Girls' School in Ankara.

With regards to apprenticeships, all schools have various attempts to include all groups and somehow place them in firms. Students with disabilities pose a special challenge in this regard, as most firms find them rather unemployable. In order to avoid their exclusion, the Girls' School in Ankara employs them as interns at the schools own workshops. Teachers in all three schools showed an interest and willingness to find and monitor student internships, however there were varying levels of commitment

and satisfaction by the students across the schools. Especially regarding the Boys Industrial School in Ankara, students complained that whenever there was a problem at workplace, teachers were siding with the firms and not making frequent visits to their workplace. Students in the other two schools showed more satisfaction with the schools' efforts for inclusion in this issue area. This issue should become clearer once the results of the surveys are available.

A varying pattern emerged with regards to managing high-risk students and drop-outs as well. The Girls' School had the lowest rate of drop out with a student quitting being a very rare instance. It was evident from the detailed accounts teachers provided on each case that even in those rare cases teachers were highly involved to avoid the issue. The friendly environment created at this school and active involvement of four full time counselling teachers seems to have a lot to do with students' feeling of institutional attachment. Furthermore, the tough selection process and rigorous tracking process provided by this school adds to its success in this area. The Boys' School in Istanbul on the other hand, while also a successful case, provides a different picture. Here, there are many high risk students especially at the 9th grade, therefore more institutional attempts –the mentoring by teachers, have been made to tackle the issue with great success. The Boys' School in Ankara on the other hand, not being as tough as the other schools at the selection and with many high risk students seems to have a harder time to deal with dropouts. The lack of an institutional culture and understaffed counselling department adds to this challenge.

Finally, the three schools have varying level of contact with the local industries in their respective community. As in the other areas discussed above, Girls' School in Ankara and Boys' School in Istanbul perform strikingly well in this regard, with the latter constituting a forerunner. What sets the Boys' School in Istanbul so far advanced in terms of its collaborations is both the depth and extent of its relations. For building new laboratories, the school cooperated with Storage Battery and Recycling Industrialists Foundation and Ford Automotive Company. In order to address its lack of educative equipment for its number of atelier, the school acquires products and machinery from a couple dozen companies working in the fields of automotives, electronics, computing, and chemicals. It is worth to mention that, in order to enhance social inclusion, the paint provided by the sponsors for one of the aforementioned collaborations has been distributed to students so that they can draw pictures/paint the school walls and backyard. The school also opened job training courses together with Istanbul Chamber of Commerce at the school's premises. Subsequently, in order to update students' and teachers' knowledge of the industry the school initiated various education seminars to students and teachers on general topics such as machinery, construction technologies and electronics as well as specialized topics such as job security, painting, diagnostics, insulation. Finally, the school

hosted a training seminar for its teachers in collaboration with Yıldız University of Istanbul on the topic of "Social Inclusion of Students who failed/have to repeat a class".

Ankara Girls' School also established various contacts with its community. One of these is the schools close cooperation with Ankara Chamber of Commerce (ATO). As part of this cooperation, first, ATO's furnishing and interior textiles committee built the seamster atelier for the school with the new machinery. An agreement has been signed where ATO took the responsibility to hire the graduates at member companies upon graduation. Another collaboration with ATO is with their gardening committee. Regularly, the committee provides the fresh flowers to be cut and arranged by the students in the gardening and flower design department. Similar to the Boys' School in Istanbul, the Girl's school in Ankara also finds creative ways to circumvent the legal barriers to collaborate with local businesses on curriculum building. For instance, the school brings in guest lecturers from Ankara Advertising Foundation as well as Hilton Hotel Cooking Department and Ankara Photography foundation to familiarize students with new methods and machinery.

While limited in number and extent, Ankara Boys' school also established some cooperation with universities and companies. Several companies helped building/improving electronics, communication, informatics and security laboratories of the school. This school also held seminars with Hacettepe University of Ankara to train its teachers.

3. ACTION PROPOSALS FOR SCHOOLS

In the light of these findings, several actions can be proposed to the participating schools. Regarding all schools, first, tracking can be done via more systematic ways that would tap into the skills of the students. Currently all schools use some skill tests for certain departments however their extent is rather limited. The research team believes that more attention should be given to the inclinations of their students for all departments.

Secondly, the evidence from pilot studies show that schools benefit greatly from international collaboration both regarding infrastructure and knowhow. The fact that these schools were willing and interested parties to this project shows their potential for further international collaboration. We advise them to follow national (such as UMEM) and international (those sponsored by the EU, World Bank, UNDP) projects. They should also strengthen their ties with academic institutions to get help with application and establish connections with partner institutions abroad.

The emerging dialogue between the three selected schools in Turkey and the ones in project partner schools abroad was quite a positive externality of this project. The research team believes that the

project schools learned from each others' positive and negative experiences and gave each other ideas on how to face unique challenges. The three schools in Turkey also showed a great collaborative skill and initiated partnership with each other and TOBB University of Economics for seminars and workshop. We advise the schools to continue to keep close ties with partner institutions and initiate projects on their own, possibly bringing in additional shareholders from their community.

Specifically, for the Boys' Industrial School in Istanbul: The school is compensating for its understaffed counselling department through voluntary teacher mentors. It would be useful to fill those three remaining positions with counselling teachers to support this model mentoring policy. The school should also export this policy to other schools. In terms of tracking, the school could employ some elaborate skill tests before placing the students in different fields as they are used in the Girls School in Ankara.

For the Girls' Technical and Vocational School in Ankara: The school could increase its links with industry. Also, most students are focused in getting higher education. More emphasis should be placed on immediate employment and students should be informed of its benefits. While this orientation towards the university is highly a function of the national/societal norms on social education parts of the issue can be tackled at the school level. For instance, additional channels with the industry can be established with the business for immediate employment of the graduates as in the example of Boys' Industrial School in Istanbul.

For the Boys' Industrial School in Ankara: This school has taken a long way in reducing crime on its premises. The research team believes that it should continue its efforts to keep crime low and should focus on reducing drop out and creating a friendly environment for students. As mentioned by several teachers, policy makers and the counsellor of the good example of the Boys' school in Istanbul, creating a campus life with social activities could be a good way to achieve this. Finally, teachers should be trained in counselling and more counsellors are needed to address high number of disciplinary issues. The model exercise of the Boys' School in Istanbul involving assigning those students to volunteer teachers (as well as the very best schools) could way a possible avenue.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Policy recommendations for policy makers at national level

4.1.1 On the system characteristics

Simplification and rebuilding of the system is quite urgent. Vocational High School, Technical High School and Anatolian Technical High School which are educating students for the same field but have different time frames and curricula. This should be simplified and structured like Vocational High School and Academic Vocational High Schools (Anatolian Vocational). Lack of this simplification creates a complicated structure hard to grasp for students, parents, as well as counsellors. This also creates problems in regard to obligating students to remain in the field they started with. This lack of flexibility in terms of changing fields is problematic and creates additional exclusion and inevitable increase of dropouts by the alienated students.

A second issue that relates to the system characteristics is the issue of Preacher schools (Imam Hatip). There was consensus among all those interviewed, including the preacher school graduates themselves, this group of schools should not be grouped together with vocational schools. According to them, very little of those graduates of preacher schools actually become Imams suggesting that, these schools do not train their graduates in a vocation, rather they give an academic training along with some religious teachings. More importantly, any policy aiming at reforming VET gets caught in the politicized debate of preacher schools as it taps into a major debate between more secular and more religion oriented parties. Therefore, the research team argues that preacher schools should be excluded from the VET system.

Another debate regarding policy making is the issue of apprenticeship/internships. As indicated earlier students in most VET high schools (except those specializing in tourism and IT) do an internship in their final year of high school. While some policy makers think the period for internship should be extended, others think this would take away from academic training and may lead to abuses of this youth labor. Based on the interviews conducted with the localities, the research team believes that rather than the quantity of time spent in the industry before graduation, the quality of the learning environment should be the focus of discussion. Several students and teachers complained about the lack of mechanisms to

address firms that take advantage of this cheap labour without delivering them a learning environment. At the national level, certain penalties for these kind of abuses could enhance the quality of learning environment for the students. This could be done through withholding the government subsidies for hiring VET interns or penalties to be imposed on these specific firms.

4.1.2 On Autonomy of Localities

According to all local branches of governmental and non-governmental institutions as well as schools argued that more autonomy should be given to the local authority because of the unequal opportunity and different conditions. One question that naturally arises from this point is about the financing of the education system. The research team believes that, an allocation of resources from the centre but joint management of the funds could be one way to go about this problem. Furthermore, it is believed that, this empowerment of the local will allow schools to integrate better with the industry in order to answer the labour market needs of them in return for improving their facilities and on the job training of the teachers.

As stated by several policy makers there is a substructure problem resulting from this centralized governance. Part of this relates to the opening of new fields and another is curriculum development. Relating to the former, in a regional setting with a lack of firms dealing with technology, what is the use of a school having a heavy specialization of Information Technologies. When the student is graduated, but where will s/he be employed? If the schools were to be allowed to assume more responsibility over education via empowering school directors and local councils, their collaborations with the surrounding industry. With regards to the latter on the other hand, the inability of schools to tailor their curriculum depending on the needs of the industry in their community creates a skill mismatch. Granting schools some autonomy in relation to at least some parts of curriculum development would be an easy way to address this mismatch.

Another aspect of this need for autonomy relates to the hiring decision in schools. All school principals we interviewed agreed that schools should be able to select their own teachers. They complained about having to work with mediocre teachers appointed by the ministry when they can have the best because of the schools good reputation or preferred location. The

research team is aware that this is a multifaceted issue which would require a major paradigm shift. Yet, the research findings illustrate that some aspects of this centralized system takes away from the quality of the education in these schools.

A subsequent aspect related to the autonomy of schools is about curriculum development. Modular education allows for some flexibility for schools to offer new classes, nevertheless the content of these courses is still determined centrally. Our local level interviewees and representatives of local and national chambers of trade and industry complained about this limitation and most suggested a decentralization of the issue at the province level in order to address the needs of the local labour market. They named Provincial Employment and Vocational Education Committee –which consists of representatives of local branches of national ministries of education, employment, chambers, as well as the governor of the province, as a potential policy maker/overseer in this regard. We believe that, empowering this structure could go a long way to ameliorate this issue.

Last but not least, the interviews conducted with several members of the Turkish Parliament indicated that the policy making for VET is heavily in the hands of the party in the government and only minor changes can be introduced by the opposition parties. In this vein, some decentralization of at least the policy implementation process would create a more transparent and inclusive policy making structure. This way, the lack of inclusion of various interests horizontally at the national level can be somewhat ameliorated with a vertically inclusive approach.

4.1.3 .On Guidance

The issue of guidance is vital to increase both the quality of education and level of social inclusion in VET in Turkey. This issue was mentioned by all local and national policy makers. Some aspects of lack of guidance relate to before selecting into vocational education while others relate to after being placed in a vocational high school.

As mentioned by various policy makers, there is no skill test employed in schools at the junior high level, before vocational training. A standard test suggesting students their possible skills and options within the vocational education system would allow students with actual

skills and interest to pursue this education. This is essential for including all interested students as well as increasing the reputation of VET schools, so that they are not seen the only alternative for the underperforming students.

With regards to counselling at the vocational high schools, our interviews point out the issue of empty slots. Most schools have about 4 counselling posts available however as mentioned earlier, the heavy disciplinary case load of these schools makes them unattractive. A way to avoid this issue at the national policy making level would be increasing the incentives for the counselling teachers for working in vocational schools. This can be done with a performance based salary system for counsellors based on rewards for each case. Similar policies are implemented in health services in Turkey and such a policy is believed to increase the teacher demand for vocational high schools.

4.2 Policy recommendations for policy makers at local level and NGOs

4.2.1 On Guidance

Some aspects to the guidance problem mentioned above can be handled by the local level policy makers and NGOs. Several NGOs and counselling teachers argued that students benefit from one on one guidance and role models greatly. The voluntary based individual coaching system developed by Koc Holding social responsibility project and Ankara Organized Industrialized Zone Education Center confirm this point as they noted that students and even parents were in great need for this kind of coaching. Futhermore, they indicated that this kind of coaching helped them feel more attached to their schools, more likely to succeed and less likely to dropout. These are mostly local level initiatives and require close collaboration between schools and NGOs. The research team believes that these model initiatives should be more common and would strengthen the existing ties between the schools and the industry.

Finally, considering the impact of institutional culture and social activities in students' willingness to integrate into the system as seen in the Girls' School in Ankara, schools should create a campus life. As part of their coaching initiative, Boys' Industrial School teachers encouraged students with high risk of drop out to be more involved in extra-curricular activities such as sports and music. To this end, with the help of parents and firms they work with, they bought instruments to create a music band and with the help of a voluntary dance

teacher, they created a dance team to compete in national contests. These model strategies are rather cost effective ways of enhancing inclusion and can be implemented with the help of local actors.

4.2.2. On collaborations with business

Comparing the three schools shows that, those two schools with better collaborations with business are better equipped technically, have better performance with job placement and their teachers are more up to date. Therefore, stronger ties with the businesses should be sought. These connections can be established with the local chambers or in the form of individual partnerships with companies, as we have seen different versions of collaboration in these schools.

What is essential here is to ensure mutually beneficial collaborations that establish close links between school and industry and extended relationships. In other words, rather than short term solutions such as donations for a workshop, schools seek increased levels of interaction by giving orientations to students before they start internships, seeking additional avenues for collaboration via educating teachers on these business' production methods or asking company employees to interact with students at the schools premises as role models. Supporting this point, all teachers interviewed were aware that they are not fully up to date with the production technologies and showed interest in participating in on the job trainings at the companies they work with. Such initiatives would certainly minimize the skills mismatch between the graduates and industry.

The collaborations of the Girls School in Ankara with several committees of ATO are a good example of this long term and mutually beneficial vision. Here, the school equipped its workshops with machinery provided by member companies of the committee in return for producing graduates trained on this machinery. Seminars and training of teachers at the companies are another way to ensure this, also evidenced by the pilot school practices.

Also, those interviewed address the benefit of participating in national campaigns for employment, especially the most well-known and recent one mentioned in the introduction – UMEM. Schools indicated that their participation in this skills training program allowed them

to expand their network –especially regarding the industry, learn about the specific needs of the industry, train their teachers further and update their equipment. We therefore also advise to enhance collaboration with industry through these channels.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research project provided various insights into social inclusion practices in Vocational High Schools in Turkey and have important policy implications, which are assessed above. Clearly, there is need for not only increased links between industry and schools, but also a national policy aiming at inclusion especially dealing with tracking and drop out, taking cues from successful/model school actions. Furthermore, the process of policy making itself is heavily politicized and not sufficiently inclusive of all interested parties. Locally, employers and schools can find some common ground through Province Employment and Vocational Education Boards, however their effectiveness remains to be seen. Nationally on the other hand, parties outside the government party feel excluded and ineffective regarding policy making.

It is important to note that, several national (such as UMEM Skill '10) and international initiatives such as European Qualifications Framework create stronger ties between the business and public side of the picture with various spillover possibilities. Therefore, our expectation is a higher involvement of business in VET policy making at both local and national level. Therefore, policy makers should be prepared for this involvement and use this to create higher levels of social inclusion.

As noted earlier, our sample of schools included more advanced schools than backward ones. Therefore, more research should be done with a larger sample of schools including Preacher Schools, Tourism and Trade oriented Vocational Schools as well as schools in lesser developed parts of Turkey. Currently, our account of the picture in these schools draws from interviews conducted with policy makers.

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APPENDIX 1: FIGURES

Figure 1: Turkish Technical and Vocational Education System

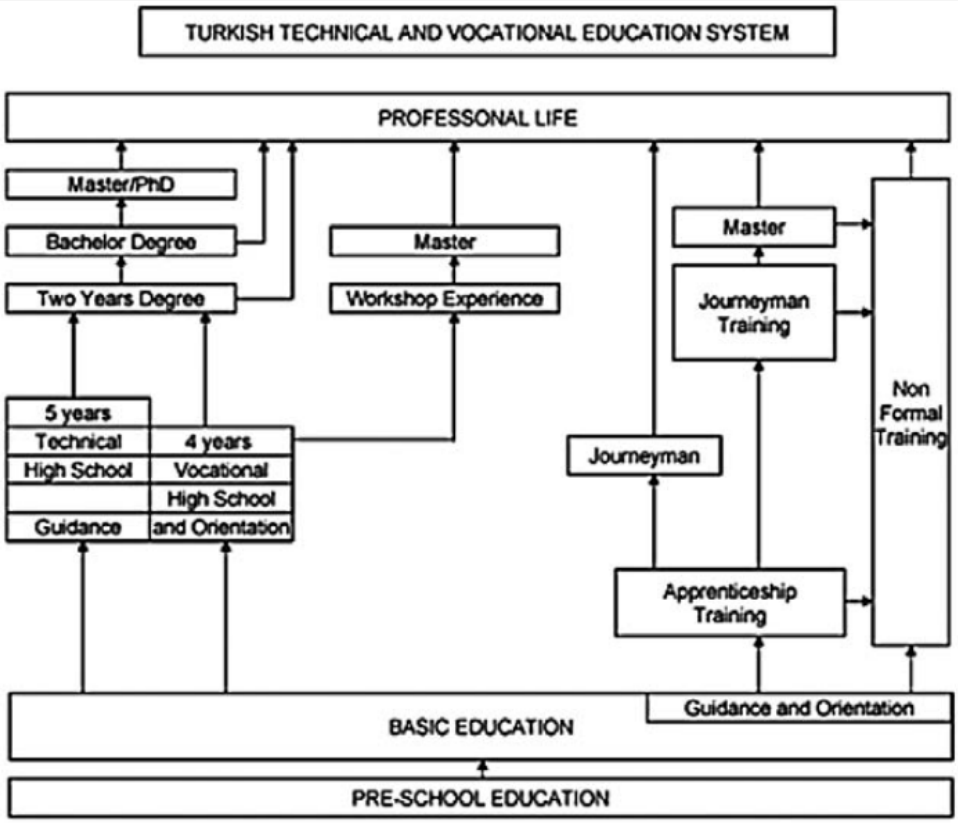

FIGURE 1: TURKISH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

Figure 2: Number of Students per Classroom

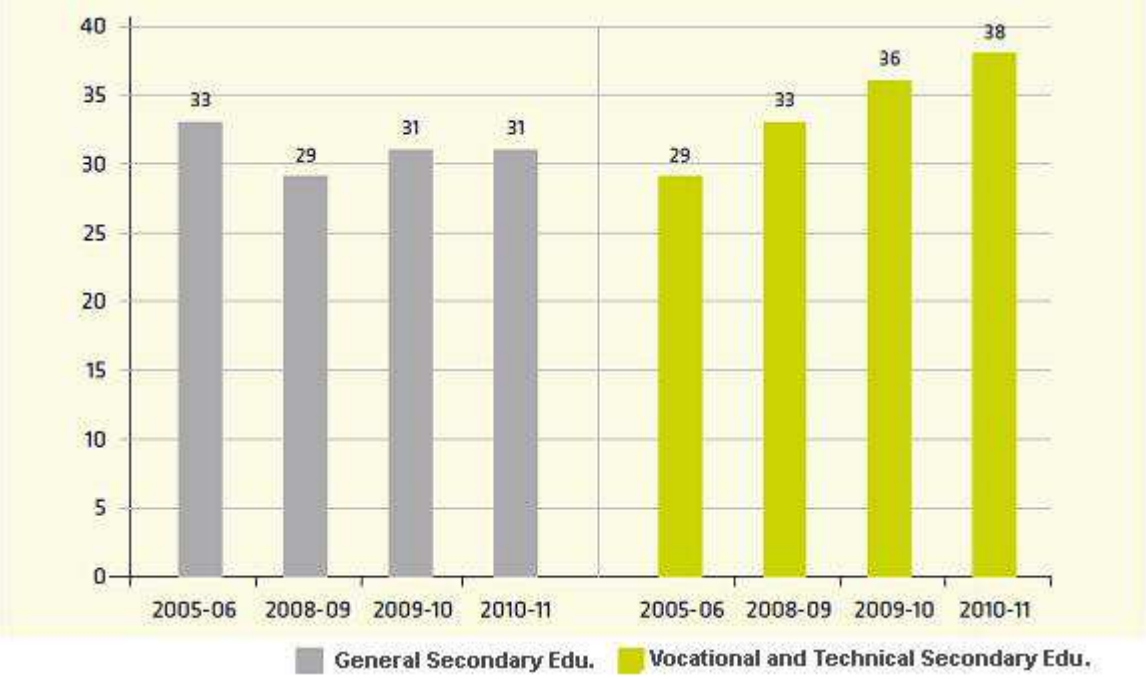

Figure 3: VET school Types in Turkey

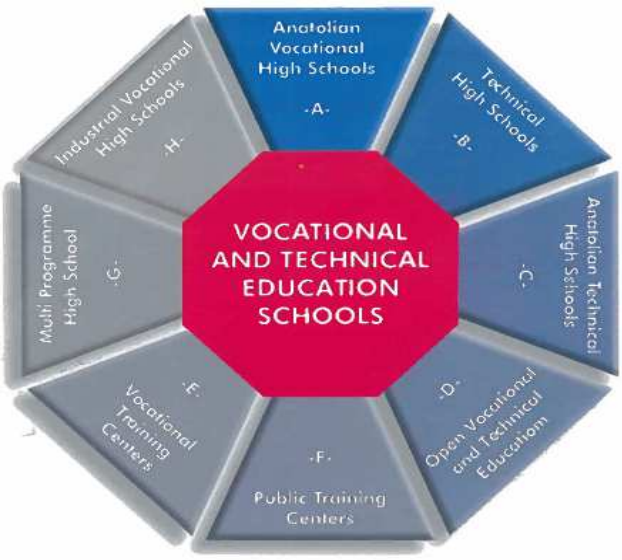

Figure 4: Drop-out Rates in Different Types of Schools by Gender in 2010