

Communication-related Barriers in Turkish Vocational Education and Training

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to discuss certain important communication-related factors which have negative effect on implementing organizational and educational changes or reforms in the institutions within Turkish Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems. The findings pertaining Turkish vocational education and training system were obtained through the observations and interviews held with 104 people of 52 institutions in three geographical regions including Istanbul, Gaziantep and Trabzon provinces in the year 2000; and it is also aimed to reveal prominent causes and effects about the subject. The probable causes and impacts are discussed within the light of the data, interviews and observations. Considering the results, findings were obtained within the direction of the identified items; in this study which analyzed the issue from the aspects of top managers, teachers, parents, students, non-educational staff and stakeholders in which the data analyzed and classified in accordance with regions and the relation with vocational education and training institutions. As the result of this study it could be asserted that communication is significantly important for not only the vocational education and training institutions but also other organizations to develop and make necessary progresses.

Key words: Turkish Vocational Education and Training • Communication • Communication Related Barriers • School Manager • Teacher

INTRODUCTION

It is intended to emphasize the importance of communication within an institution, which could be regarded as an important factor in creating a functioning environment for dynamical change and reforms within.

As for Turkey, a vocational school based workforce model has been adopted in the stage of the establishment of the vocational education system ever since. Today's vocational and technical education system grounds on training the workforce, which is going to serve at intermediate stages (steps), in secondary level vocational and technical schools. In such systems where the training of the workforce is managed in vocational and technical schools, necessary professional behaviors are taught to the students within the school environment. Those schools are structured in order to get the students to adopt necessary knowledge, skills, job pertaining behaviors and attitudes, professional habits and values. Necessary steps for change concerning training the skillful and technical workforce that plays important role in Turkey's overall development in vocational and technical schools have been realized and remarkable progress has been made. Since the years when declaration of republic was made those vocational and technical schools has taken the responsibility of introducing the new technology to the environment as well besides training the skillful and technical workforce.

However, it is also recognized that the external framework in which the education system operates, is changing ever more rapidly considering forces of globalization on the labor market and the effects of the widening of the inner market of the European Union, as well as the pace of technological advances which leads to the need for more (and more frequent) rather than less reform in the years to come.

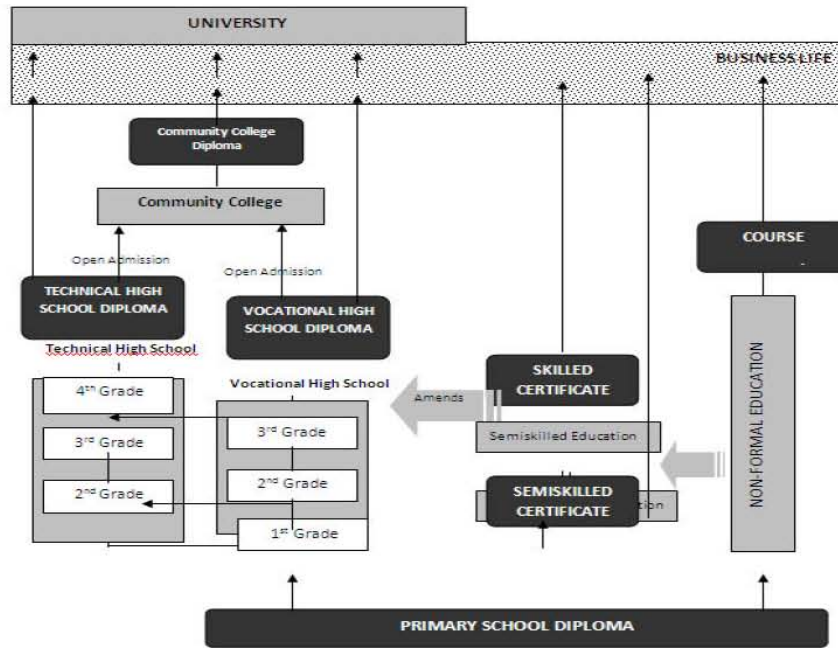
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Communication plays important role for a modern and open improvement of an organization to maintain its functioning in a productive way. Considering the increasing change and improvement processes in especially the educational organizations, the importance attached to communication between the organizations, in the organization and the members of the organization is consistently increasing. Organizational communication is the system which integrates the members and the units within the organization. Thus, people and units in the organization can work in harmony. Considering from this viewpoint, it could be suggested that organizations build a complicated communication system. As in any other field, communication constitutes an important structure in managing the organizations which are formed by people who are gathered around common goals. At this stage, what are the exterior factors that prevent the school levels from realizing the change and reforms in vocational-technical education system and what are the interior barriers cause failure in adopting these developments? Employees' attitudes against change especially in communication-based fields seem to be the answer to this question.

Vocational Education System in Turkey: Vocational education means the process of mutual adjustment of the job and the individual in business life. Vocational education consists of different fields such as technical education, apprenticeship education, adaptation training and vocational informal education according to the goals and the intended population. Scientific and technological changes create a continuous change and difference in business life and in job definitions. Those changes in business life have certain effects on quality and specialty of desired individuals, strategies within education and training processes, goals and contents of education, equipments and education period. Constant changes in job descriptions and necessary qualifications have brought an unsettled structure to vocational education. There is a significant correlation between vocational education's compatibility with the needs, compatibility with the change and the human type trained through. In modern vocational education systems, the changes in business life is constantly monitored, its reflections to educational process is being discussed and vocational education systems are tried to be keep up to date. Therefore, research and development activities are being carried on.

Historical development of vocational education and training in Turkey dates back to 19th century with the Ottoman Empire. The apprenticeship training had been given by craft guild organization until that century. Industrial revolution and advancements in science and technology in the first decades of the 19th century caused deterioration in the order of the production and education system of craft guild organization. Necessity of implementing this education and training activities in schools within the educational institution order resulted in opening schools under the name of reformatory (*istlahhane*) in the first years of the 20th century. Losing their functions through the period of declaration of Republic, those schools were gathered under the names industrial and art schools. However, those schools as well failed to meet the needs pertaining economical and industrial aspects of that time. The budget of vocational schools which had planned with local potentials in the Ottoman Empire period and supported financially by special provincial administration budgets afterwards was planned completely by the state since 1935. With the law number 2765 which was put into effect that year, vocational education and training became popular. As the number of vocational schools increased and a need for a separate administration in order to develop the quality and service of education and training emerged, Vocational education and training general directorate was established within the ministry of national education.

Vocational education and training is being conducted in Turkey as formal and informal education bound to the ministry of national education. Formal vocational education and training comprises General Directorate of Technical Education for Boys, General Directorate of Technical Education for Girls, General Directorate of Commercial and Tourism Education and General Directorate of Religious Education. Activities of informal vocational education and training are being managed by General Directorate of Apprenticeship and Non-formal Training. For the purposes of getting students ready for business life, promoting the cooperation between the schools and business firms and effective skill training the students take skill training under the name of on-the-job training beside the theoretical education given beginning with the second grade in all vocational education and training institutions. This education and training is a process planned within the direction of the demands of workplaces by the industrial coordination unit established in the schools. Students get insured by the employer and can get a salary which cannot be less than 30% of the minimum wages in this process.



Scheme 1: Education and training paths and obtained certificates in vocational and technical education system

Source: Akpınar, 2004:12

The main paths of vocational education and training beside certificates and diplomas obtained are shown at Scheme 1 above. Competencies acquired within the process of vocational education and training is meant to serve both for business life and for university attendance. The ones who finish these programs can directly enter into business life or can continue their education for further academic achievements in universities. Apprenticeship and non-formal training is aimed to equip with necessary employment oriented qualifications. The ones who deserve getting skilled certificate after apprenticeship education and training could be given the vocational high school diploma after finishing the amends. Thus, those individuals, as well, could go to higher education institutions for further academic achievements [1].

The efforts of ensuring qualified and eligible vocational education in Turkey are tried to be realized by some implementations of change and development in the system. As being one of those implementation projects, MEGEP is the most comprehensive of organizational and educational change studies. The project MEGEP is a five year project based on the agreement signed between the government of Republic of Turkey and European Commission. This European Commission financed project has a budget of € 58, 2 million.

MEGEP is conducted with the active participation of social stakeholders, co-experts of ministry of national education and teams of education and training, business market, quality assurance system, localization and regional studies. It is implemented on 40 public secondary education institutions and 105 vocational education and training high schools which were randomly chosen in 30 pilot cities. It is being conducted for realizing the purpose of ensuring the empowerment of vocational education and training system within the direction socio-economical requirements and life-long learning principles and developing a strong and qualified vocational education system which embraces the employability of individuals, their compatibility and entrepreneurship within the context of equal opportunities [2].

In order to train qualified individuals demanded by business life, their having certain skills such as, communication skills, computer literacy, analytic thinking skill and foreign language knowledge beside job skills become very important. At this point, it becomes more important to establish a healthy communication, to promote the efficiency level, to be aware of the communication barriers in production process and to provide compatibility from the very same perspective.

Individuals' self assessment pertaining change may affect their level of motivation and job satisfaction. Change, could increase the job satisfaction and as a result of this could also increase the motivation of the employees. Generally, change might cause changes and developments in comprehension regarding the field, because it is also possible to change the judgments' regarding the job. According to a study conducted by AvŞarođlu, Deniz and Kahraman [3](2005) on analysis of job satisfaction of technical teachers, it was revealed that life satisfaction and burnout levels of individuals could be affected negatively in such environments where there are intense stress factors and no job satisfaction is ensured. They also revealed that job satisfaction is caused by employers' attitudes towards their jobs and should be handled as an emotional reaction against their work life. They also ascertained that the workplace where an individual spends most of their lifetime has a dominant effect on his job satisfaction level and life quality. They discussed the variables of job satisfaction, burnout levels and life satisfaction as the factors which affect the life quality of the teachers and indicated that the teachers who suffer less emotional burnout get more job satisfaction and suffer less burnout. As a result of this study it was suggested that necessary adjustments be made to bring professional burnout level of teachers into a minimum level so that they'd get job satisfaction [3].

Communication in Educational Organizations: Communication which is one of the most important processes in educational institutions is very important from the aspects of a better comprehension of employees on organizational goals and promoting the productivity by laying ground for working more in order to achieve organizational goals. Communication plays a vital role from the aspect of motivation of administration, the school personnel, students, parents and stakeholders; orientation and ensuring school-job compliance in educational institutions. Without establishing communication the administration might have difficulties in obtaining information input, education personnel might apply different instruction programmes, there might be obstacles in building coordination between managers, personnel and units. The organizations that establish effective organizational communication would achieve great progresses in the fields of productivity, change and development. Applying a participative management style in order to achieve productivity and goals of vocational education institutions could only be managed by open and intense communication.

Within the process of managing the school, one of the most fundamental issues that the educational managers should attach importance to is to manage the process in the right and clear way. Since it implies a mutual process, there would be feedbacks on both directions. The feedback in vocational education and training organizations is prominent from the aspect of realizing the change and development applied. Openness is a fundamental issue for realizing the participation dimension of the communication process in educational organizations. Thus, all the educational personnel in a school would be informed of anything happening around and express their opinions freely. By this means, the members of the organization would participate in forming the organizational policy and plan processes and in implementing changes [4](Türkmen, 2000).

Organizational communication could be affected by some factors such as size of the organization, educational status of the members, personality attributes and cultural differences. Those factors could also affect organizational climate and culture as well as causing differences in individuals' attitudes towards change and development. The size of the organization, geographical location and localization might cause certain communication problems.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In-Turkey held part of the study which is based on the interview data pertaining the communication barriers in vocational education and training institutions, data was obtained through interviews held with volunteer participant managers working in those institutions. Participants were asked to submit their opinions on the causes of communication barrier issues experienced with top managers, teachers, parents, students, non-educational staff and stakeholders. The interviews were held with a total of 104 participants from three different geographical regions and data analyzed and classified in accordance with regions and the relation with vocational education and training institutions. Quantitative data in accordance with the region are given at Table 1:

Table 1: Quantitative data pertaining regions

REGION	PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS	PARTICIPATINGPEOPLE
Istanbul Region	20	40
Gaziantep Region	16	32
Trabzon Region	16	32
TOTAL	52	104

Findings and Interpretations: It can be asserted that managers' opinions on communication barriers differ in accordance with geographical region. Accordingly, it could be suggested that communication barriers differ in accordance with the region and are caused by different reasons. Mostly observed communication barrier issues among all group in Istanbul region are found out to be prejudgements, deterioration of values, interpersonal sensitiveness and insecurity and failing to listen actively. The issues for Gaziantep region were determined as difference in world sight, age, resisting change, overcrowded students. Regarding Trabzon region on the other hand, mostly emphasized ones among communication barriers are empathy issue, not listening, ideological approaches, not knowing ceremonies, understanding and perception issues and regional and cultural differences. It could be inferred from these findings that the managers, educational and non-educational personnel, students, parents and stakeholders who are supposed to maintain the organization by internalizing change and development face different issues regarding regions within the process of communication which is remarkably important from the aspects of better understanding of the organizational goals and promoting the productivity to achieve these goals.

Analyzing the communication barriers from top managers' viewpoints, hierarchical structure, centralist management, legal and administrative responsibilities and individual factors come into prominence. Considering the two-way functioning of the organizational communication as both managers' influencing the educational staff and students and educational staff and students' responding to the managers; one-way implementation of communication process in the hierarchical structure by top managers cause the productivity of all the participants in educational organizations to reduce. Communication barrier caused by centralist management apprehension might cause emergence of insecurity and prejudgments of members within the organization. Other barriers are identified as:

- Sensitiveness
- Failing to listen actively
- Differences in terms of mission sense
- Managers' failing to improve themselves
- Absence amnesty brought into power for children
- Constant changes in regulations for passing a grade level
- Other top managers' putting pressure on the members of educational organizations in order to realize their demands.

Considering the barriers the teachers face and cause, the main topic come out is the low level of motivation. It could be expected that teachers' struggling over some external issues such as; professional dissatisfaction, economical problems and the workload could affect improvement attempts and productivity of the schools negatively as well as decreasing the work performances. Other communication barriers from the aspect of teachers are given below:

- Formation deficiency and failing to be productive in professional sense.
- Not being open to development and criticism.
- Assessing the students as individuals whose professions are studentship.
- Failing to use time properly
- Failing to be open within organizational and individual communication process.
- Prejudgments, sensitiveness, distrust
- Failing to listen actively
- Overcrowded classes

- Factions
- Failing to understand the administration
- Reflecting their political preferences into professional area

As evaluating parents who are one of the members of vocational education institutions from the aspect of barriers within school-teacher-student communication process, the participants put emphasis first on having different education level. This aspect is defined as lack of education of the parents especially in two regions except for Istanbul and it was asserted that this made the communication with parents more difficult in all three regions. As another factor, it was also indicated that parents pay little interest to their children who are also the input of education system; or the communication process gets interrupted because of they expect more than their children could do as students. Those communication barriers from the aspect of parents are given below:

- Socio-economical level
- Failing to self-expressing
- Prejudices
- Oversensitivity
- Insecurity
- Failing to listen actively
- Urban adaptation problems
- Beliefs on uselessness of certificates and diplomas.

Participants put emphasis on many different issues that distract the focus of students who are the input of vocational education and training system on communication process. The most prominent issues found out to interrupt the communication process and caused by the students who are the input and output of the system during the process are concern for the future, exams they need to take to come up to better positions and high level anxiety caused by those exams, prejudgments caused by their being the student of vocational education and training institution, the image of their school among the society. Those factors might cause the students to get affected by the communication process as being the senders and receivers of the process and could even cause them move away from the process for good. Other factors indicated by the participants are given below:

- Prejudgments
- Structural defects in education system
- Failing to appreciate the importance of the professions
- Absence and conflicts with teachers
- Sensitiveness
- Distrust
- Failing to listen actively
- Conflict of generations
- Issues pertaining adjusting to urban life
- Successful students' preferring public high schools owing to ÖSS (Öğrenci Seçme Sınavı=Student Selection Examination)
- General economic conditions of the country
- Employment concerns
- Failing to determine a particular goal

The stakeholders who are at important for benefitting from outcomes of the vocational education and training system are the most likely social participants to be affected by the inefficiency and unproductivity of the vocational high schools.

Therefore establishing a healthy and effective communication with stakeholders is very important from the aspect of improvement of vocational education system. According to the findings of the study, among the issues cause barriers with stakeholders within the communication process come incompatibility of stakeholders' expectations with schools' goals, reluctance for cooperation because of the incompatibility, bureaucratic hindrances and the belief on schools' failing to train the workforce demanded by the markets. Beside these barriers, it was also ascertained by the participants that stakeholders look out for themselves, have the students work for lower prices as unqualified worker and these issues have negative effects on school-stakeholder communication and interaction.

CONCLUSION

First thing to be done in order to eliminate the communication related issues in vocational education and training system of Turkey is to inform the public opinion and to change the their perception accordingly. Young population in educational system believe that the only way to find a job (to get employed) is to go to a college because inefficient and unhealthy communication and professional orientation and likewise the parents who do not appreciate the importance and functioning of vocational education and training have their children go to universities for at least an undergraduate degree. Communication is significantly important for the vocational education and training institutions to develop and make progresses. For this reason, a healthy communication between the intended population such as; media, business life (markets), nongovernmental organizations, families and students and educational managers, teachers and other educational personnel; and existing communication barriers should be got rid of In order to gain the necessary positive image from staff, the Management must make sure that staff feels respected and involved.

In order to be positively inclined to reform challenges given by management, the overall job satisfaction of the staff is essential. Staff with a generally negative view of their workplace and/or their management will be much less inclined to embrace reform.

Involvement in decisions (through dialogue in which the staff has a real chance to contribute to the outcome) creates better understanding of the issue with the staff (e.g. reform challenges) and eliminates opposition to change much more efficiently than one-way information provided by management

It is the opinion of the author that these conclusions are applicable well beyond the single institution surveyed – and that indeed all the four points listed warrant scrutiny by School Management in any European VET system.

Based on the above points, one can also venture as far as suggesting the general conclusion that the keyword is “ownership”:

- *Changes “owned” by the staff (through their active involvement and influence on the planning and decision of the changes) will be embraced and often implemented with enthusiasm. Changes “owned” by the Management will most often be met with opposition and suspicion unless the staff has a very positive image of the Management and its motives.*

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication problems in vocational training in Turkey at the beginning of the first and foremost for vocational education of the public is informed and current understanding must be replaced. Because a healthy communication and vocational guidance can not be carried out, young people in the vocational education system believe to ensure the condition of employment as receiving university education and in a similar way they were directed to undergraduate education by parents who not know sufficiently the importance of vocational education and functions. Progress in the development of vocational schools, communication is vital. For this purpose, between the target group consisting by media, business, civil society organizations, families and students and the target market consisting by education administrators, instructors and training staff, a healthy communication should be established and the existing communication barriers must be eliminated.

In addition, in ensuring effective communication to guarantee employees' participation in decisions, it is important that when the employees are included in this process. Before taking decisions it is crucial to get the employees ideas and to make them feel that their ideas are important, this could lead to strengthen employees' communication with management, students and families and with stakeholders. In such a case, in terms of management, showing willingness to listen to employees' ideas could be helpful in elimination of communication barriers and in the emergence of new ideas which could be useful for the organization.

Another important point is how change and development practices transfer to general in organizations. In order to Employees to leave their traditional behavior or undergo changes, the need of effective communication with the management is a point that should not be overlooked. Through effective communication, eliminating prejudices relating to the reforms carried out to, preventing employees' misconceptions relating to their works and reducing anxiety is possible.

To achieve the participation in communication process in vocational training organizations, it should be based on openness in communication. Thus, the development and progress in school organization, it will be carried out that mainly of faculty and students, parents and employers are informed and given the opportunity to specify their views. This way, the organization's policy and plan to attend the creation and development of internal improvements can be achieved.

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