VET and VET-TT in two corners of Europe
The cases of Sweden and Turkey

Dr. Sigurd Johansson and Dr. Anders Hedman
Education Department Umeå University, Sweden

In this paper comparisons are made between some selected aspects of the Vocational Teacher Training (VET-TT) models applied in two diagonal corners of Europe. VET-TT is in focus although we consider that working life, vocational education and training (VET) and VET-TT are as intertwined as the Gordian knot. The information about the VET and VET-TT system in Turkey is gathered during two weeks of consultant work and two weeks of educator exchange at Gazi University in Ankara and Firat University in Elazig.¹

As an enlighten picture of differences and similarities between the two nations following story is told. In a comfortable conference room at the Teachers Guesthouse, close to Gazi University in Ankara, were six experienced vocational teacher educators from three universities in Turkey sitting together with one equally experienced vocational teacher educator from Sweden. They were occupied with the task to reconstruct the curriculum for the Turkish vocational teacher training.² It was agreed that this new curriculum should be competence-based and divided into a number of parts, each part focused on specified competencies judged to be important for a vocational teacher. It was also agreed that the curriculum should demand a high level of practice-oriented training.

During their talk information was passed that a commonly used schedule forced the teacher educators in Turkey to lecture for groups comprised of 60 – 70 students during three hours each week. When asked by the Swedish member about how they could manage such a situation one of the women raised both her hands to shoulder height, glanced at him with sharpened eyes while pointing at him with her index fingers like aiming guns and said with stern voice, accentuating each word: - “You need discipline”. Then she blow away a pretended gun smoke and smiled sarcastically. As mentioned, this story is told to illustrate some of the problems facing the Turkish vocational teacher educators.

**To describe and compare VET and VET-TT models**

All societies have vocational systems where specific competences and skills for their work force are transferred to its youth. Those systems can take many different forms. It can be more or less regulated and can be conducted in many different ways. We can find examples of VET carried out only on the job in the form of apprenticeship. There are other examples where the entire part is carried out in schools with school workshops. Furthermore there are huge variations of the content of the curriculum as well as the influences of the adjacent branches. Close to such issues related to VET is off course the teacher training in this field. This specific activity area also comprises of many dimensions because it also include the inevitable difficult question regarding work-cultures and ethical conduction and how such matters are transferred in the teacher education.

¹ Leonardo Da Vinci project S/05/EX966-B1 fifteen Swedish vocational teacher educators visited Ankara one week in November 2005 and Elazig one week in April 2006.
² In Turkey a difference exists between Vocational Teachers and Technical Teachers. The former includes traditional women work with household, textile work and care taking while the latter includ traditional male work in technical vocations such as mechanical engineering, vehicle repair, computer work, electrician etc. In this article the concept vocational includes both categories.
**Characteristics of the Swedish VET-TT**

Mostly the Swedish vocational teacher students have between ten to fifteen years of work experience and their mean age is between 35 - 40 years when entering the one and a half years long education. There is a formal demand for higher education equivalent to 60 Credits. This demand increases the recruitment problems because many skilled craftsmen and women lack those credits. In order to solve the problem there are today attempts to transfer real competence into credits by the use of validation.3

Except from a few guidelines from the state authority there is no national curriculum for teacher education in Sweden. Following those guidelines the teachers at the universities construct the curricula and decide how time should be allocated. As mentioned, the length is one and a half year focused on pedagogical and didactic issues. There is no education or training in the specific vocations in the Swedish model since the students are supposed to already master this. During half of the courses they study more general pedagogical subjects related to teacher work together with all other categories of teachers while the remaining time is focused on vocational teacher work. The time set aside for education at the university and at practice schools are almost equal in lengths. During their time at the university the students are scheduled about 10 – 15 hours per week. The remaining time they work individually or in groups with tasks given by their teachers. In each course the mark setting is made in three steps. During their practise time assessment are made with support of their mentoring teacher. Mark setting are made in three levels, failed, passed and passed with distinction4. Since a few years ago all teacher students has to write a scientific report as a final part of the teacher training program.

**Comparing the Swedish and Turkish model of VET-TT**

In working life today there is a global movement toward more autonomous work organisations with self-governed groups with increasing degree of freedom. This movement also affect the public services, including VET and VET-TT, to a large extent.5 Research point out that there is a related global movement whereas the steering system of public services revolves from rule-regulated towards a goal-oriented system.6 All those changes, both in working life and public sector, strongly affects VET-TT because it has to adapt itself to those changes. As mentioned above it’s like a Gordian knot.7

There are different economical conditions between the Turkish and the Swedish VET and VET-TT. Sweden is a welfare state with a BNP per capita almost four times as high as Turkey and spending 8, 3% of its BNP on education while Turkey spends 2, and 2%.8 Putting even harder strengths on the Turkish school system is the large and increasing number of students. Turkey has one third of its population younger than 15 years while the same figure for Sweden is one fifth.9

We were informed that in Turkey the military duty affected the university system. Someone presenting a university exam got shorter military duty and under better conditions.

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8 http://www.worldbank.org/data
9 http://www.faqs.org/docs/factbook
compared to private conscripts. Information also revealed that all students at the teacher training faculties were recruited directly from High School, selected by tests carried out at the end of the school. The so common way among youngsters in Sweden to make a break in their studies a couple of years were unknown in Turkey. As one expressed it: - “The young Turks got a one shoot chance. If they miss it, that’s it.” Taken this into account added with the demographic curve it becomes perfectly clear that the Turkish Education system is under high pressure to increase its capacity as much as possible.

Today the national curriculum in Turkey is quite detailed. The teachers are governed by centrally decided rules stating the content of the individual courses including learning material and how the time should be allocated. The students are scheduled at the university the entire week where the time is divided between vocational- and general subject and pedagogy. Furthermore the teacher training is carried out in such a way that the pedagogical teachers meet the students about three hours each week during a time span of three years. As describe in the introduction, the number of students are often 60 – 80 in each occasion. At present there is no demand for practice at the schools. The high number of students together with the short time made it almost impossible to arrange such a thing.

The mark setting for the Turkish vocational teacher students is made with 100 points as maximum and divided into eight steps with two letter marks. By the use of those two letters a distinction is made between practice and theory. But there are of course also similarities. Both Turkey and Sweden have a model where VET and VET-TT is a part of the public system and the teacher education is on university level.

Regarding vocational teacher training there are opposite problems in the two countries. In Sweden it is difficult to recruit students resulting in a situation where more than a third of the countries vocational teachers lack a teacher education. In Turkey too many are educated resulting in overstaffed schools and a high unemployment rate. As one researcher concluded when elaborating the dimension of vocational education and work; The dream of the perfect matching often fails when the reality has changed compared to the point of departure when education once was planned.10

Efforts to modernize and strengthen

Conclusions made in a report from British Council concerning the Turkish VET firmly stated that its standard had to be increased and more adapted to working life. The curriculum needed to be reformed, the teachers trained and the schools equipped with modern equipment.11 Regarding VET-TT the report pointed out that it was in need of reformation to better suit the need of the future vocational education.12

As a result an EU-funded three years long project called Strengthening of Vocational and Technical Education in Turkey started 2003 with the aim to increase the standard of the initial vocational training. A smaller project, Modernisation of Vocational Teachers Training was focused on teacher training. It can be noted that the budget was 70 million Euros for those projects. The arguments for this aid support were that Turkey needed a skilled workforce if the standard of living should be increased and prerequisite to facilitate mobility and strengthen Turkey’s compatibility on the capital investment market. It is in the light of this the

11 http://www.megep.meb.gov.tr/docs/OgretmenEgitimi-P.Read.ppt
12 The Turkish concept High School corresponds to the English Upper Secondary School and the Swedish Gymnasieskolan. In this article Upper Secondary School is consistently used.
projects must be understood. But at the same time began a harmonisation process between the Turkish and the European VET and VET-TT.

**VET in Sweden and Turkey**

Although the economic and demographic differences there are quite a lot of similarities how the two countries reconstructs their work forces. Both countries have national curriculum in each vocational branch valid in the whole country each covering three years. In Sweden the municipalities has responsibility for the vocational training while in Turkey the state is responsible. When entering the 3 years long Swedish Upper Secondary School the students are 16 years old. In Turkey they enter when they are 15. Both countries have specific teachers for vocational training working both in classrooms and school workshops. The way working life and its division of work is transferred into the schools are almost identical. Also the same tradition exists with regard to gender. The boys enter vocations leading to the industry and technical vocations while the girls choose toward household, textile work and care taking. In both countries the time at school is almost equally spent between subject-oriented education and vocational training. Both countries apply a model with school workshops.

A couple of exemptions do exist. Training for housework doesn’t exist as a specific program in Sweden and Turkey applies an apprenticeship model to supply the building industry with skilled work force and there is no formal public initial vocational training for the vocations in the transport branch. Both those branches have specific programs at the Swedish school.

The vocational oriented course curriculum in Sweden, ranging from 50 to 150 hours, are briefly described in comprehensive terms and the teachers transfer them into training situations themselves. The teachers choose what learning material they consider suitable and have full control of the economy, which rely on the number of students and vary depending on the actual branch. The grade setting is made in four steps and worth to note is that the grade shall reflect how independent the student had worked. Mostly the students work quite individual following either written or oral instructions. About twenty percentage of the time is set aside for elective courses. A common model is that the group is divided into subgroups, each working with different courses. The time spent in vocational theoretical lecturing varies of course but the teachers avoid spending too much time in the classroom.

In Turkey the course curriculum are considerably more detailed. Both the content and the learning material are centrally decided and a strict schedule has to be followed. The students mostly work in a collective fashion unless the need of equipment makes such an arrangement impossible.

In the Swedish school is a demand that at least 15 weeks shall be located in a workplace under guidance from a specific instructor. This time can be extended if it is found suitable. The practise period put a high demand on the school to cooperate with the local branches to find suitable work places. When and how this practise period is carried out is decided and organised by the teachers themselves. During that practise time the teachers regularly visits the students at their individual workplaces for guidance. Each vocational program has a local committee guiding and supporting the program. Members are school manager, vocational teachers, students and representatives from the local branches in the vocation at stake.

In Turkey there is no demand for practise at workplaces. Information passed was that attempts were made to implement this but the high number of students made it very difficult to organise. Instead many of the schools adopt a system called “Revolving Capital” where

13 http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/copenhagen/index_en.html
they organise the training as small production units selling their products under controlled forms.

**Concluding remarks**

It can be noted that the Swedish VET-TT education is moving towards a more academic approach. The entrance requirement is increasing since academic merits are necessary to enter the teacher training program. Furthermore, the content of this program has more of theory and theoretical studies than earlier. They study sociological-, psychological- and pedagogical theories in a wide general context not oriented toward their vocation and working life. This movement has caused criticism from non governmental organisations from trade and industry. They argue that the quality of VET will decrease because of this “academization”.

The Turkish VET-TT, on the other hand, is moving in the opposite direction. There are attempts to reform their program where the academic subjects are less favoured and more emphasis is put on work experience.

The balance between theory and practice is a problem because of the different demands from the academic world and working life. Both argue that the quality in VET needs well educated teachers to increase the quality and the nations ability to compete on a global market, but the concept “quality” is defined in different ways.

Connected to this issue is the governmental steering system. The steering system might be looked upon as a number of arenas. In one arena the curriculum is decided, in another arena this specific curriculum is transferred and specified more close to a learning situation and the third arena is the actual learning context. Research point out that there might be breaks between those arenas which in turn can result in something that was not originally intended. Viewing the Swedish model it can be said that the formulating arena where broad and overarching goals are presented. Out of those goals the university construct a way to reach those goals The work from the transforming arena, often a group of university teachers, results in a syllabus also giving the teachers a high degree of freedom, for example to specify the content and methodology The control of the system is made by annual evaluation and evaluations from the students. It is clearly a decentralised goal oriented system. In Turkey a more rule based and centralised system is used. The government decide both the goals, content and gives suggestions for the applied methodology. The government controls the different arenas in a more obviously way by inspectors visiting the university. This rule based system is today under reconstruction toward a goal oriented.

**As a final remark** it seems that the two nations VET and VET-TT models, from different point of departure, develops or moves in a direction that will make them more alike in the future.

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