



**STRATEGIC EVALUATION OF SOME EU PROJECTS  
PREPARED BY THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION IN  
THE CONTEXT OF THE VISION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

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**Abstract:**

The aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of the change in the vision of vocational education within the scope of the "Modernization of Vocational and Technical Education Project" (MTEM) and "Strengthening the Vocational Education and Training System" (MEGEP) financed by the EU, which was concluded by the Ministry of National Education. Vocational education is a type of education that increases the employability of students by providing vocational skills and is very important in the economic development of countries. Vocational education has gained even more importance in recent years due to the increasing need for human resources. This increasing importance obliges us to take some decisions about education locally and to transfer some responsibilities to local administrations as a means of development and development. In addition to this, it is necessary to set standards for each occupational group for an advanced vocational education and for citizens to take responsibility for a qualified vocational education. This study evaluates the studies on the development and standardization of the vocational education system through the projects made on this subject and sheds light on the development of the last twenty years.

**Keywords:** vocational education, European Union, ministry of education, economic development, vocational projects

**1. Introduction**

Education is a strategic area that mediates the economic and political development of a country and the strengthening of its institutions in line with universal norms. The 20th century represents a period in which countries evolved from individual development

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goals to regional and global cooperation. International structures such as the European Union, ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization), Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and D-8 (Eight Developing Countries) can be given as examples of this. There are international organizations such as OECD, UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank, and Islamic Development Bank that provide economic and political support and consultancy to these universal structures on a country and organization basis. Each country prefers to work with a global power that suits its own vision. Turkey adopted the goal of Westernization with the establishment of the Republic and concretized this by applying for European Union membership. One of the areas that the EU considers strategic within its own norms is education. In order to ensure that the standards of the EU member countries comply with the determined standards, it supports the member country through various channels. In this context, Turkey has been supported with various EU-funded projects, especially vocational training. In Turkey's EU membership process, it is important to fully evaluate the projects that use a large budget, time, and human resources, and the innovations they bring, which enable vocational education to undergo a major vision change with the financial support of EU institutions.

It should be examined why the multiplier effect of these projects, which were implemented within a certain budget and at a certain time between 2002 and 2007 and supported financially and politically by the EU, in terms of vocational education, was so effective. In addition, since a new government came to power during the implementation of the projects, its impact requires analysis not only financially but also politically. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of the vision change that vocational education has undergone within the scope of the EU-financed "Vocational and Technical Education Modernization Project" (MTEM) and "Vocational Education and Training System Strengthening Project" (MEGEP) completed by the Ministry of National Education. There is a two-way study regarding the vision of vocational education in Turkey. The first is the secondary education part of vocational and technical education, which is under the authority and responsibility of the Ministry of National Education, and the second is the higher education part of vocational and technical education, which is the responsibility of the Council of Higher Education. For this reason, with a holistic approach, the problems of vocational and technical education, solution applications, and analysis of the point reached with the EU process are included.

The low status of vocational education and training compared to general education is a common unresolved problem in all EU countries. At the end of basic education, when school systems are divided into general and technical, the best students move on to general secondary schools, while low achievers go to vocational training institutions or apprenticeship centres. Despite efforts to close the gap between these two options and achieve equal social status, this situation is the same for all countries (MoNE, Vocational Education, Strategy Document, 2007). Vocational education is a type of education that increases the employability of students by providing them with vocational skills and is very important in the economic development of countries (Cited in, MONE, 2022; CEDECOP, 2011, Özer, 2020). Providing students with vocational skills through a

qualified vocational education system also increases the competitiveness of countries in our time when production technologies gain importance (Özer, 2020). In this context, having a qualified vocational education system brings advanced social benefits as well as individual gains (Cited in, MoNE, 2022; Layalka et al., 2016).

Technical education is more expensive than general education in all forms, but in Turkey, this cost is higher than its counterparts even if no standards are taken. This means that it will be difficult to create a convincing structure to provide a share of vocational education and training. Expenditures on education in Turkey have a significant share in the country's gross product. However, a large part of the budget expenditure is covered by those who wish to be successful in their crammed university exams. That is, private financing plays a complementary role to public financing. However, it is seen that families whose children study in general secondary education need to spend more money compared to families who study in technical education (World Bank, 2005; MoNE, Vocational Education, Strategy Document, Vocational Courses and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007).

The vocational education system in Turkey has a centralized structure in terms of international standards and has significant deficiencies in adapting to market needs and technological change. Although centralized systems have positive effects on reducing inequalities, the leadership role of the Ministry of National Education in Turkey has not been very effective in eliminating inequality of opportunities since the responsibilities given to provincial directorates and schools are limited (MoNE, Vocational Education, Strategy Document, 2007). There are generally serious deficiencies and inadequacies in vocational-technical education, such as lack of equipment, outdated training programs, and low-quality teacher performance (MoNE, Vocational Courses Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007).

The results of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Bologna Process are important for the training of instructors and teachers in vocational and technical education. In this context, teachers and their education are among the primary issues addressed in the Lisbon process. Teacher training was also planned within the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and vocational-technical education was also included in this context with the Copenhagen process (MoNE, Vocational Courses, and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007, p.277). The education system should support the lifelong learning of vocational and technical teachers to meet the needs of the information society. Teachers must know the needs of the business world, important professional skills, and future developments to ensure their professional competence. In this way, teachers can learn about the local and regional business and labor market. In addition, teachers should work together with representatives of the business world by organizing education planning, development, and evaluation processes according to the needs of the labor market (MoNE, Vocational Courses, and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007, p.273). (MoNE, Vocational Courses and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007, p.273).

With the influence of the industrial revolution in Europe, three different models have emerged regarding vocational and technical education: The first is the liberal market model, which emerged under the influence of England. In this model, institutions providing vocational and technical education, companies, and the labor market decide together how the system will be structured. Secondly, in the state model formed under the influence of France, the state itself carries out the structuring of the system. The third model is the dual composite model, created by the state under the influence of Germany, depending on the profession, and the participation of the chambers of commerce. Depending on the Partnership Quality Assurance Framework and the Copenhagen process, VET systems in Europe have planned vocational education as policy, with more authority and more influence on institutions, less liberalization and more partnerships, and new steps towards the information society (MoNE, Vocational School). Lessons and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007, p.285).

The Ninth Five-Year Development Plan (2007-2013) envisaged the completion of studies including functions such as the development and accreditation of qualifications based on occupational standards, focusing on the National Vocational Qualifications System. It is aimed to create a vocational education structure suitable for this system. The modular system recommends that training programs be implemented in a modular manner, with a structure based on the principle of integrity in vocational and technical education, and that certification processes be carried out according to modules. In this context, vocational and field training should be given priority (DPT, 2011). The modular-based system has been used since the 2005-2006 academic year. However, the classical evaluation method is still used and no changes have been made in the measurement and evaluation systems. In this respect, one aspect of the modular-based system developed and implemented within the scope of SVET is implemented incompletely.

The vocational and technical teacher education system is based on the apprenticeship system that started in the 19th century in Turkey and was aimed at providing a workforce to the industrial sector. The authority to plan, monitor, and supervise all education and training activities at the secondary education level has been given to the Ministry of National Education by Law No. 3308. In this context, the task of training a qualified workforce is also fulfilled by the Ministry of National Education. The authority and responsibilities of teacher training regarding higher education were transferred to the Council of Higher Education with the higher education law no. 2547.

Lack of adequate cooperation between faculties and the sector and incompatibilities between secondary education institutions and vocational-technical education programs are among the weaknesses of the vocational and technical teacher education system. There is still no progress in quality assurance and self-evaluation systems throughout higher education and at the faculty level. In the context of in-service training, a teacher can receive training almost only once in his professional life. This, combined with insufficient career advancement opportunities, makes it difficult to renew lifelong learning and teacher qualifications in a reasonable time. In this current system, an important obstacle to achieving the goals related to vocational and technical education

is the inability to ensure cooperation and coordination due to the institutional structure that separates the decision and authority systems between the Ministry of Education and YÖK. Reports prepared by institutions such as the European Education Foundation and the World Bank draw attention to the low level of cooperation in the Turkish education system (MoNE, Vocational Courses, and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007, p.318). In light of these data, it is important to show under what conditions the studies carried out with the vision of vocational education in Turkey began and how progress can be made during the EU process.

Turkey has been making important changes and studies since the 90s in order to harmonize its education policies with the European Union's (EU) education policies. SVET and MTEM are important among the EU vocational education projects completed in the Ministry of Education. These projects have affected professional systems in terms of training programs, human resources and institutional capacity development, modern equipment provided, policy and strategy documents, and quality studies. Vocational education systems also offer training to their students according to the characteristics that the human resources needed by the sectors should have. Technology-based developments transform the production and service sectors, and vocational education systems have to revise themselves based on these changes (MoNE, 2022).

SVET is a project financed by an agreement signed between the European Commission and the Turkish government and a grant from the EU Mediterranean Programme and implemented between 2002-2007. This project aims to align the vocational and technical education system in Turkey with the standards of the EU and developed countries by making it suitable for socio-economic needs. In addition, the project aims to create the necessary infrastructure to prepare for the transition to 12-year compulsory education and to increase the interest of non-governmental organizations in vocational education. The project was carried out in 145 pilot institutions in 30 provinces and has a budget of 58.2 million euros (MEGEP, Inception Report, 2003).

With SVET, institutional changes were made in vocational education, which was previously planned but could not be made, and new education policies were developed at the central level. Some of these policies are; conducting labor market analyses, preparing occupational standards, and creating modules. In addition, studies were carried out to establish the Vocational Qualifications Authority (MYK), and a lifelong learning policy document and strategy document were created. By establishing international collaborations, approximately 20 million euros worth of equipment and equipment were provided to 145 pilot institutions (MEGEP, Final Report, 2009). SVET abandons the classical program approach in the vocational education system and is sensitive to the labor market, occupational standards, and local needs; It focuses on teaching programs that are fast, flexible, open to change, holistic, and modular. This approach aimed to modernize vocational education by integrating formal, non-formal, and apprenticeship training programs. In addition, a transformation in corporate culture was aimed, at greater participation of social partners in the field of education (MEGEP, Final Report, 2009).

MTEM was implemented between 2003 and 2007 with a budget of 18.5 million Euros provided by the MEDA Fund, as a project to comply with European Union norms and improve the quality of education of vocational course teachers (MTEM, Final Report, 2006). MTEM was designed and implemented as a second complementary project to ensure the adaptation of vocational courses in higher education to market conditions and secondary education programs in order to be compatible with the structural changes prepared in secondary education after SVET. MTEM supports efforts to ensure that vocational course teachers receive a qualified education. For this purpose, national teacher training standards (competencies) have been developed and a quality management system that meets the requirements of the Bologna and Copenhagen protocols has been implemented. In addition, within the scope of higher education reform, studies have been carried out to support the Turkish Government in creating new policies on vocational teacher education (MTEM, Final Report, 2006). MTEM has made significant contributions such as determining the competencies of vocational course teachers and preparing the 474 modular curriculum accordingly. In addition, a report called "White Paper" containing policy recommendations regarding vocational education was prepared and pilot practices were carried out for the quality assurance system (MTEM, Final Report, 2006).

Within the scope of the EU process, corporate culture has been transformed in line with goals such as vocational education, understanding the needs of the labor market, and improving professional standards. In addition, labor market analyzes have gained importance to ensure comparability with the European Qualifications Framework, and the Vocational Qualifications Authority was established in this process (MEGEP, Final Report, 2009). The MTEM project has increased the vocational education system from three years to four years in order to raise the standards of the vocational education system to the level of the EU and developed countries and to prepare the infrastructure for the transition to 12-year compulsory education. The project also aimed to increase the capacity of MoNE and social partners to obtain and manage grants and other project finance (MEGEP, Final Report, 2009). The National Vocational Education and Training Information Center, established by the Ministry of Education in Istanbul in 2005, was opened to support students and teachers in vocational education and training with up-to-date information and materials. This center also functions as a communication center between vocational training institutions and social partners (MEGEP, Final Report, 2007, 13).

The aim of this research is to examine the strategic effects of MTEM and SVET documents, which are within the scope of EU education projects and prepared considering the EU harmonization goals, on the Turkish education system in terms of process, result, and sustainability, and to evaluate the official reports and outputs of these documents written by independent experts.

The documents of the EU-supported SVET and MTEM projects prepared by the Ministry of Education were examined within the scope explained below:

- 1) Regarding the process and results of these projects; To what extent have the envisaged objectives been achieved?
- 2) Are these projects sustainable?

Research: It is limited to evaluating the completed EU-funded vocational education projects prepared by the Ministry of Education in terms of their process, results, and sustainability dimensions at a strategic level.

## 2. Method

In this research, a situation analysis was conducted using the "Descriptive survey model". The "Documentation Review" method was preferred for the research because documentation review is one of the most important data sources for researchers due to the constant and rapid change of human resources and project employees in the processes where the Ministry of National Education undertakes the responsibility of preparing and implementing many projects. For this reason, in this study, analysis was made through documentation review as the only data source for project evaluation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p.217). This study is a document analysis study with a qualitative pattern.

The main purpose of qualitative research is to examine a subject in all its aspects and details and to understand it in the relevant context. Therefore, it is very important to collect detailed data and make an intensive description for qualitative research (Punch, 2005). The main purpose of qualitative research is to understand and define the reality reached as a result of the research (Kümbetoglu, 2005). Another reason for choosing the documentation review method is that it allows the data obtained from the documents to be described in detail and to identify themes and patterns. Therefore, the study pattern of examining projects prepared by the Ministry of Education is based on a comprehensive analysis of one or several situations.

### 2.1 Data analysis

In this research, the document analysis technique was chosen using the holistic single-case design, and the requirements were met. The 7 documents examined in the study are listed in Table 1. Documents were reviewed following the following processes:

- *“Accessing documents,*
- *Checking the originality of documents,*
- *Understanding documents,*
- *Analyzing data,*
- *Using analysis results by transcribing them.”* (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 217)

During the data analysis process, thematic analysis of the documents was performed using content analysis elements. In this way, patterns in the data were identified and themes were categorized. Using content analysis, information regarding the main questions of the research was extracted from the documents and divided into categories. The documents examined to collect data in the study are texts such as initial, progress, and final reports prepared by the Ministry of Education and policy and strategy

documents prepared within the scope of these projects. The documents reviewed are listed in Table 1:

**Table 1: Documents Examined in the Study**

Document Number	Document Name	Release Dates
1	MoNE, PKM Politika ve Strateji Belgeleri	2007
2	"Mesleki Eğitim ve Öğretim Sisteminin Güçlendirilmesi Projesi (MEGEP) Başlangıç, İlerleme ve Sonuç Raporları"	2002-2007
3	"Mesleki ve Teknik Eğitimin Modernizasyonu Projesi (MTEM) Başlangıç, İlerleme ve Sonuç Raporları"	2002-2007
4	I-A "Türkiye'de Hayat Boyu Öğrenme Strateji Belgesi" I-B "Türkiye Hayat Boyu Öğrenme Politika Belgesi", MEGEP (2009-2013)	2007
5	"Türkiye'de Mesleki Eğitim ve Öğretim Strateji Belgesi", (MEGEP)	2007
6	"Mesleki Eğitimde Sosyal Ortaklığın Geliştirilmesi Politika Belgesi", (MEGEP)	2007
7	"Meslek Dersleri Öğretmen Eğitimi Politika ve Stratejileri Raporu", (MTEM)	2006

Looking at Table 1, it can be seen that there are 7 basic documents related to vocational education in Turkey and these documents are subject to review.

## 2.2 Findings

### 2.2.1 Innovative applications of the EU process towards the vision of vocational education

The most important tool developed by policymakers in EU countries to increase the reputation of vocational education and training is not to prevent students studying in vocational education and training schools from transitioning to higher education. Therefore, in order to make it more attractive for students studying in vocational education and training and to ensure continuity, students in these schools have been given clear transition opportunities to other fields and higher education. According to the Maastricht Declaration (2004), vocational education and training are increasing at all levels of education, and in this respect, a bond of equality and dignity should be established between general education and vocational education and training (MoNE, Vocational Education, Strategy Document, 2007). The European Union, which plays an active role in developing quality assurance in vocational education, has identified three main policy priorities in member countries: employability, integration, and access to educational services. These policy priorities should be reflected by vocational education systems and the vocational education system in Turkey should be strengthened to ensure consistency and transparency (MEGEP, Inception Report, 2003, XIII). In this section, since it is a new policy period, the innovative approaches and institutional structures implemented in the SVET and MTEM projects prepared and implemented with EU support will be examined.



### **2.2.2 SVET and MTEM in the vision of vocational education**

SVET is a project implemented with an agreement signed between Turkey and the European Commission, and its aim is to strengthen the vocational education system in Turkey in line with socio-economic needs and lifelong learning principles. The project aims to strengthen the vocational and technical education system holistically. The objectives of this project are as follows (MEGEP Inception Report, 2003, 2):

- Vocational education should be strengthened to bring it into line with the standards of the EU and developed countries.
- The necessary infrastructure should be prepared for 12 years of compulsory education.
- Participation of social partners and non-governmental organizations should be ensured to increase interest in vocational education.
- Modular vocational training programs appropriate to the needs of the country should be prepared, taking into account international standards, and work should be done in cooperation with social partners.

MTEM is a project originating from the EU Mediterranean Program and aims to support efforts to increase the quality of teacher education in vocational education and harmonize with EU standards. The project has a budget of 18.5 million Euros and started on 07 July 2003 and ended on 05 January 2007. Among the sub-goals of the project, vocational courses include supporting and adapting to teacher training. In line with this goal, the following sub-goals have been determined (MTEM, Final Report, 2006):

- 1) To increase the quality and reliability of the teacher training system by developing national teacher training standards (competencies) for the training of teachers of vocational courses,
- 2) To work within the framework of existing standards to train teachers in accordance with exemplary programs, including five pre-service and three in-service programs.

### **2.2.3 Structuring of EU-funded SVET and MTEM**

Each project, such as SVET and MTEM, has its own unique structure in the initial period, and the nature of the project plays an important role in the formation of this structure. The project structure established in the Ministry of Education has a unique feature that allows the transfer of know-how from the EU to Turkey. The "National Coordination Committee", consisting of representatives of the Ministry of National Education and the "Vocational Education and Small Industry Support Foundation" (MEKSA) and representatives of various stakeholder institutions, was established during the initial period of the project. The role of this committee is to agree and coordinate on the general issues of the project. Additionally, a management committee has been established to monitor and plan project strategic-level activities. This committee meets every month, evaluates the progress report, and makes plans for the next month. In addition, the former "Projects Coordination Center" (PKM) President and project co-managers will hold meetings on a daily basis and maintain contacts with social partners (MEGEP Initial

Report, 2003, VIII). In the international projects carried out in the MoNE during the EU harmonization process, a Turkish expert worked together with a foreign expert for each policy heading. This structuring was later implemented in all international projects, thus MoNE achieved a significant gain by transferring international know-how to Turkey. In the implementation of these projects, a board of directors consisting of workers' and employers' organizations, public institutions, non-governmental organizations, national and regional team leaders, and representatives of the EU Commission has been established. The highest authorized body is the National Coordination Board.

### **2.3 Labor market analysis**

One of the important effects of the EU process on vocational education is that the Ministry of Education has strengthened its cooperation with relevant sectors at the institutional level. In Turkey, for the first time, a labor market needs analysis was conducted within the scope of SVET to determine the quality of people trained by the Ministry of Education in an institutional sense, as well as the needs of the relevant sectors. Developing vocational education and training policies at the sectoral level is of great importance because the skill needs in the labor market vary by sector and sector-specific training solutions are required (Cited by MoNE, Vocational Education, Strategy Document, 2007; Berzletou, et al., 1997). In the development of vocational education and employment policies in Turkey, cooperation between the Ministry of National Education and İŞKUR, the authorized institution of employment, is very important. As the skill requirements of the labor market vary across sectors, sector-specific training solutions are required. In addition, it was decided to conduct labor market analyzes at the local level through schools and local facilities, and a handbook was prepared for this purpose (MEGEP Final Report, 2009, 24-29).

Developments in the labor market and education sector in Turkey have been analyzed at the international level by comparing them with the developments in the EU towards the Lisbon goals. The importance of this document is that it shows the relationship between the current situation in the labor market and the education sector and the EU's Lisbon goals (MEGEP, Final Report, 2009, 7). A labor market and skill need survey was conducted to obtain information about the structure of the labor market in the pilot provinces. Thanks to these surveys, professions that will be popular in the future, professions that will not be popular and professions that are needed in the job market have been determined. It is also aimed to determine the most needed skills.

#### **2.3.1 Professional standards**

The education standards of 192 professions at the 4th level were determined by SVET based on occupational standards and analysis (MEGEP, Final Report, 2009, 36). These standards were prepared in cooperation with social partners and NGOs and sent to the Vocational Qualifications Authority. In addition, sector and job analysis studies were conducted for 576 professions at levels 2, 3, and 4 analyzes for 400 professions identified in 51 general areas were adapted to the occupational standard format, and draft

occupational standards for 150 professions were prepared in accordance with the methodology developed until 2007 (MEGEP, Final Report, 2009, 30-35).

### **2.3.2 Vocational guidance and lifelong learning**

Lifelong learning and vocational guidance, which came to the fore throughout Europe in the 1990s and were the main topic of discussions, are two important concepts that are interconnected. With the increase in the quality of life of a significant portion of people, the fact that they will no longer end their lives with a single job and that they will improve themselves in different fields with the pressure of market realities has increased the importance of these two concepts. Vocational guidance is also a very important area for the labor market. SVET and MTEM, which started to be implemented during the EU process, have put these two fields on Turkey's agenda with both scientific studies and applications. The concept of lifelong learning, which is confined to only a certain area, was brought together by Decree Law No. 652, issued on September 14, 2011, under the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning by bringing together all relevant fields within the Ministry of Education.

Since there are obvious deficiencies in classical vocational guidance services, the concept of vocational guidance, which is designed to help students who are in an urgent decision-making situation, instead of improving students' education and career management skills, especially by focusing on a limited number of students, does not reflect an ideal approach. In general, there are two restrictions on vocational guidance as it is known in Turkey in the classical sense. Vocational guidance provided primarily in schools tends to focus on an educational decision and often pays little attention to vocational and long-term career options. In other words, its connection with the labor market is weak. Secondly, in vocational guidance services provided to upper secondary school students, students aiming to continue their tertiary education are given more priority than students planning to enter the labor market (OECD, 2004). Vocational guidance covers many different activities and targets people of different ages. As defined in the OECD handbook, vocational guidance is services and activities that assist individuals at all stages of life in education, training, and career choices. One of its aims is to help them shape their careers (OECD and EC, 2004).

Improving labor market efficiency, reducing labor market instability, and reducing or preventing unemployment are the three main objectives of vocational guidance (OECD, 2004). Vocational guidance is seen as an important part of lifelong learning in many countries. Some aim to improve the basic skills of their people, while others aim to provide high-quality education for young people and adults. In addition, the OECD has identified other relevant areas. The primary aim of vocational guidance is to increase the efficiency of the education system. An example of this is increasing graduation rates by increasing the transparency and efficiency of learning options or reducing dropout rates. Second, it is a necessary exercise in the growing individualization and diversification of career guidance and school programs. The third is to improve the matching between the labor market and education (MoNE/PKM, LLL Policy Document,

2007). The first aim of vocational guidance is to increase the efficiency of the education system. An example of this is increasing graduation rates by increasing the transparency and efficiency of learning options or reducing dropout rates.

### **2.3.3 Program development**

Although the education system in Turkey has its own systematics, one of its biggest shortcomings is that there is no country in its own region with which it can make a high-level scientific comparison. The EU process has become a best practice example where Turkey can look for its dilemmas and solutions regarding vocational education and at the end of which comparison can be made. In addition to the lack of a modern structure regarding how the programs will be prepared at a strategic level, according to what criteria they will be developed, and what goals will be achieved in the end, there are disagreements regarding equivalence with EU countries.

Current vocational training programs are not used based on a system. This prevents the development of a modern sustainable curriculum. When the teaching programs are examined; It is seen that most of them serve general management purposes and their purposes are not well defined. The programs are more teacher-centered and inflexible. Without a strategic goal, the level required at the beginning of the target to be achieved at the end is not concrete in the programs. Although there are no regulations regarding the criteria by which students will be evaluated, it is not at the desired level in terms of technology (MEGEP, Initial Report, 2003, XII).

### **2.3.4 Establishment of the Vocational Qualifications Authority (MYK)**

The problems experienced in the context of vocational education in Turkey are not very different from European countries: The reputation of vocational education, the employment of its graduates, the lack of established vocational standards and programs, etc. Among these, one of the biggest problems of vocational education is the need to establish an institution that will work in cooperation with internationally recognized NGOs and state institutions on issues such as recognition of prior learning and professional standards. SVET and the MTEM prepared subsequently completed the preparation and establishment phase of MYK, Turkey's most important and internationally known, in every aspect, thus creating a permanent, deep-rooted, and modern structure in the field of vocational education.

The establishment of MYK (2006), which is one of the most concrete outcomes of the SVET project carried out with the support of the EU process and has a nationwide impact on vocational education, is a very important stage in terms of establishing a national qualifications system. The biggest challenge faced by all countries regarding vocational education and training systems is to ensure that education standards comply with the occupational standards needed by the labor market (MoNE, Vocational Education, Strategy Document, 2007).

The "Vocational Qualifications Authority" was established on October 7, 2006, with the law no. 5544, in order to establish national qualification standards in vocational

and technical fields, to determine, accredit, inspect, measure, and evaluate educational institutions and programs, and to carry out certification and certification activities. In this way, it aims to raise the level of vocational and technical education and to create and operate national qualification systems. This institution determines qualifications based on national and international professional standards and accredits educational institutions that will provide these qualifications (MEGEP, Final Report, 2009, 40; Official Gazette No. 26312, 2006).

Two important responsibilities have been given to MYK to strengthen the relationship between the vocational education and training system and employment. First, it aims to develop occupational standards based on the existing skills needed by the labor market. The second is the evaluation and certification of students (MoNE, Vocational Education, Strategy Document, 2007). MYK is responsible for establishing and operating the national qualifications system in order to raise the level of vocational education and training in Turkey. In this way, by preparing programs based on occupational standards, a competency-based approach in vocational education can be adopted and the sustainability of SVET programs can be ensured.

### **2.3.5 Establishing international partnerships**

One of the best ways for institutions working in the education system to improve themselves is to produce joint work with similar institutions and benefit from each other's experiences and opportunities. One of the most important contributions of the EU process to the vocational education system is that it opened the door to international cooperation. The European Training Foundation, which is the advisory body of the EU responsible for vocational education, has made significant contributions to the Turkish vocational education system with its expert support and reports. In addition, mutual study visits to vocational schools for both human capacity development and vocational training have contributed to capacity building. Another important benefit of the EU process is that vocational education institutions in Turkey have opened the door to cooperation by visiting each other with advanced EU institutions similar to them or with the same mission. It is the completion of the sister school program carried out by a team of 100 pilot schools/institutions and 1452 people (administrators, teachers, students, and representatives of social partners), together with visits to establish partnerships between similar schools and pilot institutions in Europe and study tours offered to social stakeholders (MEGEP, Final Report, 2007).

### **2.3.6 Economic and political impacts of EU-supported projects**

Both the economic dimension and the political impact of the European Union-funded SVET are important. The project has directly and indirectly affected the Turkish economy. The economy is a complex structure that is affected not only by one area but by all the dynamics of the country. Well-trained human resources, a quality education system, and good competence of graduates are the factors that affect the economy. SVET and MTEM have brought an international standard in training the quality of human

resources desired by the labor market in Turkey. Another factor is that the quality of graduates from vocational high schools meets the needs of the economy and the standards required by the EU. These EU-financed projects have made a significant contribution to the economy in the medium and long term.

Today, the spread of automation and artificial intelligence-based production technologies changes the production processes of sectors (Roppetz, 2020) and creates changes in the human resources needed by these sectors (Cited in, MoNE, 2022; Acemoğlu, Restrepo, 2018, Özer and Perc, 2020; Sahlberg, 2007). The international importance of the Project increases with Turkey's demand for EU membership, increasing domestic and foreign investments, and international trade volume. This situation shows that Turkey needs to mobilize all its economic resources and that a certain degree of localization is inevitable since the majority of economic and industrial activities in the country are regionally distributed (MEGEP, Initial Report, 2003, VIII). The indirect impact of SVET has been integrated into primary education, secondary education, and higher education, contributing to the development of a modern, flexible, and high-quality vocational education system that meets the needs of the business world (SVET, Final Report, 2007, 7).

The political impact of SVET and MTEM is as important as its economic dimension. When these two projects started, a new government was established in Turkey and demonstrated its will to develop a common vision with the EU. The EU process and the government's priority policies coincided with the need for vocational education. Another issue is that Turkey has applied for membership to the EU, and the steps to be taken regarding education, which is one of the important chapters for admission to membership, have gained momentum in these two project periods.

Turkey is making efforts to improve vocational education to improve the quality of the workforce and increase employment opportunities in all sectors for economic growth. To support these efforts, it was decided at the 1999 EU Helsinki Summit that Turkey would benefit from MEDA funds. As a result, a project agreement was signed between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the EU on 4 July 2000 to strengthen the vocational education and training system in Turkey. This project aims to close the gap between the labor force needs of the Turkish economy and the outputs of vocational and technical schools (MEGEP, Inception Report, 2003,1,1).

The education system in Turkey has a centralized structure and the government focuses on revising the education system to meet national needs. However, some problems and the resources to solve these problems are not evenly distributed. In this context, localization of the vocational education sector is also important (MEGEP, Inception Report, 2003, XVI). SVET can be considered as a project initiated to help implement the policies that the Ministry of National Education wants to implement. At the same time, the project successfully supported the Turkish government in the process of adapting the vocational education and training system to the socio-economic needs of the country and modernizing it according to lifelong learning principles (MEGEP, Final Report, 2007, 7). The achievements of SVET and MTEM have been highly appreciated as

they provide a solid and sustainable foundation for future reforms and strengthening of the system. In this way, steps regarding the future development of Turkey's vocational education system can be taken more successfully (SVET, Impact Assessment, 2009,4).

### **2.3.6 Establishing a lifelong learning policy**

Since the concept of lifelong learning has become one of the most important concepts of the new century, it has entered the agenda of all of Europe and then the world. Nowadays, people's quality of life has increased and life expectancy has increased. The era of people being able to make ends meet with a single job throughout their lives is over. Citizens now try to survive with a few skills and jobs. It is an expected development that the first area that this lifestyle affects or is affected by is vocational education. One of the areas that Turkey is expected to adapt to the EU membership process is the concept of lifelong learning. For this purpose, the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning was established in the Ministry of National Education, and joint projects were prepared with the EU to establish lifelong learning at the policy level. In this context, the lifelong learning strategy document was prepared for the first time and became one of the top policy documents of the state.

The concept of lifelong learning has become the focus of education discussions since the early 1990s. The year 1996 was declared the year of lifelong learning in Europe and was supported by the white report on growth, competitiveness, and employment developed by the European Council. The aim of this report is to raise awareness in society in order to adapt the education and training systems in Europe to the 21st century conditions (MoNE, Vocational Courses, and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007, p.281). MoNE developed the "Lifelong Learning Policy Document" project in order to create a policy on lifelong learning in Turkey, and after the project was completed, this document was transformed into "Turkey Lifelong Learning Strategy Document" (HBÖ, Initial Report, 2011).

### **2.3.7 Localization of vocational education and training**

There is a widespread view in EU reports that Turkey's decision-making mechanisms are very centralized. In the MoNE, MEBGEP Project prepared by the Ministry of National Education for the structuring of the EU education system, it was recommended that some powers be given to provincial directorates and, if necessary, to schools (MoNE, MEGEP, Green Document, 2010). Discussing the type of graduates that the business world in Turkey wants and which type of graduates they need in which region in the future were among the constant demands of the business circles. SVET and its successor, MTEM, attempted to see the expectations of the business world by making regional analyzes for the needs of the labor market for the first time. Provincial employment boards, under the same management of provincial directorates and business circles, have been established in the provinces within this framework. In Europe, the vocational education and training system is managed at the regional level, payments received from employers are transferred to education, training programs are designed, and many practices, including

the management of vocational schools and the participation of social partners, are widely carried out (MONE, Social Partners Policy Document, 2007). SVET and MTEM projects have been implemented at local and school levels as well as at national and provincial levels. The practices carried out by the Ministry of National Education in the vocational education and training process have spread throughout the country with the participation of social partners and awareness about the project has increased (MEGEP, Final Report, 2007, 17).

### **3. Conclusion and Suggestions**

Turkey has determinedly emphasized its goal of EU membership, along with the general political goals in the 8th and 9th five-year development plans, to bring education and training up to date. These plans include information on how to raise the level of workforce education in order to increase international competition and equip the workforce with the knowledge and skills needed by the information society (MoNE, Vocational Courses, and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007). In the Lisbon Council Policy Statement, the common characteristics of the most successful countries in terms of education are listed. Countries that focus on achieving good results rather than controlling their resources and educational content have abandoned the trial-and-error method with the aim of creating universal superior standards in teaching methods. Again, developed countries have moved away from uniformity and focused on diversity and individual needs (Schleichner, Lisbon, 2007).

Although the USA invests a significant amount in education, it receives a significant portion of this from students' registration fees. In Korea, class sizes and school hours complement each other because families are willing to finance their children's education. In Finland, while the education system is being completely changed, there are also increases in public expenditures. Establishing a globalization council in Denmark is aimed to help develop new directive policies for the country. On this occasion, it was aimed to make radical changes in education systems without spending more (MoNE, Vocational Courses and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007, p.273). However, citizen contribution and obligation have not been ignored in achieving these goals.

The general trend in EU countries is to focus on a market-oriented approach and performance elements. This means that the demand-dominated approach prevails over the supply-dominated approach. The demands of the private sector are prioritized. This structure, unlike the traditional statist structure, means taking the determination of policies (EU Policies) as a basis accepting the delegation of authority (more autonomy to institutions) and creating new areas in line with the needs for new and different qualifications. These are linked to continuous professional development (cited in by MoNE, Vocational Courses, and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Report, 2007, p.273; Stephan, 1999).



Education and vocational training is an area that Europe places a strategic emphasis on. The VET systems of these countries are shaped according to the economic, social, and cultural characteristics and traditions of the countries. The EU's strategic goal in education and training is to become a world leader in terms of quality. To this end; It strives to increase the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems, to increase individuals' access to education and training services, and to ensure that large groups benefit from them. It also encourages member and candidate countries in this direction (MoNE, Vocational Courses and Teacher Education Policy and Strategy Document, 2007).

EU-funded SVET and VET projects, which started with the EU harmonization process, aimed not to impose a foreign structure on the vocational education system in Turkey, but to strengthen the system by modernizing it. When we look at all education processes; When we compare the studies carried out with vocational education, the projects proposed, the investments made and the policy decisions taken, and the vocational education policies developed with the EU process in the past periods, it is seen that they left permanent, deep-rooted and sustainable effects on the Turkish education system.

Although the vocational education system in Turkey has its own systematics, one of its biggest shortcomings is that there is no country in its own region that can be compared with itself at a scientific and strategic level. For this reason, the EU process has become a best practice example with which Turkey can compare its problems related to vocational education and the solutions it produces in the end. One of the important problems of vocational education in Turkey was the lack of an institution that would work in cooperation with internationally known NGOs and state institutions on issues such as recognition of prior learning and professional standards. SVET and the subsequent MTEM completed the preparation and installation phases of MYK, which is Turkey's internationally known institution, in every aspect, thus creating a modern structure for vocational education.

During Turkey's EU membership process, one of the areas that it lacked and was expected to adapt to its system was policies related to life span. For this purpose, the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning was established in the Ministry of National Education, and joint projects were prepared with the EU to establish lifelong learning at the policy level. In this context, a lifelong learning strategy document was prepared for the first time and this document became the top policy document of the state with the approval of the government from the state's high planning board. The ongoing lack of coordination and conflicts of authority between MoNE and YÖK, the two authorized institutions of vocational and technical education in Turkey, have been replaced by institutional cooperation through the SVET and MTEM projects, with the positive atmosphere and vision brought by the EU process, so that it is possible to carry out holistic studies on aspects of vocational education. has happened.

With MTEM, which was prepared with the EU process, the incomplete cooperation between faculties and industry and the inconsistencies between the

education programs of technical education faculties and vocational high schools have been resolved with a holistic approach. With the SVET and MTEM projects, the low-status field and professional image of teachers in vocational and technical education has partially changed with the project activities implemented throughout Turkey, professional collaborations with EU institutions, and technical investments made in some departments, leading to a tendency towards the formation of a high field and profession image. has entered.

With the EU process, the government's priority policies coincided with the needs of vocational education. Turkey has applied for membership to the EU and the steps to be taken regarding education, which is one of the important chapters for admission to membership, have gained momentum in these two project periods. EU-supported SVET and MTEM projects complement each other. The EU supported the Turkish government through the Ministry of Education in the process of modernizing and harmonizing the vocational-technical education system in line with the country's socioeconomic needs and lifelong learning policies.

The vocational education vision developed through the EU process aims not to adapt the system in European countries, but to develop a new system suitable for Turkey's conditions. These developments also enabled Turkey to complete the necessary changes for its EU entry vision. SVET Project has determined on what basis and with what criteria the debates on vocational education should be addressed in order to resolve them. The EU's experience in vocational education has also been accepted as an important benchmark in this regard. However, ultimately it is aimed for Turkey to create a unique system.

One of the best ways for institutions working in the education system to improve themselves is by producing joint work with similar institutions and benefiting from each other's experiences and opportunities. During the EU process, the European Training Foundation, which is the advisory body responsible for the EU's vocational education, provided significant support with the reports they prepared as well as expert contributions to the vocational education system.

Vocational education in Turkey is a controversial issue that has been on the agenda of governments recently. The proficiency of the professional staff trained by the Ministry of National Education in the industry or how well they meet the needs of the sector has been one of the issues that has been discussed for many years. The claim that the graduates trained by the Ministry of National Education are not sufficient for the sectors to employ vocational high school graduates causes controversy. In addition, the claim that sectors train the personnel they want instead of the personnel required by the Ministry of Education in order to train personnel suitable to their needs is also on the agenda. Another issue is the criticism of the sectors that they do not cooperate sufficiently with the Ministry of National Education on vocational training and employment issues. The fact that the vocational education system in Turkey does not comply with EU standards also causes controversy. Finally, the very diverse structure of vocational

education in Turkey is also seen as a problem. Programs such as SVET and MTEM have provided a suitable platform for discussions and resolution on these issues.

In the international projects carried out in the MoNE during the EU harmonization process, a Turkish expert worked together with a foreign expert for each policy heading. This structuring was later implemented in all international projects, thus MoNE achieved a significant gain by transferring international know-how to Turkey.

### **3.1 Suggestions**

Since vocational education has an impact that concerns and affects all parties of the country, the state, the relevant sector, and civil society must work simultaneously and in coordination in future studies. Considering the field of work of the graduates of vocational education and the compulsory collaborations, vision studies in this field should be progressed by providing technical and expert cooperation with EU institutions, which are the biggest interlocutors of Turkey's regional exports. Vocational training is an expensive investment area. It can also be seen that investments made in vocational education do not have the expected effect despite all efforts. For this reason, in the vision studies to be carried out in this field, the reports of global institutions and the regional and country-wide future expectations of the sectors should be combined with the vision of the Ministry of Education. Joint work with institutions such as the European Education Foundation, which has a global impact and a good level of expertise, should be continued. While working with institutions such as the EU, Turkey should constantly develop its human resources with co-expertise systems and ensure the continuous transfer of knowledge (know-how) through projects.

### **Statement of Research and Publication Ethics (Mandatory Statement)**

As a researcher, I declare that we pay attention to all ethical principles and rules in the collection, analysis, and reporting of data.

### **Authors' Contribution Rates to the Article (Mandatory Declaration)**

There is no one else who contributed to this study other than the author.

### **Ethics Committee Permission**

Since the study was a document analysis, an ethics committee certificate was not required.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Education Manager. He completed his primary, secondary and high school education in Sakarya. Akyüz, who received his bachelor's degree from Marmara University Turkish Language and Literature Department in 1997, completed his master's degree from

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