Changes in Business Education at the Pre-University Level: Turkish Trade Vocational Schools(*)

Üniversite Öncesi İşletme Eğitiminde Değişim: Türk Ticaret Meslek Liseleri

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A b s t r a c t

This paper aims to narrate the history of how trade vocational schools as pre-university business education centers have gained (and lost) acceptance while simultaneously linking this historical analysis with the organizational literature. The concept of legitimacy is employed to constitute the linkage point. As the result of research conducted via archival and secondary data sources, it is found that trade vocational schools have experienced a process of organizational change similar to that of other vocational schools in Turkey, although these schools are insufficient in the provision of business and trade education. On the other hand, their legitimation process reflects a unique non-linear form, which reveals the emerging dimensions of vocational and educational legitimacy.

Keywords: Trade vocational schools, business education, historical analysis, oscillating legitimacy

Ö z e t

Bu çalışma, üniversite öncesi düzeyde işletme eğitiminin merkezi olarak kabul edilen Ticaret Meslek Liselerinin kabul edilebilirliklerini nasıl kazanıp kaybettiklerini, tarihsel analiz ile örgüt yazınını ilişkilendirerek anlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. İki yazın arasında bağlantı noktasını oluşturan kavram ise

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meşruiyet olmuştur. Arşivden ve ikincil veri kaynaklarından yapılan araştırma sonucunda, ticaret meslek liselerinin Türkiye'deki diğer meslek liseleri ile benzer bir örgütsel değişim süreci yaşadığı, yine de işletme ve ticaret eğitimi vermede yetersiz kaldıkları görülmüştür. Öte yandan, söz konusu okulların geçirdikleri meşrulaşma süreci, mesleki ve eğitimsel meşruiyet açısından ortaya çıkan boyutlarıyla, kendine has, doğrusal olmayan bir formu yansıtmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ticaret Meslek Liseleri, işletme eğitimi, tarihsel analiz, salınımlı meşruiyet

Introduction

Business history as a discipline mainly focuses on systematical research of an individual firm by analyzing its archives (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006). From a broader perspective, the content of the discipline has been defined as everything that exists in the past of a business (Üsdiken & Kieser, 2004). As a research area, this field has been questioned whether it is a separate discipline, a part of management studies, or a part of history (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014). Moreover, which methodological approach best fits its aims is controversial, as well (Soydemir & Ercek, 2019). However, the discipline, having established its own community of field-related organizations, has become more institutionalized worldwide. Although it originated as a research area in the United States, studies of business history have diffused to the European Continent and Eastern countries including Japan and China. As the field expands around the world, the content of the study area is changing, as well (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014).

Business history studies in Turkish literature occasionally dealt with the history of business education. For example, there are some studies about the shifts that have occurred in business education in comparison with other countries (Kipping, Üsdiken, & Puig, 2004; Üsdiken, Kieser, & Kjaer, 2004; Üsdiken, 2004) and there are some studies related to academic tendencies and their evolutions in Turkey (Üsdiken, 2009; Üsdiken & Wasti 2009). Nonetheless, all of these studies about "business education history" have been conducted at higher education levels. These studies provide us with information about the evolution of business administration education at the university level and about the scientization of business and management as fields of research.

According to Üsdiken (2004) and Sargut (2009), in Turkey, business education at the university level started in 1883 with the establishment of the first relevant schools in the Ottoman Empire under the influence of the French, German, and

US education systems, respectively. Over the years, university-level business education has evolved in Turkey, being affected by the internal politics of the country (Sargut, 2009) and also by the diffusion of some global influences (Üsdiken, 2009). Although we have information about the evolutionary pattern that university-level business education has experienced in Turkey over the years, we do not have such information about business education at the pre-university level. To the author's knowledge, there are no available studies providing research about the history of business education at the middle school or high school levels in Turkey. This is understandable since the term "business" was first transferred to this country with the introduction of university-level business education. Furthermore, in practice, most of the people dealing with "business" have been university graduates or academicians since the 1950s. On the other hand, in the last years of the Ottoman Empire, during the transition to the Republican regime, and also in the first years of the Turkish Republic, university-level education was not widespread in the country, and this was true in all areas, not only in the business field. In those years, business education was referred to as "bureau," "office," "trade," or "commercial" education and was conducted in vocational schools at the middle school or high school educational levels.

The aims of such business schools primarily entailed educating students about the practical needs of organizational settings and accelerating the accumulation of knowledge in the business and management fields by scientific research (Özkul, 2012). The latter of these aims seems to be held by universities today, while the former may be provided by other educational organizations, such as vocational schools. Therefore, studying trade vocational schools (TVSs) may provide an opportunity to review what we know about business and management history in Turkey (Üsdiken, Selekler, & Çetin, 1998).

In the time of the Turkish Republic, TVSs were first established in 1924 in Trabzon, Ankara, İzmir, Eskişehir, and Adana. These schools were initially under the control of the Ministry of Trade and were transferred to the Ministry of Education in 1928 and 1929 (Çapa, 2012). These schools aimed to educate qualified workers for small trade enterprises and similar institutions. Small trade enterprises were important in those years since the country had not yet been properly industrialized. That is why having graduated from a middle school or high school was enough to qualify for most jobs in the first years of the Turkish Republic before university-level business education became more widespread in the country after the 1940s. In the following years, the meaning attributed to these schools changed drastically,

together with their expected duties. Due to the paucity of theoretical and empirical studies about the evolution of TVSs compared to university-level education, we lack information about whether these schools were affected by the same pressures as universities or whether they evolved for other reasons. We also do not know the historical trajectories about these schools and the possible cleavages such as those experienced in the case of university-level education (Üsdiken, 2004; Sargut, 2009).

Therefore, this paper aims to explore the changes that TVSs experienced in Turkey between 1924 and 2016 in terms of the meaning attributed to them. At the same time, this study examines which dimensions of legitimacy are reflected as a result of the changes in meanings attributed to these schools. The year 1924 is chosen since it was the date of establishment of the first TVSs in Turkey; 2016 was the endpoint in the process of data extraction. Two main contributions are expected of this study. First of all, by exploring the changes that TVSs experienced in the past, this study combines historical analysis with the organizational literature, and specifically that of institutional theory. Organizational change, which can be simply defined as a process during which organizational forms or practices evolve, and the organizational field consist of mutually related actors producing similar services or products (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Therefore, the TVS field can be understood as a sub-field of education, and any change happening in it is worthy of being extracted and may provide promising information, especially in the presence of historical data. Secondly, apart from describing a field-level change process, another linkage point established here with the institutional theory is related to the construction of legitimacy, which is a central concept of institutional theory (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Tost, 2011). For some scholars, the variety of audiences in any institutional case may lead to a decrease in perceived legitimacy (Alajoutsijärvi, Juusola, & Siltaoja, 2015: 286). According to Alajoutsijärvi et al. (2015), education consists of the process, the product, and customer satisfaction. As an organizational field, business education and specifically TVSs may be accepted as multiple-audience fields facing divergent expectations from different organizations. Even for universities, Sargut (2009) indicated that some appeal to their institutional history as a legitimation tool together with state support. The present study aims to explore the potential connection between the evolving meanings and missions in the TVS field and emergent legitimacy dimensions accompanying the former.

To reach the first aim of this study, examining the processes of change that the TVS field has experienced, documents such as state planning texts specifying the

change in the perceived meaning and the assigned mission of these schools were found, analyzed, and compared. For analysis of the dimension of reflected legitimacy, historical speeches by experts regarding the position of these schools were obtained from archives. The paper is divided into six main sections. In the first section, the conceptual details of the legitimacy and legitimation process are explained. In the second section, the data sources and analysis methods are explained. In the third section, the three historical periods of change experienced by TVSs are outlined. In the fourth section, the legitimacy dimensions of the TVS field in those different historical periods are identified. The discussion in the fifth section explicates the theoretical contributions of the findings, and the paper ends with a conclusion that notes the limitations of the study and suggests future approaches to this topic.

Legitimacy and Legitimation

Organizational legitimacy, which has been recently defined as the perceived appropriateness of an organization for a social system in terms of rules, values, norms, and definitions (Deephouse, Bundy, Tost, & Suchman, 2016), is a condition obtained by an organization or groups of organizations by organizational forms/practices, structures, or sets of rules as the result of a process called legitimation (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Deephouse & Suchman 2008). According to Suddabby, Bitektine, and Haack (2017), legitimacy as a research construct is studied in three ways in the organizational literature: as a property, resource, or asset (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975); as an interactive process of social construction (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), and as a perception (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Whichever approach is taken, all legitimacy studies explicate a process of evaluation held by some stakeholders (called legitimators or legitimacy evaluators) of an entity (the subject of the evaluation) against some criteria (called legitimacy types or legitimacy dimensions). The majority of legitimacy studies rely on four basic dimensions of legitimacy: regulative legitimacy (being in accordance with laws and regulations), pragmatic legitimacy (concurrence with the interest of some stakeholders in that organizational field), moral legitimacy (being proper in terms of ethical or moral judgments), and cognitive legitimacy (taken-for-grantedness) (Deephouse et al., 2016). There are some other dimensions of legitimacy as well, such as emotional legitimacy (based on individual feelings), technical legitimacy (such as certifications), and managerial legitimacy (organizational performance) (Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzalez, & Diez-de-Castro, 2020).

These dimensions are revealed as a result of the evaluation process of legitimacy, or they form a base for legitimacy assessments. In each case, legitimacy when studied as a social construction process is called legitimation.

Legitimation was defined early on as a process by which the legitimacy of subjects changes over time or as a process, whereby the acceptability of an object increases over time (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). The extant literature of legitimacy explicates the legitimation process as a linear sequential process. Sequential definitions of the legitimation process take recourse to the three-dimensional framework of Suchman (1995) and Scott (1995) while framing pragmatic, moral, regulative legitimation occurring in the first stages of legitimation and cognitive legitimation in the last stages (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Johnson, Dowd, & Ridgeway, 2006; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). However, some studies propose the reverse of this sequence and suggest the possibility of a non-linear format of sequential legitimation efforts (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008).

According to Alajoutsijärvi et al. (2015), some studies have questioned the legitimacy of business schools in their ability to produce the expected value and in promoting morally proper practices. In some other studies, business schools are defined as lacking cognitive legitimacy (Alajoutsijärvi et al., 2015). In order to identify whether any organizational form fulfills the expectations of various audiences in the pertinent field pragmatically, is normatively moral, or is accepted as comprehensive cognitively, the criterion of the legitimacy evaluation should be clear. If legitimacy criteria in a field are vague, this type of legitimacy challenges are defined as the paradoxical nature of legitimacy, whereby any action designed to strengthen the legitimacy of an entity may have an opposite effect (Alajoutsijärvi et al., 2015). I propose that the legitimacy challenges that TVSs have experienced may be related to the ambiguity in the evaluation criterion, which resulted in different dimensions of legitimacy becoming dominant in different historical periods. Those historical periods will be explained in the third section of this paper.

Data Sources and Analysis

Selective coding, also referred to by some authors as theoretical coding, is a coding process in which all categories and subcategories become systematically linked with the central/core category, the one "that appears to have the greatest explanatory relevance" for the phenomenon being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 104). This

paper aims to explore two fundamental core categories, which can be defined as (1) the field-level changes that TVSs experienced and (2) the legitimacy dimension of TVSs reflected throughout historical periods. Therefore, all relevant documents were coded selectively (or theoretically). An elaborate process of reading, coding, and cross-checking all documents' information was undertaken by the author to explore and verify the results. The data sources of this study can be summarized as follows:

(1) Journal Articles

(2) State Development Plans and Industrial Plans

(3) State Strategic Documents

(4) Research Reports of the Ministry of Education

(5) Expert Reports

(6) Historical Reports of Individual TVSs

(7) Parliamentary Minutes

(8) Reports and Documents of National Education Council Meetings (*Milli Eğitim Şuraları*)

(9) Newspaper Archives

(10) Archives of the Ankara Trade Vocational School

(11) Various Books and Articles

Change in the Trade Vocational Schools of Turkey

Between 1922 and 1940

Although some scholars have argued that commerce, accounting, and economics education cannot be assumed as business education (Aysan, 1973: 10), for others, business education was the synonym of trade education in Turkey and even in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century (Özkul, 2017). Founded in 1923, the Turkish Republic inherited a very limited industrial base from the Ottoman Empire (Üsdiken, 2004) and only one university continued its existence into the new era. During the Ottoman period, trade as business was generally pursued by non-Muslim minorities (Özalp, 1961). However, the young Republic and the founder of the

new country, Atatürk, approached the concept of trade as one of the main modernization tools among others such as a healthcare system and industrialization. In 1923, the first İzmir Economics Congress was organized, even as the country was in the middle of a war. Although there was no direct decision mentioned about trade education in the statement of that congress (İlkin & Gürün, 1972), the tendency of the new Republic was identified as being focused in the direction of trade expansion. To this end, between 1922 and 1924, the first TVSs were established by private entrepreneurs and the Ministry of Trade, especially in seaside cities such as Samsun, Trabzon, İzmir, and Adana, where trade and economic activities were relatively intense, as well as in other major cities such as Ankara and Eskişehir (Doğan, 2012). The aim of these schools was defined as educating qualified workers for small and medium-sized enterprises. Doğan (2012) defined the expected duty of these schools as educating students as members of an occupation to work for someone else or to establish their own businesses.

Although these first schools were established to form the notion of vocational education in terms of trade, they catered primarily to the local needs. However, the mission of national education was identified by the Ministry of Education as follows:

"…*Raising next generations as individuals having ideas that do not conflict with the national values, while respectful to different ideas; schools raising generations that will make the country economically independent…*" (Akyüz, 2012: 331).

Therefore, there was a need to establish uniformity throughout the entire education system, including TVSs. Thus, in 1924, the Law on the Unity of the Education System (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*) was passed, requiring all primary, middle, and high schools to be connected to the Ministry of Education as the sole national authority to decide the curriculums and programs to be applied in all schools. After this attempt, the Ministry of Education requested official advice from some foreign experts between 1924 and 1927 regarding the education system and the organization of the schools.

The first expert invited to Turkey was John Dewey from Columbia University. Although Dewey commented on the education system as a whole, there were some special implications for vocational education in Turkey:

"…*Every vocational student should be forced to work in a real work setting before graduation… Trade, arts, and agricultural schools should be opened according to*

the economic necessities of their local regions and cities… All these vocational schools should be under a uniform system…" (Akdağ, 2008: 56).

In the following years, two more experts offered their views on vocational education specifically. The first of them was German educational expert Alfred Kühne, who visited the TVSs in Ankara, İzmir, and Eskişehir (Ergün, 1997: 140 as cited by Akdağ, 2008: 58). In his report, Kühne advised the development of primary school education and emphasized the importance of financing in educational development (Özcan, 2006). He also stressed that the industrial infrastructure of the country was not sufficient to provide employment for all TVS graduates; thus, he said, the initial aim of the state should be to expand employment, and thus industrial development (Özcan, 2006).

The next foreigner who was consulted as an advisor was the Belgium expert Omer Buyse, who came to Turkey in 1927 and prepared a report on vocational education after his visits to TVSs in Ankara, Kütahya, Uşak, İzmir, Aydın, Konya, and Adana. In his report, he noted:

"*Schools should be in accordance with the economic and industrial conditions of the region and representatives of chairs of commerce should participate in developing these schools. These schools should educate qualified workers, technicians, and engineers. Turkey is very rich in terms of natural resources, but curriculums do not include information about these resources. In rural areas, it is necessary to have institutions and experts for running these resources. What is needed is hard-working masters and workers, not technical professionals. It is not necessary to invite educators from Europe; they must be chosen from among craftspeople. Even if not literate, a qualified forger can be a good teacher…*" (Akdağ, 2008: 60-61).

In contrast to Dewey and Kühne, Buyse emphasized the localization of education and encouraged recognition of local qualifications throughout the country, instead of uniformity. Regarding vocational education, it can be inferred that both Dewey and Kühne's centralization approach and Buyse's approach based on local needs were valued by the politicians of the country. In the former case, the centralization of vocational education continued with a law passed in 1927, which transferred control of the TVSs from the Ministry of Trade and municipalities to the Ministry of Education, which implied centralization (Doğan, 2012). A special budgeting system was also implemented, which gave financial responsibility for these schools to the Ministry of Trade together with local authorities to ensure their cooperation (Doğan, 2012), which implied, as per Buyse's recommendations, localization.

Between 1933 and 1938, Turkey experienced a planned economy for the first time with the launch of the First and Second Industrial Plans. Although the scope was very limited, these plans included some projected measures regarding trade education, such as strengthening trade education in trade-intense regions, opening new schools where there previously were none, and providing technical and practical knowledge to students regarding trade education (Özyurt, 1981).

The first national vocational plan was prepared in 1939, under the name of the Plan of Development of Vocational Education (*Mesleki Tedrisatın İnkişafı Planı*), prepared in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Ministries of National Defense, Agriculture, and Economics (Demir & Şen, 2009). The plan emphasized the importance of local business opportunities and human resources in deciding the number and scope of vocational schools (Doğan, 2012). According to some authors, this plan was applied very successfully and led to an increase in the number of TVSs, and this also represented the last time that vocational education in Turkey would be directly shaped by foreign vocational education experts (Demir & Şen, 2009). After the 1940s, the scope of vocational education, including TVSs, changed drastically.

Before ending the review of this period, it is important to emphasize that all of these expert reports, laws, and regulations on TVSs reflected only a small part of the curriculums of these schools. According to the curriculum of the Ankara Trade Vocational School in 1928-1935, a "bureau commercial" lecture was provided in every class. A course on "business knowledge" was seen in 1933 for the fifth-year class for the first time and a class on foreign language was first seen in 1934 for sixth-year students. The general lack of variance among the years in curriculums may imply inefficiency in the implementation of the decisions.

Between 1940 and the 1980s

Starting in the 1940s, a new period began for TVSs. The first important step in this new era involved the establishment of such schools in every Turkish province regardless of the economic conditions and local employment opportunities (Doğan, 2012). Although this step was related to the provision of increased budgets for these schools (Demir & Şen, 2009; Doğan, 2012), the interest in education for small enterprises and the development of local handicrafts were simultaneously declining (Doğan, 2012). This pattern contradicted with the perspective on TVSs before 1940, which focused on local necessities, and thus led to a decrease in relationships

and cooperation within the local business environment (Doğan, 2012). The second crucial step in this period was the prioritization of the mission of preparing graduates for university-level education instead of direct entry into business life. According to the Code of the Board of Education and Training (*Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu*), as of 1946, TVSs were defined as follows:

> "*Trade vocational schools are educational centers that prepare their students for higher business education primarily. For the ones who cannot continue to the higher level of business education, school should enable them to be prepared in general, and technically, for private entrepreneurship and qualified to work in business organizations*" (Doğan, 2012: 19).

With this definition, for the first time, the mission of the TVSs shifted towards higher business education instead of direct entry into working life. This situation essentially continued until the 1980s, when the general economic policies of the country shifted drastically.

Before the 1980s, the most apparent forms of change in the meaning attributed to TVSs can be observed within two main categories: (1) expressions about vocational education in the development plans of the state and (2) expressions about vocational education in the National Education Council meetings.

(1) Development plans of the state are regular five-year statements that include a summary of the previous years and projections for the forthcoming years on the issues of education, healthcare, defense, and industrial and commercial investments of the country. The first development plan was launched in 1963 and since then they have been continuously released. There are some points included in these plans that offer ideas about the patterns that TVSs have experienced. The first direct decision regarding TVSs was included in the third five-year plan (1973: 755):

> "*Trade vocational schools, by providing vocational education in addition to the general high school education, increased [in numbers] in the country. However, it is obvious that the graduates are lacking in satisfying the needs of the market with their education…*"

In the same text, it is suggested to re-structure these schools to meet the needs of both public and private sectors in terms of quality (1973: 759). For the first time in an official text, TVSs were projected to be departmentalized into four specializations: finance and accounting, trade and bureau services, cooperative systems, and secretarial services (1973: 720).

In the fourth five-year plan (1979: 433), the situation of the TVSs was described more dramatically:

"*There is capacity excess in the opening rate of these schools. The content of the education provided here is neither in accordance with modern industry nor with the traditional structure...*"

Although the fourth five-year plan did not include any suggestions regarding these situations, it was interestingly claimed that the demand for these schools had increased in the previous years as a result of an incentive given to graduates for entering some higher-level trade academies (1979: 445).

(2) National Education Council meetings (*Milli Eğitim Şuraları*) are primary advisory committees of the Ministry of Education, organized every three or four years. Decisions and suggestions proposed here are not legally binding; they are merely accepted as having potential value for the Ministry of Education. Therefore, these council statements may also give information about the potential shift experienced by TVSs. After the second council met in 1943, it was suggested to publish specific trade and vocational textbooks, and with the sixth council in 1957, it was suggested to educate students more practically.

It can be inferred that TVSs during this period were not accepted as organizations having fundamental duties, as was the case of the first years of the Republic. Instead, they were scattered across the country in terms of quantity without considering local needs. Neither the programs offered nor the decisions made about the schools were satisfactory and specific to local needs.

Until the 1980s, TVSs were accepted as supplementary to higher-level business education. Their incapacity to fulfill market needs was identified, but nothing significant was done to overcome this situation. The demand for these schools seems related to the opportunity provided to students by some of them to enter university, not seemingly related to employment directly.

Finally, according to the curriculum of the Ankara Trade Vocational School between 1940 and 1980, no meaningful change in the program has been observed. However, there are some remarkable points, such as the removal of the class of "business knowledge" from the curriculum or the inclusion of "religious knowledge" after the 1970s. Other classes were also added to the program, such as statistics, advertising and sales, asset control, trade law, economy, and finance.

After the 1980s

At the very beginning of this period, the state's Fifth Development Plan (1985: 144) included a special article on a special type of TVS, called Anatolian Trade Vocational Schools, providing education in the English language. According to Doğan (2012), the reason for the establishment of this new type of vocational school was related to a desire to make their graduates more competitive for university-level education.

The most important regulation related to vocational schools in Turkey including TVSs was passed in 1998, which required a smaller coefficient in calculating the university placement grades of the graduates of vocational schools (Sönmez, 2010). This situation made graduates of vocational schools disadvantaged compared to other high school graduates, which led to a decline in the demand for these schools. One year later, in 1999, a National Education Council meeting was held to focus on vocational education in Turkey, leading to a suggestion of re-structuring the system within the boundaries of pre-university education. Although these attempts may have been intended as efforts to make these schools return to their original vocational aims rather than preparing students for university-level education, they put TVSs in a more inferior position. Since the policy was not supported by additional employment opportunities and the education given in these schools was not enough for finding a qualified job, demand for these schools declined (Demir & Şen, 2009).

The disadvantaged position of vocational school graduates continued until 2009 when the rule of a smaller coefficient in calculations was removed. To compensate for that situation, in 2001 a special law had also been passed, called "Project of Direct Transition without Exam," which allowed vocational school graduates to enter university-level programs directly related to high school departments (Demir & Şen, 2009: 47). However, here again, the duty assigned to the TVSs was focused on students' entry into universities instead of the expansion of the scope of their education and employment opportunities.

An exceptional regulation was passed in 2002, which made TVSs transition to a modular education system. Modular education is an individual-based teaching system that organizes programs in small pieces depending on certain analyses (Kaykı, 2008 as cited by Gömleksiz and Erten, 2010: 177). This system facilitated more specialization in these schools.

It was not until 2014 that TVSs—and vocational education as a whole—would return to their original mission of preparing students for real business life. In 2014,

within the scope of the Tenth Development Plan, the Ministry of Development identified some "Primary Conversion Programs," including a program for developing basic and vocational skills (2014: 186-187). This program, with the inclusion of some articles mentioned below, re-emphasized the duty of business enterprises to cooperate in the development of trade schools. The necessities of these enterprises were also to be taken into consideration in curriculums:

> "*Aims of the program are to… strengthen the connection between the employment market and education system... plan the education programs according to the needs of the market via making effective market need analysis...*"

In 2014, the "Strategic Action Plan for Vocational Education in Turkey" (2014: 48) was also passed by the Ministry of Education, which, for the first time, embraced "supporting the transition of trade vocational school graduates into business life" as a strategic action.

Legitimacy and Trade Vocational Schools

The process of change experienced in the TVS field, as explained above, illustrates that the expected duties and meanings attributed to TVSs evolved in Turkey over the years. This narrative raises the question of whether these schools are/were assumed and evaluated as being desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions about the legitimacy of TVSs (Suchman, 1995).

For the first historical period explained above, what the state expected from TVSs seems clear, since the Republic was very ambitious in reaching the level of developed and industrialized countries and these schools were assigned the duty of promoting this overall national aim. The founder of the country, Atatürk, made various visits to these schools between 1923 and 1925 to emphasize their importance (Demir & Şen, 2009), and this reflects their perceived appropriateness. For example, in 1923, Atatürk visited the İzmir TVS and said that:

> "… *The reason that we are far away from the point that we want to achieve is related to the ignorance of these vocational schools in the past*" (Demir & Şen, 2009: 42).

There were also some local educators and researchers, such as Hamamizade İhsan Bey (Çapa, 2012: 133), who emphasized the acceptance of these schools in their local regions. For the Trabzon TVS, Hamamizade İhsan Bey noted that:

"…Trabzon is a trade city just like İstanbul and İzmir; thus, here we need enlightened traders much more than we need any other profession. Substantially, the demand towards this school reflects the approval of this need by the community. Eighty percent of our students' parents are merchants and craftsmen. Our students attend job training in the offices in the afternoons..." (Çapa, 2012: 138).

According to this report, these students participated in internships in the most well-known business organizations of the city and some of them earned more money than their lecturers (Çapa, 2012).

Although the position of TVSs during this period reflects pragmatic legitimacy, it is not easy to say that they were cognitively accepted at the societal level. When we look at the parliamentary minutes of those years, we encounter two different points of view regarding their value in deputies' eyes:

"…It is already known that to progress in economics, trade schools are very important; thus, I suggest to open one in Ankara and one in Eskişehir… Students will learn foreign languages, which is needed for our development…" (Parliamentary Minutes, 1923: 545).

However, some deputies found them meaningless, stating, for example:

"…Well, they are offering to open a trade vocational school in Ankara. This demand seems appropriate… However, in most of our cities the existence of the Ministry of Trade is not notable. Industrial and trade affairs are facing difficulties in most local regions instead of support…" (Parliamentary Minutes, 1923: 546).

Therefore, during this first period, the dimension of the legitimacy of TVSs tended to increase pragmatically. However, there were no clear normative standards and there was an apparent lack of cognitive acceptability.

For the second period, between 1940 and 1980, the number of TVSs increased dramatically all over the country, as indicated in Table 1. The rise in numbers can be accepted as a reflection of acceptance at the societal level (Hannan & Freeman, 1988) and thus, perhaps, of the cognitive legitimacy of these schools. This situation is also in accordance with the national policy of scattering TVSs across the entire country. However, this ecological-density approach to cognitive legitimacy is controversial when compared to normative and pragmatic evaluations.

Table 1. Number of TVSs between 1940 and 1980 (Ministry of Education, 2016)

Years	Number of schools	Number of enrolled students
1940-1941	7	646
1945-1946	12	1,742
1950-1951	20	1,947
1955-1956	21	3,067
1960-1961	25	4,895
1965-1966	43	12,552
1970-1971	62	20,617
1971-1972	62	27,294
1972-1973	66	33,736
1973-1974	72	42,017
1974-1975	78	50,015
1975-1976	96	67,529
1976-1977	123	78,682
1977-1978	139	86,837
1978-1979	157	87,217
1979-1980	169	88,822
1980-1981	169	85,217

As explained before, during this period the main mission of TVSs shifted from training students for direct entry into business life to preparing students for university enrollment. However, there seems to have been inconsistency between this policy and the real opportunities for university entrance. Olalı (1970: 2) explained the paradox related to TVSs as follows:

"*The aim of the trade vocational schools is to train students towards handling managerial or merchandise business work… Today's economic and technological conditions require trade managers to update their knowledge even after graduation from university; trade vocational school knowledge alone is not enough… It is obvious that the training provided in trade vocational schools is adequate for neither university-level education nor business life. In Europe, there is a dual system as a*

solution for this. In one form of high schools, technicians are trained for practical working life and these students do not aim to go to university. In the other form of trade schools, which correspond to our trade vocational schools, students are trained towards university-level education to be future managers. Nevertheless, in our trade vocational schools, curriculums are full of theory and practical training is very poor. That is why graduates by necessity consider going to university. There are only two universities accepting them, which provide very limited quotas for them. Since they don't have a chance in entering other faculties, students take to the streets… It is not in accordance with our social equity approach to close university doors to these graduates… Trade vocational schools should be accepted as antecedents of economics, business administration, public policy, and law faculties… Hacettepe and [Middle East Technical University] accept these students with their special regulations and this attitude should be imitated by other governmental universities… In a real democracy, all citizens must have an equal right to obtain education…"

This long quotation summarizes the discrepancy between the officially defined duties assigned to TVSs by bylaws (which can be assumed as regulative legitimacy) and the actual opportunities provided to them to fulfill those duties. Although it was expected that TVSs would assist their graduates in reaching university-level education, the pathway for doing so was complicated. Therefore, there were reactions from graduates and students to policymakers, such as in 1958, when graduates who were not accepted by any university faculty appealed to the Prime Minister of that year, Adnan Menderes, demanding that he should solve their problems (Milliyet, 1958). In 1969, a boycott was organized by students, who demanded support in entering university after graduation (Milliyet, 1969).

During this second period, development plans and National Education Council meetings tried to provide normative standards for TVSs to promote moral legitimacy. However, the texts themselves admit the inadequacy of TVSs in fulfilling the expectations of the constituents of the field.

After 1980, the first attempt at legitimation entailed the promotion of language training in TVSs. This effort seems to have been appreciated by society according to a newspaper report from those days, which reflects the impact of the regulation on cognitive legitimacy:

"7,500 students applied for the quota of 144 in TVSs in İstanbul, İzmir, and Ankara. When asked, students responded that they did not have a special inclination

towards trade education, but they preferred to enter a high school that provides education in a foreign language…" (Milliyet, 1984).

However, another regulation in those years had a much greater impact on the destiny of TVSs: the policy on university entrance coefficient calculations, as explained above. According to some education scholars (Demir & Şen, 2009; Sönmez, 2010), the demand for TVSs declined in these years (1998-2009) compared to other types of high schools. Although an incentive was provided in 2002 to allow direct entry into some university faculties, according to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2010, half of TVS graduates did not advise others to attend their schools (Earged Report, 2010). When asked about the reasons for this lack of a recommendation, the participating students responded that the low chance of entering a university faculty was the first reason and the inadequacy of training compared to the necessities of the market was the second reason (Earged Report, 2010).

After 2010, policies regarding TVSs seemed to return to their original state; in other words, TVSs became more practically oriented and focused more on business and market cooperation in a modernized way. The Ministry of Education cooperated with İŞKUR (Turkish Employment Agency) and YÖK (Council of Higher Education) to foster this new era for TVSs. At the same time, municipalities, universities, unions, and associations cooperated in Ministry projects such as OSANOR (*Okul-Sanayi Ortaklaşa*: School-Industry Cooperation) and MEGEP (*Mesleki Eğitim ve Öğretim Sistemini Güçlendirme Projesi*: Project for Strengthening the Vocational Education and Training System) (Demir & Şen, 2009). These efforts aimed to enhance the ability of graduates to directly enter business life and to expand their job opportunities by the legitimation of the original mission of TVSs.
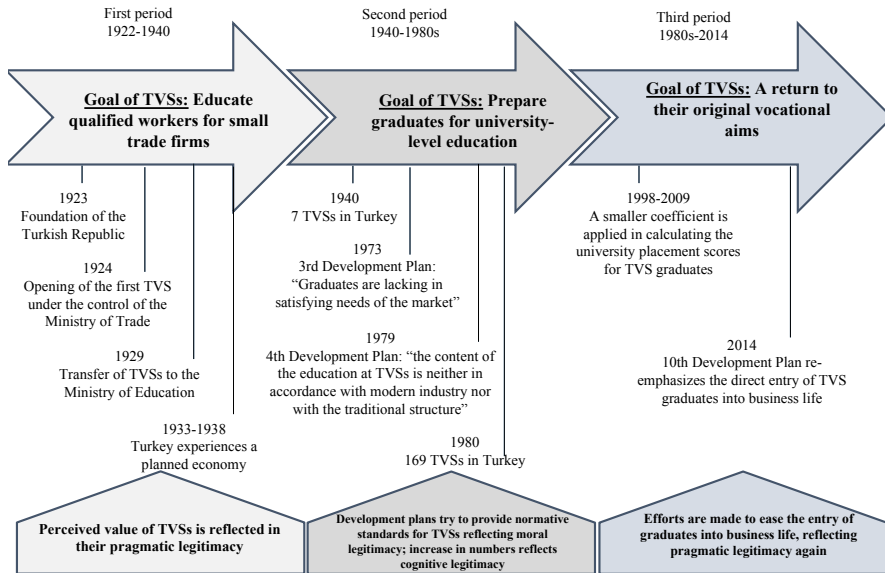
Discussion

In this paper, I have aimed to illustrate how a change in an organizational field over time may reflect the changes in the legitimacy dimensions in that field. During the first years of the Turkish Republic, the expected mission of TVSs was determined by the general national policies of the country, and reports of some foreign experts also had an influence. Although there seems to have been a clear understanding of TVSs in terms of their value for local and regional business development, they were not quantitatively satisfactory. In the second historical period reviewed, the

number of TVSs increased, but the quality of the training in these schools did not increase accordingly, as stated in various official reports. The mission of TVSs started to become vague during this period since their first expected outcome was accepted as the rate of students' entry into universities. However, there were inconsistencies in the system since it was not very easy for graduates to gain university acceptance. Together with this, the education provided in TVSs during this period was not satisfying the needs of the market. Therefore, a serious dilemma became apparent for graduates during these years, which led to a decrease in the demand for TVSs. In the final period, the mission ambiguity continued but there were some regulative attempts to compensate for that. Recently, the state took action to resolve the disadvantageous position of TVSs by fostering different projects with the cooperation of different civil organizations. The examination of TVSs historically gives us an idea about business education in its early state in Turkey, which has not been explored before.

Theoretically, I have tried here to link the historical narrative of the TVS field with the concept of legitimacy. Over the years, the ambiguity in policies, regulations, and other evaluative documents created confusion in this organizational field. Therefore, as the expected outcome of TVSs changed over the years and even became vaguer, evaluations of their appropriateness also began to be questioned. Some scholars explain such a narrative as the paradoxical nature of legitimacy (Alajoutsijärvi et al., 2015), as detailed above, while I prefer to use the term "legitimacy ambiguity." I define legitimacy ambiguity as a situation in which there is a lack of a clear criterion to judge the legitimacy of an entity, such as in the case of TVSs. During situations of legitimacy ambiguity, attempts to promote moral standards may decrease the pragmatic value or vice versa. At the same time, taken-for-grantedness at the cognitive level becomes impossible.

Figure 1 summarizes the overall historical phases through which TVSs have passed and the legitimacy dimensions that each period reflects. The narrative that I aim to illustrate in this figure may contribute to the literature in two main ways.

Figure 1. Overview of the History of Turkish Trade Vocational School(TVS)s

First, as I explained before, legitimation as a process is accepted to follow a linear sequential form by the extant studies, although some exceptional views do exist. However, even exceptional studies refer to step-by-step approaches to legitimation while recognizing that different dimensions may appear in any step (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008). On the other hand, since legitimation, by definition, is a change process, we can refer to theorizations of change, as well. According to Greenwood and Hinings (1988), change in a non-linear form including oscillations and delays rather than ordered and consistent revolution (what they call reorientation) is under-studied, although it is recognized more in organizational settings than in the literature. Potential sequential scenarios of different legitimation efforts during change processes have not captured the attention of scholars before. However, as Figure 1 summarizes, TVSs experienced an oscillating process of legitimation, which I define as a process that includes recurring to a dimension of legitimacy belonging to the early stages of a legitimated entity. The pragmatic legitimacy of TVSs was the first dimension reflected when TVSs emerged in the organizational field. Attempts to reinforce normative and cognitive legitimacy then followed. In the third phase, where we would expect to see the emergence of cognitive legitimacy according to

the extant literature, the pragmatic value of TVSs became apparent again. These oscillations in legitimation processes reveal that legitimation does not constitute a linear sequential process; instead, it is an ongoing process of evaluation and transitivity among different dimensions independent of the stage of the change process.

Secondly, there may be some emerging dimensions or types of legitimacy to which stakeholders (as legitimators) may appeal while making legitimacy assessments. The majority of the data sources used herein narrating the history of TVSs reveal the need for revision of the curriculums of these schools to better meet the vocational needs of the market. Obviously, in the literature, there is professional legitimacy defined specifically to appeal to normative standards. However, to be more precise, in this assessment, vocational legitimacy can be used. I define vocational legitimacy as conformity to the technical expertise and talent required for a specific task, including acceleration and dissemination of current knowledge about the technical skills required for that task. The extant literature describes sub-dimensions of professional legitimacy such as specialization, competence, and efficiency (Sanders & Harrison, 2008). Vocational legitimacy reflects these dimensions. However, there are dimensions of market compatibility and industrial needs, as well. Furthermore, the accumulation of knowledge is beyond scientific studies and reflects ordinary technical knowledge in the market. These aspects of the technical expertise of any profession can be considered as vocational legitimacy, which is more indigenous to the organizational field. Another legitimacy dimension emerging from the data sources is educational legitimacy. I define the educational legitimacy of any business school, including TVSs, as conformity of the educational institution's curriculum to the needs and standards of the business environment and market. Educational legitimacy is closely related to vocational legitimacy in terms of reflecting market needs. However, more specifically, educational legitimacy involves the compatibility of curriculums with the realities of current business life. Thus, from the insights that these data sources have revealed, educational legitimacy may permit a reduction in the volatility of the lifecycle of any educational institution and may thus lead to decreased oscillations in its legitimation process, as well.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to establish a link between historical research and institutional analysis of the narrative of an evolving organizational field. TVSs were very early places of business education; thus, explication of their history may provide a much clearer understanding of overall business education in Turkey. By linking the historical process of TVSs to the concept of legitimation, it was also aimed to discover a unique form of legitimacy dimension or legitimation process.

As a result of this study, it is seen that the TVS field has experienced a path similar to those followed by other vocational schools in Turkey in terms of laws and regulations. At the same time, university-level business education has become so powerful that these schools fall short in providing an adequate form of business education or trade education. According to Canbal, Kerkez, Suna, Numanoğlu, and Özer (2020), the Eleventh Development Plan and the Education Vision of 2023 aim to increase the importance of vocational education in Turkey. However, this state-level support does not include any specific regulations about TVSs or business education.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its definition and exemplification of oscillating legitimation. The emerging legitimacy dimensions described here, namely vocational and educational legitimacy, may also enlarge the scope of future legitimacy studies.

This study is limited in terms of its reflection of the current situation of TVSs. Another data collection process focusing on the inclusion of digitalization or artificial intelligence in school curriculums or projects may contribute further to the historical analysis of this field. Future studies may also enlarge the conceptualizations of vocational legitimacy and educational legitimacy by theoretically or empirically observing them in other organizational settings. Similarly, oscillating legitimation has been defined theoretically in this paper; it would be helpful to observe its prevalence in other empirical settings, which may give rise to a better explanation of legitimation processes.

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