Vocational Training through the Apprenticeship System in Turkey

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Abstract

The apprenticeship system in Turkey is believed to go back to the 12th century with the establishment of the Ahi associations (the word ahi means ‘brother’), which became the most powerful organizations in both the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires. In the Ahi system, vocational training, general education, and social life were interwoven. Each trade had its own Ahi association. They survived from the 12th to the 16th century. The most important reason for the collapse of the Ahi system was because it was an Islamic-oriented association. It excluded traders and artisans from other religions. The Ottoman Empire consisted of heterogeneous ethnic minorities who had their own laws and regulations, and who were functioning generally in trade and commerce. Consequently, as the numbers of minority traders and artisans increased, the need arose for wider co-operation. In the 18th century a new system called Gedik (corresponds to ‘monopoly’ in English) was established that was overtaken by another system called Lonca (have similarities to the guild-system) in the 19th century. After the establishment of the Republic, laws enacted to control the training and working conditions of apprentices and journeymen. The first law concerning artisans and training was issued in 1977 as the Law of Apprenticeship, Journeymanship and Mastership Number 2089. The vocational training model for apprentices is adapted from the German educational system, providing training for the working youth of 14 to 18 years of age. The educational planners in the Ministry of Education have pinpointed three different types of education: Apprenticeship training; vocational education in the enterprises; vocational education and orientation courses in educational centers. This paper explores the processes of vocational training through the apprenticeship system from its inception before the Republic to the present day in Turkey; and how they are historically, socially and culturally structured in the Turkish context.

This paper is an attempt to explore the processes of vocational training through the apprenticeship system from its inception before the Republic to the present day in Turkey; and how they are historically, socially and culturally structured in the Turkish context. Therefore, the apprenticeship system in Turkey is examined under two headings: the apprenticeship system before the Republic and the apprenticeship system after the Republic.

The Apprenticeship System before the Republic

When Nomadic Turks came to Anatolia from Central Asia in the 11th century they underwent some social change. They settled in villages, towns, and cities, thus changing their tribal life style. However, they preserved the traditions from their nomadic days; although they accepted Islam, the effects of the shamanism — their former belief system — still had some impact. At that time all commerce was controlled by the Armenian and Greek traders who had a strong guild system among themselves.

The changes in the social structure and the need to compete with the Armenian and Greek traders led the Turkish traders and artisans to establish their own organizations. This led to the establishment of the Ahi associations.

The Ahi Associations

The Ahi associations had been the major economic, social and cultural power in the Islamic Turkish Society for centuries. They survived from the 12th to the 16th century. The Ahi
associations were established after the Nomadic Turks came to Anatolia and settled down. The word *ahi* means ‘brother’ in Arabic. However, Ekinci (1991) argues that the word *ahi* comes from “aki” which means “generous”. There were several moral and social rules an *Ahi* should obey and these were called as the ‘*Ahi* system’. The aim was to live as an *insan-i kamil* (perfect-mature person). The main philosophy of *Ahi* system was to help the individual to have peace of mind both in this world and the next. This was to be achieved through a balanced way of living by investing both in this world where one leads one’s present life, and in the next world where one is supposed to go after death.

The *Ahi* way of thinking flourished among the artisans, and the *Ahi* associations became the most powerful organizations in both the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires. This was because work was highly valued among the people. Each trade had its own *Ahi* association; in smaller towns they would either organize in groups of trades or all the trades would organize under the same association.

There were many rules and regulations which determined almost everything ranging from who should be accepted for membership in the associations to supervision and discipline.

There were internal and external members of the associations. Internal members were all active workers including apprentices. External members were: The old masters whose workshops were run by their journeymen and apprentices: they would not require economic help from the association; The old masters who did not own a workshop and needed economic support: the association would provide them with economic support; The disabled and the sick who were once the internal members of the associations: since they could not work any longer, the associations would provide economic support for them.

Women were not allowed to become members of the *Ahi*. This restriction of women from economic activities in the society was part of the Islamic culture. Women were perceived as responsible for the house duties, child rearing, and looking after their husband. Therefore, the *Ahi* associations were based on fraternity associations (Cagatay, 1990).

In the *Ahi* system, society was perceived as an integral whole. People were not discriminated against, on the grounds of their occupation, social class or wealth. Each individual’s well-being was the concern of the whole society. The *Ahi* value system despised the man, as the saying goes, “who sleeps with a full stomach while his neighbor starves”. Therefore, everybody worked for the betterment of the whole society and each individual living in that society. Society was built on the principle of solidarity rather than competition. The system was organized to care not only for the members of the *Ahi* system but for all the individuals in the society. As a matter of fact, it was a moral obligation for an *Ahi* to spend all his personal savings for the benefit of people in need. This was called the “solidarity of life and wealth”, and exercised to such an extent that high levels of profit and increase in capital were discouraged because of the fear that they would destroy solidarity.

The basic aim of the *Ahi* system was to provide social equality and economic and occupational help to everybody — basically to the men-folk, since as already mentioned, the *Ahi* system excluded the women as members, although it lent support to members’ wives, daughters and sisters. The *Ahi* system depended on a paternalistic authority. At the top of the hierarchy was *Ahi Baba* (Father *Ahi*) who was the vocational, political, moral, and religious leader, yet perceived as a father by all *Ahi* members.
The master was the role model for the apprentice and the journeyman. A would-be apprentice was usually taken by the parents to a master and handed over with the words “eti senin kemigi benim” (his flesh is yours, his bones are mine).

Training in the Ahi System

In the Ahi system, vocational training, general education, and social life were interwoven. Therefore, there were two types of education in the Ahi system: vocational education and training, and social education.

The vocational skill acquisition process was long and highly structured. There was a hierarchy of steps to become a master: one would start as an assistant apprentice, would become first an apprentice and then a journeyman, and finally a master.

Assistant apprenticeship, the first step towards becoming a master, started about the age of ten when the parents requested a master to accept their son. Assistant apprentices would work in the workshop to acquire vocational skills but would also attend a dervish lodge — religious school — to get general education in religion, music, literature and similar subjects.

After serving two years as an assistant apprentice, one would become an apprentice. The length of an apprenticeship would change from trade to trade but it was in general 1001 days. However, in some trades — when the skills that were to be acquired were more complicated and required precision, like a jeweler — it could take as long as 20 years.

An apprentice was obliged to obey his master and the master was obliged to train the apprentice in all the details and subtleties of the vocation. In addition, an apprentice would learn the etiquette of the trade from his master. The apprentice would continue to go to the dervish lodge and there he would learn the manners to be a socially acceptable person. There were 740 social rules taught over time that were to be obeyed. These rules were concerned with the everyday life of a person: rules for cleaning, eating, speaking, dressing, stepping out of the house, how to walk in the neighborhood, and so on.

An apprentice would not leave his master and go to another one. However, the Ahi system would take care of the well being of each apprentice. If a master was found to be behaving badly towards his apprentice or not to be training him properly, then the master would not be allowed to take on another apprentice.

When the time serving as an apprentice had finished, an apprentice would be expected to accomplish a task and if his performance satisfied the master and the journeyman, with his skills, then he would become a journeyman.

Length of service as a journeyman was three years in all trades. A journeyman was bound to learn some military skills like riding a horse, fighting with sword, archery, and the like, besides continuing on-the-job training in the workshop.

After three years of service, a journeyman would attend a ceremony where he was expected to prove his competence in his specific trade, to a council of masters. If the journeyman was found to be successful, he would become a master (Ekinci, 1991).
In the *Ahi* system, nobody could establish his own business without first becoming a master.

Goksu (1996) explained that vocational skill acquisition in this system was highly related to life. The apprentice was not treated as a pupil learning something that is taught but as a person who was ‘working with responsibility’. If an apprentice could not perform a given task successfully that would mean loss of time and material, therefore the apprentices were expected to be responsible for their progress.

**The Collapse of the *Ahi* Associations**

If the *Ahi* associations had survived to this day they would probably have been referred to as non-governmental organizations since they were not established, governed, or supervised by the empire authorities. Unfortunately, they lost their influence gradually. In the late 16\textsuperscript{th} century, imports from Western countries, which were cheaper, created marketing problems; and there was an increase in the number of artisans in urban centers because of migration (Taspinar, 1992). The most important reason for the collapse of the *Ahi* system was because it was an Islamic-oriented association. It excluded traders and artisans from other religions. The Ottoman Empire consisted of heterogeneous ethnic minorities who had their own laws and regulations, and who were functioning generally in trade and commerce. Consequently, as the numbers of minority traders and artisans increased, the need arose for wider co-operation (Cagatay, 1990). Therefore, in this situation, new regulations were needed. The new system was called *Gedik*.

**The *Gedik***

In 1727, the number of master artisans who could have a licence to establish a business was restricted to prevent inflation of trade establishments.

The Turkish word *Gedik* corresponds to ‘monopoly’ in English. Therefore, it depended on the principle that a specific trade or occupation would only be performed by people who had been ‘licensed’. The ‘license’ could only be held by those who had been through the apprenticeship system. An apprentice would work beside the master and would become a journeyman and then would have to wait for his master to quit working or to die; then the journeyman would inherit the license of his master and would become a licensed master. Another way to obtain a license was to buy it. A journeyman whose master was still in business and had no intention to quit would negotiate with another master who wanted to quit the trade and would buy the license.

Consequently, those who did not have a license could not establish their own business and were obliged to work as a journeyman under a master artisan who had a license. Thus, problems arose between the masters and journeymen and the system weakened. The *Gedik* system continued until 1860. In the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, trade with foreign countries increased. However, the monopolistic *Gedik* system was a drawback in the competitive international trade and abolished in 1860 (Cagatay, 1990).
**The Lonca**

As trade with foreign countries increased, commercial relations with the Italian trading centers developed, and non-Muslim and Muslim Ottoman traders started working side by side. The Ottoman traders and artisans came together in places called *lonca* instead of dervish lodges. Later, *Lonca* became the name of the new organization where Muslim and non-Muslim traders and artisans came together. The *Lonca*, organized in the 19th century Ottoman Empire, corresponded to the guild system in medieval Europe. At that time, factory production had begun in Europe and the Ottoman traders and artisans could not compete with their European counterparts. The Ottoman Empire imported many goods but was unable to export goods, and thus weakened (Taspinar, 1992). *Lonca* organizations were abolished in 1912 (Ekinci, 1991).

The initial establishment of vocational education schools began in the 19th century by local administrations which financed and managed these schools (Akpinar, 2004).

**Legal Arrangements after the Republic**

Today, the working conditions of workers including apprentices and journeymen are controlled by law in Turkey. The laws on young people prohibit children under the age of 14 years and who are not primary school graduates from working. Moreover, the work conditions, the duration of the working day, and the hours of work are also regulated by these laws.

In Turkey, apprenticeship training is implemented in two different ways. The first one is carried out under Law No. 3308 by the Ministry of National Education; the second type of education is the apprenticeship training provided by professional organizations in occupational branches where the Ministry of National Education does not offer such training. However, there is also traditional apprenticeship training taking place in the informal sector which is not approved by the Ministry (Unluhisarcikli, 1999). The following provides the background of the present situation of the apprenticeship training in Turkey.

The enactment of the Law on Unification of Education in 1924, after the establishment of the Turkish Republic (1923), brought all the schools in Turkey under the management of the central authority (Ministry of Education) including vocational schools. There were 21 vocational school in 1923, which increased to 86 by the year 1940 (Alkan, 1999). In late 1940s, vocational courses were initiated as an important means for the training of skilled labor force. Mobile courses were also initiated to acquire vocational skills to people in villages. In addition to vocational courses, importance was also placed on 1-2 year practical trade schools to which primary school graduates could attend by the 1960s. In the 1960s, vocational high school was established as schools of 5 year duration after the completion of 5 year primary schools. The duration was later extended to 6 years. 4 year technical high schools were included into the system in the 1970s. With the National Education Basic Law No. 1739 the system was restructured in 1973 (Akpinar, 2004).

The first law concerning apprenticeship training was issued in 1977 as the Law of Apprenticeship, Journeymanship and Mastership Number 2089 which enabled the acquisition of a profession through apprenticeship training within the Turkish national education system. This law defined the status of apprentices, journeyman, and masters; regulations for the work
hours and work conditions; and social security and payment. However, there have been many arguments on the inclusion of this training within the system:

According to the Article 18 of the National Education Basic Law No. 1739, the Turkish national education system is divided into two major sections, namely, “formal” and “non-formal” education. The organization of apprenticeship training (also within Law No. 2089) has caused arguments concerning the place of this training within the system. Some have argued that the organization foreseen in Law No. 1739 prevails and thus apprenticeship training should be evaluated as coming under non-formal training. While others argued that with Law No. 2089 apprenticeship training has been added as a different subsystem to formal and non-formal training in the Turkish national education system (Akpinar and Ercan, 2001, p: 80).

In line with the second part of the above arguments the General Directorate of Apprenticeship Training has been established in the central organization, but later this directorate was combined with the General Directorate of Non-formal Education to form the General Directorate of Apprenticeship and Non-formal Education.

Furthermore, the expected developments of apprenticeship training could not be obtained and from 1977 to 1986, only some 20 thousand apprentices were provided with contracts in line with the regulations, whereas about 1 million apprentices and their masters did not apply for a contract. Thus, 98 percent of the apprentices in Turkey were working informally (Erder Koksal and Lordoglu, 1993).

Considering the failure of this law, a new one was prepared and issued in 1986 as the Law of Apprenticeship and Vocational Training Number 3308, to organize apprenticeship, formal and non-formal vocational and technical education in an integral system. The law was amended in 2001 and the name of the law was changed to the Vocational Education Law.

The aims of the law are: to acquire qualifications via education, to protect the young who work with no social security, to provide opportunity for the young to re-enter the educational system, and to regulate the master-apprentice relationship. Thus, this law considers the apprenticeship as part of formal education and aims to provide training to apprentices in schools. In order to provide vocational education and training for apprentices, three different types of education have been pinpointed by the educational planners in the Ministry of Education:

a. Apprenticeship training: the young, aged 14-18 who are primary school graduates, aiming to acquire vocational skills by working in a workshop and attending educational activities in the Vocational Training Centers.
b. Vocational education in the enterprises.
c. Vocational education and orientation courses in educational centers (MEGSB, 1987).

The aims of apprenticeship training are:

a) In accordance with the aims and principles of the formal education system, the participants in apprenticeship training are expected to: acquire the attitudes of a good citizen, learn the common tasks and procedures in different vocations, comprehend the meaning and importance of work discipline, learn the general principles of work security, acquire a common general culture, acquire behaviors and attitudes to help to accustom trainees to working life.
b) To help those seeking apprenticeships to choose a vocation appropriate to their interests and aptitudes.

c) To prepare apprentices for the journeymanship examination through the acquisition of vocational knowledge, skills and work habits,

d) To prepare journeymen for the mastership examination through the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and work habits to perform the vocational tasks alone and to run a workshop (MEB, 1990).

In short, it could be said that the aims and objectives of apprenticeship training provided by this law are no different from the aims and objectives of the formal education system. Apprenticeship training offers both theoretical and practical training to the young who work at enterprises in order to acquire vocational skills.

There are 46 articles in this law. Article 13 makes clear that without a written apprenticeship contract the owner of a workshop cannot have an apprentice who is 18 years old or younger. In Article 14, it is explained that a probation period of not less than a month and not more than three months, is allowed before the written contract becomes binding. The Ministry decides the duration of the probation period. If neither the entrepreneur nor the apprentice has applied to the relevant Apprenticeship Training Centre for abolition within 10 days after the probation period, the written apprenticeship contract becomes binding. The duration of the apprenticeship is 2-4 years (Law No. 3308).

Law No. 3308 conveys that the principles related to training and certification in unrecognized occupations is in the Trades and Craftsmen Law No. 507:

In accordance with the regulation related to ‘Provision of Certificates in Occupational Fields and Provinces Where Apprenticeship Training is not Applied’ brought out according to Law No. 507, chambers may organize preparatory courses for those who are going to enter journeymanship and mastership examinations. In this context, it could be said that there are no widespread and systematic activities…” (Akpinar and Ercan, 2001, p: 89).

Therefore, those who have written apprenticeship contracts are obliged to attend educational activities organized by the Ministry, either in the Vocational Training Centers, or in the training units established at enterprises which have master trainers, or supra training centers which are established and run by the Turkish Confederation of Trades and Craftsmen. Apprentices in small enterprises go to Vocational Training Centers.

**Vocational Training Centers**

Vocational Training Centers, which were named as Apprenticeship Centers when they were established in 1979 were renamed with the amendments made to the Law No. 3308 in 2001, provide vocational education for those who had dropped out from the formal education system and working in workshops to acquire vocational skills. In these centers, apprentices, journeymen and masters receive education and training in many crafts like carpentry, textile, shoe-making, electricity, construction, tailoring, auto-motives, and so on. Depending on the specific craft to be acquired, apprenticeship training takes three or four years in these centers. The apprentices attend the courses in the centers one day (10 hours) each week. In these centers, the general knowledge subjects (such as Turkish, mathematics and vocational mathematics, administration and cooperatives, total quality management) comprise 40% of
the program whereas vocational subjects are 60%. Practical skills are gained on-the-job while working at the enterprises. After finishing the program the apprentices take the “experienced apprenticeship exam” for a certificate and to become a journeyman.

The journeymanship training is in a condensed format (240 hours). Of this, 176 hours are allocated to courses related to the management of a workplace (such as economics, administration, workers’ health and work security, accountancy, insurance and tax regulations, labor law, advanced occupational information). At the end of the courses, the journeymen take an examination and those who pass it become masters. Journeymen who have not attended a Vocational Training Center but have worked for at least five years as a registered journeyman may also take the relevant examination and become a master.

Masters are expected to attend courses in the Vocational Training Centers to get a “master trainer certificate”. They attend courses which last 40 hours in total. The courses they attend are principles of apprenticeship and vocational training, training psychology, communication and communication tools in training, occupational analysis and preparation of training programs, workshop and occupational course teaching methods, work security, work quality and cost relationships, testing and assessment in training, testing and assessment. “Master trainer certificate” is required from masters in order for them to recruit apprentices and journeymen for their workshops; otherwise the law does not allow an artisan to recruit an apprentice or a journeyman.

Those who want to establish their own business have to take another “proficiency exam” after 5 years of work experience. There are different regulations for those who start apprenticeship training after graduating from secondary school, and vocational and technical secondary school. Table 4 provides the number of student attaining Vocational Training Centers.

The following Table 1 provides some data on apprenticeship training in Turkey. Recent statistics indicate that in 2004-2005 school year there are 359 Vocational Training Centers in 81 cities offering training in 110 different crafts (Directorate General of Press and Information, 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Number of Organizations</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
<th>Student/Participant Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Candidate Apprentice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-1990</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>1.359</td>
<td>6.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>5.084</td>
<td>6.792</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Akpınar, 2004: 27
* no information available

**Traditional Apprenticeship Training in the Informal Sector**

There is another form of apprenticeship training that is still observed and which would be called as the traditional apprenticeship system in the informal sector, in Turkey. In simple terms, the informal sector is the name for economic activities generated by people who have no or only limited access to the highly organized public or private sector employment opportunities.
The findings of a research study conducted in 1997 reveals that although it is a legal requirement for an apprentice or journeyman to attend to a Vocational Training Center, only 10.8 per cent of the apprentices and 29.6 per cent of the journeymen had ever attended to one of these centers in Istanbul (Unluhisarcikli, 2001). There are various reasons for not attending these centers:

Since their workshops have a semi-legal basis — the masters are either tax evaders or had not registered their workshops — they cannot attend the centers or send their apprentices and/or journeymen; the masters do not want their apprentices and/or journeymen to be away from work for one day each week; the apprentices have no information about (these centers), so the masters do not bother; the apprentices do not want to take courses; and so on (Unluhisarcikli, 2001: 453).

In traditional apprenticeship there is no systematized, organized way of training. The willingness and enthusiasm of the apprentices and journeymen are crucial for the vocational skill acquisition:

The main mode of learning for an apprentice is observing the master/journeyman when he is working, the master/journeyman shows how to do something and the apprentice observes. The master also explains what to do to an apprentice, shows the errors an apprentice has made while performing a specific task, helps the apprentice if he asks for help, and supervises the apprentice on-the-job. During the initial stages of apprenticeship, much depends on the apprentice acquiring the vocational skills he seeks. Although the master will provide help for the apprentice the most important thing is observing the master on-the-job and trying to perform in the same manner, when he is asked to do a similar task (Unluhisarcikli, 2001: 452).

The complexity of the tasks performed increases as the apprentice acquires more skills. Therefore, the given task itself is the thing which trains or teaches the apprentice. The apprentice learns while working on-the-job. What the apprentice experiences in the workshop contributes to his skill acquisition and to his overall knowledge of the trade. In the traditional apprenticeship training there are no pre-determined rules and regulations for an apprentice to become a journeyman. Generally, when apprentices get older, and become more autonomous while working (needing less supervision and help from the journeymen or the master) their payment increases and they are referred to as journeymen. Therefore, although there have been some changes in the apprenticeship system, the basic form of skill acquisition, i.e. learning by watching and imitating, remains the main mode of traditional apprenticeship training.

This paper was an attempt to investigate the state of apprenticeship training in Turkey. The apprenticeship training system is formalized over the years by the Ministry of National Education. Those who are elementary school graduates would attend to a Vocational Training Center or to another approved program by the Ministry while working as an apprentice. For the time being, the efforts are for providing both theoretical and practical skills, which complement each other, to prepare the young artisans to their prospective mastership. The traditional apprenticeship system is carried through by the master artisans who run small-scale businesses on a semi-legal basis. However, one can see the remnants of the Ahi system both in the formalized and the traditional apprenticeship system.
References


