




### The importance of the vocational training centers in providing labor to the furniture industry in Turkey

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#### Abstract

The furniture industry in Turkey has been expanding year by year. The amounts of exports have increased every year since 2001. Turkish businessmen have gained excellent experience in the steps of design, production, and sales. The value of Turkey's exports of furniture was \$2,200,000 at the end of 2015. Even so, the furniture industry has some important labor problems. Various educational institutions train students for furniture industry, e.g., industrial vocational schools, vocational training centers, and vocational high schools. But, adequate numbers of workers have not been provided to the furniture industry. In this study, we investigated the importance of the vocational training centers in providing workers for the furniture industry in Turkey. Some important data were collected concerning the students over the last five years. These data were used to analyze the labor situation in the furniture industry. The remarkable conclusion of the research is that the total number of students dropped by approximately 50 % from year 2010 to 2014. In this context, the furniture sector which already has staff shortage will likely go through tough times in finding qualified personnel in the future.

**Keywords:** Furniture, labor, vocational training centers, apprenticeship training

### Türkiye’de mobilya sektörüne işgücü sağlamada mesleki eğitim merkezlerinin önemi

#### Öz

Türkiye’de mobilya endüstrisi yıldan yıla büyümektedir. 2001 yılından beri her yıl ihracat miktarı artmaktadır. Türk iş adamları, tasarım, üretim ve satış alanlarında önemli tecrübeler kazanmışlardır. 2015 yılının sonunda, Türkiye’nin mobilya ihracat rakamı 2 200 000\$’dır. Buna rağmen, mobilya endüstrisinin bazı önemli işçi sorunları vardır. Endüstri meslek liseleri, mesleki eğitim merkezleri ve meslek yüksek okulları gibi çeşitli eğitim kurumları mobilya endüstrisi için öğrenci yetiştirmektedir. Fakat mobilya endüstrisi için yeterli sayıda işçi sağlanamamaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye’de mobilya endüstrisi için eleman yetiştiren mesleki eğitim merkezlerinin önemi araştırılmıştır. Öğrencilerle ilgili son beş yıla ait bazı önemli bilgiler toplanmıştır. Bu bilgiler mobilya endüstrisindeki işçi durumunu analiz etmek için kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın en dikkat çekici sonucu ise, 2010 yılından 2014 yılına toplam öğrenci sayısının yaklaşık olarak %50 oranında azalmasıdır. Bu bağlamda, zaten önemli derecede kalifiye personel açığı bulunan mobilya sektörünün ileriki yıllarda kalifiye personel bakımından çok daha zor bir döneme gireceği söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mobilya, iş gücü, mesleki eğitim merkezleri, çıraklık eğitimi

## **1 Introduction**

Vocational and technical training has been described as the activities - in a job field that fulfils an individual's needs - that facilitate the individual's skills and conduct along with personal development; enable the individual to contribute to the society by helping them improve their personal skills. Unlike other training types, vocational training may be conducted at places such as, school, factory and work place. The vocational training needs to meet the required training standards no matter where or under whose supervision it is executed. Thus, it was stated that the training and recruitment sectors need to cooperate with each other (Anonym-a 2006).

Vocational and technical training is one of the most important steps for a country's economy. A workplace with qualified labor force will definitely be more successful than the others. Furthermore, enlightening and educating the existing workforce at companies is an important objective of the vocational training.

The furniture production and export business of Turkey has grown tremendously in recent years. İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Bursa and Kayseri are important centers in furniture production and export. The top companies in the sector have ambitious targets. Their objective is to increase the furniture export revenues to 10 million dollars by the year 2023 (Görgüç, 2013; Bal 2015; Kolutek and Bal 2017). However, there are some obstacles in their way; among the biggest problems are the ongoing wars between Turkey's neighbors, international relations, the exchange rate policy in Turkey, Value-Added Tax (VAT), prices of raw material and energy and lack of competent workers (Demirci 2005; Anonym-b 2011; Anonym-c 2012). According the MOSDER, 30.000 personnel are needed in the sector. Especially, upholstery workers, welders, sewing machine operators and CNC operators are in demand (Görgüç, 2013). During the last 4 years, Syrian immigrants have played an important role on labor force. Nevertheless, it was reported that this workforce might migrate back when the civil war ends in Syria (Bal et al., 2015).

There are some vocational schools in Turkey that provide labor to the furniture sector. Students graduated from Industrial Vocational High Schools, technical training centers, vocational schools with degrees such as, furniture and decoration programs, furniture and decoration and forest industrial engineering are most likely to find jobs in the furniture sector. However, the demand to these schools that teach furniture has diminished because of the changes in social life and the factors that affect the new generation's job preferences. The demand to furniture classes in the industrial vocational high schools, and furniture and decoration classes at the vocational schools in Turkey have plummeted. Most of furniture and decoration and forest industry classes were shut down since, there was not sufficient enrollment (Kolutek and Bal 2017).

According to the 2009 data, there are 3 different levels of education at 36 fields of professions. These are candidate for apprenticeship, apprentice and journeyman. The number of elementary school students is 170.726, there are 14.109 students in middle schools, there are 2.468 vocational high school graduates and there are 4.444 higher education students. The number of students who earned a certificate: the number of graduates who earned a certificate of qualified instructor is 22.959, certificate of mastership: 54.190, certificate of journeyman: 66.671 and the number of graduates who have earned a certificate to start a business is 6.853. The total number of graduates who earned a certificate is 150.673. The number of instructors at vocational training centers is 3.725 (Uygur 2009).

The Vocational Training Centers in Turkey used to serve as apprenticeship training centers. The status of students at these centers is different than the other schools. This

research analyses the general status of the vocational training centers in terms of volatility in the number of students in years; students' field of occupation; level of education and age groups.

## 2 Material and method

In this study, the changes in the number of students in vocational training centers according to years, business areas, education levels and ages were examined in recent years, in Turkey. For this purpose, the data were obtained from the Directorate General for Lifelong Learning, affiliated to the Ministry of National Education. The data were obtained in the form of an excel file. Numbers for each group were calculated and new charts were created. The obtained data were grouped by years and histograms were drawn.

## 3 Results and Discussion

According to 2015 data, vocational courses are offered in many career fields at 337 vocational training centers in Turkey. Furniture making classes are offered in 5 career fields at many vocational training centers. Upholstery courses are held at 57 different vocational training locations; furniture frame production 3; furniture making 189; woodwork; furniture and salesperson 6 (Anonym-d 2015). The figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 illustrate the number of students attending classes at these training centers. The charts give information about the age groups; the years they attended the courses; career fields and level of education.

Figure 1 shows the total number of students by years. As can be seen in the chart, the number of participants in the courses dropped in the last 5 years. There were 4690 students in furniture courses in the year 2010 in Turkey. Then, it dropped to 2.411 in 2014. The number of students decreased approximately 50 %. Apparently, attendance to the vocational and technical training centers will diminish in the future, if the student numbers continue to drop at this rate. Moreover, the furniture sector may have difficulty in finding qualified labor. Industrial vocational high schools are an important source of labor for furniture sector. However, the numbers of students in furniture maker classes at the industrial vocational high schools have decreased during the recent years. In addition, according to Furniture Study Group Report in 10th Development Plan (Anonym-e,2015), considering the preferences of candidates for furniture education in the last 15 years, it seems that university, college and vocational high schools are preferred at the last place. It is thought that it will be beneficial to make furniture vocational training attractive in solving the labor problem of the sector. In a previous study, concerning this issue, It was determined that the students of vocational training centers have some hopelessness problems (Deveci et al, 2011).

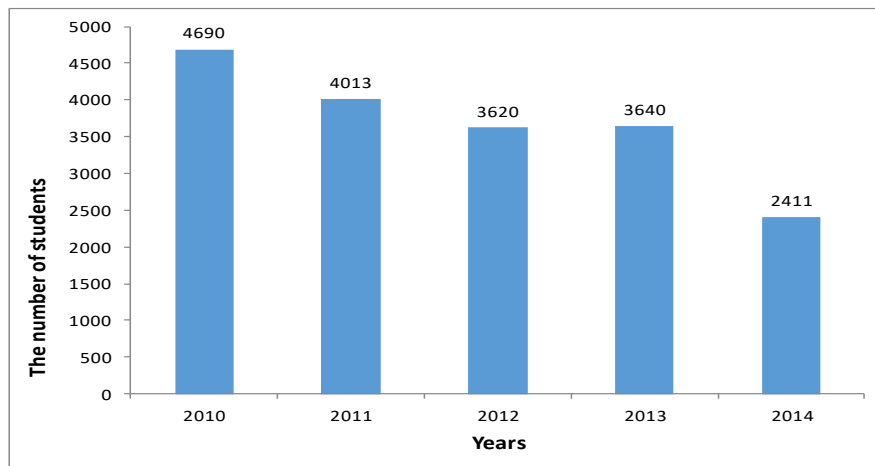
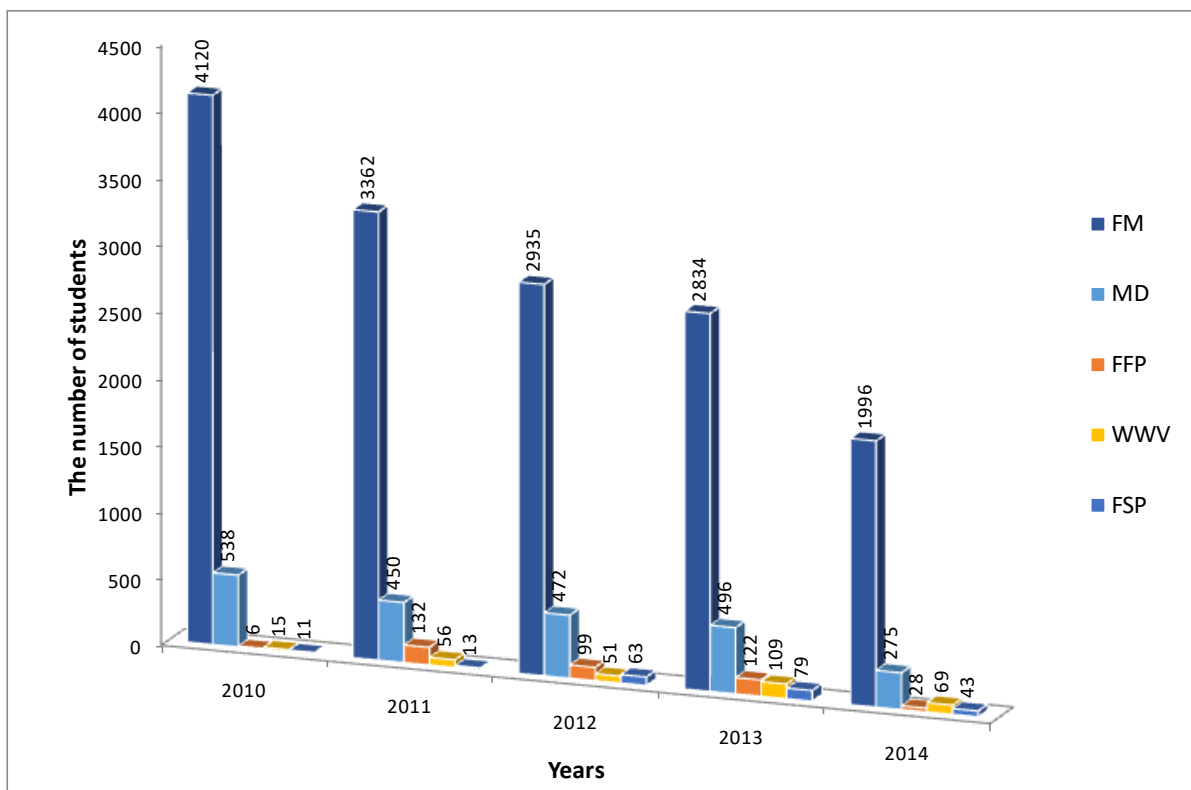


Figure 1. The total number of students by years at vocational and technical training centers

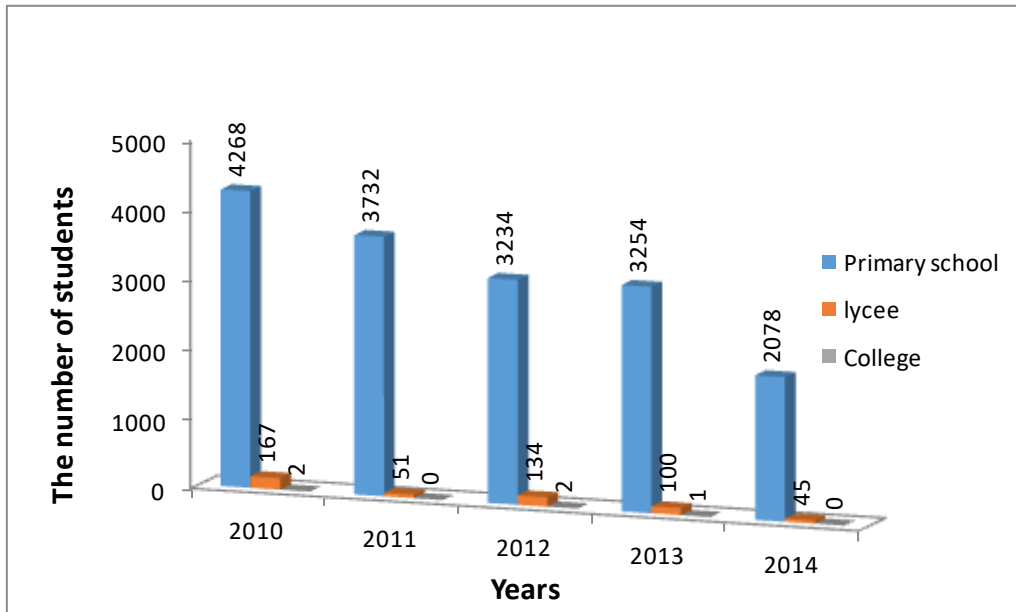
The Syrian immigrants have had a significant effect on the furniture sector labor force during the last 5 years. The Syrian immigrants who came to Turkey when the civil war began in 2011 have begun working in career fields that match with their skills. One of the fields they get jobs in, is the furniture sector. It is hard to determine a specific number since they do not have social security. Moreover, it is hard to anticipate the number of immigrants who will go back to Syria after the civil war has ended. According to a research, 60 % of the Syrian immigrants working in the furniture sector in Kahramanmaraş are planning to go back (Bal et al., 2015).

The career fields at the vocational and training centers are furniture maker, upholstery, furniture frame production, wood work, veneering, salesperson. Figure 2 illustrates the number of students based on career fields. The chart shows that the most in demand job is furniture making followed by Upholstery. According to Görgüç (2013), the most staff shortage in furniture sector is in upholstery. It is important that students choose this field.



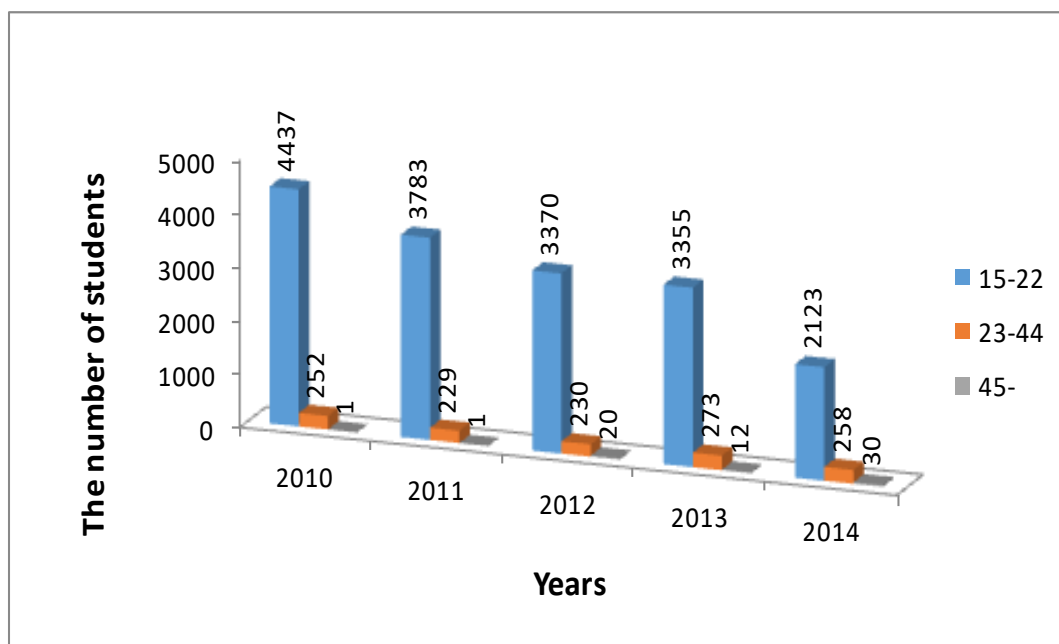
**Figure 2.** The number of students based on career fields (FM: Furniture Making, MD: Upholstery, FFP: Furniture Frame Production, WWV: Wood Work and Veneering, FSP: Furniture Sales Person)

Figure 3 shows the total number of students attending the vocational training centers - during the last 5 years - based on their level of education. The highest number of students attending the courses at the centers is elementary school graduates. However, the percentage decrease between 2010 and 2014 was more than 50 %. Participants who have higher education constitute a small number of the students at the vocational training centers. Their total number in these five years is 5.



**Figure 3.** The total number of students based on level of education

Figure 4 illustrates the number of students by age and the variation in numbers by years. Overall, it can be seen that the highest number of students attending the classes are between ages 15-22. The number of students who are 45 years old and older is noticeably low. The reason is that the apprenticeship age in the legislation is minimum 15. The number of students who are 45 years old and older is low because, they have not educated themselves about furniture making up to now. However, the number of students who are 45 years and older has increased between 2010 and 2014. The reason is that they can earn a certificate of masters and they become eligible to hire apprentices.



**Figure 4.** The total number of students by age

In summary, the total number of students at vocational and technical training centers reduces. But, reducing the number of students is not the only problem related to training centers. There are some other problems. For example, Uçar and Özerbaş (2013) studied the position of vocational education and training in the World and in Turkey, and determined that the vocational education and training should be revised, the complaints of lectures about vocational and technical education should be considered and vocational and technical education should be improved in terms of efficiency. According to Binici and Arı (2004), vocational and technical education system needs important reforms such as training of lecturers at certain periods, updating curriculum programs, and changing the education system. While these reforms are made, vocational and technical education models of different countries should be investigated. In addition, Güleç and Adıgüzel (2016) reported that inadequate vocational training and skilled labor shortage are the important factors affected the competitiveness of Turkish furniture sector in global market.

#### **4 Conclusions**

In this research, data on the history of vocational and technical training centers, general status of the centers and their role in furniture sector labor have been compiled. According to 2015 data:

- Vocational courses are offered in many career fields at 337 vocational training centers in Turkey.
- Furniture making classes are offered in 5 career fields at many vocational training centers. The highest number of students is in furniture making.
- According to level of education, the highest number of students are elementary school graduates who are 15 years and older.
- According to age groups, the highest number of students attending the courses is between ages 15 and 22.
- The remarkable conclusion of the research is that the total number of students dropped by approximately 50 % from year 2010 to 2014. In this context, the furniture sector which already has staff shortage will likely go through tough times in finding qualified personnel in the future.

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