"BELTEK" PROJECT FOR THE TRAINING AND EMPLOYABILITY OF WOMEN IN TURKEY

Erişen Yavuz
Çeliköz Nadir
Şahin Mehmet
Kapicioğlu M. Osman Kurtkan
Ataş Sait
Akyol Cemal
Girgin Çağla
Selcuk University, Turkey

This is a case study based on BELTEK, which is a training organisation under Ankara metropolitan Municipality in Turkey. BELTEK is one of the initiatives aiming to train women and help to boost their employability. In this descriptive study, the goals, structure, training activities for the training and employability of women are put under discussion so that this study, based on BELTEK, can bring out new suggestions and innovations addressing to women as a disadvantageous group in the lifelong learning process.

Keywords: further education, women education, employment of women, lifelong learning

Introduction

In our age, it is a generally accepted fact that "human" is the most important and valuable investment tool for democratisation, modernisation, development and competition. Nearly all the nations are giving more emphasis on policies and practices to this end. In this context, "training and employment of women" is one of the current issues under discussion. The fact that women, in nearly all the countries, have a lower position compared to men has been regarded as a major topic. Thus, "training and employment of women" has been an indicator for the development level of the countries. However, compared to other EU countries, the level of training and employability is much lower in Turkey. This case is one of the fundamental obstacles for national development and employability rate; thus, it is regarded as a very important issue in the EU process. Therefore, the training of women, their position and role in their families and labour force are of primary importance as the major items of agenda to be discussed. If the training of women, who make up of nearly half of the whole population and have important roles for the future generations, draws sufficient attention, it will not only help them to have self confidence and esteem but also enable them to contribute to production, thus to development, in parallel with their position in the society. There are efforts in Turkey, in a fast transformation and improvement phase, to train women and employ them. This has been in accord with the accep-

tance of "lifelong learning" as an efficient factor in formal or state organisations as well as in informal or non-governmental training organisations.

Training and employment are among major indications of "Human Development Reports", which was firstly issued by UNDP in 1990. Training and employment status of women are considered within significant indications. It is known to most of us that there is a close relation between well-educated human force and development levels of countries in every field. In order to compete in a global world, every country should make more investment into the training of society. In fact, globalisation, competition, emphasis on quality, rapid changes and improvements in technology, modernization, and improvement in democracy demand for an increase in the productive employment, and an increase in unemployment at a large extent has directed the focus on the training requiring a higher rate of women participation into work force.

The aim of this study is to examine the project of BELTEK, which is regarded as a sample practice dealing with the determination of the position of women, comprising nearly half of the population of Turkey and the examination of the relationship between training and employment over training, which is of great importance for social improvement, development, welfare and democracy throughout the world.

An Overlook to the Training and Employment of Women in Turkey

"Investing into the training and education of women is one of the tools to obtain sustainable development and economical growth as well as higher social and economical profit" (Ka.Der, 2003). In a world with a rapid globalisation, achievement of an economical growth seems to be impossible in the countries that cannot obtain social development adequately. Training and employment of women have been significant determinants of social and economical development recently. Republic of Turkey has put an emphasis on the improvement of the status of women, in general, and on the education of women and girls, in particular, by signing international documents in addition to carrying out the reforms related with this issue from its establishment onwards. Article 10 of Convention of Eliminating Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is one of these documents signed in 1985, requires "... taking all precautions needed for the elimination of every discrimination against women in order that countries being a party guarantee to make them have equal rights with men at education.". According to Beijing Action Plan issued following Fourth Conference of World Women gathered in Beijing as the conference of commitments in 1995 and signed by Turkey as well, inequality and shortages of training and education are under the responsibility of governments, nongovernmental organizations, private sector and international community and is one of 12 critical fields where society is called to make strategic actions. Besides all these, World Declaration of Education for Everybody (Jomtien – Tayland, 1990), Action Platform of International Human Rights Conference (Vienna, 1993) and

Action Plan for International Development and Population Conference (Cairo, 1994) are the documents signed by Turkey.

In the first 10 years following the establishment of Turkish Republic, there became a great development by both forming a modern organization of state and creating a reconstruction process of Turkish society. The most important change affecting Turkish women directly is the acceptance of "the Law of Combination of Instruction", issued in 1924 and aiming at gathering education under one umbrella. In that way, women obtained the right of education, which is the most basic right of citizenship. In Turkey, where basic education is compulsory from the establishment of the republic onwards, the rate of literacy, which was only 10% with the acceptance of Turkish alphabet in 1928, started to increase for both man and women. Making our woman benefit from every stage and field of education without considering gender is emphasized at "Basic Law for National Education" under no 1739. On the other hand, the principle of equality in education is included in Article 10 and 40 of the Constitution of 1982 (Çetin, 2003).

Despite the fact that all kinds of educational rights were granted to women in the period of republic, there have still been so many problems over enabling women benefit from educational opportunities and fundamental shortages in education, and these problems still exist, with an exception of some positive improvements in educational indications dealing with women.

As an example, in the earliest years of the Republic, in 1935, literacy rate of all population in Turkey was 19.3%, but only 9.81% of it was of women. Thanks to great efforts, 55 years after this data, literacy rate of adults throughout the country reached 78.4% in total, being 67.4 % for woman, based on the data of 1990. In the year 2006, adult literacy rate reached 88.1% in the nationwide and it was 80.4% for women (TUİK, 2008). But 20% of adult women population is still illiterate. When we examine the rates of schooling in formal education in 2006, which is one of the most important indicators of education for women, it is remarkable that 87.16% of women were schooled at primary level and it was 51.95% at secondary level, but the rate was only 17.41% at higher education level (MNE, 2009). In addition, according to the data of 1998, in terms of the year when an average education is given, which is considered to be a significant indicator, women in Turkey have a five-year education on average (TUİK, 2008).

As is clear, even though the number of those educational opportunities and those benefiting from them have increased, the education granted to woman is not at such a level as to accelerate the change and improvement in the society and to make her join in production in a more effective way. An improvement in the educational level of woman should be regarded as one of the indicators of development. The contribution of an educated woman into workforce is higher compared to that of an uneducated one and it leads to a remarkable increase in the economical resources of countries.

Woman in industrialized and pre-indus-

try communities have been involved in such economical activities and workforce, known as value-creating jobs and efforts. There is a unanimous belief that participation of women into workforce varies depending on location, time and conditions and that it is currently in a significant process of change. "The Case Report for Women Employment in Turkey" (Yaşar, 2007) shows that woman employment decreases in Turkey while it increases throughout the world. According to the report, the number of women not participated in the workforce between the years 1995 and 2005 increased to 276000. It is indicated that only one out of four women works and that a fourth of working people is composed of women. In addition, the following were also determined in the report: woman is considered to be responsible for housework and child care due to division of labour based on social role in Turkey. Such a case is one of the reasons hindering women from taking place in workforce. The fact that the jobs allocated to women are limited, the working conditions are heavy and the prices are low lead them to think that working is not so attractive. While women employment in the past was higher in the rural area than that of urban area, employability of women decreases rapidly due to the decline in the agricultural employment rate. The problem of lack of employment in Turkey is actually the problem of lack of women in workforce. Even though the rate of schooling for women is lower than that of men, the educational level of urban woman labourers is higher. Women in the rural area are employed in small family businesses at the expense of their education. The level of education for women and her employability can be considered in parallel with each other. As it was emphasized in the report, there is a close relation between the educational opportunities and employment opportunities for women.

The rate of employability is lower compared to that of men in Turkey. According to the data of the State Statistics Institute, while total rate of employability of women in 1955 was 43%, it declined to 40.3% in 1960, to 37.9 in 1965, 37.5% in 1970, 35.2% in 1975, 34.5% in 1990 and 24.8% in 2005. While the rate of employability of women in urban area was 19.3% in 2005, it was 33.7% in the rural area. The inequality of gender in employment rate in Turkey is striking compared to the rates worldwide. The rate of women employability is more than 50% in the countries of European Union (Tokgöz, 2007; T.C. Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü, 2009). Turkey ranks around the lowest ones in OECD countries (Hadler, 1993). Such factors as the fact that men employability is preferred at a higher level than that of women, that women leave agricultural sector owing to the increase in migration from rural area to urban life, that women cannot be employed due to the fact that they are uneducated and inexperienced together with the migration from the rural area where they work at unpaid jobs, the compulsory education was increased from 5 years to 8 years and the number of woman entering higher education are some of the factors affecting this case (Berber&Eser, 2008; Küçükkalay, 1998;). In addition, lack of training, knowledge and skills is another

dimension to be highlighted for the relation between training of women and their employment rate. According to the data of 2000, 18.9% of working women in Turkey are illiterate, and 53.1% are graduates of a primary school, 4.2% are graduates of a secondary school, 12.3% of them are graduates of a high school and 11.5% are graduates of a university (Kayhan, 2005). Such a case requires life – long training practices not only for unemployed women but also for employed ones. It is essential to consider developing widespread education that will enable women throughout the county to improve in every aspect for social improvement and development.

Widespread education comprises all programmed educational activities aiming at making people acquire knowledge, skills and an occupation, and supplying individual and social development. There have been various widespread education choices for women in Turkey. Some of them are Public Education Centres within the Ministry of Education, General Directorate of Apprenticeship and Widespread Education, Practical Art Schools for Girls within General Directorate of Technical Education for Girls, Institutes of Maturing and Vocational Courses, vocational courses within General Directorate of Commerce and Tourism Teaching, vocational courses carried out by other ministries, writing and reading courses for women and, some other courses to provide tem with skills and occupations, held by governmental or non-governmental organizations. In addition, many municipalities organize similar free of charge courses. One of them is BELTEK training course project. BELTEK course, which is considered to be a sample project in cooperation with university and municipality, is regarded as a remarkable contribution to the education and employment of women. The subject matter of this paper is to present this model training course with its merits and shortcomings as well.

BELTEK as a Project for the Training and Employment of Women

According to Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Activity Report (2008); BELTEK training course project has been carried out within the framework of an agreement between Ankara Metropolitan Municipality and Gazi University signed on 6th October 1999 and was initiated so as to make citizens acquire knowledge and skills, to realize integrity, to train people according to certain standards of city and vocational needs for SMEs free of charge. The main objective of the project is to improve cooperation between industry and local administrations, and help to find solutions for unemployment problem in Turkey in general sense. While giving a speech to close one term of this course, Prof. Dr. Kadri Yamaç, the rector of Gazi university, stressed the importance of this training course saying that "this course is a very important in the frame work of lifelong learning in Europe and one of the greatest training courses in the world for the acquisition of basic skills for employment". This project aims to:

- improve cooperation between university, industry and local administrations and provide to use the investments into man efficiently.

- facilitate access to up-to-date knowledge and present a new structure of education by changing the approach to the educational system from memorisation to skill acquisition making use of up-to-date information with an eye to digest and develop it.
- bridge the gap between qualified and intermediate labour force.
- putting an effort to transform the unemployed youth into a qualified advantageous group.
- train human force to work with sophisticated technology.
- help people keep up with innovations and changes at every stage and enable them to become a life long learner.

This course is organized for three-month periods at 8 main divisions and 66 branches within the Directorate of Cultural and Social Affairs of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality. Some of the divisions and branches are as follows:

- Department of Electronics – Computer (Radio – Television Maintenance and Repair, Computer Operation, Web Design).
- Department of Electricity (Electricity Operation, Repair and Maintenance of Electrical Equipments).
- Department of Printing (Computer Assisted Graphic Design, Photography, Graphic Design on Web)
- Department of Construction (Computer Assisted Architectural Drawing, Topography, Architectural Administration).
- Department of Furniture and Decoration (Wooden Gift Production, Wooden Statues and Natural Figures, Computer Assisted Furniture Design).
- Department of Metal – Casting - Modelling (Art of Metal Decoration).
- Department of Machinery (Computer Assisted Drawing Design: CAD – 1, Technical Drawing, Business Organization and Quality Control and Administration, Visual Basic and Industrial Applications).
- Department of Deanship Branches (Basic Computer Usage, Public Relations, Methods of TV Film Making, Orating, Foreign Language, Tourism Operating, Portfolio Administration).

So far, 72.608 people have benefited from these courses mentioned above between the years 1999-2008. Almost 37% (27.591) of the participants within the period of ten years were women. According to the data of 2007, 2% of the women participating in the courses were graduates of a primary school, 5% were graduates of a secondary school, 45% were graduates of a high school and 48% were graduates of a higher education.

One of the important features of this course is that anybody, whether employed or unemployed, can join it. The courses have been arranged in such a way as to cover innovation and change as well as serving the needs of the market complying with the changing needs of current life. The courses meet the needs of technical staff of SMEs working in Ankara at a large extent. Most of the graduates are employed at SMEs acting in Organized Industrial Zones, and some of the participants attending the courses of Electricity, Computer, Furniture, and Vocational Education can open their own businesses.

Conclusion

The issue of woman training and employment is regarded as one of the indicators of sustainable development and improvement all over the world. However, there have been serious problems over supplying equal training and employment opportunities for women in most countries of the world and this is a case for Turkey as well (ETF, 2009). From the establishment of the Republic onwards, even though some important improvements have been attained, Turkey ranks at the lowest levels concerning women training and employment at international level. Some important efforts of Turkey, trying to keep up with other countries by taking rapid steps in the path of development and improvement, have attracted much attention nowadays. Efforts concerning the access into European Union have a motivating role in this field. In Turkey, where there have been a great many efforts aiming at providing women with training and employment within a sense of life long education in recent years, the project of BELTEK courses carried out in cooperation with university and municipality is regarded as a significant example for European Life Long Learning Projects. With this project, tens of thousands of women have been trained and directed to employment. Holding such courses that aim to improve educational, economical and social positions of women widespread can be considered an important effort in terms of development and improvement.

However, taking the national and international importance of this course, some problems regarding the organisation should be expressed clearly here. First of all, BELTEK should have a well designed website in some other languages other than Turkish. The documentation and statistics are of high importance for the sustainability, visibility and promotion of this project. A confidential part besides a public part can be provided to help the researchers, like us, who are interested in such courses. In this case, the visibility of such courses will boost thanks to such researches at national and international level. To help the project to be promoted at national and international level requires at least the main points mentioned here taking its importance into account.

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