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## Education and Educational Policy in Germany. A Focus on Core Developments Since 1944

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## **Education and Educational Policy in Germany. A Focus on Core Developments Since 1944**

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*Abstract:* Lifelong learning depends on developments. However, not only on the development of single learners but also on the change and development of an educational system. The requirements are always specific in a special period of time. For this reason an educational system and so the German one as well, has to be changed and enhanced to cope with new challenges and necessities. Progress is the motor for changes and innovative education. Hence, this paper provides an overview concerning the historical development of education and educational policy in Germany since the end of the Second World War. During this time, there were many changes and new ideas to enhance the educational system. Therefore, the article offers insight into the general principles of German education and follow the changes according to the timeline of the developments. The focus is always on one or two specific decades to provide a guideline through the developments. The text offers insights into main steps of development and provides a basis for national and international discussions about educational progress and challenges.

*Keywords:* education, policy, educational system, Germany

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## **Introduction**

The education policy in Germany has passed through five significant eras from the period after the Second World War to today. To see a structure how education policy developed this text presents the state of general school education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education according to the following periods. The first period is the post Second World War in the late forties. A second post war phase took place in the fifties and sixties, which are grouped together, focusing on education in times of reconstruction and economic growth. The reform period of the seventies and eighties forms the third era, years which saw a lot of social change. The fourth era in the nineties was a period of much accelerated change, especially in the field of VET. The last era focuses on the time from the millennium to today and offers insights in the current educational situation in Germany.

German education follows a variety of principles, e.g.:

- a) Horizontal transition on educational levels (e.g. between different parts of secondary education)
- b) Vertical transition from lower educational levels to higher one (e.g. possibility to move from primary education into different parts of secondary education)
- c) Equal opportunities for learners
- d) Personalisation and Individualisation
- e) Lifelong learning.

In the period after World War II, Germany was divided under the command of the four Victory Powers into an American, British, Soviet and French occupation zone. Since the three Western occupying powers and the Soviet Union were not able to agree on a common state order for Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was founded as a democratic and social state in the area of the three western occupation zones in May 1949. This happened with the establishment of the constitution (Grundgesetz) of FRG. In the Soviet occupation zone the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was established in October 1949. Therefore, after the Second World War Germany evolved two systems of education, one for the Federal Republic of Germany and the other for German Democratic Republic. This situation continued for over 40 years. Today, there is a single educational system under a unified Germany since the GDR joined the Federal Republic of Germany on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1990 when the two states became one and Germany's status as a single state was restored. Hence, this paper also addresses the different developments in FRG and GDR until the reunion.

In Germany several stakeholders are involved in implementation of the education policy. Key groups identified include Committees, governing bodies, Unions, teachers, parents and learners. Due to the specifics in vocational education and training it is not only school education that is responsible in this field but also enterprises and the trainers there. This is because in the German dual system of apprenticeship, an apprentice has to learn (a) theoretical and practical parts at school (with an emphasis on the theoretical part) and also has to learn (b) practical and theoretical aspects at a company as well (with an emphasis on the practical part). This means that enterprise owners are also stakeholders in the decisions concerning education in Germany.

A short overview in the German language about many of the developments described in the following text is also provided in the timeline of Jacobi and the BPB - Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

### **German Education in the forties - After the World War II**

World War II ended on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1945 with the surrender of Japan. But, for Germany it had already ended with its defeat on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1945. A discussion about education after World War II has to take this into account. Therefore, the history of educational policy begins in 1946 when the unity school was established in the Soviet occupation zone. This is quite a short time after the last surrender and underpins the interest of the occupying powers to install a proper educational system quickly. The core idea was democratisation of Germany after the terrors of the World War II. In the Soviet occupied zone, a law concerning the democratisation of German schools was introduced. One basic idea concerning the democratic unitary schools was to create a general concept of all parts of education. Therefore the unity school encompassed the entire education system from kindergarten to university. The unity school combined an eight year unitary and mandatory school which included different courses in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> class with a four-year upper school, which led to A-levels. The different courses focused on a second foreign language, mathematics and natural sciences.

One year later in 1947, the Allies demanded democratisation of education in the western occupation zones as well. The Allies provided fundamental principles for the democratisation of education in Germany with the Control Council Directive No. 54. The four main principles were:

1. Equal opportunities for education;
2. No School fees and teaching resources for all school-age children;
3. Education in a stage structure and introduction of the comprehensive school without different parts of the school system' and
4. Teacher training in study programmes on university level.

But the western German zones didn't follow all of these principles.

In 1948, the "Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany" (KMK) was set up. This happened four month after the first official meeting of all 17 states (Länder) of Germany which existed at this time, on the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> of February. The KMK is responsible for common approaches in important questions of education, which addresses all interests of the different states of Germany, the so-called Länder. Based on this educational federalism was introduced in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949. The Länder became responsible for the areas of education and cultural policy.

### **German Education in the fifties and sixties**

In the fifties the education system in Germany did not change much. Both parts of Germany focused on post war reconstruction and the difficulties and challenges they faced in the process. A major change in education policy happened in 1959 when the Polytechnic Upper School was introduced in the German Democratic Republic. This took place when the 'Act on the Socialist Development of the School System' suggested this type of school with 10 classes based on the advanced upper school leading to A-levels.

At the end of the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties Wolfgang Klafki provided a new focus on didactics and addressed paths to what in Germany is called 'Bildung', which means more than just education but also getting education, a status in society and a structured way to address it. He addressed the value in educational content and provided questions which helped to select valuable content from other endeavors. At the same time, Paul Heimann and his followers Otto and Schulz created a counter position to this. It was based the insights which Heiman had established

since the 1940s. Here, the unchanging elements of instruction and structures of teaching were addressed. A distinction was made between environmental aspects and decision-making fields for the teacher, such as content, intention, media and methods. These two approaches to didactics influenced the way of dealing with pedagogy and didactics in general school education until today.

However, when the Berlin Wall and the Wall between the GDR and the FRG was erected in 1961, the educational system in Germany became more divided. In addition, a few years later in 1965, the "Act on the Uniform Socialist Educational System" in GDR was promulgated and this covered pre-school, school, university, further education and vocational training facilities. Here the German tradition of dual training was cemented. With the Law on the Uniform Socialist Educational System different facilities were established. The system offered facilities for pre-schooling, a ten-class general polytechnic upper school, several vocational training facilities and educational institutions leading to higher education. Additionally, engineering and technical schools were introduced as well as universities and colleges and additional institutions for education and training. Special school facilities in the health system were also offered for children diagnosed as "incapacitated".

At the same time, in 1965, while the conversion of the education system in the GDR was being implemented further reforms in education were taking place in the FRG. Here, the Länder concluded the 'Hamburg Agreement on Unification in the Field of Education'. A nine-year compulsory school education was introduced. This was divided into a four-year primary school, except for West Berlin where it was six-years of primary school, and a five-year basic secondary school called 'Hauptschule', which in West Berlin was only three years. An alternative to the 'Hauptschule' is the 'Realschule', which could be attended by pupils until their 10th grade, and which offers a medium educational qualification. At a grammar school called 'Gymnasium' A-levels was addressed with the possibility for a university entrance after the 13th grade.

In 1968, in higher education, the technical colleges and universities of applied sciences were established. The starting point of today's form of the Fachhochschulen was the result of an agreement of the 11 presidents of the Länder of western Germany. 'Fachhochschulen' are universities that carried out applied research and teaching on a scientific basis. From 1965 to 1969, the students of the Free University of Berlin fought for a nationwide reform of universities and higher education. At the same time university students at Münster protested against bad study conditions which

included lack of teachers, poorly equipped classrooms and inadequate facilities. This went hand in hand with discussions on freedom in education, including the need for increased rights for women and gender equality, on the need of increasing participation of minorities in public life, on more freedom in the field of sexuality, about social change and a new political culture. Emancipation was a general principle in the sixties.

Also, at higher education level topics about unification of study programmes and more comparability of study programmes with regard to internationalisation were addressed.

One of the core changes happened on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1969, when the basic law about vocational education and training (VET) was established which continues in its basic form to this day. This act of 1969, known as the 'Vocational Training Act' (Berufsbildungsgesetz), regulated VET and introduced alternate education in the dual system of apprenticeship. It is a basic law which stipulates that learning in an apprenticeship takes place in two places; schools and enterprises. In addition, further education and continuous education were enshrined as well as retraining, for example for when an individual for health reasons can no longer work in the vocation which they had before. The changes of 1969 redefined the pillars of general and vocational education in Germany.

### **German Education in the seventies and eighties**

In the seventies curriculum theory as provided by Robinsohn became popular, which he had already developed in 1967. According to the ideas of curriculum theory the curriculum should include as precise a regulation as possible not only of learning objectives and learning contents but also of learning processes and the learning organization. This is taken into account by the structural plan of the German Education Council (Deutscher Bildungsrat) 1970.

In 1970, the Bund-Länder-Kommission (BLK) für Bildungsplanung was established. The BLK was founded in 1970 as a commission for educational planning by an administrative agreement between the federal government and the Länder. After receiving additional tasks in 1975, the name was changed to "Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung" (BLK), with effect from April 5, 1976.

This government commission worked closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It fostered improvements in education and provided funds

for innovation and development projects to create innovative theory and practice in German education.

Moreover, due to the ideas of German Education Council - Deutscher Bildungsrat in the seventies the Kindergarten became a part of elementary education. It was the structural plan of the German education council that assigned kindergartens as an elementary stage of the education system. In the Federal Republic of Germany, two-thirds of the kindergartens are in the hands of NGOS and the main task is to look after young children.

In 1972 the Federal Republic of Germany reorganized the upper secondary school. The baccalaureate examinations and the structure for A-levels were redesigned. In the "Gymnasium" the 12th and 13th classes had classroom instruction replaced by an individual course system with compulsory and elective classes. These courses include the A-level from this time on. The change in 1972 was the most fundamental transformation of the higher education system after the Second World War. In 1973 the FRG decided to set up comprehensive schools. The Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung (German Federal Development Commission) presented a comprehensive training plan for western Germany. The main aim was a uniform design of preschool education, general school, vocational training and continuous education and training.

In 1976 the federation uniformly regulated the organization of all universities, educational colleges, art colleges, technical colleges, agricultural colleges and music colleges for the federal states in a "Hochschulrahmengesetz". It was installed on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1976 and offered regulations about study and teaching, research, matriculation study programmes, members of a higher education institution and concerning appointment of professors.

Back in the GDR, by 1977 elementary education attendance reached a very high level. About 90 per cent of all three- to six-year-olds were enrolled in preschool educational institutions. In the eighties the discussion about education was not that enthusiastic in both parts of Germany. But this changed with the reunification at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties.

In the eighties a reform of the Polytechnic Upper School was one of the most important aspects in education in the German Democratic Republic. Prior to this time, learners transitioned into the Polytechnic Upper School after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, this changed to after the 10<sup>th</sup> grade to deepen their knowledge. In FRG the financing of higher education was an important topic because of the lack of money in the educational sector provided by the state. Thus, a flawless functioning of research and teaching in this

decade was greatly endangered. In general, education the “Gesamtschule” a comprehensive school with the possibility of several degrees on different levels was established after ten years of testing to foster equal opportunities for learner. In the first half of the 1980s, the education policy of the Federal Republic of Germany was marked by many discussions and reforms in order to compensate for the ever-increasing grievances in the various educational sectors. These activities were criticized afterwards and led to new changes in the nineties. Also, in the eighties a first view on new media was integrated in education but the total impact was small. All in all, in the eighties the discussion about education was not that innovative in both parts of Germany. This changed at the end of the eighties with the reunification in 1989 and the beginning of the nineties.

### **German Education in the nineties**

The reunification, sometimes called reunion of 1990, had direct impact on the educational system in Germany. The new situation led to the evolvement of the school system in the former GDR. The new states in the east of Germany were guided by the Hamburg Agreement in the design of their school systems. A Joint Education Commission called “Gemeinsame Bildungskommission” of both former German countries was established. This commission agreed about the future of the educational system. The negotiating partners had difficult discussions about different possibilities for the future design of German education and were influenced by the current situation on the markets as well as on future challenges, e.g. in the fields of pedagogy and technology. They resolved to build a common and comparable basic structure of education in the two German parts. However, both partners were not able to agree on a uniform structure for whole Germany. Therefore, education was a task of the Länder within a common federal idea. This led to the situation where some states stuck to the three-part school system while others decided to go with a three-part school system.

In 1996, several changes were introduced to the German system. In elementary education, the right for every child to a place in kindergarten was enshrined by law. Thus every child, who has completed his or her third year of life, can attend kindergarten until he or she reaches the age of primary schooling.

In vocational education and training, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany

(KMK) decided in 1996 that in the syllabus and the curricular structure of all new reorganised fields of apprenticeships, an orientation on real practical situations and tasks should be the guideline and no longer subjects. The concept was presented in the handout for the development of framework syllabi of the KMK for vocational education and training in vocational schools for apprenticeship and their coordination with federal training regulations for recognized professions. The introduced approach is called learning field concept for vocational schools (Lernfeld-Konzept). This approach is now mandatory for apprenticeships, and changes the complete learning in VET. With the learning field concept, the traditional division of subjects was abolished in most of the vocational school forms. The learning fields are part of the syllabus and are based on real situations in enterprises with operational actions. A learning field can summarize several fields of action. Another core idea of the KMK was a new aim for vocational schools.

The goal is to promote the competence of the learners and to foster their willingness for lifelong learning in teaching at vocational schools. Therefore, the KMK focused on the topics of professional competence/subject-related competence, human/self-competence and social competence.

In Germany the internet, new media, and IT became increasingly important, further influencing education. In addition, school PCs became an important medium for organisation and also in didactics and pedagogy. In the early 1990s it became apparent that there was an increasing need for further computer based trainings (CBTs). Learning became a permanent process. With broader availability of the internet this developed and at the end of the nineties, the first web based trainings (WBTs) came into being, with the participation in the Bologna-Process. In 1999, the European Credit Transfer system became important for Germany and the ideas of Bologna led to several changes in higher education in the subsequent, like the introduction of consecutive study programmes.

### **German Education after the Millennium**

After the Millennium, the PISA-Shock hit German education. Society and politicians were shocked by the average results of Germany at the first PISA study which were regarded as weak. A discussion on equal opportunities for learners started and led to redesigns of the educational system.

In 2002, the ideas of Bologna were taken into account to transform the study programmes at German universities and universities of applied sciences from diploma to bachelor and master degrees which were mentioned for the first time in the fourth amendment of the Act about the Framework for higher education (vierte Novelle des Hochschulrahmengesetzes) from 1998 where deregulation was an important topic. This change was widely discussed and the idea of creating study programmes which are shorter and can be finished more quickly by students was established. The implementation in the following years was quite fast. But the core aim to make study programmes quicker could not be fully implemented. Also the idea to make study programmes of different countries more comparable has reached a structural basis.

In 2005, the federal states introduced educational plans for early childhood education based on the right to attend Kindergarten from 1996. First, this was for children of not more than three years old. However, since 2013 there has been a legal claim for a nursing place in a day-care facility for children from the first year of age which is now often integrated in the Kindergarten.

In vocational education, the 'Vocational Training Act' of 1969 with its VET regulations was redefined in 2005. In this new version, the system has been modernised but the dual system of apprenticeship remains. So, the principle of dual training is largely retained for initial vocational training. The full-time VET is still being implemented as an alternative to this system. In the further development of the learning field concept for vocational schools (Lernfeld-Konzept) in 2005, the KMK defines its competence as "the willingness and ability of the individual to act correctly and socially responsible in professional, social and private situations." This development has been incorporated into the new handout of the KMK from 2011 which specified the ideas of 1996 and strengthened the idea of process oriented learning with regard to processes and tasks in enterprises and comes with additional examples and glossaries to make the work in this field easier.

After some basic discussions in 2007 and 2009, in 2011 and 2012 a debate about standards for education took place in Germany. Therefore, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany' (KMK) decided on cross-border educational standards for all federal states of Germany. These standards address different parts of education like standards for basic school graduations at Hauptschule (Hauptschulabschluss), standards for middle school graduation (Realschulabschluss), standards for graduations at grammar

schools (Gymnasialstandards) and standards for primary school leavers. The observance is to be determined by examinations. The implementation of the standards was a task for the states and by 2012, educational standards were introduced for all school forms.

Currently, a discussion about the integration and inclusion of learners with specific backgrounds is going on Germany. The focus is on two groups (a) learners with disabilities and (b) migrants. Already in 2009, Germany has committed itself to the inclusion of learners with disabilities. This has its basis in the United Nations Disability Equality Convention, signed by Germany in 2007. Since that time the instruction of handicapped and non-disabled pupils are the aims of German education. The traditional German special education system does not fit into these new ideas. Moreover, common lessons of disabled and non-disabled learners pose new challenges for the general educational system and the teachers. Usually, the general teachers are not trained for this. There is an ongoing discussion about this in Germany because the idea and implementation of 'integration' in Germany had already been tested at the end of the eighties and was not as successful as everybody hoped.

A lot of effort has been made so far regarding the education of migrant children. After the experiences with the migration from Syria and other non-European countries the newest element integrated in German education was introduced in 2015 and a decree about teaching for newly arrivals / immigrant learners was established in North Rhine-Westfalia in 2016. For a long period of time, immigration of children and adolescents has been declining. In the years 1997 and 1998 the migration balance was even negative. But since 2008 refugees from different war zones all over the worlds are coming in much higher numbers than before. Therefore preparatory classes for children without knowledge of German within the process of integration of migrants into the National and the European system should be enhanced. Such classes can be taught by interested former teachers, volunteers or trained current

teachers. Therefore, quality in structure is quite variable at the moment. The Länder are setting up such separate preparatory classes called "Welcome Classes". The idea is to promote the potential of refugees. In higher education corresponding preparatory programs were established in more than 180 German universities. Since 2014 the federal state of Germany is allowed to foster higher education for specific periods of time. This is a chance and a huge difference to school education where the Co-operation prohibition for the federal state of Germany is stillexisting and where only the single federal states are allowed to foster education and

made decisions in this field. This is based on the reform of federalism in 2006. Here, the federal cooperation in education planning was withdrawn and university and school development transferred to the sole responsibility of the Länder.

After a general focus on eLearning in the first decade after 2000, there are new opportunities since 2010 with regard to Blogs, Wikis and mobile Learning or mLearning and the use of mobile devices for learning purposes. The German ministries as well as the economy and the educational system in enterprises and schools are currently focusing on the challenges in the field of industry 4.0 and the accompanying aspects of digitilisation. This will be a revolution in German education in the next years and comes with both, chances and risks, the teachers and trainers as well as the learners have to deal with.

### **Summarizing aspects**

The overview on education and education policy in Germany since the Second World War has drawn our attention to several problems that cannot be solved in a short period of time. Policy makers often like to have immediate or short-term results.

But, this seems to be a wrong way of dealing with such a complex issue. Many topics have to be adjusted to changing environmental settings and there are also new challenges which are coming up. The relationship between general education and vocational education and training has always been an important issue in Germany in the eras analysed above. It is important to note that changes in general education went hand in hand with changes in higher education. Although these areas of education are generally seen as separate levels of education, there is a degree of influence between them concerning challenges and discussion lines. Here, environmental changes like reconstruction after the war, general ideas of emancipation and critical thinking, the reunion or aspects like migration or digitilisation influence all sectors of education and have been taken into account.

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