

Bridging the policy-to-practice gap in the professional development for inclusive school education with the development of an in-service training programme

The German collaborative research project ‘*Schule tatsächlich inklusiv (StiEL)*’

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Some key figures

Stimulus

- Call for proposals for research funding from the German Federal Ministry of Education BMBF
- Topic: Professional development of teachers and other educational staff for inclusive education

Overall goal of StiEL

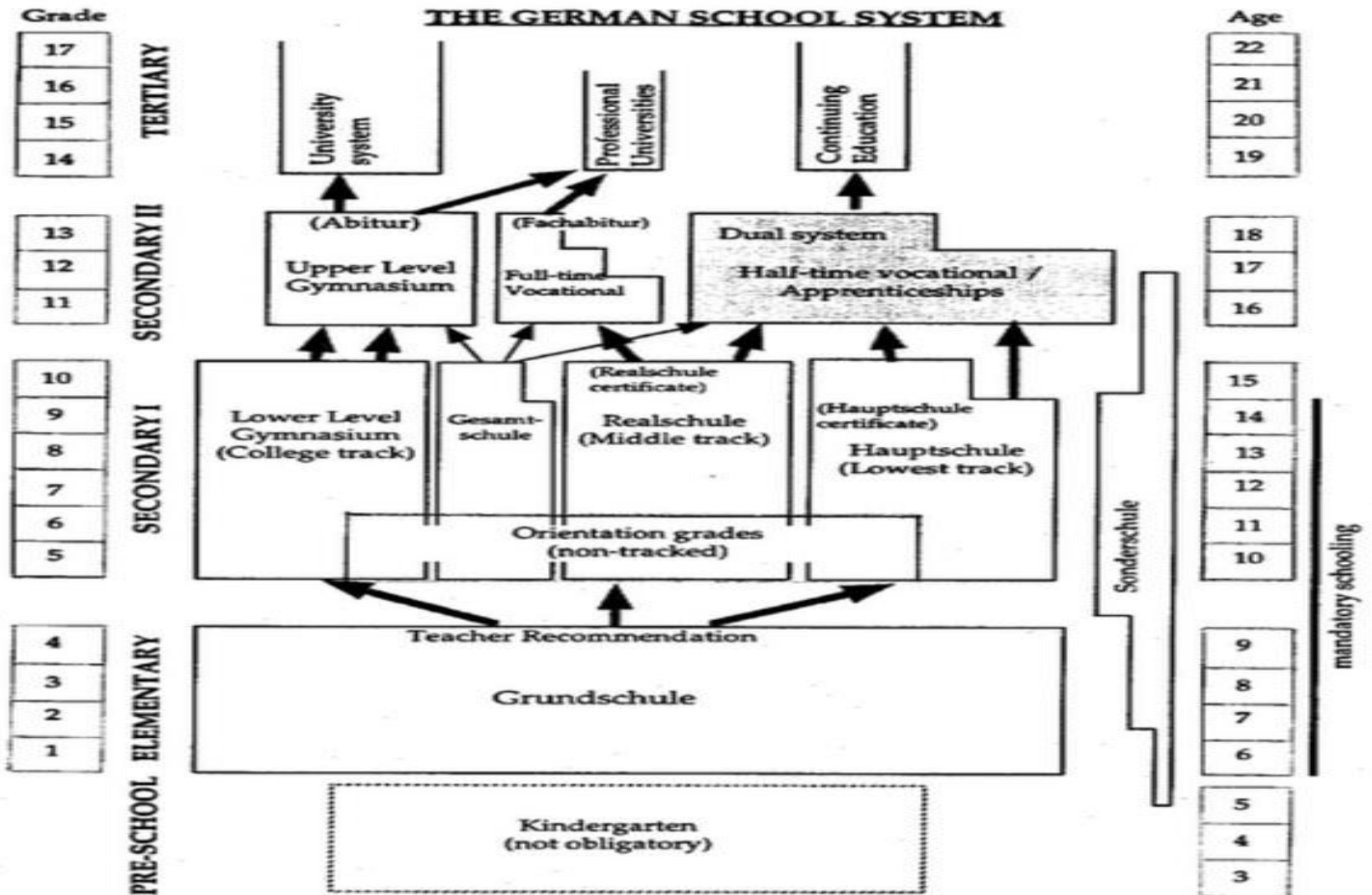
- Development, implementation and evaluation of an evidence-based training on inclusion for in-service teachers and other educational staff working at German secondary general and vocational schools

Structural features

- Collaborative research: Three partnering institutions
- Three-year research funding (start: January 2018)

Since the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- Extensive efforts in many countries of the world, including Germany, in legislation and policy-making to guarantee students a full entitlement to inclusive education on all levels
- Processes of transformation towards inclusive systems, cultures and practices



Taken from MPL, 1994.

Implementation of policies on inclusion in Germany

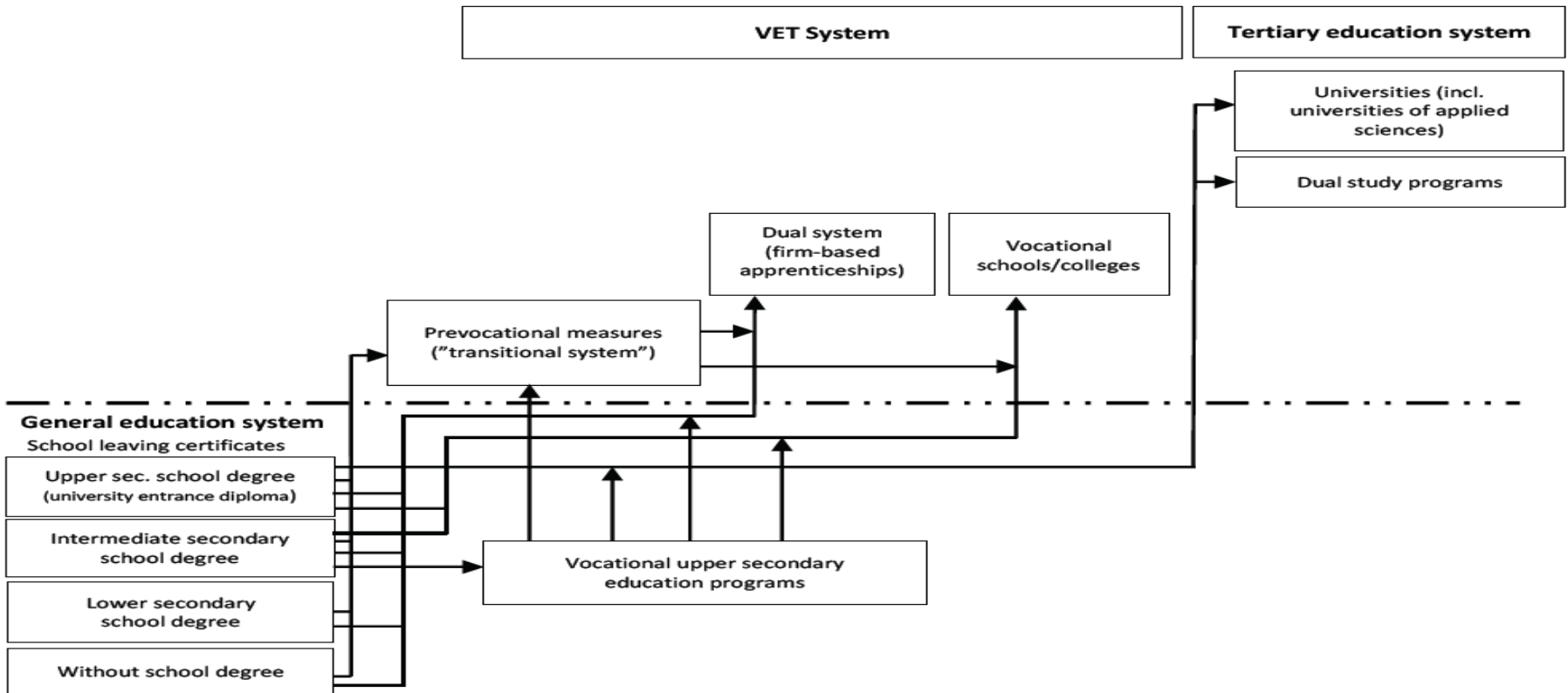
- Not without difficulties
- Scepticism among a significant number of in-service teachers and their advocacy groups
- Time delay and different priorities in implementation: Some forms of education such as vocational schools hitherto poorly addressed by inclusive measures

The German vocational education and training system

- Multiple forms, with a predominance of a dual training system
- Combination of theory and training
- Embedded in a real-life work environment
- Cooperation between mostly small/medium sized companies and publicly funded vocational schools
- Regulated by federal law

The German vocational education and training system and inclusive education: Challenges

Figure 3: Pathways into and within the German VET system and tertiary



Pre-/in-service teacher training for inclusion

- Beliefs/attitudes of teachers (& other educational staff) critical for inclusive practices and commitment to inclusion

In the recent past...

- Adjustment of initial teacher training to the call for inclusion
- But: Poor training of in-service teachers for inclusion
- In-service teachers report not to be well prepared for teaching in inclusive classrooms and coping with differences among students.
- Poorly prepared during initial training and recognition of the need for professional learning opportunities about inclusion

In addition to the upskilling of teachers...

- Appropriate training opportunities for other educational staff members involved in inclusive classrooms practices
- Professional cooperation as key strategy / common practice
- Relevance of the multi-professional approach contrasts with findings highlighting that the demand for training to support the neediest students in the classroom is even higher for paraprofessional support staff
- Problematic: Lack of provision of professional learning opportunities for these groups; Lack of motivation to attend training outside working hours for reasons of precarious labour conditions and lack of incentives

Another issue of concern: Uncertainties about best-practice professional learning

- Type of content that should be included in training strategies for inclusive education
- Structural features of the training (time scope/didactic design)
- Identification of those competencies of professional staff members that are evidenced to work in inclusive classrooms

Approach

- ‘StiEL’ connects to the debates about inclusion in education via open issues related to (a) the readiness of in-service teachers and other educational staff and (b) the content and effectiveness of professional development opportunities

Goals

- To equip teachers and other educational staff with attitudes, knowledge, and skills on the concept and principles of inclusive education
- To enable teachers and other educational staff to appreciate and effectively perform their roles for children in inclusive settings

Notion of inclusion / inclusive education

- “buzzword”, “obligatory in discourse of right-thinking people”
- Notion of inclusive education highly contested: Range from positions that see inclusion as part of a broad equity agenda for all students to positions that define inclusive education in terms of access to the general education classroom for students with disabilities
- While most of the activities are grounded on the latter notion, StiEL emphasizes the former notion

StiEL: Understanding inclusion via understanding exclusion

- Students from non-dominant groups overrepresented in special education in many countries, including Germany
- Special education students from non-dominant groups:
 - more likely to be removed from the general education classroom,
 - less likely to receive related and language services
 - less likely to enroll in higher education programs than their peers from dominant groups
- not one but multiple interacting forms of exclusion

Inclusive education

- focus on complex barriers for learning and participation in schools
- create spaces for collaboration for professionals across disciplines and fields, families, and students

Professional development for inclusive education

Training teachers

- to understand complex forms of exclusion
- to collaborate with others
- to dismantle intersecting barriers that keep certain groups of students from accessing and participating in meaningful learning experiences

Dimensions of inclusive education

- (a) Redistribution of access to and participation in quality opportunities to learn (redistribution dimension);
- (b) Recognition and valuing of all student differences as reflected in content, pedagogy, and assessment tools (recognition dimension);
- (c) Creation of more opportunities for nondominant groups to advance claims of educational exclusion and their respective solutions (representation dimension)

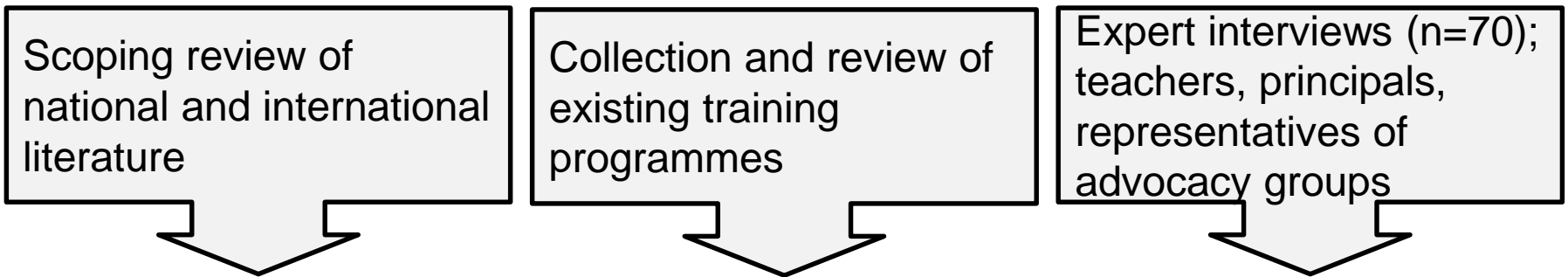
[Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013]

Objectives

- Development, implementation and evaluation of an evidence-based in-service training (programme and materials) to promote inclusive school practices of teacher and other professional groups

Design

- Multi-stage approach (three phases)



First phase (*current activities*)

- Review of national and international research literature on the topic
- Identification and review of existing training programmes
- Expert interviews with school staff members (school principals, teachers, educational assistants) and providers of in-service training

Analysis of German training courses [Amrhein 2012]

- n=775 nationwide training courses in the first half of 2012

Structure

- often single courses with a short time frame
- little improvements of the quality of inclusive teaching, school and personnel development

Contents

- Dominant focus on special needs education and on the dimension of disability
- thus a narrowed understanding of inclusion with the consequence that the training follows the logic of integration rather than inclusion

Scoping review of national and international literature

Collection and review of existing training programmes

Expert interviews (n=70); teachers, principals, representatives of advocacy groups

Development of training modules

- Six preliminary themes: 'inclusive didactics and diagnostics', 'multi-professional cooperation', 'school and community development', 'definitions of inclusion and diversity', 'human rights education and social learning', and 'differentiation of achievement and learning objectives'

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Implementation and evaluation

- In three federal states (n=108 schools)
- Evaluation approaches: Longitudinal design (pre/post-comparison between intervention/control groups) and ethnographic approach
- Outcomes: Knowledge and skills, changes of dispositions in teaching and management of inclusive classrooms

Expected results

- To contribute to bridge the policy-to-practice gap
- to learn more about current competencies of those people who are in charge of the everyday implementation of inclusion in the German educational system
- not only assessment of knowledge and skills but also in-depth insights into attitudes and other dispositional factors
- Identification of good practices of in-service training on inclusion
- In terms of deliverables: development of a comprehensive and evidenced training that is capable to better prepare in-service teachers and other educational staff for inclusive education

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