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**INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE DUAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE
FIELD OF LIGHT INDUSTRY EDUCATION**

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: In the world, dual learning programmes are increasingly offered by higher education institutions. These programmes' main characteristic and greatest challenge is their integration of academic and vocational learning. So far, this challenge has frequently been stated without specifying its exact nature and consequences for learners. The present study addresses this pedagogical research gap and examines the extent of variation in the degree of integration among dual study programmes. With reference to curriculum theory, the study develops an empirical typology of curricular integration in dual programmes. The data sample consists of 152 programmes at (dual) universities and universities of applied sciences. Data is analysed using hierarchical cluster analysis. Results indicate that the currently prevailing forms of curricular integration should best be differentiated according to five types. The five overlapping types of integration are located on a continuum ranging from parallelism through organisational linking to full curricular integration targeted immediately at students' personal integration. The analysis confirms that there are problems with complying with integration standards set on the policy level. Above all, the study offers new insights on what marks the diverse integration landscape of dual study programmes. It proves that approaches to integration are more differentiated than previous research has shown.

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of dual study programmes in higher education (HE) is to offer students the benefits that result from integrating academic and vocational learning. While these dual academic programmes are formally part of tertiary education, the vocational elements are typically located at the secondary level. According to the German Science Council (GSC, 2013), dual bachelor studies aim at systematically linking these two realms of learning. An increasing number of students in Germany favour dual studies (Authoring Group Educational Reporting, 2020), with universities of applied sciences (UAS)—the main provider of dual programmes—reporting stable growth rates. In 2005, the share of dual students at UAS was 1.4%; in 2017 it was 9.7% (Mordhorst & Nickel, 2019). According to the national student survey at universities and UAS, every second student can imagine studying dually (Multrus et al., 2017). Dual vocational programmes at the secondary level have a long tradition in Germany (Wolter, 2017). The recent expansion of “hybrid programmes” (Graf, 2017) at the intersection of the HE and the vocational system, in turn, is an innovation, since traditionally the two systems have been strictly separated (Baethge, 2006). The growth of dual programmes in tertiary education relates to a crisis of the dual vocational system and to the international trend of massification in postsecondary education: an increasing number of professions is moving out of the vocational and into the HE system.

Research on their structure suggests that the degree to which academic and vocational learning are integrated varies greatly between programmes (Krone, 2019; Langfeldt, 2018). Often the students themselves are challenged to connect their distinct learning experiences (Faßhauer & Anselmann, 2021; Kupfer et al., 2014). Different degrees of integration are generally possible if the programmes have coherent profiles. Parallelism of the two realms of learning, however, is not in line with the normative frame of these programmes. A lower degree of integration usually asks a higher transfer capacity of students and should be made transparent (GSC, 2013). Transfer capacity refers to a student’s ability to make sense of and link vocational and academic learning experiences. As research on these programmes in general and on pedagogical aspects in particular remains scarce, the challenge of integration is frequently discussed without specifying degrees, types or consequences for learners. Until now, the few studies on the educational quality of dual programmes mostly reported students’ perceptions (e.g. Krone, 2019; Nickel et al., 2018) and are often short of representative data (Langfeldt, 2018; Weiß, 2016). Commonly, research lacks pedagogical concepts of what integrating academic and vocational learning implies for the actual educational design of dual programmes (Faßhauer & Anselmann, 2021; Meyer, 2019).

In this paper, we investigate the differences in integration of academic and vocational learning. We focus on the pedagogical implications of different curricular characteristics, exploring the extent of

variation in the degree of integration among dual study programmes. We contribute to the ongoing discourse on the design and the quality of dual programmes by first introducing a pedagogical perspective, where hitherto theory-based empirical contributions have focused on system-related aspects or structural issues (Graf, 2017, 2018; Krone et al., 2019; Schiller & Leišytė, 2020). Second, we contribute by identifying different types of curricular integration in dual programmes. To this end, we propose indicators grounded in curriculum theory (e.g. Kelly, 2009) and apply them in a cluster analysis. To understand typical curricular types of design, we examine dual bachelor programmes in the most common subject areas: engineering and economics (Hofmann et al., 2020). We draw on a representative data set from the German Centre for Higher Education (CHE) on dual undergraduate programmes. This makes the study the most complete empirical contribution in this field. As a result, we present a curricular typology of integration for dual bachelor programmes. With our paper, we show how curricular design elements support learners in integrating academic and vocational learning experiences. By adding a pedagogical perspective on the state of integration in dual programmes, it provides a differentiated picture of the status quo in Germany and an analytical framework for international policy makers, researchers and dual programme designers.

In the German education system, dual educational programmes have a long tradition in initial vocational training at the secondary level (Wolter, 2017). Situated in “the dual system of vocational education and training (VET)” (Baethge & Wolter, 2015, p. 97), these vocational programmes combine “training on-the-job” and “school-based learning in vocational colleges” (Sloane, 2014, p. 402). For many years, VET has been the backbone of the German educational system with entrants well above those to HE. This distribution changed over the last decades and in recent years entrants to HE have been higher than entrants to VET (Authoring Group Educational Reporting, 2020). Tertiary dual programmes must be perceived in the context of HE massification and the simultaneous “apprenticeship crisis” (Deißinger, 2006, p. 181) in VET. One of the reasons for the crisis is companies’ declining interest in the VET system (Deißinger, 2006). While learners and companies increasingly ask for academic degrees, many still acknowledge the benefits of VET (such as immediate access to a job or trainees’ workforce), making dual programmes at the tertiary level a relevant phenomenon.

To grasp the variation in the degree of curricular integration among dual programmes, we have to consider the dual character of these programmes not only structurally but also in pedagogical terms. For several years now, scholars have noted that the discourse on how to design dual academic programmes lacks a focus on pedagogy (Faßhauer & Anselmann, 2021; Meyer, 2019; Mordhorst & Gössling, 2020), i.e. the relationship between structural decisions and the individual learner’s

development. Until now, there has been no comprehensive theoretical framework in HE which focuses specifically on duality, i.e. the question of how to design the integration of academic and vocational learning. Such a framework, however, is necessary to delineate what duality or integration mean and which characteristics of these concepts are present in the curricular designs as well as the pedagogical practices of dual programmes. To develop theoretical categories which allow for a pedagogical understanding of duality and integration, first, we expound on the German dual VET system. Second, we refer to curriculum theory, deducing general curricular dimensions relevant for shaping educational experiences in dual programmes. Third, these dimensions are further qualified with reference to policy recommendations. Fourth, we refer to the state of research on curricular integration in dual programmes.

The German dual system of VET is highly regulated and complex. The 16 federal states are each responsible for designing syllabi for vocational schools, while training regulations for companies are the responsibility of the federal government (Sloane, 2014). Conceptually, the term dual system suggests that two systems collaborate to form a whole, which has been emphasised since the 1960s (Euler et al., 1999). Duality goes beyond governance or the organisational combination of two venues of learning and extends to the teaching and learning activities (Sloane, 2014). While the legal framework for VET emphasises this extensive duality, the degree to which it is implemented varies (Euler et al., 1999). Zabeck (1996) distinguishes between dualism and duality. Where the former suggests parallel activities of schools and companies with hardly any cooperation, the latter implies intense collaboration.

The VET-related discourse on duality provides basic categories for understanding degrees of integration between academic and vocational learning. At the same time, the transferability to dual study programmes has its limits (Faßhauer & Anselmann, 2021). This is largely due to the different regulatory settings of HE and VET and their consequences.

The German HE system is binary, comprising universities and UAS. The system is further characterised by academic freedom of teaching and research as well as relatively autonomous higher education institutions (HEIs). While the federal states exercise oversight and accreditation provides some quality control of study programmes (Kehm, 2018), there is no direct regulation regarding educational content and pedagogies.

From a regulatory perspective, there are two types of dual academic programmes, which differ in regard to the contracts students sign with corporate partners and the awarded degrees. In both programmes,

students gain a bachelor's degree and enrol in a HEI. In so-called training-integrating programmes students sign a contract with a company for a legally regulated profession and obtain an additional VET degree. In practice-integrating programmes students only enrol for the university degree. Besides their status as HE students, they have a contract for extended work placements with a corporate partner (GSC, 2013).

The German Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (GCMEC, 2017) defined the criteria for the accreditation of dual programmes in an exemplary statutory order. This statutory order (GCMEC, 2017) defines the following aspects as crucial dimensions for carrying the label dual: Besides the academic principle, the core element characterising dual studies is the combination of at least two venues of learning. It further indicates that duality in the sense of organisational linkages between the academic and the vocational venue of learning provides the basis for an integration that should extend to learning content. As opposed to VET on the secondary level the organisational and the curricular side of integration are defined as two connected, but separate elements which are not standardised.

Thus, in the context of dual academic programmes, the term duality refers to organisational linkages between HE and VET, remaining rather unspecific about content and pedagogies. It requires adequate concepts to investigate how learners are supported in linking and integrating the learning experiences in dual programmes. Curriculum theory can provide these concepts. The need for such an approach is underpinned by the fact that most dual programmes encompass some degree of organisational linking, while problems occur with the systematic integration of learning content (German Accreditation Council (GAC), 2020). The principles of academic freedom and autonomy of HEIs make a greater variety of approaches to integration more likely. Additionally, dual study programmes were never strongly supported by political initiatives (Nickel et al., 2018). It is up to each HEI to spell out how to accomplish duality and integration. To sum up, HEIs are granted much more autonomy in how to run their dual programmes than the VET institutions (Graf, 2017).

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