

HANDOUT 2.3 A - GERMAN EDUCATION INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

Specific Characteristics of the German Educational System

Who is responsible for education in Germany?

Education is under the responsibility of the 16 *Länder* (states), so Germany has 16 different, but similar school systems. The conference of the education ministers of the *Länder* (KMK) cares for coordination and agreement on certain standards and developments. In school education, the *Länder* have an almost absolute say. In the area of *Kindergarten* (Day Care) and in the area of higher education the Federal Government has some say too.

Tuition Fee:

Generally education in Germany is free, but there are exceptions. In most of the *Länder* parents have to pay for *Kindergarten*. The fee differs from *Land* (state) to *Land* and even among municipalities within one *Land*. Depending on the income of the parents tuition can be from zero up to approximately 4,500 €. Some *Länder* introduced tuition fees for university a couple of years ago, but they are normally not more than 1000.00 € per year.

Kindergarten:

Normally *Kindergarten* is available for children between the age of three and six. It's still not too common for parents to send younger children to *Kindergarten*. If parents want to or have to send their younger children to a *Kindergarten*, they quite often have to start looking for a spot and apply for it with the birth of the child or even earlier.

Primary Education:

In elementary school the children have one or two class teachers who teach all of the core classes. Teacher and students have their own classroom. These are German, math and *Sachkunde* (general studies) which includes basics of biology, geography, history, and civic education. In addition, students take arts and crafts, music, and physical education. Depending on the grade level and the *Land* students have between 20 and 27 class periods per week.

Secondary Education:

In all types of secondary schools the students have their classroom and the teachers have to move around. The teachers have a spacious teacher's lounge where they normally have a mailbox and some limited space to store material, but generally, teachers in Germany have an office at home and carry things back and forth. Only for subjects where special equipment is needed does the teacher have his or her own classroom. These subjects include arts and crafts, music, biology, chemistry, physics, and geography.

Germany has a continuous teaching approach. That is to say, students have most subjects for the entirety of their school life. Certain subjects are introduced at different grade levels only and in order to keep the absolute number of classes on a decisive level. The subjects can have a changing number of hours per week over the different grade levels. There are mandatory subjects and electives. Students have between 27 and 39 periods per week depending on grade level, the school type and the *Land* they live in.

School day:

School is Monday through Friday, five days a week. Traditionally most schools start class at 08:00 AM and end around 01:30 PM. One period is typically 45 minutes long. In the upper grades students frequently have two periods joined together for one subject (a type of block schedule). Between period one and two is a five minute break, afterwards a 20 minute break. Then again two periods with a five minute break followed by a 15 minute break and again two periods with a five minute break in between. With the change from half day school to full day school, schedules change because a lunch break has to be included. So-called core classes like German, math or history are mostly taught in the morning, some electives and generally additional workshops are taught in the afternoon.

How to become a teacher?

Since the German university system was changed to the bachelor/master structure, the bachelor must be studied in the form of a 2-subject degree, because in Germany teachers must have at least two subjects. Essentially, the university student has to choose the subjects he or she wants to teach later.

During the bachelor program, the student mostly gets a technical overview. Upon completion of the bachelor's degree, he can theoretically leave the university and work, for instance, for a textbook publisher. Or he may continue a Masters of Education.

The pedagogical education and first professional teacher training is normally only part of the master's program, even if there might be possibilities for internships at schools during the bachelor's portion. But there are models, such as in Bielefeld, where the students are able to study pedagogy during their bachelor's program, and then begin to study the second subject during the master's program.

With the completion of the Masters of Education, or the *Erstes Staatsexamen* (first state examination), a student is not yet a teacher.

First is two years of student teaching (*Referendariat*). Afterwards, the student has to pass the *Zweites Staatsexamen* (second state examination) in order to become a fully certified teacher.

During the *Referendariat*, the future teacher will earn a salary. Many student teachers regard the period of student teaching as very stressful, because in addition to the work at school, they must attend more events, in particular the accompanying *Lehrerseminar* (college of teacher training). The first year the student teacher will mostly be a spectator and observe his or her colleagues at school, and teach only a few hours by himself. The second year, he or she teaches almost full time, but is still often accompanied by subject teachers.

In some *Länder* (states) it is possible to study purely to become an elementary school teacher. But in others, however, study for teaching in elementary schools is connected with study for *Hauptschule* and/or *Realschule* (both secondary schools). Most of the time, the student still has the option to choose elementary school as a focus.

To become a *Gymnasium* teacher is another choice at university. This is followed by a *Referendariat* at a *Gymnasium*.

One more option is to become a teacher at a vocational school. The "standard subjects" (German, mathematics, English, etc.) can be studied at many universities with the goal of becoming a teacher at a vocational school, but there are also specific courses taught at vocational schools (e.g. metalworking, electronics, etc.). Sometimes, depending on the subject, there can be a lack of vocational school teachers, so it is also possible to change careers, for instance as a graduate electrical engineer, and start with the *Referendariat* as student teacher, or perhaps even begin teaching immediately at a vocational school as a teacher.

Workload and salary:

With a full-time position, a teacher has to teach between 25.5 and 28 periods per week, depending on the school type and the *Land*. This does not include any prep-time.

For a full-time position, salary differs between the different *Länder*, the school types, and whether a person becomes a civil servant or is considered an ordinary employee. Civil servants get a higher income. It also depends on the educational level and work experience of the teacher. Salaries range from about 2,500 € to 4,500 € per month before tax and insurances.

The Different Institutions within the German Educational System

Kindergartens

Mostly between the age of three and enrollment in primary school, children attend *kindergarten*. In some *Länder*, mostly in East Germany, *kindergartens* enroll children even younger than three. They spend all day or part of the day at the *kindergarten*. Attendance is voluntary. *Kindergartens* are to provide care for children, educate them and foster their development into responsible individuals with good communication skills. In some *Länder*, there are also other institutions such as pre-school classes or school *kindergartens* which prepare children for transition to primary school.

Elementary Schools / *Grundschulen*

Elementary schools cover the first four years of schooling. In Berlin and Brandenburg, they cover six years. All children attend elementary school and are provided with a basic education that prepares them for secondary schooling. The subjects taught include German, mathematics, arts and crafts, music, physical education and the basics of biology, physics, chemistry, social studies, history and geography. Foreign language instruction is offered in all *Länder*.

Orientation Stage / *Orientierungsstufe*

This covers grades 5 and 6, which either form part of the various secondary schools or are separated from them. The aim is to promote pupils and to enable parents to decide what type of secondary education they wish to choose for their child.

Secondary General Schools / *Hauptschulen*

Attendance at secondary general school is compulsory for all pupils who, having finished primary school, decide not to attend any of the other types of secondary school. Secondary general school covers classes 5 to 9 and in some *Länder* includes class 10. In most *Länder*, voluntary participation in class 10 at secondary general school is possible. Approximately 30% of secondary general school pupils stay on for a tenth year. Secondary general schools provide general education as a basis for practical vocational training.

Secondary Intermediate Schools / *Realschulen*

Intermediate schools are secondary schools normally covering classes 5 to 10. The final certificate awarded by these schools in general provides the basis for training in all types of medium level occupations. It qualifies holders for attendance at *Fachoberschulen* (see below), specialized high schools or high schools with classes 11 to 13 only (*Gymnasien in Aufbauform*). Intermediate schools provide extended general education.

Secondary High Schools / *Gymnasien*

High schools are secondary schools which, most of the time, cover 8 or 9 years (grades 5 to 12 or grades 5 to 13). Schools in Saxony and Thuringia consist of only 12 grades. Nearly all *Länder* meanwhile offer or plan to offer the possibility of acquiring the final certificate (*Abitur*) after 12 years of schooling. There are also high schools with grades 11 to 13 only, which as a rule are open to pupils with a final certificate from intermediate schools. The final certificate awarded by high schools (*Abitur*) qualifies its holder for studies at all institutions of higher education.

Comprehensive Schools / *Gesamtschulen*

Comprehensive schools combine the different types of secondary school in various organizational and curricular forms. There are integrated comprehensive schools (joint classes for all pupils) as well as additive and cooperative comprehensive schools. They offer the possibility to achieve a high school certificate (*Abitur*) after class 13.

Secondary Schools / *Sekundarschulen*

Secondary schools are a newly introduced type of school joining together the secondary general schools (*Hauptschule*) and the intermediate schools (*Realschule*). They offer the possibility to leave school after grade 10 with an intermediate school certificate (*Realschulabschluss*) or to continue for three more years (grades

10 – 13) and acquire a high school certificate (*Abitur*). Introduction of this type of school was planned and has started so far only in the *Land* of Berlin.

Collective Schools / *Gemeinschaftsschulen*

Collective schools are also a newly introduced type of school joining together elementary school, the secondary general school (*Hauptschule*) and the intermediate school (*Realschule*), so children learn at least from Grade 1 – 10. They offer the possibility to leave school after grade 10 with an intermediate school certificate (*Realschulabschluss*) or to continue for three more years (grades 10 – 13) and acquire a high school certificate (*Abitur*).

Introduction of the latter two new types of school was planned and has started so far only in the *Land* of Berlin. High schools (*Gymnasium*) will further exist besides the secondary schools and the collective schools and offer the *Abitur* in 12 years of schooling. There are thoughts in other *Länder* to introduce this or a similar system too.

Specialized High Schools / *Fachgymnasien*

Specialized High schools are oriented towards occupations. They accept pupils who have earned an intermediate school certificate or equivalent. The final certificate (*Abitur*) awarded after three years (classes 11 to 13) qualifies its holder for studies at all institutions of higher education.

Special Ed. Schools / *Sonderschulen*

Special schools apply special teaching concepts which meet the special needs of children and adolescents with handicaps. There are different schools for the different kinds of handicap. Special schools provide not only teaching at the primary and secondary levels, both stage I and stage II, (sometimes organized as boarding schools), but also practical advice for everyday life and support for social integration. Corresponding institutions are also available at the level of intermediate schools, high schools and vocational schools. This type of school will most likely be phased out as recent United Nations so-called Inclusion Rules are adopted to better integrate children with special needs.

Evening Classes and Full-Time Adult Education Colleges / *Abendschulen und Kollegs*

These are institutions offering second-chance programs for adults enabling them to acquire the secondary general school certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss*), the intermediate school certificate (*Realschulabschluss*) or the high school certificate (*Abitur*), the higher education entrance qualification. There are evening classes at secondary general school level, at intermediate school level and at high school level. Participants are working during the first few years. The full-time adult education college (*Kolleg*) gives an opportunity to acquire the *Abitur*; it offers full-time schooling while participants are not working.

Basic Vocational Training Year / *Berufsgrundbildungsjahr*

Full-time or part-time classes provide basic general knowledge or basic vocational knowledge relating to a certain occupational field.

Dual Vocational Training / *Duale Berufsausbildung*

The system is called dual because education and training are provided at two places of learning: In companies and in part-time vocational schools. This is the main type of vocational training in Germany; more than 60% of an age-group is involved in dual vocational training. Training in individual occupations is governed by training directives (taking the form of Federal Government ordinances). At present there are about 350 recognized occupations for which the Federal Government has issued training directives.

Specialized Secondary Schools / *Fachoberschulen*

An intermediate school certificate or a recognized equivalent is required for entry to this type of school. Full-time attendance is for at least one year and part-time attendance for up to three years. The certificate, awarded upon successful completion, qualifies its holder for studies at *Fachhochschulen* (Universities of Applied Sciences).

Full-Time Vocational Schools / *Berufsfachschulen*

Full-time vocational schools offer courses of at least one year's duration. In general, attendance is voluntary. These schools can be entered after completion of compulsory full-time schooling. They prepare for an occupation or provide full vocational training for those who have previously not participated in practical vocational training. Participants who have passed their final examination are awarded a certificate; the certificate awarded to those who have completed a two-year course is equivalent to the intermediate school certificate and qualifies its holder for entrance to trade and technical school. Those who complete full-time vocational school can acquire the qualifications for a recognized occupation.

Vocational Extension Schools / *Berufsaufbauschulen*

Vocational extension schools are attended by young people who are undergoing vocational training or who are employed. They can be attended after completion of compulsory part-time vocational schooling or in addition to such schooling after at least 6 months' attendance at part-time vocational school. Most vocational extension schools specialize in certain subjects. The duration of full-time courses is 12 to 18 months and that of part-time courses 3 to 3 1/2 years. On successful completion, participants are awarded certificates which are equivalent to intermediate school certificates and qualify them for entrance to trade and technical school.

Schools for Nurses, Midwives, etc. / *Schulen des Gesundheitswesens*

These schools provide training for non-academic healthcare occupations, for example for nurses and children's nurses, midwives (male and female), masseurs, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. Many of these schools are integrated with hospitals on whose premises they are located and where theoretical instruction and practical training take place.

Trade and Technical Schools / *Fachschulen*

Trade and technical schools are attended voluntarily after vocational training has been completed and practical work experience gained, in some cases even after many years of practical work, or on proof of special ability. These schools provide advanced vocational training (leading for example to masters' or technicians' qualifications). Full-time attendance is for between 6 months and 3 years and part-time attendance normally for 6 to 8 half-year periods.

Universities (Including Technical Universities) / *Universitäten (inclusive Technischer Universitäten)*

Universities are the traditional type of higher education institution in Germany. They provide courses for a broad range of study subjects. The traditional degree awarded at a university was the *Magister* or the *Diplom* (both were equal to a master's degree). Actual coursework generally totaled nine semesters (four and a half years) of full-time study with various options for specialization. Universities combine teaching and research and have the right to award doctorate degrees. In an effort to make educational degrees more compatible within Europe, the traditional German university degrees were phased out and replaced by the European bachelor's and master's degree by the end of 2010. While attempts were made to phase-in moderate tuition fees, most public German universities are tuition-free.

University of Applied Sciences and Arts / *Fachhochschule*

Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts differ from the traditional university mainly through their more application or practical orientation. This includes research and vocational aspects. Subjects taught at a *Fachhochschule* include engineering, computer science, business & management, arts & design, communication studies, social service and other professional fields. The traditional degree awarded at a *Fachhochschule* was the *Diplom* (FH). Actual coursework generally totaled eight semesters (four years) of full-time study with various options for specialization. In addition, there are one or two practical training semesters to provide hands-on experience in a real working environment. Today the *Fachhochschulen* are also conducting research. The research projects are usually sponsored by industry. The German universities of applied sciences enjoy a high importance for the German industry and they normally have several partnerships with the local industry. Nevertheless, in Germany the right to confer doctoral degrees is still reserved to the universities. The *Fachhochschule* degree was also phased out and replaced by the European bachelor's and master's degree by the end of 2010.

Colleges of Art and Music, Colleges of Theology and Colleges of Education /*Kunst-, Musik-, Theologische und Pädagogische Hochschulen*

Colleges of art and music (*Kunst- und Musikhochschulen*) offer study courses in the fine arts. Colleges of theology (*Theologische Hochschulen*) provide training for theologians. Colleges of education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*), which have survived only in Baden-Württemberg, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia, provide training for teachers at the primary, secondary general and intermediate school levels and sometimes also for special school teachers. In the other *Länder*, teachers are trained at universities, technical universities, comprehensive universities and colleges of art and music.

Comprehensive Universities /*Gesamthochschulen*

Comprehensive universities, existing only in Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia, combine research and teaching functions of the universities, the colleges of education, the *Fachhochschulen* and to some extent also of the colleges of art and music. Typical of them are the integrated study courses they offer.

Colleges of Public Administration /*Verwaltungsfachhochschulen*

The colleges of public administration (*Fachhochschulen für Öffentliche Verwaltung*) are run by the Federal Government and the *Länder* governments provide training for those wishing to carve out an executive career in the civil service.

Continuing Education

Continuing education means continuing or resuming any form of learning (including informal learning) after completion of an educational phase, which may vary in duration, during childhood and adolescence. Continuing education includes two main areas, namely general and vocational continuing education. Most political and cultural courses are considered to be part of general continuing education. Higher education institutions and voluntary providers offer courses for further scientific training and distant education courses for both these areas. Continuing education is characterized by voluntary participation, a great variety of courses, a plurality of providers and the subsidiary role of government.

Source:

The German Educational System is the Best in the World: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (n.d.). *Germany: Once Weak International Standing Prompts Strong Nationwide Reforms for Rapid Improvement*. Retrieved from Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/52/32/46581323.pdf>

Special Characteristics of the German Educational System (2004). *Basic and Structural Data 2003/2004*. Retrieved from Bundesministerium fuer Bildung und Forschung: http://www.bmbf.de/pub/gus_2004_ges_engl.pdf

The German Educational System is the Best in the World

For centuries Germans thought their educational system was the best or at least one of the best in world. In fact Germany has 16 different educational systems because education is under the responsibility of the 16 *Länder* (Federal States), but they are all very similar.

In a more simplified way you can say children attend *Kindergarten*, named day care in the US, from the age of three until six. Afterwards they attend elementary school for four years. At the end of grade four the children are split between the three different types of secondary school. The selection happens based on the average marks of grade three and four and the recommendation of the elementary teacher. In some *Länder* the recommendation of the elementary school is mandatory - in other *Länder* the parents have the last say.

The lowest pillar of the tripartite system is the *Hauptschule* (Secondary General School). The students receive a general, practical oriented education and leave school with a *Hauptschulabschluss* (Hauptschule Degree) after grade nine or ten.

The middle pillar is the *Realschule* (Intermediate School). The students receive an extended general education which is still relatively practical oriented and they leave school after ten years with the *Realschulabschluss* (Realschule Degree).

In both types of schools the students learn one foreign language, mostly English. The degrees of these two types of school don't allow the students to attend university, so traditionally they look for an apprenticeship program, mostly in the so called *Duales System* (Dual System).

The third and most advanced pillar is the *Gymnasium* (High School). It offers the broadest, deepest and most theoretical education. Students generally learn two foreign languages, in a lot of cases even three. They leave school nowadays after 12 years of school with the *Abitur* (High School Degree) which enables them to choose any kind of higher education including university.

In the year 2000 the first PISA-Study (Program for International Student Assessment) organized by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) took place¹ and Germans' view that their educational system was superior collapsed. When the final evaluation of the test was released in 2001 Germany was shocked about the results because it ranked only 21st in reading, 20th in math, and 20th in natural sciences among the 29 OECD countries. The term *PISA-Shock* became part of the German language.

In the following evaluation and comparison of the results certain areas were identified to be the weak points among the students and in the German system: language difficulties among migrant families and also partly among German non-academic families, the early separation of the students after fourth grade, half day schooling, lack of personal manpower in the schools, relatively large student numbers in class, a lack of quality control and common national standards.

As a result, different measures were taken and first reforms were implemented. Since education is under the responsibility of the different *Länder* approaches were different. But you can find certain trends or sometimes even common agreements between all of the *Länder*.

In 2003 all ministers of education agreed on early childhood language support. If language shortages are identified, children are eligible for special language training in *Kindergarten*. Within this framework *Kindergartens* underwent reform overall and became more like playful early childhood learning centers instead of holding institutions.

¹ What is PISA?

- A three-yearly survey, starting in 2000, of knowledge, skills and other characteristics of 15-year-olds. In the first survey, around 315,000 students in 43 countries took part in pencil and paper tests and additionally filled out questionnaires about themselves. Their schools also provided background information. Since then the number of participating countries increased.
- A specific assessment of reading, mathematical and scientific literacies in a way that looks at the capacity of students to address real-life challenges. Every time the focus area is different. 2000 the focus was on reading performance, 2003 the focus was on math, 2006 on natural sciences, and 2009 again on reading performance.
- A unique collaboration among governments to monitor educational outcomes, coordinated through the OECD.

In the matter of the early separation, discussions came up to prolong elementary school from four to six years or to found new collective schools where the children study together at least from grade one until grade ten. Elementary school is traditionally six years in *Berlin* and *Brandenburg*, an attempt in *Hamburg* to prolong it failed recently because of a negative referendum. Starting 2011/12 in the *Saarland*, elementary school will be five years.

In many *Länder* the schools have more autonomy to decide about necessary teachers or social workers. More effort is put in further education of teachers.

There are approaches to reducing student numbers in class, but normally numbers between 20 and 30 students in class is still high but common.

More and more *Länder* change from half day schooling to full day schooling. This does not necessarily mean the students have more school subjects and classes. More often the time is used for special language or other training, help with homework and electives such as drama, arts, music, or sports.

The *Länder* agreed on certain common standards and further assessment tests to assure and improve the quality of education within the country. Meanwhile, 15 of the 16 *Länder* introduced the centralized *Abitur*. This means the tests are made by a central authority, which is usually the *Kultusministerium* (ministry for education) of each *Land*.

The deepest change in the system is a real school reform which has taken or is taking place in most of the *Länder*. Because of the PISA result highlighting lower results in *Haupt-* and *Realschule*, changing requirements in the working environment and less acceptance of the *Hauptschule* among parents led to a wide debate to get rid of the *Hauptschule* mostly by joining *Haupt-* and *Realschule* together to form new types of secondary school. In 14 of the 16 *Länder* a bipartite system is nowadays on the way or already implemented. The different types of secondary schools include middle schools where students learn together grade five until seven and are separated with grade eight, or students learn together at least until grade 10 with the option to continue to the *Abitur* within 13 years of school if they have good marks. (The *Abitur* can be acquired after 12 years in the *Gymnasium*.) Furthermore, there are pilot projects with so called *Gemeinschaftsschulen* (Collective Schools) where the children learn at least together from grade one until grade 10.

Over the last years Germany has improved in the follow up PISA surveys. In the latest study from 2009, Germany reached rank 17 in reading performance, rank 10 in math, and rank 9 in natural sciences within the participating 33 OECD countries. "Germany got promoted – promoted from the second league into the first league. But Germany is still far away from the Champions League", said the director of the OECD in Berlin, Heino von Meyer on December 7, 2010 when he introduced the results of the 2009 study to the public.

Source:

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (n.d.). *Germany: Once Weak International Standing Prompts Strong Nationwide Reforms for Rapid Improvement*. Retrieved from Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/52/32/46581323.pdf>