

NATIONAL EDUCATION REPORT

AUSTRIA 2012

Indicators and Topics:
An Overview

*Edited by
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Michael Bruneforth
& Lorenz Lassnigg*



Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger, Michael Bruneforth & Lorenz Lassnigg (Eds.)

National Education Report Austria 2012

Indicators and Topics: An Overview



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Foreword



Austria published its first National Education Report (NBB) in 2009. Since then, the pilot version has become an oft-quoted source that serves as the basis for many discussions about education policy and has met with lively responses from interested parties both inside and outside academia. The NBB has also been the subject of interest abroad, as several EU and OECD countries also publish national education reports, although many of these are significantly different in concept.

The first volume of the 2012 National Education Report focuses on indicators and largely corresponds with the 2009 pilot version. However, some additional indicators were carefully selected to ensure both continuity within the project and long-term monitoring of developments within the Austrian school system.

The second volume of the NBB, while significantly more compact than the 2009 version, analyses the following key issues in the Austrian school system: School Policy, Competencies and Standards, Equal Opportunity, Quality Development and School Types in Focus.

The topics were first formulated in 2010–11 in coordination with the parliamentary representatives for education as well as experts in the field of education. The key questions were then presented to the editors of the NBB at BIFIE, who in turn selected the authors for the different chapters. As such, these chapters reflect the perspectives of Austrian educational researchers on the strengths and weaknesses of these key topics.

Over the last few years, we have introduced many key development processes, which must now be systematically implemented. Most of the chapters present my department's current reform plans – such as introducing the New Secondary School [*Neue Mittelschule*], all-day schools, educational standards social inclusion and the overhaul of teacher training at university level – as necessary steps to improve the effectiveness of and equal opportunity within Austrian schools. The design of these reforms clearly indicates the increased influence of our international experience in recent years, in particular through participation in EU educational programmes and OECD activities. I am convinced that these developments in the Austrian school system – in systematically implementing these reforms while simultaneously taking full advantage of expert advice and criticism from both inside and outside of Austria – will ensure significant improvement in the coming years.

Even though these key development processes have been initiated, we still face serious challenges and will need to fight for greater equality of opportunity in the Austrian school system. Through education we can lay the foundations for a democratic community and civil society as well as economic growth and employment. This is a foundation on which all people, regardless of their socio-economic background or ethnic heritage, must be able to build.

I would like to thank the editors of the National Education Report Austria 2012 for their work as well as the contributing authors. The report offers a professional basis to support current discussions and subsequent decisions regarding school policy.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claudia Schmied".

Dr. Claudia Schmied
Federal Minister for Education, the Arts and Culture

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List of abbreviations

Type of school

AHS	Academic secondary school
BHS	Upper secondary technical and vocational colleges
BMHS	Middle and upper secondary technical and vocational schools and colleges
BMS	Middle-level secondary technical and vocational school
HS	General secondary school
KMS	Cooperative middle school
NMS	New Secondary School

General abbreviations

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
BCS	Bosnian – Croatian – Serbian
ET 2020	Education and Training 2020. Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.
EU-27	27 EU Member States
EU 2020	EUROPA 2020. A strategy for intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth.
FÖRMIG	Model program designed to provide educational support for children with an immigrant background.
MINT	Mathematics, Information technology, Natural sciences, Technology
NBB	National Education Report Austria
NQF	National Qualification Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PIRLS	IEA – Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (https://www.bifie.at/pirls)
PISA	OECD – Programme for International Student Assessment (https://www.bifie.at/pisa)
SPF	Special educational needs (confirmation by written formal notification)
SQA	Support system for schools in the field of general education (not vocational education)
TALIS	OECD – Teaching and Learning International Survey (https://www.bifie.at/talis)
TEDS-M	IEA – Teacher Education and Development Study in Mathematics
TIES	The Integration of the European Second Generation (http://www.tiesproject.eu)
TIMSS	IEA – Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (https://www.bifie.at/timss)

Editors' preface

The National Education Report 2012 is the second of its kind in Austria. This summary contains an overview of the results of the two volumes, which contain nearly 700 pages with approximately 200 illustrations and tables offering current analysis, data, facts and issues for an evidence-based discussion of education policy in Austria. It not only provides an initial overview but also serves as an introduction and an impetus to delve deeper into the two main volumes, which are available for download (in German) at www.bifie.at/nbb.

The National Education Report 2012 follows the structure used in the 2009 version and consists of two complementary volumes: one of indicators and one of analyses. This is to ensure that the Report fulfils its three main functions: First, to support the policy-makers deep understanding of the education system through evidence-based knowledge; second, to give account of the state-of-affairs in the school system towards the public and legislative bodies; and third, to offer critical, research-based guidance for education reform.

Volume 1, *The School System Reflected in Data and Indicators*, presents data and indicators for the Austrian education system; it brings together the relevant data sources to provide a detailed overview of statistical knowledge. Volume 1 was compiled by experts from the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), BIFIE and Statistics Austria.

Volume 2, *Analyses of Key Areas in Education Policy*, offers expertise from leading Austrian educational researchers on central topics and problem areas in the school system. Each of the topics was handled by a team of researchers, whose work was advised by the steering-group and evaluated by researchers from other German-speaking countries as part of a peer-review process. This ensured that all of the articles were as up to date as possible.

More than 30 researchers worked in ten groups to compile the second volume. The editors owe special thanks to Univ.-Prof. Dr. Johann Bacher (University of Linz), Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ferdinand Eder (University of Salzburg) und Univ.-Prof. DDr. Christiane Spiel (University of Vienna) for their infallible support in the steering group and quality management. The steering group also included the editors as well as leading staff at BIFIE, Dr. Claudia Schreiner, head of BIFIE's Salzburg Centre, and one of the founders and first BIFIE directors DDr. Günther Haider.

Last, but not least, we would like to express our sincere thanks to the authors for their dedication to the demanding process of writing, accepting feedback, making revisions, incorporating the results of the external reviews as well as meeting strict deadlines in a way that is not usual for academic writing.

Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger, Michael Bruneforth & Lorenz Lassnigg

The School System Reflected in Data and Indicators – Results from Volume 1

Volume 1 of the National Education Report 2012, presents data and indicators for the Austrian education system; it brings together relevant sources of data to provide an in-depth overview of statistical knowledge of the school system. By combining data from different sources, the NBB indicators supplement and expand the annual reports on education compiled by various organisations, in particular Statistics Austria, in their publication *Bildung in Zahlen* (Education in Numbers), the OECD with *Education at a Glance* and BIFIE with its reports on specific projects such as PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS and the standardized tests in grade 4 and grade 8. Volume 1 presents eighty-five statistical figures in twenty-four indicators. These are structured in six sections according to the process model:

- A The School and Education System in Context:* Although beyond state control, the broader social context affects the quality and the goals of the education system as well as public expectations. This section reports social indicators for demographics (including migration), parents' education level, economic framework, public financing and the total size of the education budget.
- B Input – Personnel and Financial Resources:* Input comprises resources in the widest sense, whether material, human or financial, whose amount, allocation and use lie within the purview of agents in the education system.
- C Process Factors:* Process characteristics describe the performance of the school system and its organizational context, i. e. the use of resources. Process indicators encompass all of the activities within the system: school entry; learning structures; education paths; atmosphere, grading, academic success, retention/repetition.
- D Output – Results of the School System:* Output describes all the immediate achievements and results of the school system: “What children gain from school” and whether it remains relevant: Output indicators not only include data on qualifications, competencies and attitudes, but also data on pupils who drop out, are at-risk, or fail to achieve educational goals.
- E Transition from School to Work:* Indicators regarding this transition are located in the overlap between the achievements and effects of the school system.
- F Outcome – The Impact of the School System:* Indicators regarding the effects of the school system (outcome) describe the long-term effects of achievements for school-leavers and for society as a whole. Despite being the actual goal of the education system, these effects do not fall under the direct control of education agents. These effects include the following aspects: employment, income, social integration and participation in social and political areas, health and self-actualisation.

The following part of the NBB summary presents a selection of the most important results from the six sections of the first volume. The numbering corresponds to Volume 1. The results (in German) are available in detail at www.bife.at/buch/1914.

A: The School and Education System in Context

A1 Demographic development:

- In Austria, demographic development is heavily influenced by decreasing birth rates and immigration. Whereas there were still 513,000 children of primary school age in 1970, there were only 325,000 in 2010, a decline of 37 %. A slight recovery and relative stability for this age group has been forecast to occur by 2030. At the secondary school level, significantly fewer pupils are expected leading up to 2020.
- Population growth differs significantly among the federal provinces. Vienna counters the national trend with significant growth in the number of primary school aged pupils.
- Approximately one fifth of the population comes from immigrant backgrounds, ranging from 38 % in Vienna to 9 % in Burgenland. On the whole, however, migration within the EU is on the rise (especially since opening to Eastern Europe) in comparison to in-migration from the “traditional” countries of labour-recruitment (Turkey, the Balkans).

A2 The socio-economic background of Austrian school children:

- As the level of education in the population rises, the percentage of children whose parents only have compulsory schooling decline. At the end of primary school (year four), 55 % of children with Austrian parents have at least one parent who has completed upper secondary school with the university entrance certificate, and only 5 % have parents who have only completed compulsory schooling. The education level and socio-economic status of immigrant parents is lower on average, yet extremely heterogeneous. Up to 55 % of school children with Turkish roots have parents with a maximum of compulsory schooling; however, this is only representative of 17 % of families from the former Yugoslavia and other countries.
- In the fourth school year, 3 % of school children come from non-German-speaking homes; a further 22 % live in multilingual homes where at least some German is spoken. Looking exclusively at school children with immigrant backgrounds, 84 % speak German at home, though very often with an additional language (68 %). One in six children in this group comes from a home in which no German is spoken.
- In Austria as a whole, a third of all children at the end of primary school (year four) belong to at least one of the three educationally high-risk social groups: parents with low education, parents with low occupational status and/or non-German-speaking homes. In urban areas, nearly half of all children belong to these groups, in more rural areas only one in five.

A3 Economic conditions and public spending on education:

- In 2009, the financial crisis led to a decrease in national GDP and GDP per capita by nearly 4 % from 2008. However, 2010 levels almost returned to those of the 2008 national GDP and 2007 GDP per capita.
- At the same time, public education expenditures grew. In 2010, public expenditure for the school system comprised 5.7 % of the GDP and 10.8 % of government spending. Compared with EU-27, the percentage of GDP spent on education in Austria was above average.

B: Input – Personnel and Financial Resources

B1 Access to education:

- This indicator shows a long-term improvement in resources based on developments in the number of classes, pupils and teachers. It describes cross-sections of the absolute number of pupils according to type of school and, for the secondary level, distribution according to subject area.

B2 School children from non-German-speaking homes:

- One in four primary school children speaks a language other than German at home (2010–11). In communities and cities with a population of less than 10,000, 10 % of all children are multilingual; this figure reaches 30 % in cities with populations between 10,000 and 50,000. In Vienna, more than half of all primary school children come from non-German-speaking homes; in larger cities in the provinces of Salzburg and Upper Austria, the share is over 40 %.
- The most frequently spoken non-German languages among primary school children are Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS 7.1 %) and Turkish (7.0 %). An additional 9.9 % speak a different non-German language at home.
- Accompanying the differentiation in school types that characterises the transition from primary to lower secondary school is an increase in the segregation of children from non-German-speaking homes. They account for just 16 % of pupils in the selective academic secondary schools (AHS), well below average, 21 % in general secondary schools *Hauptschulen*, 28 % in New Secondary Schools (NMS) and 30 % of the pupils in special needs schools.
- For upper secondary schools, the percentage of children from non-German-speaking homes is significantly lower due to selection processes. Vocational schools for apprentices (9 %) and upper secondary vocational colleges with a social orientation (kindergarten-teachers 4 %, social work 4 %, services in tourism 5 %) have the lowest percentage of pupils from non-German-speaking homes, whereas the percentage in middle secondary vocational schools BMSs is substantially higher (19 %).
- One in two children from multilingual homes attends a class where the majority of the cohort also comes from non-German-speaking homes. At general secondary schools, every third child from a non-German-speaking home is in a classroom in which three out of four children are from a non-German-speaking home. Children lacking competence in the language of instruction are therefore predominantly educated in an environment in which the contribution of the classmates to their learning the language of instruction is restricted.

B3 Education expenditure:

- Over 6,000 Euros are spent on each primary school pupil per year. The average annual spending on pre-vocational schools and secondary one (the first four years) of AHS schools (7,300 Euros) is significantly lower than on general secondary schools and NMSs (9,150 Euros).
- The expenditure per pupil or student across all sectors (with the exception of the elementary sector), when adjusted for inflation, was approximately 10 % higher in 2009 than in 2000. In comparison to a selection of other European countries, Austria is among the

highest in per capita spending on public and private education as a whole since comparatively high public education expenditure is available for relatively few children.

B4 Teachers:

- Due to the predicted retirement wave, age distribution among teachers may pose a challenge for both the school system and teacher training programmes in coming years. In the 2010–11 school year, approximately 43 % of teachers were over 50 years old.
- The wave of teachers entering retirement is predicted to reach its climax in the 2017–18 school year (with the predicted retirement of approximately 4,500 teachers). Following this, it is expected that more than 4,000 teachers will retire each year, a slight decrease but still a high number.
- By 2020 approximately 36,500 teachers will have retired, a number that corresponds to approximately one third of the teachers currently employed (46 % of general secondary school teachers and over 30 % of AHS and BMHS teachers).
- In schools of general education (all school-types except for those with vocational orientation) three out of four teachers are female. This gender disparity is greatest in primary schools, where over 90 % of teachers are female.
- Only around 4 % of female teachers, but 9 % of male teachers, are school principals. In primary schools, one in four male teachers holds a leadership position, but only one in fourteen female teachers.

B5 Class size and pupil-teacher ratio:

- The 2010–2011 average class size for all schools was 20 pupils with a 1:10 teacher to pupil ratio. The average class size for lower academic secondary school (AHS) was almost 25, significantly higher than for general secondary schools and NMSs.
- More than 40 % of general secondary school classes across Austria have less than 20 pupils, compared with 2 % of lower AHS classes. Conversely, nearly 40 % of lower AHS classes have more than 25 pupils, compared with 1 % of classes in general secondary schools. Upper AHS class sizes are on average smaller than lower AHS classes (22 versus 25).
- In Austria, primary school class sizes and pupil-teacher ratios are below the OECD average; only four OECD countries have smaller classes.
- There is only one pedagogical support staff member for every 29 teachers in Austria, the poorest ratio found among OECD/EU countries.

C: Process Factors

C1 Student flow and school path selection:

- Almost all children attend some form of pre-school before the last year of compulsory schooling, also compulsory since 2010. This trend is even evident among three-year-olds, four out of five of whom attend kindergarten or another type of pre-school.
- Of all primary school graduates in 2010, 34 % entered lower AHS, 44 % general secondary school and 21 % NMS. This percentage will further increase as more schools become NMS.
- As pupils enter upper secondary school, differences between lower AHS and general secondary pupils become marked. Whereas 95 % of AHS pupils choose schools that offer university entrance certificates, with 63 % remaining in AHS and 32 % switching to BHS, only 37 % of general secondary school pupils select a school that offers this qualification.
- The larger the municipality in which the pupils live, the greater the chance that they will attend an AHS after primary school. This is true for Vienna, where almost half of all children do, and similar rates, 47 %, occur in cities with a population larger than 100,000 (Graz, Linz, Salzburg and Innsbruck). The probability that a child will attend AHS during lower secondary (year 5 to 8) is only half as likely in rural areas as in urban centres. Schools in small communities with academic results equalling those of schools in larger communities see substantially fewer pupils register for an AHS.
- The educational background of families with children attending general secondary schools/NMS is vastly different from those attending AHS. Whereas 70 % of children registered for an AHS have parents holding an university entrance certificate, only 30 to 35 % of children who attend general secondary school or NMS do. Moreover, significantly fewer AHS pupils have parents with an apprenticeship as their highest level of education.
- Gender distribution in upper secondary school is pronounced, with differences varying according to school type and specialisation. Only 29 % of pupils experience a relatively balanced gender ratio. The predominance of male pupils is strongest in apprenticeship programmes.

C2 Learning structure:

- Due to the fact that pupils in general secondary school and academic lower secondary school can get instruction according to the same curriculum, nearly 60 % of all pupils in lower secondary school received AHS-level instruction in the core subjects, with half of them being placed in the highest of three achievement streams.
- There are substantial overlaps in academic performance between AHS and all streams of general secondary schools. In maths and German, the academic performance of the weakest quartile of AHS pupils is on a par with that of the best quartile of the lowest achievement group of general secondary school pupils (2009). Performance overlaps are lowest in English. Among general secondary school pupils, the maths performance of 45 % of those in the highest group are above the median value of AHS pupils; in German the overlap is smaller, and in English only 28 % of pupils in the highest group scored above the median value of AHS pupils. This means that general secondary schools only partially fulfil their mission to reach AHS-level instruction in the highest of the three achievement streams.

C3 Special education:

- Across Austria 4 % of school children have special educational needs, with 55 % of special needs children being integrated in mainstream schools and 45 % attending special schools or segregated classrooms. The percentage of special education pupils is above average in Vienna, Carinthia and Vorarlberg but as low as 3 % in Styria and Tyrol.
- At the provincial level, a high percentage of pupils from non-German-speaking homes corresponds with a high percentage of special education pupils (SPF), although language competence is not a SPF criterion. Multilingual pupils tend to receive instruction in special schools rather than integrated in mainstream schools.
- Among pupils from multilingual homes, the percentage requiring special education is higher than that of all Austrian pupils taken together, especially for those in lower secondary school (year five to eight). On average, approximately 6 % of multilingual general secondary school, New Secondary School and pre-vocational school pupils throughout Austria require special education.

C4 School and classroom environment:

- In Austrian vocational schools for apprentices, there is a more positive relationship between 15-/16-year-olds and their teachers than in other types of schools. Those attending pre-vocational schools report a poorer relationship between pupils and teachers.
- 18 % of 15-/16-year-old boys and 2 % of girls report being the aggressor in acts of physical aggression. A higher percentage of BMS and pre-vocational school pupils report being the victims of aggression, and 71 % of upper secondary principals have expressed a need for more support from outside to effectively combat school violence.

C5 Academic success, retention and grading:

- Approximately 68 % of pupils that attend the upper level of a school leading to the university entrance certificate complete it. Three-quarters of AHS pupils successfully complete the upper level. At 78 %, the eight-year AHS has highest rates for completion, followed by *Aufbaugymnasien* and *Realgymnasien*, with 75 %, both of which only offer upper level of secondary education. The school with the lowest completion rates is the *Oberstufenrealgymnasium* (also an upper level school) at 69 %. For BHS, only 61 % of pupils complete the programme, significantly less than upper AHS.
- There are significant differences in grading between primary schools in smaller and larger municipalities. In particular, lower grades are given out in primary schools in small (rural) municipalities for comparable performance.

C6 Performance and comparative efficiency:

- In international comparison, there is no systematic correlation between average class size and academic performance either at primary or secondary level. In Austria, a comparatively low pupil-teacher ratio is associated with relatively poor performance.

D: Output – Results of the School System

D1 Upper secondary completion:

- In 2010 Austria reached the 85-percent mark for upper secondary school completion set by the Lisbon Strategy, yet did not improve beyond the level reached in 2000 when the programme began. In comparison with other European countries, Austria ranks above the European average.
- The comparatively good completion results for upper secondary education result from an increase in the number of female graduates. Since 2004, the level of education achieved by women has been consistently above that of men.
- The general increase in successful graduation can primarily be attributed to the BHS school type.

D2 Early school leavers:

- 7.2 % of pupils discontinue their education once it is no longer compulsory. Approximately four-fifths of those who leave directly after the end of compulsory education successfully completed lower secondary school. In the future, they could continue their education by transferring to another school.
- In Tyrol, 9.2 % of 15-year-olds leave school at the end of compulsory education despite successfully completing lower secondary school. In the provinces of Upper Austria and Salzburg, the early-leaving rates are only half this (4.6 %).
- Approximately two-thirds of early school leavers are from German-speaking homes and one-third from non-German-speaking homes. Among multilingual pupils, the percentage of early school leavers is, however, in some respects significantly higher. 17.8 % of boys and 17.3 % of girls from Turkish-speaking homes did not pursue further schooling in the year following their compulsory education.
- Following compulsory education, girls are more likely to continue their schooling than boys.
- Fewer than half of all BMS pupils nationwide successfully complete BMS regardless of the school's specialisation. Most drop-outs switch to a different type of education or training; however, in the 2006–07 school year 11 % of new male BMS entrants and 17 % of females dropped out before the 2010–11 school year and left the school system without any certificate. More BHS pupils have to repeat a year than BMS pupils, but fewer pupils leave without a certificate.
- By 2008–09, training centre apprenticeships [*überbetriebliche Lehrausbildung*] had become an established part of the vocational education system. The number of youths taking part in a training-centre apprenticeship grew from 2,165 in 2001–02 to over 14,000. But these types of apprenticeships still constitute a very small percentage of apprenticeships within the system.

D3 Equal opportunity in education:

- There is a strong correlation between parents' education and upper secondary education: A higher than average number of 17-year-olds whose parents have a low level of education

do not attend any further education beyond compulsory level or still attend lower secondary school.

- Upper AHS is highly socially selective: Nearly two-thirds of 17-year-olds whose parents have completed some form of tertiary education attend an AHS. But only 8 % of children whose parents have completed compulsory schooling strive for a university entrance certificate in the AHS.

D4 Competencies at the end of primary school:

- Of the 29 EU/OECD countries participating in the PIRLS study of primary schools (reading proficiency), 15 rate significantly higher than Austria, and only six countries rate significantly lower.
- 20 % of primary school pupils in Austria do not achieve more than basic competence in reading, double that of Finland and the Netherlands. The percentage of pupils who read at a high level is only one third that of Finland, Great Britain and the USA.
- In mathematics Austria's primary school pupils occupy the lower mid-range among EU/OECD countries. In the natural sciences, however, Austria's pupils rate comparatively well.

D5 Competencies of 15-/16-year-old pupils:

- In Austria, the reading achievement of 15- to 16-year-olds in PISA declined significantly looking at the PISA test results in 2009 (-22 points using the mean of previous measurements) and is well below the OECD average.
- Performance levels in maths and natural sciences have also declined. Austria and the Czech Republic are the only two EU/OECD countries out of 31 in which performances dropped in all three key subject areas.
- In Austria, one in three pupils is considered at risk in at least one key subject area.

D6 Attitudes and motivation:

- Professional interests of young persons in natural sciences at the end of lower secondary school declined significantly between 2003 and 2009.
- Young Austrians do not enjoy reading. Only 27 % of 15- to 16-year-olds counted reading among their favourite hobbies. Every second youth admitted to reading only when necessary or to obtain information. Slightly more than one-third considers reading a waste of time. Girls enjoy reading much more than do boys.

D7 Equal opportunity in competency acquisition:

- In Austria 29 % of the difference in the reading performance of 15- to 16-year-olds can be explained by family background. Only in Hungary this level is higher. The most important single factor is the cultural capital of the parents, which is closely connected to cultural practice in the family.
- The academic performance of the children of immigrants is on average two years behind that of Austrian children after nine years of schooling. The difference between the groups can not only be attributed to their immigrant background but also to substantial differences in socio-economic status.

-
- A disproportionate number of youths with immigrant backgrounds comprise at risk-pupils; however, three-quarters of those with the lowest reading level are youths from non-immigrant homes.

D8 Equal opportunity for qualifications and competencies between the sexes:

- Compared with other EU countries, a relatively large difference in various competencies is noticeable between the sexes. Girls perform markedly better in language competencies.
- In a comparison between years 4 and 8, girls show more progress than boys at the lower secondary level. From the end of primary school to end of lower secondary school, girls almost catch up to boys in maths while substantially widening their lead in German.
- The gender-differences in writing and English performance are striking.

E: Transition from School to Work

E1 Access to employment:

- In Austria, 13.4 % of 15- to 19-year-olds do not attend a school or training program (Not in Employment, Education or Training NEET-rate). This percentage is slightly above the EU-21 mean (EU countries that are also OECD members) and significantly above results for Germany, Finland, France and the Netherlands.

E2 The right employment fit:

- The transition from school to work is relatively smooth for the majority of entrants to the workforce. On the whole, 87 % of respondents feel that their first job after the (presumed) completion of their formal education corresponded well with the qualification they received. 9 % of respondents felt overqualified for their first job and 4 % underqualified. Individuals who earned a diploma or leaving certificate outside Austria experienced difficulties finding an adequate job in Austria. Among them nearly one-fifth, that is double the average, were overqualified for their first job.

F: Outcome – The Impact of the School System

F1 Education levels:

- In contrast to men, women's education tends to be somewhat polarised. More 25- to 64-year-old women have completed a tertiary-level degree than men, although significantly more men (approx. 85 %) than women (approx. 76 %) have at least a secondary school leaving certificate.

F2 The economic advantage of education:

- The structure of education and employment are closely related in economically developed countries. Higher educational attainment is connected to both better opportunities for career advancement and a lower risk of unemployment. It also affects the income that individuals are able to receive.

F3 Public satisfaction with the school system:

- The downward trend in public evaluation of the school system since 2004 persisted in 2009, though to a lesser degree. A comparison over time, however, does reveal dissatisfaction among the population: In 2009 only 53 % of respondents rated schools a „Very Good“ or a „Good“, the lowest percentage over a 10-year period.
- However, in 2011, the Austrian population seemed to embrace reform measures that were either planned or already underway. Measures to reduce class sizes and extra German classes for children with insufficient language skills received high approval rates (both over 90 %), as did topics such as career orientation and educational advising, special language tuition for immigrant children, combining an apprenticeship with a university entrance certificate, and school structure improvements (all over 80 %).

Focused Analyses of Key Areas in Education Policy – Results from Volume 2

Volume 2 contains ten chapters with different focuses organised into five thematic blocks. Each chapter is subdivided into four sections. An outline of the problem is followed by a detailed analysis of the situation and subsequent outlook for the future – after the research desiderata, each chapter ends with suggestions for action. Below is an overview of the key topics followed by a two-to-three-page presentation of each chapter.

- A Pupils' competencies:* The first chapter focuses on learning to read as an elementary cultural skill that is relevant for all subjects. The second chapter also concentrates on educational content objectives, taking up the broad understanding of education in the Austrian constitution and discussing the meaning and the teaching of cross-curricular competencies in Austrian schools.
- B Teachers' and principals' competencies:* The third chapter analyses the kinds of competencies required by teachers and principals in order to maintain and develop quality in school. The following chapter examines the institutionalisation of subject didactics at universities and colleges of education in Austria and how it compares to other countries.
- C Equal opportunity and multilingualism:* The fifth chapter analyses the realisation of equal opportunities and participation. It offers an analysis of educational inequality based on socio-economic background, immigrant background, gender, family type and area of residence. The sixth chapter addresses the situation of multilingual children and adolescents in the Austrian school-system.
- D Types of schools:* The seventh chapter examines the current state of all-day school types in Austria as well as the pedagogical, educational and socio-political expectations associated with these schools and ways to meet them. The eighth chapter focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of initial vocational training, which must be questioned in the light of demographic trends.
- E New ways of governance in school policy:* Educational standards are seen as an important means of ensuring and developing the educational quality in schools addressed in the constitution. They are the subject of the penultimate chapter. The final chapter addresses the Europeanisation of Austrian education and education policy both in regard to teachers and pupils and the political process itself.

Each chapter constitutes a separate research article, which can be downloaded individually (in German). The corresponding hyperlinks are located at the end of the description of each chapter.

Chapter 1: Reading competence, instruction and promotion in the Austrian school system. Analysis of the pedagogical promotion of reading competence

Learning to read is a complex process which continues throughout a pupil's years at school. First, children learn to recognise (decode) and comprehend written words. With increased practice and reading experience, reading becomes automatic. Children progressively learn to read different types of texts (literary, factual, online), for both pleasure and independent learning, thereby gaining further reading competence. The goal of this process is reading comprehension. However, some pupils are unable to master even the first few stages of reading development, rapidly decreasing reading motivation.

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The reading performance of Austrian pupils

As a whole, Austrian pupils' reading levels are unsatisfactory. In comparison with reading levels measured at the end of primary school (PIRLS 2006), Austrian pupils only ranked in the mid-range of the participating countries. By the end of year four, approximately 11,000 pupils only have basic reading skills and approximately 1,500 fail to achieve even this. PISA 2009 revealed even greater issues for Austrian pupils aged 15 to 16 as they only ranked 22nd of the 25 EU/OECD countries that took part in both surveys. This low rank is strongly influenced by the large percentage of particularly weak readers (27 %) in the Austrian system. If PIRLS and PISA are taken as one integrated longitudinal study, it becomes clear that the weakest readers fall behind by at least one year of typical learning progress between the end of primary school and the end of lower secondary school. Conversely, even the strongest readers cannot compare with international reading levels. As such, in addition to the question of whether Austria's selective school system brings about disadvantages for weaker pupils, the question arises whether this system allows even the most talented pupils to reach their full potential.

Children from families with low levels of education as well as those from non-German-speaking homes run a significant risk of acquiring only weak reading skills. Reading problems are not, however, confined to particular demographic groups: Although 43 % of the weakest primary school aged readers are from German-speaking and 25 % from non-German-speaking homes with low levels of education, 25 % come from German-speaking homes where at least one parent has a university entrance certificate.

School and reading instruction

The acquisition of written language takes place primarily within the school system. Each child encounters written language with a very different level of background knowledge, and the schools and teachers face the difficult task of ascertaining each child's individual needs in order to provide adequate support while learning to read and write. While reading comes easily to some children, who simply require stimulating reading material to encourage their skills, other children rely on a well-structured teaching approach that breaks down the complex process of written language acquisition into manageable steps as well as constant motivation to follow these steps at their own pace despite falling behind the rest of the group. Extra-curricular resources (especially parental support, reading partnerships, advice from educational psychologists and, where necessary, therapeutic intervention) can and should be used to supplement daily school activities but are in no way able to replace them.

Enhanced teacher education and training in the psychology of reading and didactics

Current teacher training programmes differ a lot between the universities and colleges: Courses on teaching reading and the cognitive psychology of reading are not a prerequisite

and seldom offered. As such, fundamental knowledge about the complex processes of the development of reading skills is not sufficiently ensured amongst teachers. Minimum training requirements as well as an intensification of teacher training and further education in reading instruction are therefore recommended. This affects the following areas in particular:

- Teachers often lack sufficient diagnostic competence to reliably identify reading difficulties at an early stage. Increasing the teachers' expertise and offering structured guidelines for identifying weak pupils at different stages of development (e. g. using standardised reading screenings) could significantly improve the situation. In light of the persistence of reading problems, strategy of "waiting to see" if the child naturally improves should be discouraged.
- There is a significant amount of heterogeneity in the implementation of measures to support individual pupils in basal reading (word recognition). This is striking, especially since promising – and also problematic – didactic methods have long been discussed in the literature. In Austria as a whole, relatively little classroom time is spent on learning to read. Pupils with weak reading skills in particular should always be provided sufficient time to develop their skills (e. g. dyslexia tuition) not only during the first few years, but also throughout secondary school.
- The explicit and structured teaching of reading comprehension is not sufficiently implemented in the classroom. Attempts to increase the expertise of teachers in all subjects are recommended.
- The teaching of reading should not be limited to German classes, but should instead take place in all subjects. Reading education is, however, not being realised as an interdisciplinary principle in Austria. Numerous opportunities to teach reading comprehension skills in other subjects exist but are not taken advantage of, mostly due to a lack of didactical competency on the part of teachers.
- Language tuition, both in preparation for initial reading lessons and as part of later, general reading instruction, is increasingly important in light of the rising number of children from non-German-speaking homes and is also recommended for a significant percentage of children from German-speaking homes. There are however few evidence-based programmes with a clear theoretical background. This represents a definite research gap. For the future, intervention programmes and assessment procedures must be developed (and specifically adapted for groups of children with German as a second language). These are to be evaluated and their implementation should be boosted.
- Well-meaning measures targeting reading in the classroom and special programmes for pupils with reading problems are often insufficiently evaluated. Developing a culture of regular evaluation will also bring about an increase in teacher expertise. Quality management in all measures being taken to combat weakness in reading and writing both inside and outside of schools is of central importance. A substantial canon of scientifically sound programmes and methods is already available and should be preferably used in practice.
- The appropriate, guided application of general programmes to encourage reading, e. g. family literacy and reading partnerships, can improve the situation of pupils from homes with low levels of education, thereby supplementing and expanding classroom teaching.

Conclusions

Improving reading competence and the culture of reading requires an increase in teacher expertise in order to be able to teach these competencies appropriately. Teachers require comprehensive education in the fundamentals of the psychology of reading as well as reading pedagogy as both concern the development of basal reading competence (especially word recognition and fluency), the teaching of efficient reading strategies for comprehension and immediate identification of reading problems. This is not exclusively the domain of primary schools: Children require efficient support in pre-reading skills in kindergarten, and text comprehension should be taught well into secondary school. Weak readers even require continuous support in their development of reading competence throughout their school careers. Accordingly, systematic measures to teach reading must also be adequately implemented in secondary school. Reading instruction cannot be limited to German class. All subjects involve reading, and teachers must be aware of best practice methods and the processes underlying children's reading acquisition. Moreover, trainee teachers should be prepared for the current demographic situation of Austria's classrooms (e. g. increasing number of pupils who lack sufficient knowledge of the language of instruction).

Pupils who have difficulty learning to read must be identified at an early stage and provided with adequate support. This chapter examines support measures for the classroom as well as special tuition to supplement regular teaching. Those measures need an appropriate regulatory framework and the necessary resources. In cases of persistent reading problems, long-term support must be provided throughout a pupil's entire school career. Moreover, high level support must be assured for diagnosed cases of reading and/or writing disorders.

A good reading education also comprises a diverse curriculum that provides encouraging, gender-sensitive reading material and reading situations. But good learning conditions and motivating measures for reading education only lead to success if pupils are provided with the appropriate skills to respond to such stimulation.

A positive shift for the reading culture of children and young people in Austria requires that the education system commits itself to supporting reading. Reading skills are fundamental for acquiring information, participating in the cultural and political life of Austrian society and for life-long learning. Teaching these fundamentals is a central task of the school system.

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Chapter 2: Cross-curricular competencies in Austrian schools: appraisal, implications and development perspectives

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In public discussion on international comparisons of school performance it has been repeatedly stated that, in addition to reading, maths, natural sciences and English, schools must teach other competencies. This is closely examined in this chapter, which discusses the cross-curricular competencies of Austrian pupils.

The legal framework for cross-curricular competencies

Cross-curricular competencies concern educational goals beyond the core competencies taught in individual subjects and which are of particular importance in Austrian schools. Legally, the educational mandate of Austrian schools is regulated in § 2 of the School Organisation Act, *Schulorganisationsgesetz*, and is based on universal goals and cross-curricular competencies. The (historically built) list of “areas of education”, “principles of didactics”, “interdisciplinary principles” and “educational concerns” shows that educational policy has thus far endeavoured to meet specific challenges produced by technological or societal developments by constantly introducing new “principles” and “concerns”. However, recent developments and current challenges – in particular those connected with immigration – require a better theoretical foundation and systematisation of cross-curricular competencies.

The systematisation of cross-curricular competencies

The cross-curricular competencies currently practiced (with varying levels of quality) can be organised into five groups: (a) self-referential competencies, which are related primarily to self-regulation; (b) social-interactive competencies, which involve coping with diversity and inter-cultural phenomena as well as gender equality; the term methodical competencies encompasses (c) competencies involving self-regulated learning, problem-solving and digital competencies; while (d), societal competencies, includes democratic competence, entrepreneurship and cultural competence. The last group (e) consists of environmental competencies. Even if categorisation is difficult and in some cases not clear-cut, these groups provide a matrix which can be used to assist decision making regarding curricula.

The extent of cross-curricular competencies

In general, Austrian pupils achieved average scores across the board for cross-curricular competencies, where comparisons are available for OECD countries, e. g. the general citizenship knowledge of 14-year-old pupils. On the other hand, looking at schools as places for learning democratic competences schools are almost completely disregarded in Austria. There are certain deficiencies in career choice competencies: Among 15- to 16-year-olds, choosing the school that corresponds to their personal interests seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Even among school leavers, there seems to be only a rudimentary “insular” knowledge of career paths. With regard to cultural competencies, data on cultural behaviour show that more than half of 15- to 16-year-olds have never been to a museum and around three-quarters have never attended a classical concert, the opera or the theatre. Pupils aged 15- to 16-years score slightly above the OECD average on knowledge of the environment, though nearly half of the test-takers possess only a fundamental knowledge, and only 15 % test in the highest competence level. In the area of health competence, data on behaviour at the end of lower secondary school is available. Here, more than half of the pupils admitted to smoking at least occasionally, and more than 80 % had consumed low-alcohol-content beverages. Over two-thirds of Austrian pupils have good to very good self-esteem. According to data, this remains constant throughout their school career. The classroom principle of “intercultural learning” has been relatively successful. Self-regulation competencies, which are closely linked to the principle of life-long learning are suppressed rather than supported in schools. Surety

of success, a positive view of one's abilities and confidence in one's academic self-efficacy tend to decline over the school career; this appears to be connected to the learning environment and the concrete grading procedures.

Which didactical approaches are used to teach cross-curricular competencies?

An analysis of (mostly limited) empirical data shows that greater quality and effectiveness of teaching cross-curricular competences occur in areas with structural support (didactical materials, external institutions etc.), for example, in ecological competence. A general deficiency in teaching cross-curricular competence in the classroom is clearly present: it is not an incorporated part of the curriculum, not part of grading and not evaluated in any way at school level. With the exception of seals of approval or certificates of quality, there are few incentives for schools to work in this direction. Contrary to guidelines specified by the law, subject-oriented goals are clearly foregrounded in Austrian schools, while cross-curricular competencies are viewed as an "additive" whose implementation seems to be of little importance in contrast to subject-based learning. From an international perspective it must be noted that, in addition to the additive approach, there are also integrative approaches in which cross-curricular competencies act as a framework with overarching goals for subject-based learning.

Development options for Austrian schools

As a result of existing systematic evaluations, concrete suggestions for improvement can be given for every cross-curricular competence. For example, competency in career path selection can be better taught as a separate subject, and environmental competence is less effective if it is not embedded in a location-based school development programme. In general, cross-curricular competencies would play a more effective role in the classroom if education policy promoted an "integrative" rather than an "additive" approach and if they were coupled with evaluations and framed within several layers of responsibility (school principal, middle management). The following questions remain to be addressed: which consequences would be associated with a stronger implementation of cross-curricular competencies in school evaluations; how could the level of individual competencies be monitored within a system and how could individual teachers formatively test the cross-curricular competence of their pupils in order to exert a positive influence on development processes.

Focusing on basal competencies, developing process standards for respective learning situations and offering a clear structure of responsibility in individual schools could lead to improved achievement levels, at least in the mid-term.

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Chapter 3: Result-oriented quality development in schools: Specific competencies for teachers and principals

Which competencies are important for result-oriented quality development?

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The result-oriented quality development of schools focuses on optimising the school as a whole by systematically aligning its activities with pupils' learning outcomes. This pertains both to teaching in the classroom and to all the work that is done in school. Of fundamental importance are the consistent implementation of accountability for results, an evaluative mindset, openness to change and an organisational framework that supports the necessary changes. On the level pertaining to specific groups of people within a school system (teachers and principals), result-oriented quality development calls for at least the following competencies: the ability to 1) define (learning) goals, 2) take targeted measures to reach those goals, 3) measure and test the level of progress towards these set goals, 4) derive more targeted measures as a consequence, 5) initiate and conduct internal evaluations (i. e. efficacy analyses) and 6) handle the results of external evaluations and use them productively. A meaningful concept of result-oriented quality development should be seen as being directly connected to a cycle of quality management.

Current models only partially cover areas of competency

In current models of teacher and principal competency, the result-oriented quality development of schools is not explicitly addressed. Most models do, however, contain at least a few relevant partial competency areas representing prerequisites for result-oriented quality development. In current teacher competency models, the implementation and utilisation of internal and external evaluations receive no mention whatsoever. Approaches to the competency of principals allow for a more detailed consideration of specific competency areas within result-oriented quality development. Nevertheless, little mention of a readiness to implement evaluations or the handling of external evaluation results exists. Internal evaluations are not mentioned explicitly but referred to using terms such as monitoring and control. This reflects the hitherto rather one-sided focus, which has been repeatedly identified as a problem in the context of result-oriented quality development. Based on the fact that no suitable, detailed model exists as yet, but that such a model is indispensable to the process of working out concepts for training and further education as well as for research recommendations, this chapter of the Education Report brings the defined areas of competency together in a concrete form and systematically delineates the necessary individual competencies for result-oriented quality development.

Limited available data on relevant teacher and principal competencies

To date, Austria has seldom participated in (international) studies aimed at defining relevant teacher competencies. Austria, for example, did not take part in the internationally comparative Teacher Education and Development Study in Mathematics (TEDS-M) which systematically examined the efficacy of teacher education regarding the competencies of trainee math teacher. In Austria, the only data available are results from questionnaires that examine result-oriented quality development taken from the subjective assessments of various agents (teachers, principals, those involved with school supervision). The Austrian results of the 2008 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) from the OECD show that both (internal and external) evaluations and feedback on the results are extremely uncommon in Austrian schools and had little effect in the eyes of teachers. Studies accompanying the educational standards also clearly show how important it is to accompany education monitoring studies with targeted, individualised feedback measures for all participants and to offer competent support and further education for schools. Otherwise, evaluations run the risk of becoming an end in themselves. This is in accord with the results of a supplementary

study to PISA 2009 which showed that principals find teacher (and principal) education and certification essential for quality development in a school.

The current status of teacher pre-service and in-service education

Due to the lack of empirical information available for Austria, this assessment was carried out in institutions which offer teacher and principal education programmes. The goal of this assessment was to analyse in how far competencies furthering the realisation of result-oriented quality development are systematically integrated into current programmes for pre- and in-service education for teachers and principals. The results show that steps clearly must be taken to develop these competencies in training programmes for future teachers. Most pre-service teacher education programmes do touch on the topic of school development, but despite their relevance, topics such as how to implement educational standards, monitoring and reflection, and how to handle the results of studies, receive only marginal attention. In in-service education the range of programmes that deal with particular competencies is more extensive. Here, however, the various institutions offer quite different quantities of programmes. Further education concentrates on the implementation of current reforms, especially educational standards. The quantity of programmes for principals varies markedly between institutions but is definitely not yet broad enough to initiate the target implementation of result-oriented quality development. On the whole, the quantity of available programmes must still be optimised and awareness of them increased. In addition, the programmes offered need to be systematised in order to ensure that result-oriented quality development is not represented sporadically through individual areas of competence and does not vary so widely dependent on institution.

Outlook

To sum up, it is clear that further research on teacher and principal competency related to result-oriented quality development is necessary for the implementation of need-oriented, systematic concepts for the promotion and development of corresponding competencies among teachers and principals. Thus, existing competence models should be expanded, data should be collected on the degree to which competencies are currently manifest, and plans to promote and support these competencies should be developed and evaluated.

The opportunity for change is better now than ever before because the reform of teacher education programmes in Austria that is currently being planned can be used to make systematic changes and implement long proposed guidelines for the optimisation of pre-service and in-service education programmes. An important step in this process is the recently adopted amendment of § 18 of the Federal School Supervision Act *Bundes-Schulaufsichtsgesetz*, which provides for the institution of development-oriented quality management encompassing all levels of schools and school administration. It also provides a framework for talks on finances and target agreements as well as location-based development plans that extend beyond a simple project.

Finally, on the political front, three development options should be considered: (1) Result-orientation must be conceived of as an over-arching concept with an improvement in quality as its goal and must be implemented completely; otherwise, it will not have the desired effects. (2) International approaches should increasingly be acknowledged and understood as opportunities from which to learn. (This is not to be confused with blindly adopting (single) competencies.) (3) The planned reform of teacher education must be seen as an important opportunity, and already-existing efforts to integrate competencies, involving result-oriented quality development, should be supported explicitly.

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Chapter 4: Subject didactics and its contribution to quality development in instruction

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Subject didactics, *Fachdidaktik*, is the science of *teaching and learning a subject*. Learners can be children, young people and also adults. Knowledge of a subject alone is not enough to be able to properly teach a subject. Empirical research on classroom teaching suggests that good didactical characteristics such as “clearly defined content” and “structure, clarity, comprehensibility” are important characteristics of classroom teaching. But the evaluation of pupils’ progress also requires a high level of didactical knowledge. Such evaluations call for teachers to be able to convey goals clearly, know the development status of the learners and be aware of the paths that lead towards a goal. Another area in which subject didactics comes into play is the cooperative selection and justification of the socially relevant *content* and *competencies* that are taught at school. The results of these choices are reflected not only in classroom teaching but also in *curricula* and *educational standards* as well as in *instructional materials* (school books, learning games, videos websites etc.), which are enriched by didactical concepts.

Teacher knowledge of subject didactics is key

Teacher *planning and evaluation of classroom instruction* plays a decisive role in developing quality in classroom instruction. Among the particularly important planning questions is that teachers ask themselves which meanings pupils will attach to the questions they work on. Moreover, it is also crucial for teachers to know what kind of previous knowledge each learner brings to the classroom, what difficulties do learners frequently experience and which modes of assistance are helpful etc. These are meaningful elements of *pedagogical content knowledge* which have been identified by numerous studies as essential for planning a successful lesson. This knowledge corresponds to a didactical *habitus*, i. e., a basic attitude that understands teaching as practical subject didactics in action, as an independent creative act which adequately applies previous knowledge in a given situation. In order to appropriately develop their knowledge of subject didactics – as well as pedagogy and their subject – teachers require adequate learning opportunities both during their *pre-service and in-service education* and the *exchange* of ideas with colleagues. Research and development in subject didactics is fundamental to acquiring sound knowledge of creating such learning opportunities in the classroom and in teacher education.

Subject didactics as a young discipline

In addition to having a close connection to subject knowledge – this can comprise multiple disciplines per subject taught – research and development in subject didactics requires *a close connection with other disciplines* like pedagogy, psychology, sociology, neuroscience etc., as well as the *systematic analysis of practical questions* – in the classroom and in teacher education. On the whole, subject didactics is an inter- and trans-disciplinary discipline which has recently established itself as *an independent discipline*, as indicated by the proliferation of international societies, handbooks, conferences and journals, professorships and doctoral programmes, quality teaching materials and types of teacher education etc.

Key results of the 2012 subject didactics study

Currently, there are few departments exclusively devoted to subject didactics, but many in which subject didactics is used. However, this often means that the departments are not run by professors of subject didactics. The relationship between “integrated” and “specialised” departments is 1 to 6 in colleges of education, *Pädagogische Hochschulen*, and 1 to 3 at universities. This means that universities have a higher level of concentration and diversification in subject didactics. Their departments are larger; they have more professors certified to teach subject didactics and the relationship between teaching and research is balanced. This is not the case in colleges of education where the staff estimates that 43 % of their working-

time runs into teaching and 7 % into research. They often have to rely on outside experts to fulfil the need for expertise in subject didactics. What the study clearly showed is that the term “subject didactics” is used in very different ways: The looser the association with social scientific research, the more frequent subject didactics is understood as the practice of teaching and lesson planning.

Subject didactics is only loosely incorporated in Austrian universities and other institutions of higher education

In Austria, as opposed to the situation in other countries, subject didactics is still an underdeveloped and insular field of research and practice in many subject areas. This is particularly true of primary school subject didactics, in which there is an extreme lack of research. Moreover, natural science subject didactics is also a field with a very limited number of protagonists which has seen little to no growth. This could well indicate the need to develop young researchers.

A clear spirit of optimism in the institutions

Subject didactics has clearly seen great development in the last five (to ten) years, especially in places where colleges and universities have established subject didactics centres and professorships or implemented other structural measures, providing an increasingly firm social scientific foundation for didactic innovation and implementation. The discipline of subject didactics in Austria has made important contributions to quality development in the classroom through the work of individual experts on curricula, educational standards, standardised leaving examinations, teaching materials, scholarly publications, teacher training and further education programmes, school pilot projects, school development, doctoral programmes and various committees etc. But the overall personnel and institutional situation is still not stable enough to be able to guarantee international compatibility and to contribute to systematic quality development in Austrian classrooms.

Long-term support urgently needed

Existing strengths (in particular subject didactics centres and innovative subject didactics programmes which contribute to quality development in the classroom) must be strengthened and existing weaknesses (in particular the two-track system of teacher education and the accompanying lack of synergy between theory and practice) must be gradually overcome through careful planned decision making from the highest political levels.

On the whole, the political community’s reactions to studies like TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS have triggered positive developments. But these developments can only become part of a sustainable process when the slight upward trend toward subject didactics in colleges and universities is perpetuated by these institutions and consistently and systematically supported by both responsible ministries.

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Chapter 5: Equal opportunity and a guaranteed minimum education

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Fairness in the education system is connected with two key goals: equality, i. e. equal opportunities regardless of family background, and a guaranteed minimum education. A guaranteed minimum education will give children the skills they need to participate successfully in the economy and society as a whole. The aforementioned goals are incorporated in the constitution and are often part of target agreements like financial management goals, the strategy of lifelong learning and the EU 2020 goals.

Equality and a minimum education are different expressions of concepts of justice. Equality of opportunity stems from an idea of justice in which only inequalities that individuals are responsible for are considered fair, whereas differences based on family background should not exist. A guaranteed *minimum education* is justified in the right to be able to participate in the social, economic and political life in the society in which one lives.

Educational inequalities as a reproduction of class

The Austrian school system is marked by a high degree of inequality of opportunity. The socio-economic status and the education level of a child's parents play a central role in a child's observed competencies and school choice. At the end of primary school, children whose parents have attained only compulsory education or less have fallen more than a year behind the reading level of children with better educated parents and transfer less frequently to lower AHS even if they demonstrate similar school performance. Differences in school choice (secondary effects of inequality) have a much stronger influence than the effects of performance (primary effects of inequality). This continues with the transition into upper secondary school, where differences in school choices are lessened by BHS but not entirely compensated for.

Of less relevance are immigrant background and area of residence. Children of immigrant parents have performance deficits both at the end of primary school and the beginning of the upper tier of secondary school, and roughly a third of these can be explained by socio-economic and other factors. A child's area of residence becomes an issue with the transition to lower AHS. Due to the lack of AHS in rural areas, children from these areas are less likely to transfer to lower AHS.

Educational poverty according to leaving certificates and competencies

Educational poverty is not only measured by the non-attainment of certain levels of schooling (certificate poverty) but also by a lack of certain competencies (competence poverty). Each year nearly 7,000 pupils leave school at the end of compulsory education. Despite this fact, Austria is well positioned among European countries. However, Austria has a high level of competence poverty. In 2009 every third 15- to 16-year-old performed very poorly in at least one school subject. The risk of competence poverty is, in turn, strongly dependent on social background.

Additionally, the social constitution of schools and classes also has an influence on school performance and the development of competencies. The chance of pupils developing inadequate competencies increases markedly in schools that are considered to have a difficult social context.

Areas for further research

Although sufficient data to describe inequalities and poverty in education is currently available, it requires better processing and analysing, and longitudinal data to explain the development of inequality both within and between schools and types of schools has yet to be gathered. While inequalities in education and the analysis of their effects are now research standards, this is not the case for educational poverty; the concept of educational poverty still lacks agreed-upon definitions and operationalisation. National threshold levels for competence poverty with regard to national educational standards are clearly worth striving for.

Policy options

Due to the high level of competence poverty the focus should – at least for the short term – be on fighting it. Preventative measures should be implemented early in a pupil's school career. The social groups affected by inequalities are disproportionately affected by competence poverty. Programmes aimed at pupils at risk should therefore provide more equality of opportunity as well. Such a policy would provide a basis for equal opportunity without stigmatising particular social groups. The prerequisite for achieving this goal is to complement standards with a definition of minimum education.

One particularly important measure for reducing competence poverty is improvement in diagnosing performance; this should become a compulsory and integral part of teacher education and further education. More information is needed about classroom instruction that supports particularly at risk pupils while reducing social inequality and simultaneously retaining or even raising performance levels. Measures that afford a higher degree of individualised instruction and differentiation between pupils would assist here. There is some evidence that an increase in the quality of classroom instruction, good subject matter instruction, and structured and disciplined classroom instruction can reduce the number of at risk pupils and the level of social inequality.

The great importance of school choice due to the early selection process is strongly related to social class. Here, secondary effects of inequalities play a dominant role. A later school-selection age and an extension of lower secondary school are therefore desirable. Furthermore, making school choice more objective could reduce secondary effects. Better counselling options to help socially disadvantaged families choose a school and support their children after transferring schools is also recommended.

In addition to measures targeted at individuals, measures should be implemented to improve the working conditions in schools with difficult initial context factors such as low levels of parental education, high shares of families living in poverty etc. These schools should receive more financial resources which could be achieved by tying funding to a social index.

The political goal of reducing certificate poverty also requires action to be taken at the end of compulsory schooling or when children intend to leave school or vocational training without qualifications. These actions put children back on the path to education and offer support to those at risk of dropping out. Measures to reduce certificate poverty generally begin too late to avoid competence poverty but are still a meaningful way to soften its consequences both for those affected and society as a whole. Nevertheless, they should not hide the fact that the causes of impending educational poverty can be combated earlier in a pupil's school career.

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Chapter 6: Multilingual pupils in Austrian schools – Problems, conditions and international comparisons

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This chapter outlines the situation of multilingual pupils in the Austrian school system. Pupils are referred to as multilingual when they both speak German and come from a family in which a non-German language is used. This focus results from the fact that besides immigration, which was covered in detail in the 2009 National Education Report, a pupil's command of the language of instruction has a great influence on their success at school. For approximately one-fourth of all children starting school, German is a second language, which, in comparison to the first language of a monolingual child, follows a different development path. At present, multilingual children are at a strong disadvantage in the Austrian school system. The great differences in competencies and highest degrees as well as low levels of participation in institutions of higher education run counter to the concept of equality of opportunity regardless of origin as incorporated in the constitution. Additionally, it puts Austria's commitment to multilingualism as a value in society into question, as expressed in numerous documents of the European Union and the European Council.

Large differences between language and social groups

Looking at different language groups, which also represent different context features (among others, the prestige of the language, legal standing, history of the groups' relationship, immigration history, socio-economic composition of the group), there are large differences within the category "multilingual pupils". But it is these context features that exert an influence both on the acquisition of the first and second language and, as they are conveyed through language, subject-specific learning processes and decisions involving a pupil's school career.

Large differences between school types and forms

In the 2010–11 school year, 207,000 pupils with a first language other than German were enrolled in Austria's schools. Among these, approximately 110 different languages were spoken. The distribution of multilingual pupils between different types of schools is striking. The higher the prestige of the school type, the lower the percentage of multilingual pupils. This, however, is not universal since the lowest percentages can be found in colleges of agriculture and forestry and colleges of social and service industries as well as vocational training accompanying apprenticeship positions. On the other hand the highest percentages are found in pre-schools, medium level business administration colleges, special schools and pre-vocational colleges.

International comparisons indicate inhibiting conditions

In order to better analyse the influence of societal conditions and the structure of the school systems, it is necessary to concentrate on the school careers of particular language groups from particular countries of origin using an international comparative perspective. The comparative research project *The Integration of the European Second Generation* (TIES) shows that Turkish second generation pupils in Germany and Austria have significantly higher percentages of early school leavers as well as significantly lower percentages of highly educated school leavers than Sweden and France. Different structural characteristics of these education systems, such as early participation in crèches and kindergartens, late separation in ability groups and school types as well as all-day schools for all pupils, make the difference. A variety of favourable conditions for immigrants and minorities created in other fields of politics also play a role.

Though the Austrian Ministry for Education has developed and begun rolling out numerous measures over the last several years, in addition to older support structures, the diffusion of

responsibility across various levels of politics and a lack of obligation to implement these measures must be criticised.

A lack of accompanying research

In addition to the empirical results and emerging trends, the analysis of the present situation points to considerable gaps in research and insufficient underlying data. There is a lack of studies on the actual support provided to multilingual children in the Austrian education system. In order to provide evidence on the effectiveness of different classroom-teaching and support models, longitudinal studies are needed. Only when improvements in performance can be measured can they be attributed to successful conditions in schools and classrooms. Successful schools with a high percentage of disadvantaged pupils should be analysed more closely in case studies. On the whole, there needs to be a shift in perspective from a singular focus on learning German in private and pre-school situations to a multi-level approach which connects the individual factors to the school and social factors. This approach is based on the assumption that the actions of teachers and principals are extremely important for developing academic competencies in multilingual pupils.

From the analysis of the situation, five *key priorities for education policy in Austria* can be derived, as they were described in the OECD Review on Migrant Education in Austria.

1. The quality (and not solely the quantity) of early childhood education should be raised. In doing so, the main focus must be placed on providing appropriate education and compulsory further education for the staff as well as recruiting multilingual staff. It should also be ensured (e. g. through a certification process) that language tuition and the integrative approach of a kindergarten is of appropriate quality and that every child, beginning from birth, has the right to a place in an (all-day) crèche and kindergarten.
2. With regard to language tuition in schools, the concept of continuous language development (e. g. FÖRMIG), which is based on biographical and inter-institutional continuity and the fully developed competency of school staff should be implemented nation-wide and funded appropriately.
3. The teaching and learning settings in schools should be improved by adopting the following measures: compulsory education and further education of teachers in the area of language and cultural diversity, increasing diversity among teaching staff, strengthening the position of the school principal as well as supporting relevant research and dissemination of good practices.
4. Working with parents and establishing contact with ethnic communities should also be a priority. The Ministry for Education could support the integration of parents who speak different languages by issuing guidelines for communication with these groups of parents, lending support to successful programmes and spreading them to other schools, and strengthening the position of the principal as a model in this area.
5. The fifth priority comprises structural changes in the Austrian school system. Student selection into educational tracks (whether academically oriented or not) should be as late as possible, and an all-day school type could raise equality of opportunity and provide an institutional framework in which multilingual pupils can develop their potential and make up lost ground.

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Chapter 7: All-day schools – national and international experiences and future recommendations

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In an overall European comparison, school systems that primarily consist of half-day schools are the exception in Austria and Germany. It has not been earlier than in the school year 2006/2007 that all-day programmes are obligatory, if a minimum of 15 parents request them. To allow for the introduction of a fully integrated all-day programme, two thirds of parents and of teachers have to vote in favour of implementation. Despite a noticeable lack of evidence-based, empirically quantitative data, research shows that mainly voluntarily chosen afternoon programmes following a tightly scheduled six-hour morning of lower-tier secondary classes have been implemented in favour of the fully integrated form. Nevertheless, the number of programmes is on the rise. Currently, one-fourth of compulsory schools offer all-day programmes, approximately 86 % of those are voluntarily chosen afternoon programmes.

The situation in Austrian schools with all-day programmes

Most schools start at around 8am, approximately one-quarter of Austrian schools stay open until 4pm, slightly more than half until 5pm, and one-fifth until 6pm. There are, however, still gaps in the system (103,500 to 125,500 places in additional capacity needed). Yet another problem is the selective use of these programmes: parents with higher education and/or a higher overall income use them more frequently. Fees vary markedly depending on the school's location. Moreover, there is a lack of uniform guidelines. If the fees are not adjusted to the parents' income levels, lower earners such as single-parent families and large families can be unduly burdened. In addition, children from disadvantaged families might be systematically excluded from these programmes. To ensure equal opportunities in all Austrian regions, municipalities should receive additional assistance to finance all-day programmes.

Social policy, educational policy and pedagogical arguments

From a *social policy perspective*, the *childcare aspect* facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life is predominant. The argument is twofold: On the one hand, all-day school programmes offer guaranteed childcare and activate labour force potential, on the other hand, they decrease families' financial burden by providing systematic support. From an *educational policy perspective*, the argument aims at evoking sustainable, societally relevant effects on *education* (by eliminating educational disadvantages, utilising pupils' talents and raising the educational level). The *pedagogical argument* emphasises the necessity of favourable framework conditions in schools with regard to a broader understanding of education and learning in order to foster a profound development of both personal and academic values.

Results from international research on types of all-day schools

Evidence from international research clearly advocates the idea of expanding all-day school programmes in favour of the *fully integrated type* (alternating teaching, learning and leisure time multiple times throughout the day – compulsory for all children in class) over the *dissociated type* (separation of morning classes from afternoon supervision – voluntarily spread across all classes) due to its conceptual advantages. Fully integrated types are considered to be more appropriate to fulfilling educational and pedagogical goals than socio-political ones. All-day programmes systematically contribute to an improvement of work-life balance within families. Especially for disadvantaged families, pupils' participation in these programmes reduces pressure on parents to regularly supervise homework and provide learning assistance, altogether it has a positive effect on the “at home” atmosphere. Any fears of negative effects on family life have been clearly refuted.

All-day school types have a positive impact on pupils' learning motivation, learning goal and social competence as well as reducing behavioural problems among teenagers. What is more,

findings in American studies show positive effects on pupils' self-perception and health awareness. With regard to improving school performance, the results are contradictory: In Germany, no continuous effects of all-day schooling have yet been shown, however, indirect positive effects leading to a reduction in behavioural problems in the classrooms have. Moreover, attending a fully integrated all-day school lessens the risk of pupils' repeating a year. In an international comparison, countries in which all-day schools are a standard practice (e. g. France and Sweden), show positive effects for pupils from a socially disadvantaged immigrant background. Additionally, positive effects on academic success, the development of far-reaching educational aspirations and better career opportunities have been confirmed in American studies.

Research results support full integration

Evidence from current research findings supports the notion that some expectations – namely, improving pupils' performance and individual support, fostering psychosocial development and enhancing equal opportunities and system conditions – are only fulfilled if funds flow into raising pedagogical quality, providing adequate institutional circumstances for pupils and teachers as well as utilising the school's organisational potential at the maximum. Thus, it is recommended that, *based on findings from pedagogy, developmental psychology and learning psychology, new models for primary school, lower and upper secondary school* be developed which assure a *fully integrated balance of teaching, learning and leisure time*. Such models should aim at eliminating the separation of narrowly defined subjects, learning and non-learning time as well as an inflexible rhythm of 50-minute lessons, incorporating new forms of cognitive, social and intercultural learning, offering periods of activity and relaxation, different kinds of extra-curricular attractions, parent participation and teenager-friendly, healthy food.

The necessity of a suitable framework

An expansion of fully integrated programmes must be accompanied by *better working conditions for teachers and other pedagogical personal*. Moreover, transparent institutional responsibilities and salary conditions (upgrading of non-teaching duties, integration of other occupational groups, flexibility in structuring daily schedules and attendance throughout the day, guidelines for non-teaching duties that exceed in-service attendance) as well as appropriate facilities for lesson preparation and follow-up processing by teachers are required. Furthermore, a solid investment into teacher training and further education is required.

Schools need a generally accepted *model framework* (e. g. legal, organisational, pedagogical, extra-curricular cooperation, evaluation of practice and non-teaching schedules) that takes school-specific conditions and needs into account. At the same time an autonomy-friendly learning and teaching environment must be supported. Furthermore, it is strongly recommended to accompany the present process of all-day programmes' extension with evaluation focusing on process quality and efficacy.

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Chapter 8: Competitiveness, social demands and lifelong learning – a policy analysis of the challenges for vocational education

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Vocational education contributes greatly to economic innovation. Even if Austria lags behind in the research-driven high-tech sector, its economy ranks among the best for small scale incremental innovations from the shop floor. Currently, there is a reorientation in innovation policy discourses from a focus on formal upgrading of upper education to a focus on improving all levels of education and establishing the right mixture of qualifications – this mixture, however, has yet to be found.

Vocational education is also marked by a differentiation between economic and social demands resulting from the selective structure of the educational system. Upper level technical and vocational colleges (BHS) are strongly affected by aspirations for upward mobility. Many graduates continue in higher education (Fachhochschulen and universities), and thus postpone employment. Aspirations for social advancement also create recruitment problems in apprenticeship programmes. Therefore apprenticeships in combination with a university entrance certificate are offered.

The current framework for the transition from compulsory schooling to upper secondary education between years nine and ten requires thorough evaluation. Problems in the transition to apprenticeship are addressed through labour market policies; however, the school system lacks substantial feedback regarding these problems. The “second threshold”, between completing an apprenticeship and regular employment, also requires more political attention, especially with regard to the quality of in-company vocational training.

Broadening access to lifelong learning, to include less qualified groups of people, would be quite important in the long run but requires sufficient basic competencies which compulsory schooling fails to provide. Vocational education programmes take on young people from the lower half of the academic performance spectrum, creating an ‘educational paradox’ in that vocational training only emphasises occupational competencies and offers no room for the thorough improvement of basic competencies. The mission of vocational education should be evaluated in light of this fact.

Demographics play a decisive role in the supply and demand of qualified labour. In the medium term, a significant decline in the number of pupils pursuing vocational education, and also higher education, is expected. This will make competition between schools and apprenticeships a zero-sum game which will require meaningful solutions instead of undermining rhetoric. The systematic consequences of demographic developments must be analysed comprehensively. Utilising the multilingual potential of immigrant pupils is a decisive issue in the development of vocational education.

The distribution of occupations is strongly determined by gender segregation in vocational education. This limits the access of girls to MINT competencies and is embedded in gender-specific differences in labour-market, income and family structures. This segregation is further strengthened by trends toward traditional gender-specific vocational choices among immigrants.

So far, vocational education has been developed incrementally up to now. Recently, however, structural reforms have been initiated and will bear observation in the middle term. Employers have suggested more far-reaching reforms involving the *Mittlere Reife*, a leaving certificate after year 9 in the school-system (age 15), the incorporation of vocational programmes in higher education all the way to fundamentally restructuring the entire vocational education system. These suggestions are still not concrete enough to evaluate; on some points they are not conclusive.

The following points demand stronger political attention:

- Political intervention in vocational education is concentrated in areas in which the indicators in international perspective are already good (school transition and employment, dropout risk), while there is no adequate intervention in the area of basic competencies where the indicators are poor.
- Behind the strengths of vocational education that provide a high percentage of young people with diplomas, weaknesses are evident, specifically, low achievement in basic competencies as well as losses due to selection processes.
- Despite comparatively good indicators regarding young people in the labour market, a large percentage must take advantage of labour market policy measures. Here, preventive measures as a part of formal education should be strengthened.
- Teachers have strong vocational qualifications but often lack sufficient professional pedagogical qualifications. Solutions to this problem exist in the plans for a reform of teacher education but there are still decisive gaps in the important area of further education of teachers and trainers, especially those in the enterprises (Lehrherren).
- The problematic effects of the two-step transition between years nine and ten need to be resolved. Due to the interlocking nature of vocational education and the differentiated structure of the Austrian school system, any kind of resolution will have serious consequences for the system as a whole. Suggestions in favour of delaying the transition by one year must be evaluated based on the expected advantages and disadvantages as well as the costs.
- The expected demographic decline in the number of entrants to vocational and higher education programmes along with an increase in the percentage of multilingual pupils are among the most important challenges for vocational education. First, the system must learn to nurture the potential that multilingualism offers, and second, competition between the educational sectors for pupils and apprentices could have adverse effects. These problems must be made explicit immediately.
- Questions concerning the need for qualified workers must be subjected to an objective evaluation. Processes of anticipation for the types of qualifications and competences that will be needed must be developed and the current status of how qualifications and competencies are used should be monitored consistently.

Research in the field of vocational education is scattered and strongly conditioned by contract research requested by interest groups. There is a lack of basic research and pedagogical processes are a blind spot, in particular with regard to the in-company part of vocational training. Developing a shared platform and agenda for vocational education research is an important task; compiling a cooperative research-based vocational education report would be an important impetus.

Evidence-based further development should be based primarily on three approaches:

- (1) Putting the potential offered by immigrants to good use while simultaneously evaluating how vocational education models balance (a) vocational competencies, (b) basic competencies and (c) cross-curricular competencies.
- (2) Thoroughly evaluating pedagogical practices in vocational education as they relate to the professionalisation of teachers and especially to in-company vocational trainers, with the goal of turning the current “negative” selection model toward a “positive” support of achievement potentials. In order to make this possible, investments must be made in the further education of teachers and trainers in enterprises.
- (3) Directing attention towards developing conditions that foster a learning-friendly working environment in innovative businesses and organisations.

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Chapter 9: Educational standards and external examination of pupils' competencies: Possible contributions of external measurements in attaining quality goals in schools

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In recent decades, the Austrian school system, as in other European countries, has undertaken measures towards an evidence-based, output-oriented school policy. Within this framework, national educational standards and the external evaluation of pupil competency shall contribute to increasing and assuring quality schooling. This chapter analyses the intermediary mechanisms through which the expected effects of these new policy measures shall be obtained. The results of these analyses are then presented in a hypothetical impact model.

Inconclusive international findings resulting from different models

Whether Austrian educational standards and their evaluation lead to an improvement in pupil competency and an overall achievement improvement of the system cannot be answered conclusively due to a lack of data. In countries with high-stakes systems, which are hardly comparable with Austria, the findings on academic performance are not uniform and indicate that standardised testing can also have undesired side effects. Since standardised testing results in Austria must not influence the grading of pupils, more equality in access and grading is unlikely. The implementation of new education policy measures alone does not smooth out origin-based disadvantages (“process and developmental equality”); these must be accompanied by and ensured through consciousness-raising structural measures and special assistance programmes.

The concept and implementation of Austrian educational standards

Educational standards in Austria describe competencies that children and adolescents should possess in German and maths years 4 and 8 as well as year 8 English. The evaluation takes place at transitional stages in the Austrian education system (the final year of primary school and lower secondary school, respectively). The results are reported in an aggregated form several months after actual testing; teachers receive summary reports for their classes or learning groups; principals, for the entire school; chief education officers for their respective provinces; and the minister of education and the public, the federal results report. In addition, the learners receive a written feedback on their individual performances.

Discovering discrepancies between actual and target performances

Regarding the plausibility of the assumptions made in the described impact model the analysis of Austrian and international research literature reveals the following: The aim to attain more competence- and result-oriented lesson plans and classroom teaching as well as an increase in standards-oriented quality development at the school level by using educational standards and feedback on standardised tests, is difficult to achieve in the short run. Periodic competency testing and feedback regarding the actual level of competency achieved were regarded as useful by a majority of the teachers who participated in earlier studies. According to these teachers, the feedback enables them to discover discrepancies between actual and target performances, to a certain extent; however, the focus tends to be on performance aspects rather than discovering inequalities based on social and regional disparities. Currently, the opportunity to use educational standards as an observational and diagnostic tool to aid individual pupils still plays a minor role. An increased and focussed support of certain groups of pupils lagging behind (“individualisation”) is unlikely due to the aggregated feedback and the many months between actual testing and the issuing of results.

¹ This chapter summary was partly written by the editors of this report and contains a different focus than the extended version.

On current developments

Now is the optimal time to realise the positive potential of the current policy strategy as the amendment of § 18 of the Federal School Supervision Act has created a new legal basis for ensuring educational quality in schools. By implementing this amendment it has become possible to tackle some of the aforementioned problems. The National Quality Framework (NQR) provides room for process-related feedback within the overall quality assurance framework. The finance and target agreements as well as location-specific development plans advocated in the NQR should provide a clearly formulated evaluation of the responsibilities of the individuals involved which adequately takes their efforts into account. Qualification processes for these instruments are currently taking place. The new support system for School Quality (SQA) in all school-types except schools for vocational education (where another system is in place since many years QUIBB) is designed to provide the necessary framework. It includes concrete steps for implementation such as pedagogical diagnostic materials, the process-related feedback tool SQA-online etc. Following the feedback administration that conveys the concrete results of standardised tests in individual schools, qualified experts will be educated as part of the initiative “Counselling in School Development” (EBIS). It is the responsibility of colleges of education to accompany and support classroom-teaching and school development processes. It remains to be seen whether the SQA initiative as well as the way current processes work together as a system actually lead to a harmonisation of the different aspects of quality development. It is however recommended that expectations for new policy measures be lowered and realistic goals set. It could take five to eight years for a shift in attitude and practice as well as cultural and structural changes to take place. At the same time, however, the intermediate objectives that have been evaluated must lead to necessary changes.

Further support measures are necessary

- (i) Stronger accountability by incorporating key elements of the new policy into the professional self-understanding of teachers;
- (ii) Stronger incorporation of educational standards and the use of standardised testing results in teacher education;
- (iii) Revision of curricula in view of a stronger competence orientation;
- (iv) Stronger inclusion of further stakeholders in the school system;
- (v) Implementation of special programmes to increase the equality of opportunities.

Research needs

The following research should be conducted to improve these policy instruments and their intended effects: Continuous accompanying evaluation of educational standards and their implementation; incorporation of further levels of implementation in the research (Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, school supervisors, further education and counselling) as well as enabling outside researchers to use the data; accompanying research on the implementation of the *National Quality Framework*; incorporation of teacher and principal or school supervisor self-reports with information on the characteristics of results; use of observation feedback in different school and group settings; interventional studies to test processes of development in instruction and improvements in educational equality based on educational standards; a national research focus on education policy.

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Chapter 10: European education initiatives and national education policy: Experiences and evaluations of the Austrian response to EU initiatives

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Despite continued limitations to EU jurisdiction, European cooperation in education has increased over the last 10 to 15 years. This is based on two factors: European education programmes which support “bottom-up Europeanisation” and the Open Method of Coordination, a soft-governance process agreed upon by Member States at the Lisbon European Council in 2000. European policies and initiatives are therefore an important impetus for internationalising the Austrian education system as well as shaping the “European education zone” and driving education reforms. This chapter discusses the state of research on Austria’s response to European cooperation in the area of education.

European education initiatives and policies

Education programmes have promoted exchange and cooperation throughout Europe since the 1970s. Targeted school participation was made possible in 1995 with the introduction of the Socrates programme for general education and the Leonardo da Vinci programme for vocational education. In 2007 both were incorporated in the Lifelong Learning Programme.

European cooperation in school education policy has been in place since 2000 via the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). This form of soft governance relies not on standards but rather on political commitment. It employs a system of goals, benchmarking, European comparisons and the sharing of best practices. The OMC was first implemented in the 2000s as part of the Education and Training 2010 programme and since 2010 as part of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training 2020 (ET 2020), which covers a broad range of education policy topics and targets. The most important policy development is the even closer connection with the EU’s Europe 2020 strategy for Member States to set national goals which will be tightly monitored.

Implementation and efficacy of European education programmes in Austria

Lifelong Learning Programme: The Comenius Programme assists schools in a broad range of actions: in-service training and assistantship grants for teachers, school partnerships, regional partnerships, networking on the eTwinning platform and individual pupil mobility. Participation in the European study visits programme is also funded. Vocational schools can participate in exchange programmes and partnerships as part of the Leonardo da Vinci initiative.

Since 2007, Austrian school participation in these actions has been consistently good, with steady active participation and utilisation of EU financial resources at the comparatively very high rate of over 99.8 %. The (quite possibly underestimated) participation in programmes since 2000 (due to a lack of data), excluding multiple participation, covers 26 % of all schools, although the rate among secondary schools is much higher: 90 % of AHS schools and 56 % of vocational schools (including vocational schools for apprentices) have participated at least once. A survey of participants indicates a widening of horizons, increased (work) motivation and the acquisition of subject-based, intercultural, personal and language competency in teachers and pupils depending on the action.

Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 programme and the ‘strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training 2020’ in Austria

Since 2000, both programmes have covered a wide range of measures which correspond to relevant goals and objectives in Austrian education reforms presently under way.

Austria has produced some positive and some below-average results following the 2010 and 2020 programmes: Austria has posted positive results for the completion of upper secondary education and dropout statistics; still the high dropout rate among pupils with an immigrant background remains a problem. On the other hand, Austria is far from meeting its commitment to reduce its percentage of below-average performances in basic competences, gender-specific differences remain a problem and although pre-school participation has increased, Austria remains below the benchmark of 95 %.

The development of a National Qualification Framework (NQF) and the introduction of a quality assurance system in the school sector have been chosen as exemplary topics for analysing interrelationships between Austria and Europe due to their importance for national education policy and their relationship to European policy processes. Although the NQF was initially driven by EU initiatives and developed rapidly, it stalled at the stage of national implementation (partially due to differences in classifying academic and vocational secondary school leaving certificates). Nevertheless, synergies in the area of quality assurance, especially in vocational education, were created, enriching both Austria and European development. Both of these topic areas reveal an interplay between the still dominant national education policy and the soft pressure exerted by the EU.

Active Austrian participation in European policy processes ensures co-determination at the European level and enables the exchange of European learning processes useful to Austria.

A stronger focus on internationalisation and Europeanisation

In light of Europe's increasing importance, particularly in implementing Europe 2020 and ET 2020 strategies, a closer examination of European education policy is recommended to enable Austria to both become more active in helping develop European education standards and strategically employing European learning policy. One strand would be to raise awareness of ET 2020 policy processes among school administrators and the general public. Additionally, current efforts to actively shape European education and improve Austria education standards require support and expansion. The second strand concerns the lack of research on the relevance of internationalisation and Europeanisation in the school system. It comprises a qualitative analysis of the implementation of education programmes and research on European education policy within the OMC and its relationship to developments in the Austrian schools sector.

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