

Skills development – what the dual approach can achieve

Traditional apprenticeship training should again be given more significance in development cooperation, ideally via the dual training approach, our author maintains. In the article below, he explains why this concept is so promising and how it can be applied in the Global South.

By Winfried Heusinger

Learning, i.e. the dissemination of knowledge and skills has made humans what they are today. This ability, in its complexity and immanent function, which is based on the transfer of abilities and skills from an experienced practitioner to the learner, accompanies an individual from birth. It is thus a central feature of our civilisation, which has been manifested through apprenticeship training for thousands of years. In all cultures, the older and more experienced individuals pass on their skills to the next generation. Apprenticeship training is thus not only a tradition but also a characteristic of our species, especially when it comes to the acquisition of practical skills.

As a result of the ongoing process of academisation, which is being driven by the commercial interests of international education providers and a universal tendency in society to portray academic education as a superior form of education, traditional apprenticeship training has been removed from the focus of development cooperation, and has even been regarded as backwards, assigned to the informal sector or, at best, ignored. This is all the more surprising because the universally recognised dual system of vocational training, which has been particularly successful in providing the economy with the necessary qualified specialists in Central Europe, is based on traditional apprenticeship training. Thus, dual vocational training is an optimised apprenticeship training, combining the increased demand for theoretical background knowledge, which is becoming more necessary to carry out practical work professionally, with the master craftsman-apprentice principle, for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Creating a win-win constellation

Consequently, forward-looking, sustainable and financially viable vocational training systems will emerge in the Global South if the traditional apprenticeship system can be success-



Two young men being trained as energy technicians in Mongolia.

Photo: Winfried Heusinger

fully designed as a dual system. This requires part-time vocational schools to make apprenticeship training an integral element of the formal education system, thus simultaneously improving the quality of vocational training. It is crucial for success that there is no excessive bureaucracy, which is inevitably linked to mechanisms that promote corruption. Rather, the aim is to establish a trusting partnership between the private and public sectors. Such a partnership will only be successful if a win-win constellation is created which enables companies to carry out apprenticeship training without financial losses and at the same time provides young people with the quality of training that enables them to successfully position themselves on the labour market.

By being trained directly in the work process, the learners are equipped with the skills that are actually required by the employer. The learners are also given the prerequisites to be able to become self-employed after training, for example as a subcontractor, which is a common

form of employment in many economies of the South, as existing companies are often unable to provide enough jobs. The countries are frequently overburdened with the necessary resources for satisfactory vocational training. Part-time vocational schools can make more effective use of the scarce resources of the state. At the same time, it can be assumed that the quality of training in vocational schools will increase because both places of training benefit from the alternation between practical training in the company and in the vocational school, as knowledge and know-how is actively transferred to both partners by the learners.

A constellation must be created for the training companies which prevents the employer from incurring a financial loss through apprenticeship training. However, particular care must also be taken to ensure that apprentices are not misused as cheap labour. Rather, the employer must see the vocational training as an investment that pays for itself in

the course of the training. This is already the case with traditional apprenticeship training. The combination with part-time vocational schooling can be expected to significantly increase the effectiveness of the training process, as well as generating a technology transfer to the participating training companies.

A dual approach must therefore take into account the interests of all parties involved in order to create a system that can function without payment flows, as money transfers basically carry the risk of corruption. Additionally, a cost-effective framework is to be created which, unlike a CBET system (Competency-Based Education and Training, a very popular educational product which is mainly marketed by English-speaking countries), functions without formalities that cannot be financed, such as complicated accreditation procedures or small-scale certification mechanisms. Instead, the system is based on traditional procedures that are integrated seamlessly into the social and cultural reality of the people.

Bridging the gap between the world of work and the world of education

Not only are school-based vocational training systems hardly affordable, they also lead to a relatively large gap between the world of education and the world of work. This is due to the fact that the teaching staff move further and further away from the reality of the world of work the longer they teach. However, if the largest and especially the practical part of vocational training takes place in the companies, then, thanks to the system, this gap does not arise. Apprenticeship training is therefore a guarantee that vocational training produces skilled workers who are optimally prepared for the labour market. Of course, at this point it is of crucial importance that there are responsible persons in the companies who can act as In-Company Trainers (In-CT). Basically, an In-CT is a master craftsman from the traditional apprenticeship system who has to continuously be qualified further, not only to guarantee the desired training quality, but to also strengthen the competitiveness of the participating companies. The integration of the apprentices into the labour market will only be successful if the training can be carried out in the companies with the appropriate quality. This is therefore an essential factor which must not be neglected under any circumstances. Almost all cultures have a positive concept of the master craftsman, and here too there is a good starting point for profiting from the traditional apprenticeship system. Master craftsman training can be formalised and integrated into the qualification framework. This can also provide young people with an attractive and valuable alternative to further qualification outside the university world.

While practical apprenticeship training in companies is carried out directly in the work process, the quality improvement through digitisation offers opportunities for the transfer of theoretical and methodological background knowledge. Teaching staff in vocational schools often do not have access to necessary and up-to-date training material. Moreover, teachers are often very poorly paid, which means that the motivation situation is not optimal. Didactically well-prepared training sequences that are oriented towards actual customer orders and made available via online platforms have a considerable potential to enhance the quality of apprenticeship training.



A trainee at a construction industry inter-company training centre in Frankfurt am Main/Germany.

Photo: Winfried Heusinger

Taking advantage of this potential can build on the fact that smartphones have now also become standard in the countries of the South. For example, apprentices can be encouraged to produce their own learning sequences in video format and make them available to other apprentices on the Internet. This can significantly increase the learning effect on the one hand, and on the other hand it gradually creates a rich pool of learning videos, which enables learners to gain an insight into other working environments. This can ultimately improve the learner's chances on the job market. A professional evaluation of the learning applications created must be carried out by a competent body.

Paving the way for lifelong learning

If a learning ecosystem is created in which the learner is actively involved in the learning process, an outstanding goal of dual vocational training can be achieved: preparing for lifelong learning. We all know that we are living in a time of rapid technological change – a change that has affected all sectors of the economy. We also feel that this change will continue, making it clear that what has been learnt previously cannot guarantee its value for the labour market in the long term. In

dual vocational training, it is clear to the learner that he or she can see this process as an opportunity. The focus of training is not on processing pure factual knowledge, but rather on developing a mentality that enables the apprentice to learn. Above all, this includes how continuous learning can be structured, how the necessary information can be found and verified and how this can be used to arrive at optimal decisions for the work process. In such an approach, which is only a representation of the design of a work process, the learner is qualified to realise continuous learning as part of working life.

There are promising approaches in Afghanistan to make traditional apprenticeship training more efficient using dual components and transferring it to the formal education system. Other examples from Nepal, Bhutan and African countries also show that dual vocational training concepts adapted to local conditions can lead to a win-win constellation between apprentices, companies and the state. For state institutions, the dual approach creates the opportunity to use their own resources more effectively.

For example, a part-time vocational school can provide three classes instead of one using the same premises and teaching staff. An increase in the quality of training can also be expected since the intermittent approach means that the two learning locations correspond with each other at the technical level as well.

The dual training approach can also be transferred to higher education. In dual courses of study, the training time is divided between the university and the company. The same mechanisms are used here as for apprenticeship training, with a stronger focus on planning and organisation. For the companies, this has the advantage that graduates of such a dual course of studies can get to know the structures within the company, which is of great advantage for the pursuit of engineering tasks, for example. Here, too, it is evident that this form of training leads to skilled workers who are optimally prepared for the job market. The companies in turn gain access from human resources whose level of quality cannot be found on a labour market.

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