

# **Dropping out in an Irish and German Schooling System**

Comparison, Interviews and Recommendations

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## **Preface**

Considering the European efforts to retain the newly defined rate of school dropouts under 9% in all European jurisdictions, this work attempts to study the dropout phenomenon of two countries: Germany and Ireland. The aims of this work are, on the one hand, to understand the connection between the school system as a whole and the personal decision of a dropout and, on the other hand, to compare that connection between the two countries involved and seek to learn from each other.

In the last ten years, Ireland has managed through several educational restructuring steps to reduce the number of its school dropouts in half standing at about 5% of young people aged 18 to 24 whereas Germany has remained at just above 10%. Germany, however, has lower unemployment rates than that of Ireland excelling at offering a wide range of apprenticeships and dual trainings to its pupils. The first chapters will allow the reader to get an understanding of the historical education backgrounds in Germany and Ireland and pinpoint the struggles which school dropouts face daily. For instance, in Germany, each state is responsible for its education offering different education roads to its pupils. Ireland has a more unified system with the Department of Education and Skills offering a unique vision to all its schools.

This thesis becomes more qualitative as Galleta's semi-structural interviewing method is followed through meeting fourteen educational personnel and school dropouts from each jurisdiction. This interviewing method followed by using Kuckartz's thematic qualitative text analysis to evaluate the findings of the interviews will be outlined in a separate chapter to give validity, reliability, and makeup to the research. The findings of these interviews are subsequently compared with the literature presented earlier as well as the preventative and curative measures undertaken by the Education departments in both countries. This synopsis ultimately reveals the actual concerns, struggles, and aspirations of the school dropouts. It highlights particularly the similarities as well as the differences of the German and Irish dropout phenomenon, due to the complexities of personal backgrounds, school systems, societal make-up, work markets, and others.

The last section of this thesis reveals the necessity to focus on a unique goal which is to strengthen the bond between pupil and school. That goal can be achieved through implementing several steps at a national and local level.

## **Acknowledgement**

My appreciation goes out first and foremost to my wife and two boys. They are the meaning and rock of my life. Without their unwavering support, this work would not have seen the light.

Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisors, colleagues, and classmates for supporting me all along the way. Standing beside me and taking part in great conversations have certainly helped me crystallize some thoughts.

Last but not least, I am very grateful to my parents. My father died a few years ago yet I am sure he would be very proud of me for achieving this important milestone in my education life.

## Introduction

In order to understand the group of young people in this thesis, it is important to define the meaning of school dropouts. In her book *Schulabsentismus und Schuld Dropout: Fallanalysen zur Erfassung eines Phänomens*, Sandra Seeliger clarifies the understanding of a dropout or *Schulabgänger*<sup>1</sup> as a pupil who, after the legal age of leaving school, which is sixteen years in both Germany and Ireland, decides to quit with neither a Leaving Certificate in the hand nor going into a different schooling system. This thesis will deal solely with this dropout group.

Dropping out is a problematic phenomenon as not dealing with it could prove to be economically costly for the country involved. Over their lifetimes, Clive Belfield writes that these dropouts will have lower incomes, contribute less in taxes, rely more heavily on government health and welfare programs, and impose higher costs on the criminal justice system.<sup>2</sup> Prof. Roger Dale makes it clear that school dropouts are much less likely to be active citizens and become involved in lifelong learning.<sup>3</sup> He further quotes that a European estimate puts the additional lifetime income for a student staying at school for an extra year at more than €70.000.<sup>4</sup> In the long-term, he sums up by writing that school dropouts constitute a tremendous waste of potential, for individual, social, and economic development. Furthermore, predictions of “future skill needs” in Europe suggest that only 1 in 10 jobs will be within reach of a school dropout.<sup>5</sup> Reducing the European rate of school dropout by just one percent would provide the European economy with nearly half a million additional qualified potential young employees each year.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Seeliger, *Schulabsentismus und Schuld Dropout: Fallanalysen zur Erfassung eines Phänomens*, (Köln: Springer VS, 2015), p. 25, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Clive R. Belfield, *The Economic Burden of High School Dropouts and School Suspensions in Florida*, (Queens College City University of New York, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Roger Dale, *Early School Leaving, Lessons from research for policy makers*, (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> GHK Consulting, Anne Mari-Nevala et al, *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, (Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies Education and Culture, Brussels 2011), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, *Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda*, (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Brussels, 2011).



In other words, if governments and societies postpone dealing with the dropping out phenomenon, dealing with its consequences is more likely to be much harder. A dropout in a possession of only a Junior Certificate in Ireland or equivalent to a *Hauptschulabschluss* or *Mittlere Schulabschluss* in Germany will struggle at a later stage in his or her life as the demand in the marketplace for qualified people with higher certificates increases. Since I completed my Master in Education on school dropouts in Ireland,<sup>7</sup> the rate of dropping out has been halved to reach 5%. In Germany, this rate remains above the new European target of 9%.

The aim of this book is to compare the phenomenon of dropping out in both Germany and Ireland, while focusing on the similarities and differences between each school system on the one hand, and the personal factors which lead pupils in each country to decide to leave on the other hand. While the literature relied on for this research is mainly from Germany and Ireland, it occasionally refers to materials outside these two jurisdictions in order to support the evidence base and enrich the work with alternative ideas and policies.

The first chapter will examine the specific aspect of the German educational system and respectively the Irish one. It will go over some historical developments which led to the current shape of the relative school system and the various aspects, distinctions, and qualities of each. By laying these out, one can gain an overview of both school systems and draw later some recommendations as to what could be more beneficial for the pupil and what role a school system can play in pushing its pupils indirectly or perhaps directly to decide to drop out. Educational systems are regularly compared and rated in the European Union and worldwide. Although it is extremely difficult to change some habits, structures, and modes of behavior in a school system, it may not be impossible in the long run.

In the second chapter, the focus on the personal decision of the pupil in Germany and Ireland to drop out will be highlighted and thoroughly discussed. That decision is a personal phenomenon, in other words an individual decision, made by a teenager who is sixteen years old or older. This decision and its motives can be very complex. Such a move can be a result of several causes which form a mindset and create psychological disturbance within the pupil. The direct influences on that personal

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<sup>7</sup> Ricky Youssef, *School Dropouts: Reasons and Recommendations*, (Berlin: Epubli, 2013).

decision will be broken down and compared in both countries. Ultimately the goal here is to understand how that personal decision to drop out and the school system are intertwined, how they influence each other, and what one can learn from each country on how to tackle these problems in order to benefit both pupils and help them clarify and reach their aims in life.

After comparing the dropout phenomenon in both Germany and Ireland through their systems and individuals, this book will document in its third chapter the preventative and curative measures taken by the German and Irish Education departments to tackle that issue. On the one hand, the preventative measures reflect the initiatives taken on a broader scale through various stages of the educational school path of a pupil to prevent the dropping out problems from arising. On the other hand, the curative measures reflect the immediate actions taken to tackle the dropping out issues at the Sekundarstufe II or Senior Cycle. While both initiatives are seen to be crucial in the fight for reducing the number of school dropouts, they need to be constantly modified and adjusted to suit the ever-changing needs of these pupils.

Before moving on to present the interviews carried out in Germany and Ireland, the fourth chapter will present and discuss, on the one hand, the methodological approach for conducting these interviews with both school dropouts and educational personnel and, on the other hand, the analytical method used to analyze the interviews' findings. The interviewing approach will be based on Galletta's semi-structured interviewing method,<sup>8</sup> which is designed to provide a range of interviewing opportunities since it can be adequately structured to address specific topics related to the phenomenon of dropping out, while leaving space for participants to offer new meanings to the study focus. The analytical process for examining the findings will be based on Kuckartz's thematic qualitative text analysis.<sup>9</sup> The combination of both deductive and inductive analysis and the attempt to create the themes which school dropouts find as relevant make that choice of Kuckartz's text analysis suitable. Following this thematic qualitative cycle, categories will be evaluated and streamlined to create the right combination and attempt to answer the research question. The analysis of the

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<sup>8</sup> Anne Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*, (New York University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Udo Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practice & Using Software*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014).

interviews will therefore be exposed to a structured yet comprehensive method allowing to capture the core of what the interviewees attempted to share while neither leaving room for ambiguity nor missing out on important information.

Hence, the fifth chapter will present the interviews with school dropouts and educational personnel which were carried out in Germany and Ireland. These interviews, which were selected randomly from different corners of Ireland and also randomly from different parts of Swabia, Bavaria, will give this book a qualitative aspect of what the respective educational personnel and pupils think of their systems and what issues and suggestions they offered for their progress. Comparing what the Irish thought of their system while their dropout rate was high (about 10% in 2007) and what the Germans think of theirs now while their rate is still high (above 10% in 2021), could help us materialize this research and understand better both jurisdictions' developments.

The sixth chapter will be divided into three sub-sections. Relying on Kuckartz's thematic qualitative text analysis, the first two sections will evaluate the findings of the interviews in both jurisdictions, search for similarities and differences, group the interviewees' answers into codes and categories and ultimately try to find some trends. The third section will further compare the findings of the first two sub-sections and reveal what the education personnel and school dropouts in Germany and Ireland find as relevant and causative to the dropout phenomenon. This chapter will place the finger on the wound and shed some light on what both educational systems deal with on the ground, especially vis-à-vis each other.

To make the whole thesis more intelligible and cohesive, chapter seven will attempt to find the links between all previous chapters. In other words, the similarities and differences between the interviews which were carried out in Germany and Ireland will be connected to the dropout literature and the undertaken initiatives in both countries. This chapter will then lay out in two sections the common grounds between what has been researched before and what this thesis reveals. This comparison will be discussed in relation to the connection between school system and personal decision. This chapter should give the reader a clear overview on where the two jurisdictions stand in relation to each other,

The last chapter will present the vision and theory of this work. It will argue that any recommendation for a reduction in the number of school dropouts should be dealt with at a national and local level for the same very purpose of: *Strengthening the Bond between Pupil and School*. This chapter will explain in more details the meaning of that bond and how it could be achieved at both levels. At the national one, seven recommended measures will be divided as follows: Simplifying Education Through Stages, Early Recognition and Preventative Intervention, Developing an Adaptive Curriculum, Raising the Vocational Education Standards, Allowing for Smoother Transition Periods, Investment and Funding, and Compulsory Education. These will be discussed in detail in order to show how the education departments in both countries can contribute positively to this domain. At the local one, five measures which are called the S measures, i.e., Surrounding, Space, Substance, Support and Safeguard, will be presented and explained. These measures require the involvement of various parties for their success. That section shows not only how complicated tackling the issue of dropping out is, but how it could also be reduced through the awareness and involvement of various actors.

The thesis plan will thus fold out as follows:

## Introduction

### 1. German Vs. Irish School System: Influence of the System on the Dropout

#### 1.1 The German School System

##### 1.1A A Brief Historical Overview of the German School System

##### 1.1B The Primary to Secondary Transition

##### 1.1C The System of a Diverse Schooling

#### 1.2 The Irish School System

##### 1.2A A Brief Historical Overview of the Irish School System

##### 1.2B The Junior to Senior Cycle Transition

##### 1.2C The System of a Simplified Schooling

### 2. Personal Decision: Dropping out in Germany vs. Ireland

#### 2.1 The German and Irish Home Background

- 2.2 The German and Irish School Background
- 2.3 Peer Relations, Bullying and Personal Pursuits

### 3. The German and Irish Curative and Preventative Initiatives

- 3.1 The German Education Department Curative and Preventative Initiatives
- 3.2 The Irish Education Department Curative and Preventative Initiatives

### 4. The Methodological Approach for the Interviews in Germany and Ireland

- 4.1 Semi-Structured Interviewing Method
- 4.2 The Design of the Interviewing Method

### 5. Interviews with Educational Personnel and School Dropouts in Germany and Ireland

#### 5.1 Meetings with Educational Personnel and School Dropouts in Germany

##### 5.1.1 Meetings with Principals and Educational Personnel in Germany

- 5.1.1A Meeting with a Gymnasium Teacher in the Inner City of Augsburg
- 5.1.1B Meeting with an Educational Psychologist of a Realschule in the South-East of Augsburg
- 5.1.1C Phone Conversation with a Mittelschule Principal in the Outskirt of Augsburg
- 5.1.1D Phone Interview with a Vocational School Principal in the East of Augsburg
- 5.1.1E Phone Interview with a Higher Vocational School Principal in Augsburg
- 5.1.1F Meeting with a Former Manager of the IHK in Swabia
- 5.1.1G Phone Interview with a Vocational School Principal in Königsbrunn

##### 5.1.2 Meetings with School Dropouts from Germany

- 5.1.2A Meeting with Dropout Twins from the Inner City of Augsburg
- 5.1.2B Meeting with a Female Dropout from the Outskirt of Augsburg
- 5.1.2C Meeting with a Female Dropout from the North of Augsburg
- 5.1.2D Meeting with a Male Dropout from the West of Augsburg
- 5.1.2E Meeting with a Female Dropout from the South-West of Augsburg
- 5.1.2F Meeting with a Male Dropout from Friedberg
- 5.1.2G Meeting with a Female Dropout from Mering

#### 5.2 Meetings with Educational Personnel and School Dropouts in Ireland

## 5.2.1 Meetings with Principals and Educational Personnel in Ireland

5.2.1A Meeting with a School Principal in County Limerick

5.2.1B Meeting with a Guidance Counsellor of a School in Limerick City

5.2.1C Meeting with a School Completion Programme Officer in the North Side of Dublin

5.2.1D Meeting with a Guidance Counsellor of a School in the North Side of Dublin

5.2.1E Meeting with a Guidance Counsellor of a School in Cork

5.2.1F Meeting with a Guidance Counsellor of a School in the Inner City of Galway

5.2.1G Meeting with a Regional Manager from the National Educational Welfare Board

## 5.2.2 Meetings with School Dropouts from Ireland

5.2.2A Meeting with a Male Dropout from Dublin's North Side

5.2.2B Meeting with a Male Dropout from the Inner City of Galway

5.2.2C Meeting with a Female Dropout from County Galway

5.2.2D Meeting with a Male Dropout from the North Side of Cork

5.2.2E Meeting with a Female Dropout from the Inner City of Cork

5.2.2F Meeting with a Female Dropout from the South Side of Limerick

5.2.2G Meeting with a Male Dropout from the Inner City of Limerick

## 6. Analysis of the Interviews and Meetings

6.1 Analysis of the Meetings with Education Personnel and School Dropouts in Germany

6.2 Analysis of the Meetings with Education Personnel and School Dropouts in Ireland

6.3 Comparison of the Analyses of Both Countries

## 7. The Links between the Literature, the Initiatives, and the Interviews

7.1 The German and Irish Systems Vs. The Interviews

7.1.1 The German System Vs. The Interviews

7.1.2 The Irish System Vs. The Interviews

7.2 The German and Irish Personal Dropout Decision Vs. The Interviews

7.2.1 Home Background

7.2.2 Teacher's Influence

7.2.3 Peer Pressure and Digital Mobbing

7.2.4 Detachment from School

## 7.3 The Education Departments' Initiatives Vs. The Interviews

7.3.1 The German Education Departments' Initiatives Vs. The Interviews

7.3.2 The Irish Education Department's Initiatives Vs. The Interviews

## 8. Recommendations for Both German and Irish Systems

8.1 At a National Level

8.2 At a Local Level

Conclusion

Appendix 1

Appendix 2

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## **1. German Vs. Irish School System: Influence of the System on the Dropout**

Understanding the environment where pupils get their education is crucial to understanding their psychological and physical development. What the system offers them from steps, school years, school choices, class size, school materials, school breaks, tests, and so on all form the shape of a schooling system. That schooling system within a country of more than 80 million inhabitants such as Germany differs from a state to another as we shall see below, although a general line of education can be realized. The schooling system in Ireland, a country of about 5 million inhabitants, is to a great degree unified and consistent.

Not only does an education system play an important role in the success of its pupils, but it could also lead to their failure or ultimately dropping out. A system can be for instance demanding, unclear, rigid, extremely diverse, boring, under or over-challenging, test-oriented, and so on that a pupil can feel lost within and unfit. Comparing these two systems which are quite different in their structures should give the reader an image of the educational choices that we are offering our children there. Perhaps the pedagogues of each system can learn from each other on how to create a more educationally attractive atmosphere for their pupils as well as for their teachers.

In this chapter, a thorough look at the structure of the German and Irish systems will be presented as well as some historical and statistical backgrounds. The combination of structure, history and statistic should clarify some aspects of each system and give the reader ideas as to where we could be failing some pupils, or where they could be failing themselves within the system.

### **1.1 The German School System**

Starting with the German schooling system,<sup>10</sup> pupils begin their obligatory primary education at the age of six. The primary system or Grundschule in Germany lasts four years or when the pupil reaches the age of ten (except in two German states where it

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.studying-in-germany.org/german-education-system/>



lasts up to six years such as in Berlin and Brandenburg). At that stage and according to each pupil's grades and performance, they get advised to move into the lower secondary level (or Sekundarstufe I), which is divided into three main streams: the highest one is the Gymnasium, followed by either the Realschule, Gesamtschule or Integrated School and then the Hauptschule or Mittelschule.<sup>11</sup> Each German state follows its own rules on education although the overall German schooling structure tends to be similar. In their book, *Entstehung, Struktur und Steuerung des deutschen Schulsystems: Eine Einführung*,<sup>12</sup> the three authors van Ackeren, Klemm und Kühn reveal the progress and differences of the educational systems in the various federal states of Germany. Along with these differences, Germany spends overall more than 71 billion Euros on their education systems and the Germans grew up after the Second World War or since the sixties with the mentality or phrase: "*Schick Dein Kind länger auf bessere Schulen*" or translated: Send your child for a longer time to better schools.<sup>13</sup>

Generally, at the age of ten, pupils get advised to go on to a specific lower secondary schooling, as mentioned above. Parents can, however, insist on sending their children to the highest level, i.e., Gymnasium, although their marks may not meet that criterion. There is no official or national test for such a move. This lower secondary schooling lasts from the age of ten until fifteen or sixteen (or until the mandatory age of leaving school). Therefore, pupils attend 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> class, which prepare them to move on to the upper secondary schooling (Sekundarstufe II) if they wish.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that pupils from different lower secondary schooling may or must change schools according to their grades. These moves could happen at different years during that period. At its end, pupils sit in an exam at the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> class. According to their grades, they are offered a variety of Sekundarstufe II schooling options, be them continuing in the Gymnasium, or Gesamtschule, or attending vocational schooling (Berufsschule), or enrolling in a technical college (Fachoberschule).

Thus, the upper secondary level caters for pupils from the age of sixteen to eighteen. It prepares them to either enter university or do vocational trainings. These schools

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<sup>11</sup> There is also *Förderschule* in Germany which caters for pupils with special needs

<sup>12</sup> Isabell van Ackeren, Klaus Klemm, und Svenja Mareike Kühn, *Entstehung, Struktur und Steuerung des deutschen Schulsystems: Eine Einführung*, (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2015), p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.studying-in-germany.org/german-education-system/>

have different names according to each German state.<sup>15</sup> After two or three years of upper secondary schooling, a pupil can acquire a Leaving Certificate in its various forms which finally allows him or her to enter third level education.

The main highlights of the German educational system are as follows:

- 1- Primary education begins at the age of six.
- 2- Primary education mainly lasts four years until the age of ten.
- 3- Pupils need to select their line of education straight after primary education, so as early as ten years of age. Although they are flexible to move schools according to their marks and performance, they still get directed from an early age into certain levels. These lower secondary schools tend to face some integration issues for some pupils.
- 4- After the *Mittelschulabschluss* or *Mittlere Schulabschluss*, German pupils, once again, could change schools according to their grades or even by repeating a certain year and moving on to higher schooling. After that test, German pupils get a very wide choice of schooling. Some German states offer as many as eleven lines of education such as in the state of Rhineland Palatinate.<sup>16</sup>
- 5- At the age of eighteen and to move on to third level education, pupils sit in state exams which allow them to select different colleges and universities. Even there, the German education system offers pupils who do not get the right grades alternative roads to go on to further education in the hope of finding the suitable education line for them.
- 6- The German school system offers much flexibility to its pupils. It is less rigid when it comes to pupils switching schools or even catching up with a specific education line, where they have not managed to succeed at a younger stage.

To summarize the German educational system, here is Table 1:<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The various schooling systems in Germany are highlighted in various graphs under this link: <https://planet-beruf.de/lehrerinnen/berufswahl-aktuell/schule-berufswahl/grafische-uebersichten-der-schulsysteme-nach-bundeslaendern/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/RPF\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/RPF_Schulsystem.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.studying-in-germany.org/german-education-system/>

**TABLE 1**

German Education System							
	Grade				Age		
Third Level		Fachhochschule (University of Applied Sciences)		Universität (University)	19+		
Secondary Level I-II	13	Berufsschule, Fachoberschule (Vocational School, Technical College)		Gesamtschule or Intergrated School (Comprehensive School)	Gymnasium (Academic secondary School)	Sonderschulen (Special Schools)	18/19
	12						17
	11						16
	10	10. Klasse (tenth year of school)	Realschule (Secondary School)				15
	9	Hauptschule or Mittelschule (Secondary General School)					14
	8						13
	7						12
	6						11
	5						10
Primary Sector	4	Grundschule (Primary School)			9		
	3				8		
	2				7		
	1				6		
Elementary Sector		Kindergarten, Tageseltern und Kinderkrippe (Day Nursery, Daycare Staff)			5		
					4		
					3		
					2		
					1		

### 1.1A A Brief Historical Overview of the German Education System

In order to understand the transition from the Grundschule to the Sekundarstufe I in Germany, one needs to look at the historical development of the German education from the 18<sup>th</sup> century until now. This development should clarify the reasons as to why the Grundschule was shortened to four years which led to the early selection phase in the Sekunderstufe I. This historical review should also clarify to the reader the background behind every state in Germany having a slightly different educational system or in other words how come that every German state can decide by itself over the run of its education. Once one understands these historical developments, one can better figure out the current format of the German education system.

In the Prussian era and more specifically at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the introduction of a decree called “The General Laws of the Prussian States” made not only school attendance obligatory to all children but also divided education into lower (niedere)

and higher (höhere) schools.<sup>18</sup> The lower school was meant for all youngsters whereas the higher school or Gymnasia was designed to acquire higher knowledge and apply this in various crafts. The main goals of such development were the need for the Prussian State to create a common national awareness, support the economy by educating its people and meet the aspiration of those who see themselves in concurrence with the nobles.<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note that the focus on developing various Gymnasia sectors began as early as in the year 1800 with the Scholar school, the Knight school, the Latin school, the City school and so on. The interest of developing an exam at the end of the higher schooling was manifested through three different rulings of the Abitur or the leaving certificate from 1788 to 1834 (1., 2. and 3. *Abiturregelment*). With the Abitur, a pupil could look forward to further education in Law, Philosophy and even Teaching.

By introducing the testing possibility in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pupils began to be assessed according to their performance and marks. This era was also influenced by the Neo-humanistic ideology where the focus was first and foremost on developing the individual as a whole. Thereafter, he or she could specialize in further education.<sup>20</sup> This humanistic education approach of the 1837 was considered a further change to the usefulness-centered Prussian Gymnasium approach. The combination of both the humanistic and usefulness approaches have influenced the German education up to this day.

The Volksschule, which is the lower school, was founded in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and was influenced by the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV after the civil revolution in 1848. The main teaching focus for this elementary school was on religion, reading, writing, calculation, German, and the Motherland/Natural history. In the second half of that century and with the industrial revolution kicking in, the need to develop a more practical school became more tangible, especially that the Volksschule was limited in its subjects while Gymnasia was more academical and humanistic. Therefore, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two new high schools emerged: the Realgymnasium and

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<sup>18</sup> B. Michael, B. and H. Schepp, *Die Schule in Staat und Gesellschaft. Dokumente zur deutschen Schulgeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, (Göttingen und Zürich: HansenSchmidt, 1993), p. 70 to 72.

<sup>19</sup> Isabell van Ackeren, Klaus Klemm, und Svenja Mareike Kühn, *Entstehung, Struktur und Steuerung des deutschen Schulsystems: Eine Einführung*, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> C. Menze, *Die Bildungsreform Wilhelm von Humboldts*, (Hannover: Schroedel, 1975).

the Oberrealschule. These focused more on Mathematic, natural sciences and drawing and less on languages.<sup>21</sup> From that period on, girls were also allowed to attend higher schooling and do their Abitur. Moreover, it is important to note that as early as 1849, a school section was founded to train pupils for professions. This would offer a three-year program which ends with a test.<sup>22</sup> This focus on professional education went even further with the ideas of the German pedagogue Georg Kerschensteiner who, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, prepared the way for the introduction of the obligatory professional schools for pupils of the Volksschule.<sup>23</sup> Every pupil should feel that he or she is contributing to society through work, diligence, conscientiousness, and responsibility. In this way, even the pupils who are less talented can play an important part in the interest of the whole.

Up to the time of when the Weimar republic was established, i.e., after the first world war, the German school system took this following shape:

There were four different schools where students enrolled in from the beginning. Volksschule lasted 8 years. Middle School and Gymnasium started with 3 years of Volksschule and then 6 years of Middle Schooling and 9 years of Gymnasium. For the weak students, there was also the Support School or Förderschule which lasted as long as the Volksschule did.

This system was found to be outdated and lasted only until the Weimar School Compromise of 1919/1920. The compromise allowed firstly freedom of religion with pupils being offered religious education according to their faiths. Secondly, apart from pupils of the Förderschule, all primary pupils were combined into one primary schooling system which lasted 4 years before they got separated into other schools according to their marks and performance, i.e., Volksschule, Middle School and Gymnasium.<sup>24</sup> The last two schools retained the length of their further schooling, i.e., 6 and 9 years. This led to prolonging the overall schooling time by a year.

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<sup>21</sup> J.C. Albisetti und P. Lundgreen, *Höhere Knabenschulen*. In: Berg, C. (Hrsg.): Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte Band IV – 1870-1980. München: C.H.Beck: 228-278

<sup>22</sup> Isabell van Ackeren, et al, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> T. Wilhelm, *Georg Kerschensteiner (1854-1932)*. In: Scheuerl, H.: *Klassiker der Pädagogik*. Band 2, (München: C.H. Beck, 1979. P.108), 109.

<sup>24</sup> Isabell van Ackeren et al, p. 35.

The fact that the political parties of the Weimar Republic could not unite in bringing all youths under one school has ultimately led to the complex schooling system that Germany offers today in its various states.<sup>25</sup>

During the Nazi Regime, the schooling system experienced a major setback in many of its forms, from the reduction of schooling time to the modification of the learning materials to suit the regime, to the discrimination against women, Jews, and others. The Regime took from the Weimar schooling system what benefited its propaganda and left out what was not necessary in their eyes.

This situation did not get quickly better after the second world war where Germany was divided into four areas governed by different powers. One of the main goals of the Allied Control Council of 1947 was to change the Nazi ideologies in the schools and implement more democracy-friendly learning materials.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the East of Germany experienced a more unique educational development. Up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in the year 1989, the education there was divided into two main streams: primary or *Polytechnische Oberschule* which lasted 10 years and secondary or *Erweiterte Oberschule* 2 years. After that and up to this day, the education in the east followed the guidelines of the west.

As for the West of Germany, the Düsseldorf Agreement in 1955 shaped the education road up to our current days. That agreement was again influenced by the education system of the Weimar Republic, by maintaining the differences between lower and higher education, beside the focus on training pupils to take on professions. Even in the prosperous times of the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, the various states of Germany could not agree on uniting the different schools into one, i.e., *Mittelschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* into *Gesamtschule*. Some states attempted to implement it but without great success and appeal from parents.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, up to the present time, there have been several attempts to update the curriculum of the schools while offering more choices towards the end of the schooling systems to suit the entrance to universities.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Michael and Schepp, 331.

<sup>27</sup> Isabell van Ackeren et al, p. 41.

## 1.1B The Primary to Secondary Transition

We have seen in the previous section how the Grundschule stemmed out historically of the Volksschule and its development from 3 to 4-year basic education. We have realized how the economic and political environments have led to structuring the German basic educational system in its current form. The attempt to combine the various schools after the Grundschule into one have failed and that 4-year basic education has remained to be a great influence from the Weimar School Compromise, almost 100 years ago.

This 4-year basic education leads German pupils to a stage where they need to figure out as early as 10 years of age which line of education they need to follow. We have seen that, depending on which German state they belong to, they either get a recommendation or an assessment according to their marks in order to move into the Sekundarstufe I.

By looking into that transition period, one can see that the criteria which are used for the recommendation into the different secondary schools vary. For instance, in 2016 and 2017, two studies by the name of PIRLS (The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) were carried out on 4<sup>th</sup> grade pupils across 61 and 47 education systems in the world respectively, including Germany.<sup>28</sup> Over 4000 pupils from over 200 schools in Germany took part. They got tested on both their reading and understanding skills on the one hand and on their Mathematics and Science competence on the other. Although their performance in both tests apart from Mathematics has remained stable since 2011, Germany lost its top position to a middle one.<sup>29</sup> What is remarkable however is that these German pupils with similar competence in PIRLS and TIMSS are being transferred into different secondary schools, whereas in other countries pupils with similar competence get taught further in the same schools.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pirls/index.asp> and H. Wendt, W. Bos, C. Selter, O. Köller, K. Schwippert, und D. Kasper, *TIMSS 2015. Mathematische und naturwissenschaftliche Kompetenzen von Grundschulkindern in Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich*, (Münster: Waxmann, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.bmbf.de/de/iglu-internationale-grundschule-lese-untersuchung-82.html>

Furthermore, Germany took part in The Programme for International Student Assessment or PISA in 2018 where 15-year-old pupils got assessed in their reading, mathematics, and science competence.<sup>30</sup> About 5400 pupils from various secondary schools (226 schools) participated in that assessment and the results revealed that the average competence in reading, science and mathematics deteriorated and returned to levels observed in 2009, 2006 and 2012 respectively. The results from the 4<sup>th</sup> graders show us that their bad educational performance at the Grundschule get reflected at a later stage in the various secondary schooling at the age of 15. It shows that separating them into various schooling systems does not necessarily solve their performance problem.

PISA studies have showed that by separating pupils from an early age into different secondary schooling leads to creating different segregated social groups,<sup>31</sup> which, too, leads to different performance results and expectation tendencies. One of the key findings from PISA 2018 was that the gap in reading performance between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils in Germany is large and increased by nine score points since 2009.<sup>32</sup>

In the Bildungsbericht 2018,<sup>33</sup> it was shown that in the last 20 years, there has been an increase of pupils changing schools at the Sekundarstufe I, i.e., from Gymnasium into other schools and vice-versa - although the rate of pupils changing from other schools to Gymnasium is much lower. What is noticeable is that the school systems in the German states which offer less school options in the Sekundarstufe I (For instance only Gymnasium and Gesamtschule) witness less school changes than others who offer more. In fact, a two-school system at the Sekundarstufe I also witnesses more pupils changing into Gymnasium than pupils in other systems. The class repeat rate at a two-school Sekundarstufe I is at the lowest among the other systems.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018\\_CN\\_DEU.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_DEU.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> J. Baumert et al, *PISA 2000 – Basiskompetenzen von Schülerinnen und Schülern im internationalen Vergleich*, (Opladen: Les-ke+Budrich, 2001), p. 458.

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018\\_CN\\_DEU.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_DEU.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Bildungsbericht 2018, 95.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



These statistics show us that pupils who are faced with more choices when they are transitioned from Grundschule to Sekundarstufe I can be overwhelmed by their choices, experience uncertainties at an early age, move often between schools which create feelings of failure or incompetence within, and lead to longer education periods if not to dropping out at a later stage.

Pupils who are faced with fewer choices are more likely to focus on what they have on offer without pondering on about what other opportunities could bring when things do not work out. Isabell van Ackeren et al describes the current German system as one which brings high risks, wrong roads, and even dead ends for some.<sup>35</sup> Some might see it as a flexible system, yet for Isabell et al, it is unfair as it is more of a system that brings pupils to lower levels than to higher ones.<sup>36</sup> By placing pupils in lower education levels at an early age, we are somehow degrading their aspirations to perform better or to seek higher certificates and diplomas.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, PISA studies have also shown that Gymnasium and Mittelschule pupils who come from a similar social economical background and have similar cognitive competence perform differently in Mathematics for instance.<sup>38</sup> Their schooling system can be a decisive factor in their input. A Gymnasium pupil whose competence in a subject was promising at the Grundschule, and he or she changes into a lower secondary schooling level, that competence could be underchallenged. The school system could push the pupil into underperforming. In their words, Isabell et al summed up the situation by linking it historically to the development of the German school system as follows:

In summary, it can be said that in the frayed and boundaries of school forms that are historically rooted and over the characteristic differences between 'lower' and 'higher' education which were passed down decades and centuries: 'lower' school education limits development opportunities and focuses on less cognitively demanding educational and professional qualifications.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, they argue that the lack of educational visionary and progress was also manifested in the sixties and seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the attempt to simplify

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<sup>35</sup> Isabell van Ackeren, et al, p.57.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>38</sup> Baumert 2001, 174.

<sup>39</sup> Isabell van Ackeren et al, p.61.

and better structure the educational system for pupils failed.<sup>40</sup> The divisive educational system has remained influenced by the past to a high degree. Although some German states are slowly implementing some changes to that transition period between primary and secondary education, i.e., in postponing it to the 6<sup>th</sup> class, it can be argued that this step does not go that far in helping pupils figure out what they need from their education.

### 1.1C The System of a Diverse Schooling

The higher secondary schooling in Germany, which is the main focus of this thesis, has had a long tradition in the German education system although its structure has not changed that much. The Sekundarstufe II mainly offers Vocational schooling known as Berufsschule, Technical College or Fachoberschule, Gymnasium or Gesamtschule, as already highlighted in Table 1.<sup>41</sup> Every German state offers a line of Gymnasium but not necessarily a Gesamtschule. Every state offers various lines of Berufsschule and Fachoberschule. These schools last between 2 to 3 years. A Berufsschule and Fachoberschule are vocational and technical institutions which focus more on the practical sides of learning and allow through various successful years of education and dual learning<sup>42</sup> to reach third level education, i.e., the Fachhochschule or University of Applied Sciences. Dual learning allows pupils to get practical experience at a workplace while attending a certain number of lessons at school. With a combination of certain languages and learning materials, pupils at these schools could even be entitled to apply for the standard Leaving Certificate or Abitur as known in German.<sup>43</sup>

When it comes to the Gymnasium in Germany, it is worth stating that the Gymnasiasten or pupils of the Gymnasium have always been more esteemed in society than the pupils from other Sekundarstufe II schools and so the Gymnasium is

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> <https://planet-beruf.de/lehrerinnen/berufswahl-aktuell/schule-berufswahl/grafische-uebersichten-der-schulsysteme-nach-bundeslaendern/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.kmk.org/themen/berufliche-schulen/duale-berufsausbildung/berufsschulen.html>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/bildung/schule/auf-bestehenden-abschluss-aufbauen>

a place where parents could feel proud sending their children. It was regarded to be more academic and humanistic, which eventually led to the foundation of Realgymnasium or Realschule which was more profession-orientated and shorter in duration than the former. The Gymnasium and Gesamtschule last the longest or offer the longest education road to their pupils. With the Abitur, one can enter universities immediately and attend various colleges. Pupils from other schools, in order to transfer into Gymnasium, need to either repeat a class or prove with their marks that they can catch up.

Here are 16 links which show the different school systems of the 16 German states:

- 1- Thüringen:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/THUE\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/THUE_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 2- Schleswig-Holstein:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/SLH\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/SLH_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 3- Sachsen-Anhalt:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/SAN\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/SAN_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 4- Sachsen:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/SAC\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/SAC_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 5- Saarland:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/SAR\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/SAR_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 6- Rheinhand-Pfalz:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/RPF\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/RPF_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 7- Nordrhein-Westfalen:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/SAR\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/SAR_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 8- Niedersachsen:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/NDS\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/NDS_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 9- Mecklenburg-Vorpommern:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/MVP\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/MVP_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 10- Hessen:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/HES\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/HES_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 11- Hamburg:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/HAM\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/HAM_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 12- Bremen:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/BRE\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/BRE_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 13- Brandenburg:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/BRA\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/BRA_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 14- Berlin:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/BRA\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/BRA_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 15- Bayern:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/BAY\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/BAY_Schulsystem.pdf)
- 16- Baden-Württemberg:  
[https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender/BAW\\_Schulsystem.pdf](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender/BAW_Schulsystem.pdf)

When one compares the graphs of these links, one will automatically notice the general similarities among the various schools in the German states, yet their differences too. In all German states apart from Berlin and Brandenburg,<sup>44</sup> the diverse schools of the Sekundarstufe I lasts 5 to 6 years. At that level, pupils with successful

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<sup>44</sup> The Gymnasium at those two German states lasts 4 years as the Grundschule or primary education is prolonged by two years in comparison to Grundschule of the other German states.

marks can be transferred into the Gymnasium, Gesamtschule, Berufsschule, Fachoberschule, or other schools of the Sekundarstufe II or do various tests to attend other high-level schools. As diverse as the Sekundarstufe I is, the Sekundarstufe II can even be more assorted in some states as the above graph links show.

Looking at some statistics of this diverse educational system, one can note that 15% of all schools in Germany in 1952 were Gymnasium and the percentage has grown since to stand at 38% for the school year 2018/2019.<sup>45</sup> Surely, the population of Germany has grown from 70 million inhabitants to 83 million during that period. But these numbers are also contributed by the emergence of other school types. For instance, the Hauptschule lost its percentage from 78% to only 9% in the last 70 years. The Realschule gained 12% to reach 19% school share in the last school year. Furthermore, other combined schools such as Gesamtschule, Freie Waldorfschule,<sup>46</sup> and others have risen from 17% to 34%. Berufsschule and Fachoberschule have witnessed a small decrease.<sup>47</sup>

All in all, if we observe the trend in the last ten years, we can automatically see that while the Gymnasium has remained the same, the Realschule and Hauptschule have lost almost 10% of their share each and the fast-growing schools are the Gesamtschule and the Integrated school<sup>48</sup> which have doubled their shares. While the percentage of pupils at the Gesamtschule is at about 20% at the Sekundarstufe I, it becomes more than 50% at the Sekundarstufe II – more than that at the Gymnasium. In other words, there are between 2000 to 9000 more students who attend the Gesamtschule than the Gymnasium at the Sekundarstufe II in Germany.

What is also remarkable to note is that the interest in the vocational and technical schooling in Germany varies dramatically from a state to another. In the school year 2020/2021, the percentage of these vocational/technical pupils in relation to those in the general education varies between 15,9% such as in Brandenburg and 27,5% such

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<sup>45</sup> Quelle: Statistisches Bundesamt. <https://www.datenportal.bmbf.de/portal/docs/de/Tabelle-2.3.34.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Waldorf education, also known as Steiner education, is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy. Its pedagogy strives to develop pupils' intellectual, artistic, and practical skills in an integrated and holistic manner. The cultivation of pupils' imagination and creativity is a central focus. (Wikipedia)

<sup>47</sup> [https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2021/03/PD21\\_115\\_211.html#:~:text=W%C3%A4hrerend%20die%20Sch%C3%BClerzahl%20an%20allgemeinbildenden,auf%202%2C4%20Millionen%20zur%C3%BCck](https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2021/03/PD21_115_211.html#:~:text=W%C3%A4hrerend%20die%20Sch%C3%BClerzahl%20an%20allgemeinbildenden,auf%202%2C4%20Millionen%20zur%C3%BCck)

<sup>48</sup> The Integrated schools were the result of the combination of the Hauptschule and Realschule in the East of Germany after the unification of the East and West.

as in Bremen.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, while the number of pupils in general education in Germany has risen in the school year 2020/2021 by 0.6% in comparison with the previous year, the number of pupils in vocational education has declined by 2%.<sup>50</sup> States like Berlin, Bayern, Hamburg, Saxony Anhalt and North Rhine-Westphalia have witnessed the biggest drop of over 3% while only one state, Saxony, witnessed an increase of 0.2%.

The last statistics from the German Ministry of Education and Research, which we are going to examine is the one related to the pupil shares at the various schools in the various German states. By observing the four states Hamburg, Sachsen, Saarland, and Schleswig-Holstein with the two school options at the Sekundarstufe I, one can see that the number of the Gymnasiasten is much lower than the number of pupils in the second school option, be it Gesamtschule or Integrated school.<sup>51</sup> Even when a pupil has the choice between the prestigious Gymnasium and the general school, more seem to opt for the latter and that is in all four states. Moreover, by looking at Mecklenburg-Vorpommern which offers two orientation years at the beginning of the Sekundarstufe I, one notices over 30% the pupils attend the Gymnasium, and that number has remained stable in the last ten years. The majority however goes for the Integrated School. For Berlin and Brandenburg where the Grundschule lasts 2 years longer than in the other states, one witnesses an increase in the number of Gymnasiasten, almost 6% increase. At the Sekundarstufe II in Germany, there are almost 760,000 pupils attending Gymnasium, a decrease of almost 200,000 pupils in the last 10 years and approximately 130,000 pupils at the Gesamtschule, an increase of more than 55,000 pupils.<sup>52</sup>

These statistics show us how diverse and ever-changing the German schooling system is. It could even be very confusing for parents as well as for pupils to understand how it exactly works, not only within one state but also in the whole country. That system allows pupils to shift between schools and aim for a higher education should they wish. Yet perhaps in that flexibility and complexity lie certain

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<sup>49</sup> <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/981823/umfrage/anzahl-der-schueler-an-allgemeinbildenden-schulen/> and <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1321/umfrage/anzahl-der-schueler-an-allgemeinbildenden-schulen/>

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2021/03/PD21\\_115\\_211.html#:~:text=W%C3%A4hrerend%20die%20Sch%C3%BClerzahl%20an%20allgemeinbildenden,auf%202%2C4%20Millionen%20zur%C3%BCck](https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2021/03/PD21_115_211.html#:~:text=W%C3%A4hrerend%20die%20Sch%C3%BClerzahl%20an%20allgemeinbildenden,auf%202%2C4%20Millionen%20zur%C3%BCck)

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.datenportal.bmbf.de/portal/docs/de/Tabelle-2.3.4.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> The Förderschule or Special Need Schools at the Sekundarstufe II in Germany has about 320000 pupils.

weaknesses. We will discuss that at a later stage. For now, we will move on to present and discuss the Irish system model which should give the reader another perspective of how another school system can look like and prove to be successful especially at reducing the number of school dropouts by half in the last decade.

## 1.2 The Irish School System

Moving on to the Irish school system,<sup>53</sup> one automatically notices that almost all Irish pupils begin their schooling at a very early age, i.e., in the September following their fourth birthday, although officially it is not mandatory until the age of six. The primary education in Ireland is defined by its long road: Eight Year Cycle. Two infant classes and six primary classes constitute this period. Only when a pupil roughly reaches the age of twelve, he or she is entitled to move into the secondary level of education. In his book, *Irish Education: its History and Structure*, John Coolahan identifies the strong and well-recognized tradition of the public interest in education evident among the general Irish population.<sup>54</sup> John even indicates that almost one in every three individuals in Ireland is involved in the education system.

At the age of twelve, post-primary education begins in Ireland. It comprises of six years: three years Junior Cycle followed by a Junior Certificate or the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement,<sup>55</sup> and two or three-year Senior Cycle followed by three types of Leaving Certificates. This Senior Cycle is divided into three main streams: the highest level is Secondary, followed by Vocational and then Comprehensive. The first year of the three-year Senior Cycle is called Transition Year. It is optional and “provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal examinations.”<sup>56</sup> In fact, it is a year which helps pupils decide which course of education they wish to pursue.

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<sup>53</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-primary-education-21\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-primary-education-21_en)

<sup>54</sup> John Coolahan, *Irish Education: its history and Structure*, (Dublin: ColourBooks Limited, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> There has been an introduction of a newly reformed Junior Cycle in Ireland with a reformed testing system called the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. For more information, please visit:

<https://www.ict.ie/perch/resources/about/jcpa-handbook.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> <http://cityofdublin.etb.ie/further-education/second-level/>

Pupils who are at the age of seventeen or eighteen complete either the traditional Leaving Certificate (LC) which allows a direct entry to universities, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) which focuses more on technical subjects and leads to more specified technical careers and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA) which follows a more person-centered course involving a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject based structure.<sup>57</sup>

In summary, the main highlights of the Irish Education System which are clearly documented in Table 2 below<sup>58</sup> are as follows:

- 1- Primary education begins at a very early age, i.e., at the age of four, unlike in Germany, which starts at the age of six.
- 2- Primary education lasts eight years until the age of twelve. In Germany, excluding Berlin and Brandenburg, it lasts only 4 years.
- 3- Pupils do not choose a line of education until after the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement and even more until after a transition year at the age of fifteen or sixteen if they wish. Therefore, the Irish education system shapes the lives of pupils for as long as eleven years before it requires them to decide on their future through testing and experimenting. In Germany, pupils get guided into different lines of secondary school education after 4 years of primary education.
- 4- For all pupils with a LCVP or LCA (Vocational and technical certificates), they could pursue further education and ultimately, if successful, go to universities, where pupils with the traditional Leaving Certificate can automatically enroll in. In fact, Ireland sends more students to third level education than any other country in the European Union.<sup>59</sup> Germany, too, allows its vocational and technical pupils to reach third level education.
- 5- The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement is designed to test pupils on their broad Junior Cycle curriculum which they follow in order to acquire the knowledge and skills they need for their next decisive steps in their education.

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<sup>57</sup>[https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Senior-Cycle-/Syllabuses-and-Guidelines/lca\\_programme\\_statement.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Senior-Cycle-/Syllabuses-and-Guidelines/lca_programme_statement.pdf)

<sup>58</sup>This detailed Table is taken from the OECD Education Website:  
<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=IRL>

<sup>59</sup><https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/are-we-sending-too-many-young-people-to-third-level-1.3499432>

6- Very few pupils switch lines of education until the age of eighteen. They get enough time and resources to decide on their future. The European statistics show that Ireland has exceeded the Europe 2020 target of 40% of people aged 30-34 holding a higher education degree or equivalent qualification, whereas Germany has missed the target by more than 10%.<sup>60</sup>

**TABLE 2**

Irish Education System					
	Grade			Age	
Third Level		University	Further Education College		19+
Senior Cycle	12th	Leaving Certificate Programme	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme	Leaving Certificate Applied	18
	11th				17
	10th	Transition Year			15/16
Junior Cycle	9th	Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement			14
	8th				13
	7th				12
Primary Sector	6th	Primary Schooling			11
	5th				10
	4th				9
	3rd				8
	2nd				7
	1st				6
	Senior Infants				5
	Junior Infants				4
Pre-Primary School		Day Nursery, Daycare Staff			3
					2
					1

## 1.2A A Brief Historical Overview of the Irish School System

<sup>60</sup><https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/de/publications-and-resources/statistics-and-indicators/statistics-and-graphs/tertiary-attainment>



The education in Ireland has been through different political, social, economic, and religious turmoil since the 18<sup>th</sup> century which has helped shape its structure as it currently is. On the political front, there was the desire of the British Empire to strengthen the link with its neighboring colony and have it as a testing arena for its own education. On the social and economic fronts, the widespread poverty at that time was seen to be better controlled through literacy and numeracy among the Irish population. Thirdly, the struggle between the Protestant and Catholic churches was strongly present in pushing their own beliefs and influences among their followers in Ireland.<sup>61</sup> All these factors led to the creation of a national system of Education in 1831 which goal was to unite all children (Protestant and Catholic) in a system run by the state. During that period, 15% of the schools were state-funded and the rest were informal and even secretive known as Hedge Schools.<sup>62</sup> So in other words, the introduction of that national education system's aim was the civilization, socialization, assimilation, politicization, and the reproduction of colonial values within the Irish population in order to make them easy to govern. This led to the creation of more organized official schools which nonetheless faced further fierce battles between the two different religious groups as to who exercises more religious and moral influence on the pupils. These battles have led to protestant schools remaining outside the national system and the catholic schools further being managed by the same faith principals and teachers. By 1900, the system had become denominational in practice with nearly 65 % of schools denominationally homogeneous while 80 % had clerical managers.<sup>63</sup> By that time, most curriculum decisions were held in Westminster in England which did not suit the aspiration of the Irish population. However, the introduction of that system has led to the reduction of illiteracy among children aged 5 from 50% to less than 20%.<sup>64</sup> The 6 years of primary education were divided according to the sets of books made for each year. They contained several topics on Arithmetic, English grammar, natural history, political economy, geographical material, biblical stories and so on.<sup>65</sup> The first three years focused solely on reading, writing, spelling,

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<sup>61</sup> Tom Walsh, *The National System of Education, 1831-2000*. In *Essays in the History of Irish Education*, Ed. Brendan Walsh, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p.8.

<sup>62</sup>P. Dowling, *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, (Dublin, 1935), p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> 68th Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for 1901, H.C. 1902, [Cd. 1198], 17–18.

<sup>64</sup> 66th Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for 1899–1900, H.C. 1900, [Cd. 287], Section II, Appendix M, 116.

<sup>65</sup> Coolahan, p. 20.

and Arithmetic. 100 days of attendance per year as well as certain age restrictions were reinforced alongside examination in order for a pupil to move on to a higher level.<sup>66</sup> Education during that time was criticized to be less pragmatic on the one hand (although there were some attempts to introduce agricultural education in the curriculum) and did not focus on the Irish language and culture on the other hand. Drawing, elementary science and manual training were introduced in 1900 yet these were again abandoned straight after the Irish Independence in 1922.<sup>67</sup>

The power of the Catholic church grew over the Irish education system at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the reduction of the protestant population and the declaration of the state that the schooling system was under its direct supervision and that of the church. With the Irish independence, the schooling system introduced several subjects which revived the Irish language and the sense of Irish nationhood.<sup>68</sup> After the reforms of Vatican II, the emergence of National Parents' Council Primary and the teachers union towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more democratic structures within the education system have emerged although the church kept on owning a consulting power there.<sup>69</sup> The engagement of the Irish government with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Economic Community (EEC) has shifted the educational purposes in Ireland to have a more human capital and economic perspective. In 1967, the Education Minister, Mr. O'Malley, made it clear that Ireland cannot afford not to spend on education as the richer nations do.<sup>70</sup> He officially made the secondary schooling system free of charge, which gave a significant boost to that level of education. Furthermore, Tom Walsh writes that a process of social partnership and consultation between the government, employers and trade unions underpinned industrial relations and education policy development from the 1980s.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Tom Walsh, p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> L. O'Flaherty, 'Religious Control of Schooling in Ireland: Some Policy Issues in Review', *Irish Educational Studies*, Spring 1994, 13, 62–70; P. Clancy, 'Education Policy' in S. Quinn, P. Kennedy, A. O'Donnell and G. Kiely (Eds.), *Contemporary Irish Social Policy*, (Dublin, 1999), 72–107.

<sup>70</sup> D. O'Malley, 'University Education in Dublin—Statement of Minister for Education', 18th April 1967. *Studies*, Summer 1967, LVI, 222, 113– 21, 115.

<sup>71</sup> Tom Walsh, p. 13.

By analyzing the curriculum and school development of the Irish school system in more details since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one sees that even with the introduction of the national system of Education in 1831, the curriculum was quite basic focusing on moral, literacy and religious education while the attendance was very poor standing at 38%, even as late as 1870. Teaching was in English and very few pupils proceeded to higher levels of education.<sup>72</sup> The importance of training teachers was however center to this development. By 1870, more than 25 interdenominational District Model Schools were founded ‘to promote the united education of Protestants and Roman Catholics in Common Schools; to exhibit the best examples of National Schools; and to give preparatory training to young teachers.’<sup>73</sup> Teachers were well trained and highly regarded in the Irish society. In 1868, the Irish National Teacher’s Association was established to look after the rights and pay conditions of every Irish teacher. Teachers were more rewarded in terms of additional payments should their pupils brought about better marks (Payment-by-result).<sup>74</sup> The development of the curriculum toward the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with more focus on mechanical and exam-oriented instruction helped improve the attendance of pupils, the quality of teaching, and reduce the illiteracy rate. Yet that system of payment-by-result had also its negative impact on the system by fostering “a narrow approach to the curriculum, both in terms of content and methodology. It made no allowance for differences between pupils or between schools.”<sup>75</sup> It was criticized for being too mechanistic and far from the realities of life and work outside school.

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a movement towards child-centered and more practical education. In 1900, there was a new Revised Programme for National Schools which secured new manual and practical subjects, changed the focus on existing subjects, altered the methodologies employed to ensure an emphasis on activity and discovery learning and allowed for local adaptation of content. The education of children in the infant classes were emphasized, where the

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<sup>72</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Ireland), H.C. 1870, [C.-6], Volume 1.

<sup>73</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Ireland), H.C. 1870, [C.-6] Conclusions and Recommendations Contained in the General Report, Volume 1, Part V, 427.

<sup>74</sup> That was introduced by the Powis Commission, a Royal Commission of Inquiry in 1870, which inquired into the Education system in Ireland.

<sup>75</sup> A. Hyland and K. Milne, *Irish Educational Documents—Volume 1. Selection of Extracts from Documents relating to the History of Irish Education from the Earliest Times to 1922*, (Dublin, 1987), 128.

focus on enjoyment and hands-on activity became important.<sup>76</sup> This has been even more materialized in 1948 with the Revised Programme for Infants which stated:

The purpose of the infant school is to provide for young children the environment, opportunities and activities most favorable to their full development. Infant teaching, if it is to be successful, must be based on the young child's instinctive urge to play, to talk, to imitate, to manipulate materials, to make and do things.<sup>77</sup>

After the Independence of Ireland, the number of some compulsory subjects were reduced, while the Irish language was made necessary to the development of the sense of nationalism and identity for the Irish people, as stated above. The State exercised more control over the schooling system, introduced teacher registration and paid teacher salaries. Compulsory attendance for pupils under 14 years of age saw the light and the Vocational School system as well as both the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate Examination were created.<sup>78</sup> In fact, the Irish department of Education was established in 1924 to co-ordinate primary, secondary and technical education branches under the same Minister for Education.

In 1943, the Primary Certificate examination was introduced on a compulsory basis after 6 years of learning. With its focus on written examination in Irish, English, and Arithmetic, it was proven to have a more negative effect on the narrowing of the curriculum which led to its abolition in 1967.

The secondary schooling in Ireland did not develop in the way the national schools did. The former was privatized until 1964. The number of pupils in 1924 moving from the national schools to the secondary was less than 5%, in 1935 about 7% and in 1960 just over 10%.<sup>79</sup> Among these secondary school pupils, those who received scholarship were just over 3%. The Intermediate Education Act of 1878 had only allowed the State to disburse indirect funding only on the basis of the success rates of the pupils at the public examinations.<sup>80</sup> The curriculum of these schools was mainly humanist, language and literary centered. The main goal of these pupils is to acquire

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<sup>76</sup> Tom Walsh, p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> Department of Education, *The Infant School—Notes for Teachers*, (Dublin, 1951), 3.

<sup>78</sup> Adrian E. Raftery and Michael Hout, *Maximally maintained inequality: Expansion, reform and opportunity in Irish education, 1921-1975*. *Sociology of Education* 66: 41-62.

<sup>79</sup> Coolahan, p. 47.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78.

secure careers in the professions and public service rather than in commerce or industry, hence the lack of focus on mathematical, scientific, or modern topics. Teaching at this secondary level was unattractive and most teachers were mainly clerics. The age of entry to secondary schooling varied between 13 and 19. The vast majority of those attended secondary schooling dropped out before reaching the senior cycle.

As seen above, throughout the sixties of the twentieth century, the state took many actions to improve the education system by making the secondary schooling available for all social classes and free in order to compete with the industrial growth and attract more foreign investment.<sup>81</sup> By 1969, the vocational schools, as well as the new comprehensive schools, were offering the upper-secondary Leaving Certificate programme which then included engineering, construction studies, technical drawing and home economics as subjects.<sup>82</sup> With the introduction of the new curriculum in 1971, the Irish education further shifted its emphasis on child-centered education, discovery learning and what the child can learn rather than what the child should learn.<sup>83</sup> Towards the end of the seventies, the attendance at secondary schooling doubled, which meant dropping out after primary education was reduced dramatically. The legal age of leaving school was set at 15. Moreover, the traditional restrictions on vocational education were abolished, a comprehensive curriculum was founded, and vocational schools were brought within the ambit of a more integrated post-primary system, which then saw the further creation of community schools that were designed to deliver a comprehensive curriculum, incorporating both academic and vocational subjects.<sup>84</sup> The seventies witnessed a variety of curriculum and testing activities. Subject teachers, university personnel and members of the Irish Department of Education inspectorate came together, sponsored by the Department of Education, to undertake these activities. The Intermediate Certificate and the Group Certification which were brought in to test pupils after two or three years of junior secondary school

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<sup>81</sup> Raftery and Hout, p.44.

<sup>82</sup> Barney O'Reilly, *Education Policy in Ireland since the 1940s*. In *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 2012, p. 258.

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/history-in-primary-school-a-future-for-our-past/>

<sup>84</sup> John Walsh, Eamon de Valera, 1921–75. In *The National University of Ireland 1908–2008 Centenary Essays*, edited by Tom Dunne, John Coolahan, Maurice Manning and Gearoid O Tuathaigh, (Dublin: UCD Press, 2008), p. 130-145.

were proven to be incoherent and unmatching to the respective curriculum.<sup>85</sup> These two testing were finally replaced in 1989 by the Junior Leaving Certificate after 3 years of junior secondary schooling or Junior Cycle.

In 1999, a primary curriculum revision was held which was based on its former one and was designed to nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her life - spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical.<sup>86</sup> With the new Educational Act of 2000, the legal school attendance age was set at 16, thus at the end of the Junior Cycle.

Finally, it is said that the structure of the education system in the Republic of Ireland is unique among countries of the European Union because private institutions have been publicly funded, where “...control of education has been ceded away from the public and given to an authority that does not seek its mandate from the public will”.<sup>87</sup>

## **1.2B The Junior to Senior Cycle Transition**

We have already seen in the previous section how the Primary Certificate after 6 years of primary education was abolished in 1967 as it was proven to have a negative impact on the curriculum format and pupils’ development. Pupils learnt specifically to pass the exam and the curriculum was consequently narrowed to cater for the exam. Since then, Irish pupils have gotten transferred from primary to secondary schooling at the age of 12 after almost 8 years of primary education: junior infant, senior infant and first to sixth class. The aim of the primary education is to provide a broad learning experience and encourages a rich variety of approaches to teaching and learning that cater for the different needs of individual children. The revised curriculum of 1999 was designed to nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her life.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> T. Crooks und J. McKernan, *The Challenge of Change: Curriculum Development in Irish Post-primary Schools 1970-1984*, (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration in association with IACD, 1984), p.99.

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Primary/>

<sup>87</sup> D. O’Sullivan, *Cultural Politics and Irish Education since the 1950’s* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2005), p. 212.

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Primary/>

Without an official examination, Irish pupils begin their post-primary education at the age of 12. This post-primary education sector comprises of secondary, ETB schools and community colleges. Secondary schools are privately owned and managed. ETB schools are state-established and administered by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), while community colleges are managed by Boards of Management of differing compositions.<sup>89</sup> The Post-Primary, as we know, comprises of 3-year Junior Cycle, followed by the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement examination (the first official state examination at school), then an optional transition year and finally 2-year Senior Cycle, followed by either the LC, LCA or LCVP.

The main objective of the Junior Cycle is for pupils to complete a broad and balanced curriculum, and to develop the knowledge and skills that will enable them to proceed to Senior Cycle education.<sup>90</sup> Thus, even up to the age of 15 or 16, pupils are still offered general and broad knowledge without being directed into a particular field of education, contrary to the philosophy of the German schooling system.

A new Framework for Junior Cycle has been adopted since September 2014 to make significant changes to the old Junior Cycle. It will operate in schools alongside the programmes based around the existing Junior Certificate. According to the National Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Ireland, this framework provides the basis for post-primary schools to plan quality, inclusive and relevant education programmes with improved learning experiences for all pupils, including those with special educational needs.<sup>91</sup> The Junior Certificate would then be replaced by the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) on a phased basis until 2020. There is a classroom-based component to the assessment which is based on work completed by the student during second and third year. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is developing a new report card for parents which will give them much more information about their child's learning progress.<sup>92</sup>

Eight principles underpin the Framework for Junior Cycle. These principles listed below will inform the planning for as well as the development and the implementation of junior cycle programmes in all schools:

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> <https://ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/framework-for-junior-cycle>

<sup>92</sup> [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state\\_examinations/junior\\_certificate\\_programme.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state_examinations/junior_certificate_programme.html)

- 1- Learning to Learn: High quality curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning support students in developing greater independence in learning and in meeting the challenges of life beyond school, of further education, and of working life.
- 2- Choice and Flexibility: The school's junior cycle programme is broad enough to offer a wide range of learning experiences to all, and flexible enough to offer choice to meet the needs of students.
- 3- Quality: All students experience a high-quality education, characterized by high expectations of learners and the pursuit of excellence.
- 4- Creativity and innovation: Curriculum, assessment, teaching, and learning provide opportunities for students to be creative and innovative.
- 5- Engagement and participation: The experience of curriculum, assessment, teaching, and learning encourages participation, generates engagement and enthusiasm, and connects with life outside the school.
- 6- Continuity and development: Curriculum, assessment, teaching, and learning enables students to build on their learning to date, recognizes their progress in learning and supports their future learning.
- 7- Inclusive education: The educational experience is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation, and outcomes for all.
- 8- Wellbeing: The student experience contributes directly to their physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing and resilience. Learning takes place in a climate focused on collective wellbeing of school, community, and society.

Points 2, 5, 6 and 7 show how that the Junior Cycle is meant to be inclusive to all pupils yet remains attractive and supportive in every step. It offers broad topics which cater for a wide range of learning experience in order to have something for everyone regardless of their ambitions or skills. That newly organized cycle even gives details of the skills that pupils are expected to develop: Being Literate, Managing Oneself, Staying Well, Managing Information and Thinking, Being Numerate, Being Creative, Working with others, Learning with others, and Communicating.<sup>93</sup> What makes this new Junior Cycle so attractive to pupils is mainly its active and personally-fitted curriculum. As defined by the NCCA, it features revised subjects and short courses

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*



and new approaches to assessment and reporting. Schools have more freedom to design junior cycle programmes that meet the learning needs of all pupils. That new cycle means that the curriculum available in their schools is a mix of 34 subjects and short courses<sup>94</sup> as well as other learning experiences.<sup>95</sup> Every school can, through widely defined curriculum choices, adapt its learning materials to suit the needs of almost every pupil. During second and third year, students complete several classroom-based assessments, which get added to the Junior Certificate marking system. For a small group of students with special educational needs, priority learning units (PLU) are provided. These components enable the statements of learning and key skills to become a reality for the students throughout their three-year junior cycle.

Moreover, that new Cycle includes The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) which projects are related to identifying potential early school leavers and devising a programme suitable to their needs.<sup>96</sup> Since its introduction in 1996, the programme has expanded from 32 schools to 240 schools in 2010. It offers schools and teachers an even more flexible approach than a traditional subject-based curriculum. While recognizing that all pupils are unique individuals with different learning interests, strengths, ways of learning, and challenges, schools using the JCSP have identified it as a suitable programme for those who have difficulties in the areas of literacy and numeracy, with learning disabilities which hinder them from fully participating in and benefiting from the Junior Cycle, who show clear signs of not coping with the experience of school at Junior Cycle and whose attendance and/or behaviour and attitude indicate a considerable degree of disengagement from school. Pupils participating in the JCSP follow the same subject syllabuses, though often fewer in number, and are assessed in the same way as their Junior Cycle peers in the Junior Certificate examinations. They gain a Junior Certificate outlining their achievements in the subjects taken but, in addition, they receive the Student Profile, which outlines the skills, knowledge and achievements that they have attained during the course of the programme.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> <https://curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Short-Courses/>

<sup>95</sup> <https://curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/>

<sup>96</sup> [https://ncca.ie/media/2496/the\\_revised\\_jcsp\\_programme\\_statement\\_.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/2496/the_revised_jcsp_programme_statement_.pdf)

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

In the new Junior Cycle, there will be two qualifications. One, a replacement for the current Junior Certificate. The other, designed for students with special educational needs who currently cannot access the Junior Certificate.

After examining the new transition period set up by the Irish Department of Education and Skills, some of the results of the Irish pupils at the international examinations mentioned in the German section above will be presented. In 2011 and 2016 Ireland took part in the PIRLS international testing. In 2016, 148 schools with 4,607 pupils participated in the paper-based written test. Ireland managed to take 4<sup>th</sup> place internationally, whereas Germany 27<sup>th</sup>.<sup>98</sup> Ireland's average score of 567 on PIRLS 2016 is 15 points higher than the comparable national score in 2011. This difference is statistically significant and larger than the increase found in most countries.<sup>99</sup> In 2015, TIMSS (mentioned in Section 1.1B of this thesis) was also taken by Irish pupils. Irish fourth-class students ranked 9<sup>th</sup> out of 49 countries in Mathematics (up from 17<sup>th</sup> out of 50 countries in 2011) and 19<sup>th</sup> of 47 countries in science (broadly consistent with 22<sup>nd</sup> position out of the 50 countries that participated in 2011). Ireland performed much better in Mathematics than in Germany yet in science they almost landed at the same level.

Comparing the 15-year-old Irish pupils' performance in the PISA<sup>100</sup> testing in 2018 with that of Germany, we can see that while Ireland and Germany have produced similar results in Mathematics and Science, Ireland has overperformed in Reading skills by 20 points ranking it at 7<sup>th</sup> place and Germany at 19<sup>th</sup> place. Furthermore, in 2015 Germany performed better than Ireland in both Science and Mathematics, yet in 2018 Ireland took the lead. All in all, primary and secondary Irish pupils (9 and 15 years old) performed much better in Reading in 2016 and 2018. In Mathematics and Science, the performance of these Irish pupils in both years proved to be more promising than that of Germany since the latter lost its ranking places to lower ones.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pirls/pirls2016/tables/pirls2016\\_table01.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pirls/pirls2016/tables/pirls2016_table01.asp)

<sup>99</sup> [https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/International-Statistical-Reports/stats\\_pirls\\_2016\\_public\\_briefing\\_note.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/International-Statistical-Reports/stats_pirls_2016_public_briefing_note.pdf)

<sup>100</sup> The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) examines what students know in reading, mathematics and science, and what they can do with what they know. It provides the most comprehensive and rigorous international assessment of student learning outcomes to date. Results from PISA indicate the quality and equity of learning outcomes attained around the world and allow educators and policy makers to learn from the policies and practices applied in other countries. (Note from the following PISA website: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/pisa-2018-results.htm>).

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf>

## 1.2C The System of a Simplified Schooling

In 2015, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) invited several renowned educational researchers in Ireland to carry appraisal of the Irish schooling system in order to identify its main strengths, the main shortcomings, and the main opportunities for development.<sup>102</sup> It has been shown that due to the great esteem which teachers receive in the Irish society and the involvement of parents and several education unions in the Irish Education System, that there have been constant calls for renewal and ways to meet the demands of all pupils within the system. For instance, there has been a new focus on early childhood education up to the age of 4 through offering new materials and trainings for teachers, a free education year for 3-year-old kids and more encouragement for parents to resume work at a part or a full-time basis.<sup>103</sup> The primary education level which lasts from age 4 to 12 has been witnessing a reform process, with an initial emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Consequently, a new Primary Language Curriculum focusing on oral, reading, writing, Mathematics and Religions/Beliefs/Ethics came to light from 2015 to 2019 - a curriculum which some of its contents were developed by teachers and pupils alike.<sup>104</sup> Work has not been completed yet as demands for "more" to be included in the primary school curriculum are manifesting by providing a more flexible approach to time allocation. The reform, as shown in the previous section, has also been materialized in the Junior Cycle with the implementation of the new framework and replacement of the old Junior Certificate with the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). This is also an ongoing development which will last until 2022 and will bring about a mixture of new school-based assessments, new choices, new programme for potential school leavers, and a better transition into the Senior Cycle. At that Senior Cycle, an implementation of a new programme has been more complicated, while the assessment for entry into third level education is done through external examiners and approved by the universities and third level colleges. Two qualities are striking at that senior level: 1-

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<sup>102</sup> John Coolahan, Sheelagh Drudy, Padraig Hogan, Seamus McGuinness and Aine Hyland, *Towards a Better Future, A Review of the Irish School System*, (Dublin: The Irish Primary Principals Network and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, 2017), IX.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37 and chapter I.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

The Transition Year,<sup>105</sup> mentioned above, which has been growing in popularity 2- The Leaving Certificate Applied or LCA, which although it does not entitle pupils to transfer directly into universities, was developed to cater for pupils who are in danger of dropping out.<sup>106</sup> As we already know, the Senior Cycle caters for three types of pupils who will eventually take on either the LCA, LC or LCVP. All three certificate programmes last two years. 60% of pupils go for the LC (the equivalent of Abitur in Germany) where the emphasis is heavily concentrated on the end-of-cycle examination. As for the LCVP programme (which is more like the Berufsschule) which focuses more on development business and enterprise skills, 30 to 35% of pupils opt for it. Last but not least, almost 6% take on the LCA which involves a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject-based structure and that number has been falling in recent years.<sup>107</sup>

In identifying how the Irish system has become more simplified than that of the German, it is important to highlight three main facts:

- 1- Only after the abolishment of the Primary Certificate Examination in 1967 and the introduction of a new primary curriculum in 1971 that new opportunities for schools to develop assessment policies free from the demand of centrally devised examination system saw the light.
- 2- The Junior Cycle was the result of a complex and confusing post primary education which saw the emergence of a comprehensive school in 1964,<sup>108</sup> with already-existing secondary and vocational schools. Each had its own distinctive programmes and examinations with absence of cooperation and interaction. After years of process and discussion, these three schools came together to offer a unified Junior Cycle programme and examination system in 1989.

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<sup>105</sup> The TY which was founded in the early 1970s is taken by almost 60% of Senior Cycle pupils. *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>108</sup> E. Randles, *Post-Primary Education in Ireland 1957-1970*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1975).

- 3- Assessment, whether formative or summative,<sup>109</sup> is being designed to be smoothly integrated into the Irish school system. “Teaching to test” can have very negative effects on both teacher and pupils. Assessment forms an integral component of the curriculum development process, yet its purpose is only to promote and support high-quality teaching and learning.<sup>110</sup>

There is an ongoing desire for the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland to implement new policies and strategies which see a simplified and attractive school system to all parties involved. There have been several ongoing discussions to reform the Senior Cycle in Ireland to make it less oriented towards summative assessment and more towards formative one.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps with the success of the Junior Cycle reform, the need to implement changes to the Senior Cycle structure and assessment will become more necessary.

Although Ireland went through a deep recession after the economic crisis in 2008/2009 and the budget for Education did not increase, the calls to reform and create a more inclusive education system have not stopped. Inclusion means working on an equal education system where disadvantaged pupils, due to disability, sexual orientation, poverty, ethnic and religious background, and gender, get the same equal chances and additional support in realizing their potentials.<sup>112</sup> The easiest way in that matter would be to exclude pupils who do not apparently fit into a system. Yet simplifying an education system requires efforts on all parties to include the disadvantaged ones who can benefit from those who excel in learning within the same schooling system rather than seclude and place them in different matching groups.

The simplified Irish education system is proven to be successful in bringing more secondary school pupils into third level education than many other countries in Europe and surely in raising the number of pupils in secondary schooling in the last fifty years.<sup>113</sup> In 1965/66, the educational participation numbers were 504,865 at primary, 142,983 at second level and 20,698 at third level. In 2014/2015, the numbers were

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<sup>109</sup> Formative Assessment takes place on a regular basis during the school year whereas Summative Assessment at the end of a school year or cycle.

<sup>110</sup> John Coolahan et al, 2017, p. 59.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, chapter 5.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, chapter 7.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p. 114.

544,696 at primary (an increase of 8%), 372,296 at secondary (an increase of 160%) and 173,649 at third level (an increase of 739%), while the population increase was at 61%.

A simplified schooling for the Irish pupils means a system where assessment serves the curriculum, not dominate it; where assessment employs a combination of modes and techniques so as to match the intended programme outcomes; where conducting assessment should form the basis for improving teaching and learning practices;<sup>114</sup> where the roads and choices are clear and goals are pleasure to achieve without stress and confusion; and where inclusion becomes a priority rather than developing ways of secluding those who do not fit in from an early age.

The Irish system is by no means perfect, yet it has been forward in creating ways of tackling the issue of dropping out in secondary levels through programmes within the school system. The Junior Certificate School Programme at the Junior Cycle as well as the Leaving Certificate Applied at the Senior Cycle are clear examples of these endeavors. The rate of school dropouts in Ireland has halved in the last 15 years, which somehow show that the policies which Ireland are adopting are leaving some positive effects.

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187.

## 2. Personal decision: Dropping out in Germany vs. Ireland

After presenting the German and Irish school systems and their various transitional steps, it is important now to shed some light on the overall dropout phenomenon in both these countries. This should help us get an understanding of the scale of the personal decisions of these upper secondary school pupils to leave school.

Both Ireland and Germany share the same rule when it comes to the legal age of leaving school. When a pupil accomplishes the Sekundarstufe I (in Germany) or the Junior Cycle (in Ireland), in other words when one reaches the age of 15 or 16, he or she is legally entitled to leave school, in the hope of having already accomplished either the Mittleschulabschluss or Mittlere Schulabschluss (in Germany) or the Junior Certificate (in Ireland).

When it comes to comparing dropping out between Germany and Ireland, it seems that Ireland has improved its numbers dramatically in the last ten years. In fact, the percentage of pupils dropped out of school in 2020 stood at about 5% of young people aged 18 to 24.<sup>115</sup> In Germany however that number was still hovering at around 10%, above the European average, as shown in Graph 1 below. Having said that, it is worthy to note that, among others, due to the various German vocational and technical programs, Germany has 3,2% unemployment rate while Ireland stands at almost 5%.<sup>116</sup> In other words, the fact that a country has a lower dropout rate does not automatically or necessarily mean that it has a lower unemployment rate. One cannot nonetheless ignore that Ireland ranks among the top three countries in Europe in the number of students in third level education (at about 58%) whereas Germany lies under 55%.<sup>117</sup>

### GRAPH 1

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<sup>115</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early leavers from education and training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training)

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268830/unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/>

<sup>117</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Tertiary educational attainment, by country, 2008 and 2018 \(%25 of the population\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Tertiary_educational_attainment,_by_country,_2008_and_2018_(%25_of_the_population).png)



[ec.europa.eu/eurostat](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat)

By examining the difference in dropping out of female and male pupils between Germany and Ireland, one can notice that there is no significant difference in Ireland, although ten years ago male dropouts used to be more than their female counterparts. Whereas in Germany, female dropouts managed to be below the 10% mark while male dropouts are still above, reaching almost 12%.

What is striking to note in the Eurostat data of 2020 is the analysis of dropping out by labor status,<sup>118</sup> in other words whether the dropout who is now between the age of 18 and 24 is currently employed, looking for work or does not want to work. It is worthy to remark that in Germany almost half the dropouts are employed, and more than half of the other half of the dropouts would like to work. In Ireland however, the highest proportion of dropouts are those who do not want to work and the smallest one constitutes those who are employed. The Irish figures are nonetheless below the European average, as we know, while the German ones reflect better employment outlook for the dropouts. (See Graph 2)

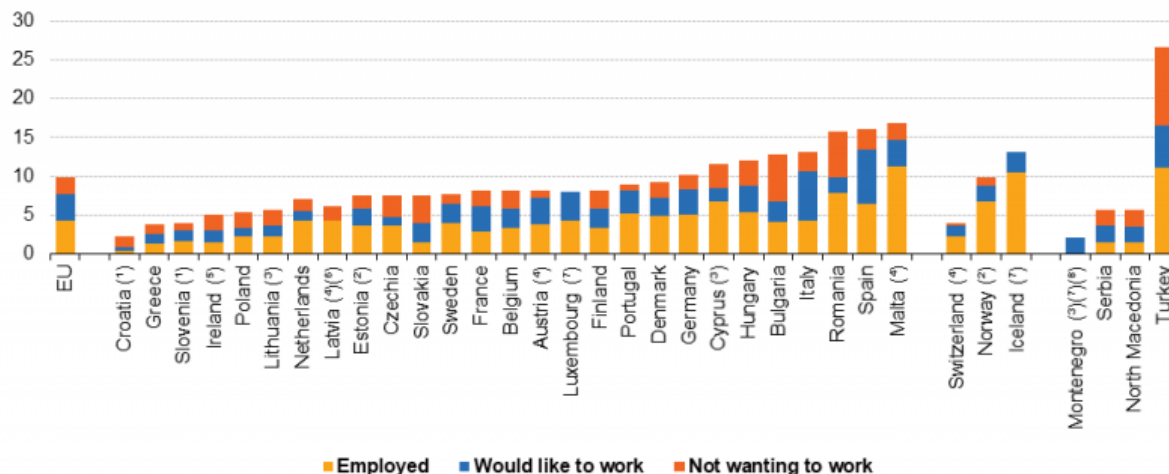
<sup>118</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early leavers from education and training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training)



## GRAPH 2

### Distribution of early leavers from education and training by labour status, 2020

(% of population aged 18-24)



Note: ranked on overall share of early leavers.

(¹) Low reliability.

(²) Not wanting to work and would like to work: low reliability.

(³) Would like to work: low reliability.

(⁴) Not wanting to work: low reliability.

(⁵) Employed: low reliability.

(⁶) Would like to work: not available due to a very low reliability.

(⁷) Not wanting to work: not available due to a very low reliability.

(⁸) Employed: not available due to a very low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifse\_14)

eurostat 

Now after examining several studies in Germany and Ireland relating to the personal decision as to why a pupil drops out, one can easily notice many similarities and differences. Prof. Dale was accurate in stating that school dropouts are not a homogeneous group. They are associated with a wide range of economic and social disadvantages.<sup>119</sup> These are related to specific backgrounds where a dropout grows and will be highlighted in the following sections.

## 2.1 The German and Irish Home Background

The home and family backgrounds play a crucial role in the dropout phenomenon in both Germany and Ireland regardless of their cultural differences. What is meant by

<sup>119</sup> Roger Dale, p. 6.

the deficiencies of this background can be clearly summarized by Clive Wilkinson who divide them into several areas:<sup>120</sup>

- a- Absence of communication within the family
- b- Absence of value, motivation, expectation, and interest
- c- Absence of economical success
- d- Absence of residential security

Starting with the German perspective, pedagogues such as Ricking, Hillenbrand, Knollmann, Baier, Dunkake and others take on this topic in their relative studies and pinpoint to the importance of this home factor. Their focus was placed on the psychological disturbance or the physical sicknesses of the parents due for instance to drug consumption,<sup>121</sup> their separation or divorce,<sup>122</sup> their lack of control and support which can lead to various forms of conflict and violence,<sup>123</sup> their strict, unjust, and inconsistent parental style,<sup>124</sup> their unemployment,<sup>125</sup> and their low educational level.<sup>126</sup> Another main influential factor can be related to the immigration background of some pupils. According to OECD in 2018, 22% of German students had an

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<sup>120</sup> Clive Wilkinson, *The Drop Out Society, Young People on the Margin*, (London: Youth Work Press, 1995), p. 104.

<sup>121</sup> Heinrich Ricking, *Desintegration in Zeiten der Inklusion. Neue Erkenntnisse zum Dropout und ihre Konsequenzen für die schulische Förderung benachteiligter Schüler*, (Oldenburg: Oldenburger VorDrucke, 2011), p. 590.

<sup>122</sup> Clemens Hillenbrand und Heinrich Ricking, *Schulabbruch: Ursachen – Entwicklung – Prävention. Ergebnisse US amerikanischer und deutscher Forschungen*. In: Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, 2011, 57 (2), p. 153-172 und Ulrike Pokorny, *Kurzfristige Folgen elterlicher Scheidung/Trennung für die Kinder*. In: Harald Werneck und Sonja Werneck-Rohrer (Hg.): *Psychologie der Scheidung und Trennung. Theoretische Modelle, empirische Befunde und Implikationen für die Praxis*. 2., korrigierte Aufl. Wien: Facultas, 2011, p. 81-88.

<sup>123</sup> Martin Knollmann, Kinan Al-Mouhtasseb und Johannes Hebebrand, *Schulverweigerung und psychische Störungen: Merkmale von schulverweigernden Kindern und Jugendlichen und ihren Familien einer kinder- und jugend psychiatrischen Schulverweigererambulanz*. In: *Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie* 58, 2009 (6), p. 434-449.

<sup>124</sup> Dirk Baier, Christian Pfeiffer, Michael Windzio, und Susann Rabold, *Schülerbefragung 2005: Gewalterfahrungen, Schulabsentismus und Medienkonsum von Kindern und Jugendlichen. Abschlussbericht über eine repräsentative Befragung von Schülerinnen und Schülern der 4. und 9. Jahrgangsstufe*. Hannover, 2006.

<sup>125</sup> Ricking, 2011.

<sup>126</sup> Imke Dunkake, *Der Einfluss der Familie auf das Schulschwänzen. Theoretische und empirische Analysen unter Anwendung der Theorien abweichenden Verhaltens*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften/GWV Fachverlage GmbH, Wiesbaden 2007.

immigrant background, up from 18% in 2009.<sup>127</sup> Sälzer has revealed that in Germany migrant children tend to drop out at a higher rate than native children.<sup>128</sup> Some of the negative additional causal factors for dropouts with migration background are language, cultural differences (parental expectation), traditions, and parental contact barrier with educators, as also argued by Hintz et al.<sup>129</sup> This topic falls into the discussion of “Acculturation” which refers to the integration of immigrants into new societies and what that brings from stress and anxieties.<sup>130</sup>

Moving on to Ireland, Irish researchers, such as Greaney and Kallaghan, made it clear that poverty and deprivation at home is at the heart of dropping out.<sup>131</sup> The association between negative home factors and disengagement from education has been even confirmed by other findings, which were carried out by Smyth, McCoy, and Watson.<sup>132</sup> They see that turning into a dropout can become a forced decision made by harsh circumstances at home. The circumstances can also be related to drug consumption, violence, and unfair parental style. To confirm further the similarities with the German home circumstances, Goodwin revealed in his research in a highly deprived community in the mid-West of Ireland that parents of school dropouts were either unemployed or have a low level of educational attainment.<sup>133</sup> Even if they had an occupation, it showed that it was either a low paid or a short period occupation.<sup>134</sup>

On the topic of belonging to a minority group or having an immigration background, it was shown that pupils from the Traveler Community in Ireland tend to have more health problems than those in the settled communities and “ignorance and prejudice are still deeply entrenched in various sectors of Irish society and these serve to act as

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<sup>127</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018\\_CN\\_DEU.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_DEU.pdf)

<sup>128</sup> C. Sälzer, *Fragestellungen*. In: Schule und Absentismus, (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), p. 79.

<sup>129</sup> Anna-Maria Hintz, Michael Grosche und Matthias Grünke, *Schulmeidendes Verhalten bei Kindern und Jugendlichen mit Migrationshintergrund*, In Heinrich Ricking, Gisela Schulze und Manfred Wittrock (Hg.): Schulabsentismus und Dropout. Erscheinungsformen – Erklärungsansätze – Intervention. (Paderborn: Schöningh (UTB, 3213: Pädagogik), 2009), p. 49-73.

<sup>130</sup> Andreas Zick, *Psychologie der Akkulturation: Neufassung eines Forschungsbereiches*, (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), p. 31-42.

<sup>131</sup> V. Greaney & T. Kallaghan, *Equality of opportunity in Irish schools: A longitudinal study of Irish students*, (Dublin: Educational Research Centre, 1984).

<sup>132</sup> S. McCoy, E. Kelly, & D. Watson, *School Leavers' Survey Report 2006*, (Dublin: ESRI, 2007) and E. Smyth & S. McCoy, *Investing in education: Combating educational disadvantage*, (Dublin: ESRI/Barnardos, 2009).

<sup>133</sup> M. Goodwin, *A longitudinal case study of school experience, educational disadvantage and early school leaving among an entire cohort of entrants to a second level school*, (University College, Dublin, 2003).

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

barriers to efforts towards integration.”<sup>135</sup> These might push pupils to feel unease in their school surroundings, truant and eventually drop out. Regarding pupils with immigration background, there is not extensive research on that topic in Ireland yet. Kelly et al points out in their Irish migrant research of 2010 that dropping out as someone with an immigrant background is less problematic compared to other OECD countries.<sup>136</sup> According to an OECD review in 2018, some 18% of Irish pupils have an immigrant background, up from 8% in 2009.<sup>137</sup>

## **2.2 The German and Irish School Background**

Bad performance is often blamed on pupils themselves, on their lack of diligence or intelligence, whereas schools or teachers escape responsibility. Several studies in Ireland and Germany<sup>138</sup> around that influence have shown that our schools could be predisposing low achievers towards a sense of failure.

An Irish study carried out by Scott Bolt in the inner city of Dublin<sup>139</sup> shows that there was a broad consensus that most teachers did not care about their pupils. It was found that the pupils’ relationship with their teachers is one of the main factors that determined whether they would remain in school to obtain a qualification or drop out. Smyth et al expressed further not only the advantage of formal supports such as guidance counseling to enhance students’ engagement with school but especially the importance of an informal climate within the school and the nature of teacher-student interactions.<sup>140</sup> A interconnection between and among staff and students is seen as key. Research findings in the southwest inner city of Dublin by Downes and Maunsell

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<sup>135</sup> Pavee Point, *Assimilation policies and outcomes: Travellers’ experience*, (Dublin, 2006).

<sup>136</sup> F. Kelly, M. Taguma, M. Kim, and G. Wurzburg, *OECD Review of Migrant Education in Ireland*, 2010, p. 48.

<sup>137</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018\\_CN\\_IRL.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_IRL.pdf)

<sup>138</sup> These will be highlighted below in this section.

<sup>139</sup> Scott Boldt, *Listening and Learning: A Study of the Experiences of Early School Leavers from the Inner City of Dublin* (Dublin: Marino Institute of Education, 1994), p. 54.

<sup>140</sup> E. Smyth, A. Dunne, S. McCoy, and M. Darmody, *Pathways through the Junior Cycle: The experiences of second year students*, (Dublin: Liffey Press/ESRI, 2006), p.190.

have also stressed the absence of confidentiality between pupil and teacher, let alone a mediator who can act as a bridge between the two parties.<sup>141</sup>

These findings have also been found in various German studies carried by Wagner and Baier et al, and could be summed up as follows:

- a- A bad climate in class and a missing social integration<sup>142</sup>
- b- Lack of teacher control, teacher acceptance and school connection<sup>143</sup>
- c- High level of school violence<sup>144</sup>
- d- Repeating class<sup>145</sup>
- e- Bad performance<sup>146</sup>
- f- Changing of schools and even school types<sup>147</sup>

Another important aspect of the school influence on school dropouts is early education – a factor which indirectly and in the long run influences pupils in their upper secondary schooling. The effect of early experiences for staying at school is social and behavioral, rather than merely cognitive.<sup>148</sup> Both Germany and Ireland are attempting to support this early education period financially and with adequate personnel, yet it is not going too far.<sup>149</sup> It was argued that poor-quality early childhood education is worse than none. Dropouts develop at a later stage a disengagement with the school

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<sup>141</sup> P. Downes and C. Maunsell, *Count us in: Tackling early school leaving in South West Inner City Dublin – an integrated response*, (Dublin: Educational Disadvantage Centre, 2007).

<sup>142</sup> Baier et al, 2006

<sup>143</sup> Baier et al, 2006.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Michael Wagner, Imke Dunkake, and Bernd Weiß, *Schulverweigerung. Empirische Analysen zum abweichenden Verhalten von Schülern*. In: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 56 (3), 2004, p. 457-489.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Michael Wagner, *Soziologische Befunde zum Schulabsentismus und Handlungskonsequenzen*. In: *Schulabsentismus und Dropout*, 2009), p. 123-136.

<sup>148</sup> H. Penn, *Early Childhood Education and Care: Key lessons from research for policymakers*, NESSE network, 2009.

<sup>149</sup> Rosaleen Murphy, *Early Childhood Education in Ireland: Change and Challenge*, International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 2015, 8(2), 287-300. And <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/bildung/zukunftsbildung/278950/qualitaet?p=1>

mirrored by not doing homework, truanting, getting suspended, and participating less in school activities.<sup>150</sup>

Some of the key school influences on the dropouts, as highlighted in the GHK study<sup>151</sup> and which affects both Germany and Ireland, are as follows:

- I- High pupil-teacher ratio
- II- Low status of vocational education
- III- Insufficient career advice and guidance for pupils
- IV- Inefficiency of public or private expenditure on education
- V- Lack of training opportunities for teachers
- VI- Lack of teacher skills to work with disengaged students
- VII- Inappropriate pedagogy – focus on curriculum content rather than learners
- VIII- Lack of alternative education provision with formalized accreditation
- IX- Outdated school admission policies
- X- Irrelevance of curriculum perspectives

One can see from these ten points how a teacher is also dependent on the right career financing, direction, training, and motivation. A motivated, satisfied, and well-trained teacher would more likely make a learner-focused curriculum more interesting and appealing to his or her pupils. Teaching as a career should rather be attractive in order for the teacher to feel privileged to work in that position. Moreover, branding some schools as rather low such as vocational schools or Mittelschule can only bring bad feeling to their pupils who would think that they belong to a lower class of education and cannot perform better. Some schools in both countries could also be denying some pupils the possibility to perform better if they are put in groups of low achievers. Therefore, the school admission policies should be investigated to reveal the fairness of their criteria. After all, the real question remains if pupils are getting a clear picture of their education and career options or whether they get directed into roads which they do not find appealing, i.e., they get led into roads of failure.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> GHK, Study on Access to Education and Training, Basic Skills and Early School Leavers: Final Report, DG EAC, 2005, 38/04, Brussels: DG EAC, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc284\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc284_en.pdf)

## 2.3 Peer Relations, Bullying and Personal Pursuits

In addition to the two main backgrounds presented above, peers (or the environment outside school and home) can play a very crucial impact on the pupil's decision to quit. According to an Irish researcher Thomas Kellaghan, when a child comes back from a school to a home where his or her parents are neither present nor supportive to learning, he or she might seek acknowledgment and appreciation from different sources, such as from his or her peers.<sup>152</sup> The pressure from peers and the idea of being left without friends can be too serious to ignore. J. D. Finn stated that it is well documented that dropouts as well as delinquents associate with friends with like behaviour.<sup>153</sup> Research done in Germany by Ricking and Samjeske also shows that contacts with school truants as well as threats from peers can in certain cases lead to dropping out.<sup>154</sup>

Peer pressure and bullying are very much connected. Bullying is understood as repeated, negative acts committed by one or more children against another. These negative acts can be physical or verbal in nature.<sup>155</sup> If the bullied student does not feel safe at school, he or she might rather truant and be safe somewhere else. Knollmann confirms that not feeling safe is accounted as a major reason for dropping out in Germany.<sup>156</sup> The same research results have been found in Ireland by B.J. Byrne where he further states that one needs to pay attention to the fact that the victims of the act of bullying are not only the bullied ones but also the bullies.<sup>157</sup>

Coming now to the last point about personal pursuits, one notices that the older a pupil is the less connected he or she might feel drawn towards school. According to Beck and Malley, most children fail in school not because they lack the necessary cognitive skills but because they feel detached, alienated, and isolated from others and from the

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas Kellaghan, *Relationships between Home Environment and Scholastic Behavior in a Disadvantaged Population*, (Journal of Educational Psychology, December 1977), 69, 754-60.

<sup>153</sup> J. D. Finn, *Withdrawing from School*, *Review of Educational Research*, 1989, 59

<sup>154</sup> Kathrin Samjeske, *Der Einfluss der Peers auf Schulverweigerung*. In Wagner, Michael (Hg.): *Schulabsentismus. Soziologische Analysen zum Einfluss von Familie, Familie, Schule und Freundeskreis*, (Weinheim: Juventa, 2007), p. 177-200.

<sup>155</sup> Susan Limber and Maury Nation, "Bullying Among Children and Youth", in *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, April 1998. Visit <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>

<sup>156</sup> Knollmann et al, 2009.

<sup>157</sup> B.J. Byrne, "Bullies and Victims in School Settings with Reference to Some Dublin Schools", *Irish Journal of Psychology* 15:574-586, 1994.

educational process.<sup>158</sup> For the German researcher Wagner too, truancy starts at a later stage, more specifically from the fifth class (age eleven) and particularly in the eighth and ninth class (age fourteen and fifteen)<sup>159</sup> and eventually leading to dropping out at the Sekundarstufe II or the Senior Cycle for that matter. This disconnection may also manifest itself in various forms. These could be laid out as follows:

- a- Getting less involved in extra-curricular activities at school<sup>160</sup>
- b- Taking on part-time jobs and developing a drinking habit
- c- Getting engaged in sexual activities at an early age
- d- Getting influenced by and additive to media sources and tools

A dropout tends to stay away from extra-curricular activities at school. The ideas of abiding by rules, playing in a team, and discipline do not seem to fit in his or her codes of behavior.<sup>161</sup> Ricking et al even write that the more a school involves pupils with school activities the more they feel attached to it.<sup>162</sup> On working beside schooling, due to various economic reasons or simply perhaps the feeling of being an adult, some pupils take on some part-time jobs which could put a strain on their schooling concentration and achievement. This has been shown in several researches in Dublin, Ireland.<sup>163</sup> A survey which was carried out by J. Anderson in a county Meath secondary school in Ireland reveals that second level students who do not perform well in school examinations are working part-time to finance a social life, more precisely, to buy alcohol.<sup>164</sup> As for being sexually active at any early age, some researchers have shown that pupils who abstain from sex would be subject to less emotional turmoil and fewer psychological distractions. They are likely to have greater future orientation, greater impulse control, greater perseverance, greater resistance to peer pressure, and more respect for parental and societal values. These traits are likely to contribute

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<sup>158</sup> M. Beck & J. Malley, *A pedagogy of belonging. Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 1998, 7(3), p. 133-137.

<sup>159</sup> Wagner, 2009.

<sup>160</sup> The extra-curricular activities were such things as sports and athletics, student government, subject clubs, hobby clubs, etc.

<sup>161</sup> Cervantes, *The Dropout*, 81.

<sup>162</sup> Heinrich Ricking, Gisela Schulze und Manfred Wittrock (Hg.): *Schulabsentismus und Dropout*, 2009, p.33.

<sup>163</sup> M. Morgan, *School and Part-Time Work in Dublin*, Dublin Employment Pact, Policy Paper No. 4, Dublin: May 2002 and D. Redmond and P. Butler, *Leaving Certificate Student's Employment, Experience and Attitudes, Skills Work and Youth Project*, (Dublin: Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Youthstart, 2000).

<sup>164</sup> J.P. Anderson, *Drink in the Babies Bottle*, check the following website: <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/81222>



to higher academic achievement.<sup>165</sup> Last but not least, one notices that more and more pupils are being bombarded and influenced by various computer games, mobile phone applications, media sources such as TV, Netflix, Amazon and so on. Regardless of when or how, they could avail of these digital offers and perhaps spend excessive time on them. Several German researchers such as Ricking,<sup>166</sup> Puhr et al,<sup>167</sup> Schreiber-Kittl und Schröpfer<sup>168</sup> have tackled that sensitive topic and found that extended media consumption can lead to several mechanism of actions which in its turn influence negatively the pupil's school performance. Likewise, in a study carried out in Ireland, Layte et al showed that pupils relied on several media sources such as the Internet to get informal sources of support on many topics such as sexual behavior.<sup>169</sup> We will see later in the Interview Chapter below that using chatrooms and digital communication can also lead to mobbing and depressive attitudes for many pupils.

All in all, whether in Ireland or in Germany, one can sum up these factors in one idea which reveals that if a pupil does not feel connected to and safe in his or her school, their school system could indirectly place them on the road to failure. Michael Beck and James Malley clearly argued that most children fail in school not because they lack the necessary cognitive skills but because they feel detached, alienated, and isolated from others and from the educational process.<sup>170</sup> Learning to care and being cared for are crucial in every pupil's development. Furthermore, Wentzel and Caldwell admits that positive group membership has been a consistent predictor of young adolescents' academic achievement.<sup>171</sup> A safe environment where pupils grow in and engage in dialogues with all parties can surely allow them to build a relationship of trust which help them realize their potentials.

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<sup>165</sup> Kirk Johnson and Robert Rector, *Teenage Sexual Abstinence and Academic Achievement*, The Heritage Foundation 2005. Please visit <https://www.heritage.org/node/17059/print-display>

<sup>166</sup> Ricking, 2011.

<sup>167</sup> Kirsten Puhr, Birgit Herz, und Heinrich Ricking (Hg.): *Problem Schulabsentismus. Wege zurück in die Schule*. (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2005), p. 11-18.

<sup>168</sup> Maria Schreiber-Kittl und Haike Schröpfer, *Abgeschrieben?* München: Verl. Dt. Jugendinst. 2002 (Übergänge in Arbeit; 2).

<sup>169</sup> R. Layte, D. Fullerton, und H. Mc Gee, *Scoping Study for a survey of Sexual Knowledge Attitudes and Behaviour*. Unpublished document. ESRI, Dublin, 2003.

<sup>170</sup> Beck and Malley, *A pedagogy of belonging*. Vol.7 No.3, 1998, p. 133-137.

<sup>171</sup> K.R. Wentzel and K. Caldwell, *Friendships, peer acceptance, and group membership: Relations to academic achievement in middle school*, (Wiley, Society for Research in Child Development, 1997), 68(6):1198-209

### 3. The German and Irish Curative and Preventative Initiatives

Since 1990 and at the European level, there has been a call for action to tackle the issue of school dropout. This call has been manifested in different policies and actions taken by the EU members in order to reach common targets which set a defined 9% target of school dropouts for all member states, including Germany and Ireland, until 2030. All member states agree on the fact that inadequate education can generate large public and social costs in the form of lower income and economic growth, reduced tax revenues and higher costs of public services such as healthcare, criminal justice, and social benefit payments. To put it in figures, estimated costs of school dropouts in Europe per country, projected over a lifetime, vary from 1.1 million EUR to 1.8 million EUR and predictions of future skills needs in Europe suggest that in the future, only 1 in 10 jobs will be within reach of a school dropout.<sup>172</sup>

After presenting the environment and personal factors which affect and influence school dropouts in both countries, it would be an eye-opener for the reader of this research to get some ideas as to how the education departments in both countries are tackling this dropout phenomenon. Both Germany and Ireland have been facing up to this challenge through various curative and preventative projects and initiatives, using official and NGO institutions. The curative steps are dedicated to offering direct and immediate solutions to acute problems in a relatively short period of time, whereas the preventative measures are designed to offer support in the long run by preventing problems from arising. While the curative initiatives are more likely to be implemented during the Sekundarstufe II period, the preventative ones could be applied as early as pre-schooling and at any time during the schooling time. The next two sections will outline some of the work of the Irish and German Education departments for the last few years through various educational steps.<sup>173</sup>

Looking briefly at the EU level, the policies and measures taken to tackle the school dropout problem could be grouped into two main categories: Targeted and

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<sup>172</sup> GHK Consulting, Anne Mari-Nevala et al, *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, Brussels 2011, p. 37.

<sup>173</sup> There is a wider recognition in the EU of the need to find different solutions for different points in the education system process and this is primarily illustrated by the growing recognition of the role of early childhood education and care (ECEC) - pre-primary education especially - in school dropout strategies. *Ibid*, 65-66.

Comprehensive.<sup>174</sup> On the one hand, the targeted measures which are compared to the curative approach allow for particular support to school children at risk by identifying individuals, groups of individuals, schools, or neighborhoods with a higher risk of dropout. On the other hand, the comprehensive measures, similar to the preventative initiatives, improve the education system for all and therefore attempts to improve outcomes and reduce the risk of students disengaging from education.

The table below<sup>175</sup> summarizes the action plans which could be taken at both levels. These will be a good starting point of comparison between what the German and Irish educational steps have entailed so far and what the EU recommends.

**TABLE 3**

Targeted Measures	Comprehensive Measures
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Positive discrimination/ area-based approaches</li> <li>2. Early warning/monitoring/tracking systems</li> <li>3. Mentoring programmes</li> <li>4. Extra tuition/tutoring and teaching assistants</li> <li>5. Support of transition</li> <li>6. Financial support for students and families</li> <li>7. After-school activities</li> <li>8. Support for children from minority groups and disadvantaged backgrounds</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher training</li> <li>2. Provision of high-quality pre-primary learning opportunities</li> <li>3. Increasing the scope of compulsory education</li> <li>4. Curricular reforms/ new types of study pathways and changes in teaching methods</li> <li>5. Raising the profile and quality of Vocational Educational and Training pathways</li> <li>6. Guidance and counselling</li> <li>7. Tackling bullying and improving well-being</li> <li>8. Changes to social security/benefit systems</li> <li>9. Working with parents of children at-risk of dropping out</li> </ol>

We will start first with the German initiatives followed by the Irish ones. We will also attempt to highlight some of the important steps taken in four German states from

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 67.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, 66-83.

south to north since, as we already know, the education in Germany is the responsibility of the education departments in the relative German federal states.

### 3.1 The German Education Department Curative and Preventative Initiatives

Although German schools are funded by their national education department, known as the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF),<sup>176</sup> it is the various German states which look after the education developments in their own regions. Having that said, it is shown that BMBF has been investing, more and more, year after year, in its overall education, about 140% more in the last ten years. Its work could be regarded as more preventative than curative as it deals with the overall picture. Yet its funding could be tackling both initiatives. It is planning on spending about 160 billion EUR on education between the year 2021 and 2030.<sup>177</sup> This funding will come at a time where the overall education system in Germany is facing many challenges especially when it comes to equal education and career chances among its 16 states. Some of these states are performing much worse than others and the work opportunities which they offer to their pupils are far from being competitive.

On the international educational arena, Germany has been leader in research by providing work placements for its own and international pupils.<sup>178</sup> We have seen above that the unemployment rate in Germany is among the lowest in Europe. This rate has been halved in the last 10 years, standing at about 5% before the Covid-19 crisis.<sup>179</sup> According to BMBF, about 50 percent of all school dropouts undergo vocational training provided by companies which consider the dual system the best way to acquire skilled staff.<sup>180</sup> This developed German dual system, supported by the ministry, offers pupils an excellent approach to skill development, covering initial and

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<sup>176</sup> <https://www.bmbf.de/en/index.html>

<sup>177</sup> <https://www.bmbf.de/de/18-3-milliarden-euro-fuer-bildung-und-forschung-10312.html>

<sup>178</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1224/umfrage/arbeitslosenquote-in-deutschland-seit-1995/>

<sup>180</sup> <https://www.bmbf.de/en/the-german-vocational-training-system-2129.html>

further vocational education, careers, employability, occupational competence, and identity.<sup>181</sup> This system contributes to that low number of unemployment.

In its report on Vocational Education and Training of 2019 which, on the one hand, describes the training place market situation in the 2017/2018 training year and, on the other hand, documents the current challenges confronting vocational education and training in Germany,<sup>182</sup> BMBF has been aiming at further funding and supporting its educational activities reflected through 12 curative and preventative steps.

**TABLE 4**

Curative Measures	Preventative Measures
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offering careers orientation activities</li> <li>2. Helping young people succeed in transitioning into training</li> <li>3. Filling vacant training places</li> <li>4. Supporting unplaced applicants</li> <li>5. Improving the compatibility of training with specific life situations</li> <li>6. Promoting trainees' mobility</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Securing the supply of skilled staff</li> <li>2. Increasing companies' participation in training</li> <li>3. Preventing premature training contract termination and training dropouts</li> <li>4. Increasing the power of vocational training to promote integration</li> <li>5. Strengthening vocational training to upgrade skills</li> <li>6. Advocating international training cooperation</li> </ol>

The sector covering dual training, as defined in the Vocational Training Act and Crafts Code (BBiG/HwO),<sup>183</sup> recorded positive development with training place contracts and company-based training contracts growing by over 1.6%. These figures yield a supply and demand ratio of 106, which means that for every 100 young people interested in

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> [https://www.bmbf.de/upload\\_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht\\_2019\\_englisch.pdf](https://www.bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht_2019_englisch.pdf)

<sup>183</sup> <https://www.bibb.de/de/1874.php>

training, there were 106 training places available.<sup>184</sup> School-based vocational training also constitutes a crucial element of vocational training in Germany. In the 2017/2018 school year, there were 178,800 new entrants into training in the healthcare, education, and social services occupations - a rise of 2.1% compared with the previous year. The early childhood care and education training sector, which covers the occupations of kindergarten teacher, children's nurse, and social assistant, reported a growth of 24% over the figure of the year before.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, young people without a secondary general school certificate can gain training in occupations with lower qualifications such as sales assistant for retail services, inventory clerk, or machine and plant operator. In 2017, 52,700 school dropouts were involved in these occupations, which shows the importance of these vocational trainings.<sup>186</sup> New amendments to the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) in 2019 were aimed at giving further training qualifications more consistent and attractive titles, which make the equivalence of vocational and academic education and training more visible and tangible.<sup>187</sup> BMBF regards vocational initial and continuing training as equivalent to academic education.

Through the 12 steps mentioned above and the Vocational Education and Training Pact,<sup>188</sup> the Federal Government sheds extra light on the importance of dual training and hence has been doing its best to make it more attractive. An alliance by the name of "Alliance for Initial and Continuing Vocational Education" which is made up of the BMBF, Federal Employment Agency (BA), business representatives, the unions, and the German states, is working on strengthening that dual training. An essential central curative point of that pact is the abolition of tuition fees and the introduction of a training allowance – a positive incentive for dropouts to get back into education.

On another curative front, BMBF realizes the importance of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in the fight against unemployment and keeping school dropouts engaged in at least learning a skill. It backs inter-company training centers through a range of funding and support programmes, helping them purchase modern

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<sup>184</sup> [https://www.bmbf.de/upload\\_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht\\_2019\\_englisch.pdf](https://www.bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht_2019_englisch.pdf)

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> This pact, set up by the BMBF, is a comprehensive implementation agenda for ongoing and upcoming actions, and those still to be developed, to make vocational training more modern, attractive, and dynamic.

equipment and further digital learning and training in a digital world of work through networks of representatives from science, companies, and training providers.<sup>189</sup> It is involved in boosting the qualifications of vocational training personnel through various programs in order to ensure their readiness for the technologies of the present and future. It also assists these enterprises through projects as part of the “Jobstarter plus”<sup>190</sup> training structure programme, which promotes recruiting people who discontinue their studies as trainees and helps integrating those returning to work into dual training.

Another important initiative on the curative front relates to the influx of refugees to Germany in the last 10 years due to the Syrian crisis. The Federal government has also been attempting to integrate young refugees and migrants through various language and vocational trainings, let alone the inclusion of people with disabilities. The “Refugee Guides” (“Willkommenslotsen”)<sup>191</sup> and “Tailored Matching” (“Passgenaue Besetzung”)<sup>192</sup> programmes support companies in their search for suitable young people to fill training places. While the formal programme assists in integrating refugees into the training market, the latter focuses not only on young people from Germany but also from other countries who are not refugees.

Moving on to more preventative measures, BMBF has been attempting to reduce the number of school dropouts by focusing on early childhood education, through attracting skilled staff and ensuring their continuing training. Consolidating the long education process through a solid foundation of early childhood programs is turning to be the focus. In other words, BMBF supports the Continuing Education Initiative for ECEC Staff (“Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte – WiFF”), which is designed to improve day care for children and early childhood education as the basis of the education system by professionalizing skilled staff.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, through its planned “Campaign to recruit early childhood educators: attracting young workers and binding professionals” (“Fachkräfteoffensive für Erzieherinnen und Erzieher: Nachwuchs gewinnen und Profis binden”) national programme, BMBF is offering

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<sup>189</sup> <https://www.aufstiegs-bafoeg.de>

<sup>190</sup> <https://www.jobstarter.de/teilzeitprojekte>

<sup>191</sup> <https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Artikel/Wirtschaft/willkommenslotsen.html>

<sup>192</sup> [https://www.bafa.de/DE/Wirtschafts\\_Mittelstandsfoerderung/Fachkraefte/Passgenaue\\_Besetzung/passgenaue\\_besetzung\\_node.html](https://www.bafa.de/DE/Wirtschafts_Mittelstandsfoerderung/Fachkraefte/Passgenaue_Besetzung/passgenaue_besetzung_node.html)

<sup>193</sup> [https://www.bmbf.de/upload\\_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht\\_2019\\_englisch.pdf](https://www.bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht_2019_englisch.pdf)

momentum for attracting qualified kindergarten teachers and making the resulting occupational and financial development opportunities in working life more alluring.<sup>194</sup>

With the support of the Federal Employment Agency, the Federal government takes another important preventative measure by sponsoring careers orientation and counselling through workshop days and potential analyses, in the goal of filling open training places. Its many employment agencies and Job Centers do guide young people with comprehensive support in whatever regions they are, in the hope of finding their dream jobs and occupying less-known vacancies. Through its “Educational Chains Initiative” (“Abschluss und Anschluss – Bildungsketten bis zum Ausbildungsabschluss” – Bildungsketten Initiative),<sup>195</sup> BMBF aims at leading these pupils to success in education and training and especially to a smooth transition from school into work in a structured and coherent way.

Last but not least, BMBF further supports young people who tend to give up their training through its “Preventing Vocational Education and Training Dropouts”<sup>196</sup> funding and support programme, and that is by providing trainees with individual support and social educational guidance through training. The PraeLab (preventing training dropouts – Praevention von Lehrabbrüchen)<sup>197</sup> project, which is a part of the EU Program “Leonardo da Vinci”, works on reducing the number of trainees who drop out of training by establishing an “early warning system” to enable people working in the areas of training and career counselling to identify young people at risk of dropping out of their training more quickly and offer them effective counselling and support services.<sup>198</sup> Moreover, the “Taking opportunities! With qualification modules towards vocational qualification” (“Chancen Nutzen! Mit Teilqualifikationen Richtung Berufsabschluss”) project<sup>199</sup> has been set up to support people with low-level formal qualifications to gain a substantial training qualification, one step at a time, in order to work at their pace, offer them a second chance of improving their current situation and meet their aspirations for a better future. BMBF also funds the improvement of the

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> For more information, visit the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung website [www.bibb.de](http://www.bibb.de) or click on this link: <https://www.bibb.de/de/11355.php#:~:text=Die%20Initiative%20%E2%80%9EAbschluss%20und%20Anschluss,und%20die%20Berufsausbildung%20erfolgreich%20abzuschlie%C3%9Fen.>

<sup>196</sup> [https://www.refernet.de/dokumente/pdf/Artikel\\_DE\\_Early\\_leaving\\_from\\_VET.pdf](https://www.refernet.de/dokumente/pdf/Artikel_DE_Early_leaving_from_VET.pdf)

<sup>197</sup> <https://methodenkoffer-ausbildungserfolg.f-bb.de/praelab-praevention-von-lehrabbruechen/>

<sup>198</sup> [https://www.bmbf.de/upload\\_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht\\_2019\\_englisch.pdf](https://www.bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht_2019_englisch.pdf)

<sup>199</sup> <https://teilqualifikation.dihk.de/de>



quality of gender-awareness preparation for making a decision on a career through its “Klischeefrei” initiative.<sup>200</sup> This initiative expands the range of careers chosen by young women and men as well as helping to prevent trainees from dropping out of training due to gender-stereotyped ideas about occupations.<sup>201</sup>

As already highlighted, since education in Germany is mainly the responsibility of each of the 16 German federal states, we will look briefly at four of them from the south to the north of Germany, i.e., Bavaria, Thüringen, Lower Saxony, and Schleswig Holstein.

First and foremost, each of these four states works closely with the European Social Fund (ESF) and attempts to fund various curative and preventative projects to reduce the number of their school dropouts. These funding initiatives will not be mentioned in the summarizing table below as they affect all states alike.

**TABLE 5**

<b>Initiatives to tackle the problem of school dropouts</b>					
	<i>Curative</i>	<i>Preventative</i>		<i>Curative</i>	<i>Preventative</i>
<b>Bavaria</b>	1- Vocational Preparation Year (BIJ) 2- Extra support for pupils with immigration background 3- Integrating asylum seekers into the school system	1- Praxisklassen in the Mittleschulen 2- Support for whole day German lessons at primary and first secondary levels 3- Career start-up support	<b>Lower Saxony</b>	1- Inclusion through Inculturation 2-Development of cross-institutional educational networks	1- Education 2040 2- Creation of inclusive schools 3- Special budget for primary education 4- Expansion of all-day schools

<sup>200</sup> <https://www.klischee-frei.de/de/index.php>

<sup>201</sup> [https://www.bmbf.de/upload\\_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht\\_2019\\_englisch.pdf](https://www.bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Berufsbildungsbericht_2019_englisch.pdf)

<b>Thüringen</b>	1-Development training and coaching of teachers 2-Providing individual support for pupils 3- Supporting the integration of pupils with a migration background	1- Offering to develop an open or (partially) bound all-day schooling 2- Offering seminars for guardians and families of pupils 3- Exchanging of experiences and networking between various parties	<b>Schleswig-Holstein</b>	1- Offering regional training support 2- Flexible Transition Period at Sekundarstufe II 3- Promoting extracurricular activities 4- Creation of DaZ Centers	1- Two Probation Years between Primary and Secondary levels 2- Implementing the projects: "Leaving Nobody Behind", "Reading makes you strong" and "Math makes you strong - elementary school" 3- Orientation of projects called "SINUS-SH" and "SINUS on Primary schools"
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Starting with Bavaria, the Ministry of Education and Culture or StMUK (Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus) has been promoting equal access to high quality education and better chances of employment, under an ESF funding of 57.7 million EUR, through the following curative and preventative steps:

#### 1- Praxisklassen in the Mittleschulen

Praxisklassen is a model of support for secondary school pupils with major learning and performance deficits. It is designed to lead to a positive learning and work attitude by accompanying the affected pupils into professional life through cooperation with business and companies.<sup>202</sup>

#### 2- Vocational Preparation Year (BIJ)

<sup>202</sup> For more information, please visit:  
<https://schulamt.info/index.php?&pid=689&eb=2&e0=3&e1=21&e2=689&csp=&aid=KS00001>

BIJ is the first year of vocational integration training. During this year, the focus of the lessons is on language promotion so that the following year of professional integration can start with a good knowledge of German. Socio-educational support is very important in that year while learning becomes action oriented. Its main curative goal is to enable pupils to act independently in order to facilitate for them a smooth transition into the following vocational years.<sup>203</sup>

### 3- Career Start-Up Guide and Support for Pupils from Various Backgrounds

During the 2019/2020 school year, the StMUK and the Federal Employment Agency funded measures for career start-up support (BerEb) with over 35 million EUR in ESF funds.<sup>204</sup> BerEb is designed for pupils whose aim is a secondary school or special school qualification and who then need an apprenticeship with a special support. The career start-up guides mainly deal with issues relating to the transition to vocational training, application documents, placement in internships, career orientation, and the search for a training position. Furthermore, the StMUK plays a big role in integrating asylum seekers into the school system and keeping them engaged through German language lessons and vocational trainings. For instance, during the school year 2018/2019, the ministry set up ca. 730 vocational integration classes for asylum seekers in the whole of Bavaria.<sup>205</sup> Another initiative which is called the "Educational Regions in Bavaria" is set to improve the educational and participation opportunities of young people on site. The regional networking structures particularly help supporting young people with an immigration background. With the involvement of the coordinators of the educational regions, a collection of over 150 measures from all government districts on the subject of "Young people with a migration background" has been created. It documents and shares ideas on what educational regions can achieve to support these young people.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> <https://www.bsoal.de/fachbereiche/bij-joa-bik/bik-bij-joa/>

<sup>204</sup> <https://www.bildungsketten.de/berufseinstiegsbegleitung>

<sup>205</sup> <https://www.km.bayern.de/allgemein/meldung/3756/bayern-engagiert-sich-fuer-die-bildung-von-jungen-fluechtlingen.html>

<sup>206</sup> <https://www.km.bayern.de/lehrer/unterricht-und-schulleben/integration-und-sprachfoerderung.html>

When it comes to Thüringen and with its high rate of school dropouts (over 10%),<sup>207</sup> its Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport has been attempting to reduce the number of dropouts through the following curative and preventative measures:

- 1- Supporting the process for school development at the respective school
- 2- Offering to develop an open or (partially) bound all-day organization<sup>208</sup>
- 3- Providing individual support for pupils along with practice-oriented learning planning, socio-educational and psychological support as well as alternative offers for the fulfillment of compulsory schooling
- 4- Supporting the integration of pupils with a migration background
- 5- Further training and coaching of teachers, educators, social pedagogues, and special education specialists
- 6- Offering seminars for guardians and families of pupils
- 7- Exchanging of experiences and networking between various parties<sup>209</sup>

State schools as well as approved alternative schools and private educational institutions are entitled to apply for funding if they appear to fit the criteria for support. Funding takes the form of project funding. Through the support of the European Social Funds (ESF) and Thüringen Ministry, Thuringian regular schools, community schools, comprehensive schools, and special schools have started offering an individual graduation phase (IAP) for those at risk of dropping out without any certification. The goal of such a phase is to enable pupils to acquire the Hauptschulabschluss after

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<sup>207</sup> [https://www.gfaw-thueringen.de/cms/?s=gfaw\\_esf\\_aktuell&pid=14&fid=49&](https://www.gfaw-thueringen.de/cms/?s=gfaw_esf_aktuell&pid=14&fid=49&)

<sup>208</sup> [https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2017/2017\\_09\\_14-Umsetzung-Foerderstrategie.pdf](https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2017/2017_09_14-Umsetzung-Foerderstrategie.pdf)

<sup>209</sup> [https://www.gfaw-thueringen.de/cms/?s=gfaw\\_esf\\_aktuell&pid=14&fid=49&](https://www.gfaw-thueringen.de/cms/?s=gfaw_esf_aktuell&pid=14&fid=49&)

attending the required time of learning and fulfilling the proper hands-on practice requirement.<sup>210</sup>

Moving on to Lower Saxony, this state tackles the issue of school dropouts through addressing the whole education system. With a project called “Education 2040”, which was launched in 2018 by the Lower Saxony Ministry of Culture, the curative and preventative attempt includes raising the question of what and how children from early childhood education, adolescents and young adults should learn in the future in order to be fit for the challenges of a world in constant change.<sup>211</sup>

An important initiative in Lower Saxony in the fight against dropping out is the creation of inclusive schools. These are schools of individual advancement, in which every child is given the best possible support after examining their individual talents and special needs.<sup>212</sup> Inclusive schools were introduced at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year. In the school year 2019/2020, they have covered all grades up to the eleventh. Pupils with a need for special education receive appropriate support there and can acquire the school leaving certificate upon completion of the 10th grade.

What is remarkable in Lower Saxony is that a child who starts school receives the care needed to acquire enough knowledge of the German language to be able to adjust to the initial phase of education.<sup>213</sup> Primary schools, on the other hand, which faces a high proportion of students with learning problems and/or social problems (even migrant pupils) receive a special additional budget from the ministry of education. Moreover, over 60% of all public general education schools in Lower Saxony offer all-day schooling. A high proportion of all-day schooling offers is carried out by the teachers themselves. In addition to the prolonged school day, extended learning time meant that the learning conditions of pupils through tailor-made individual support has been improving. Last but not least, Lower Saxony has adopted a program called “Inclusion through Inculturation”.<sup>214</sup> Its objective is to reduce the number of school

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<sup>210</sup> Frank Oschmiansky, Sandra Popp, Karin Kowalczyk and Rabea Kaas, *Analyse und Ursachen für den höheren Anteil von Schulabgängern ohne Abschluss in Ostdeutschland und Entwicklung von Lösungsansätzen*, (Berlin, 2014), p. 65.

<sup>211</sup>[https://www.mk.niedersachsen.de/startseite/aktuelles/bildung\\_2040/die-zeit-ist-reif-fuer-bildung-2040-174800.html](https://www.mk.niedersachsen.de/startseite/aktuelles/bildung_2040/die-zeit-ist-reif-fuer-bildung-2040-174800.html)

<sup>212</sup>[https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2017/2017\\_09\\_14-Umsetzung-Foerderstrategie.pdf](https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2017/2017_09_14-Umsetzung-Foerderstrategie.pdf)

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

dropouts. This is to be achieved through the amalgamation of educational success on the one hand and social, cultural, or linguistic origin on the other hand. Framework conditions are created to allow access to a successful participation in education and thus to a successful life and active citizenship, which enables everyone to have a living wage.<sup>215</sup> The target group is not only the risk children and young people themselves, but also the people involved in their development. The program supports the development of cross-institutional educational networks through which the various competencies are brought together. Testing and evaluation of training and qualification modules as well as new concepts on key issues (e.g., intercultural education, prevention of exclusion of disadvantaged groups, etc.) are being implemented. In the funding period 2007 up to now, the European Social Fund funded almost 50 projects through the program "Inclusion through Inculturation".<sup>216</sup>

Finally, looking at Schleswig-Holstein (SW), this state proactively supports companies and employees in their training activities and is committed to strengthening its dual vocational training through its "regional training support".<sup>217</sup> A shortage of 100,000 skilled workers is forecast for 2030, 85,000 of them in the non-academic sector. In the School Act of SW, if a pupil is diagnosed to be a special need child, a learning or support plan will be created for them through support centers, which take preventative measures before school starts. The children of minority groups, too, such as travelers, Sinti, and Roma receive special support, even from teachers who stem themselves from these groups. A program called "Leaving Nobody Behind" was set up in SW to support underperforming students and ultimately school dropouts with extensive advice and materials. It offers help through the project pillars "Reading makes you strong" and the following educational steps:<sup>218</sup>

a) The first and second year of the Sekundarstufe I are considered to be an introductory or probation phase. The attendance can even last up to three years depending on the student's learning development.

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<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> <https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/en/portal/1/DE9>

<sup>217</sup> [https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2017/2017\\_09\\_14-Umsetzung-Foerderstrategie.pdf](https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2017/2017_09_14-Umsetzung-Foerderstrategie.pdf)

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

b) Flexible transition phases were established, which means that grades 8 and 9 with a maximum of three years offer a high proportion of practical experience and an intensive career orientation.

c) All day pupil care and school events for which volunteered pupils can register for binding participation have seen the light. In 2017, there were 507 open all-day schools and 179 care support at schools at primary level, which the states funded with a total of around 10.8 million EUR.

Moreover, SW schools are encouraged to expand their teaching offerings by creating learning locations outside the school grounds. The cooperation with extracurricular partners, for instance school laboratories, is supported by the Ministry of Education. Since the school year 2013/14, the orientation of projects called "SINUS-SH" and "SINUS on Primary schools" have been combined into a common structure. The "SINUS-SH" project is bundled from a variety of training courses tailored to the needs of teachers: There are 67 continuous regional training groups in which teachers can take part to develop their own teaching concepts for technical and didactic inputs. In collaboration with the Leibniz Institute for Science and Mathematics Education, a two-part work material was developed - the pupil and teachers' books containing diagnostic and support tasks. "Math makes you strong - elementary school" was created as an independent textbook which includes preventive focuses on dealing with weaknesses in numeracy.<sup>219</sup>

Starting in 2002, Schleswig-Holstein gradually became a multi-stage system of language and inclusion at locations called DaZ centers. As of February 2017, there were 269 DaZ centers. DaZ lessons have been integrated in the school system and were also meant for refugee children and migrant pupils. They constitute the first steps towards linguistic, school, and social integration. Furthermore, to support young people who have failed at school, were constantly absent or lacked key skills, SW, through its Ministry of Education, the north regional directorate of the Federal Employment Agency and The European Union, has been working on a successful transition from school to work through vocational schools to conduct coaching and

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<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

strength-oriented potential analyses. The aim is to promote training and employability of young people to get their direct connection with the hiring company. Last but not least, the number of schools with all-day open courses has increased in recent years. There are currently 538 private and public schools (2016/17 school year) with an all-day education. They are especially designed to reduce inequalities in education. Since 2016, Schleswig-Holstein has also been participating in the “LiGa-All-day Learning”, which is run by the Mercator Foundation and the German Children's and Youth Foundation. The goal of the program is to improve individualized learning in higher educational quality all-day schools. This is meant for all students to increase their learning success and especially those with migration background and social disadvantages.

### **3.2 The Irish Education Department Curative and Preventative Initiatives**

The Department of Education and Skills in Ireland (DES) has been very active in attempting to understand the phenomenon of school dropouts and reducing its numbers to reach the European goal. Similar to BMBF, this department has been trying to implement various curative and preventative measures at different stages of its education. It understands how the educational journey of pupils throughout these stages is complex yet intrinsically intertwined. Through this understanding and implementation of various measures, the rate of Irish school dropouts has been halved in the last decade.

On the preventative front, DES has been dedicated to delivering an equality of opportunity in schools for its pupils through its national programme DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). DEIS which was launched in May 2005 and renewed in 2017 set out the department's vision for future intervention in the critical area of social inclusion in education policy and remains its instrument to address educational disadvantage.<sup>220</sup> The preventative action plan of DEIS focuses on addressing and prioritizing the educational needs of children and young people from

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<sup>220</sup><https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/>



disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years old). 890 schools are included in the programme in the 2019/20 school year. These comprise 692 primary schools (334 urban and 358 rural) and 198 post-primary schools.<sup>221</sup>

The DEIS Plan of 2017 presents an ambitious set of objectives and actions to support children who are at greatest risk of educational disadvantage and introduces the following actions:

- I- A new methodology for the identification of schools in need of such support.<sup>222</sup>
- II- A more effective system of resource allocation to ensure that resources are matched to identified educational need in schools.
- III- Better interdepartmental and inter-agency working to achieve more effective delivery of services in and around schools.
- IV- A pilot approach to introducing measures which have been shown to work well in improving educational outcomes. Some excellent practice in teaching and learning has been developed in recent years, both in DEIS schools and in the wider education community.
- V- A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to gather better information on school performance.<sup>223</sup>

Overall rates of literacy and numeracy, school retention, and progression to further and higher education have increased for pupils in DEIS schools. Both the Educational Research Centre (ERC) and the DES Inspectorate have conducted evaluations of aspects of the DEIS programme, and the findings of this work showed a positive effect

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> More information about such selection could be found under this link: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

on tackling educational disadvantage, improvement in both mathematics and reading levels of pupils. Moreover, assessments of reading and mathematics performance in DEIS rural primary schools show that students in these schools in some cases perform better than rural non-DEIS schools and at the same level as their counterparts in urban non-DEIS schools. ERC evaluation of the impact DEIS at post-primary level also show encouraging trends in terms of both attainment and pupil retention. The DES Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools 2009 Entry Cohort (July 2016) shows that the improvement in DEIS schools' retention rates to Leaving Certificate has, in recent years, been significantly higher than the overall improvements nationally – up from 68.2 % in 2001 to 82.7% in 2016. The corresponding rates at Junior Certificate Level are 94.3% for DEIS schools, against a national norm of 96.7%.<sup>224</sup>

Moving to other preventative measures, DES actively supports the following pre-primary services while bearing in mind that nearly 40% of Irish pupils enroll as early as four years of age in primary schooling in Ireland, although the official age of attending school is six:

- a- The Early Start Programme,<sup>225</sup> a pre-primary initiative in designated areas of urban disadvantage, for children who are most at risk of failing in education. The total number of spaces provided by the existing 40 Early Start centers is 1,650.
  
- b- The Rutland Street Project,<sup>226</sup> a programme in a Dublin inner city community. Although not part of Early Start, it was used to pilot many of the approaches later incorporated in the Early Start project.

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<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> The programme is a one-year intervention scheme to meet the needs of children, aged between 3 years and 5 years, in September of the relevant year, who are at risk of not reaching their potential within the school system. The project involves an educational programme to enhance overall development, help prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage. Parental involvement is one of the core elements of the programme in recognition of the parent/guardian as the prime educator of the child and to encourage the parent/guardian to become involved in his/her child's education.

<sup>226</sup> The Rutland Street Pre-School Project is a two-year pre-primary programme catering for 3- to 5-year-old pupils.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Ireland, through closely working with agencies funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)<sup>227</sup>, produced an *Aistear*<sup>228</sup>-in-Action toolkit, which is a resource for use in early years settings showing how the *Aistear* themes of Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Exploring and Thinking, and Communication translate into practice.<sup>229</sup> The Department of Education and Skills has also directed the implementation of *Síolta*,<sup>230</sup> the National Quality Framework, by working with these agencies. The final report<sup>231</sup> on the implementation of this phase of *Síolta* was published in December 2013. DCYA announced in 2019 the launch of the National Childcare Scheme, which will give way to quality, accessible (free 2 year of pre-schooling),<sup>232</sup> affordable Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare in Ireland.<sup>233</sup> That scheme is the first statutory entitlement to financial support for childcare in Ireland. Through this entitlement, the National Childcare Scheme aims to improve children's outcomes, support lifelong learning, reduce child poverty, and tangibly reduce the cost of quality childcare for thousands of families across Ireland.<sup>234</sup> Through the close work and support between the Department of Education and Skills and DCYA on the one side and parents on the other side, pupils from a very early age receive a unified type of initial educational roadmap and parents get financially alleviated and supported, which together would place pupils at the right start into a long journey of education and keep those at risk of not performing well at a later stage at the same level of those who would. Allowing a fair start for all pupils as early as pre-schooling would most likely make the process in education smoother for all.

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<sup>227</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-children-equality-disability-integration-and-youth/>

<sup>228</sup> *Aistear* is the curriculum framework for children from birth to 6 years in Ireland. It provides information for adults to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging experiences so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others.

<sup>229</sup> <https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/>

<sup>230</sup> *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, was developed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. It was published in 2006, following a three-year developmental process, which involved consultation with more than 50 diverse organisations, representing childcare workers, teachers, parents, policy makers, researchers and other interested parties. For more information, visit: <http://siolta.ie/index.php>

<sup>231</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/S%C3%ADolta-Final-Report.pdf>

<sup>232</sup> The Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) programme is a universal two-year pre-school programme available to all children within the eligible age range. For more information, visit: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>

<sup>233</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/8fa170-minister-launches-the-national-childcare-scheme-for-ireland/>

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

Moreover, another preventative measure was taken by the NCCA as it tried to reform its primary education scheme from 2015 to 2019. Although the curriculum of 1999 was created through a partnership process which involved teachers, parents, school management, and the Department of Education and was developed to enable children to learn how to learn, and to grow an appreciation of the value and practice of lifelong learning,<sup>235</sup> it was not without its disadvantages. Curriculum overload and lack of resources were a major topic, let alone the fact that the Irish society had seen many changes in its format, with an increasing number of foreign students in its classrooms. The topic of inclusion resulted in greater numbers of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, a new Primary Language Curriculum focusing on oral, reading, writing, Mathematics, and (Religions, Beliefs, Ethics) came to light in 2019 – a curriculum which some of its contents were developed by teachers and pupils alike.<sup>237</sup> Work has not been completed yet as demands for “more” to be included in the primary school curriculum are manifesting by providing a more flexible approach to time allocation. Some of the actions taken or recommended by the NCCA and DES are:<sup>238</sup>

- 1- Support Materials in the form of support supplies for teachers, a DVD for parents to inform them about the curriculum, a website with exemplification of methods of teaching and learning ([www.action.ncca.ie](http://www.action.ncca.ie)) and guidelines for assessment preparation.
  
- 2- Literacy and Numeracy Strategy: In 2010, the department of Education and Skills published a draft national plan for improving literacy and numeracy after having involved teachers, education stakeholders and the public in a debate relating to school standards. That plan requested from primary teachers to spend more time on literacy and numeracy by using their discretionary time.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Primary School Curriculum, Dublin: GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS SALE OFFICE 1999, p.7

<sup>236</sup> Primary School Curriculum, Have Your Say, Discussion Document and Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Education, 2015, p.13

<sup>237</sup> Coolahan, Drudy, Hogan, McGuinness and Hyland, *Towards a Better Future*, p. 39.

<sup>238</sup> Primary School Curriculum, Have Your Say, Discussion Document and Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Education, 2015, p. 15 - 19

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*, p.16

- 3- Learning Outcomes: The revised curriculum was suggested to be based on learning outcomes incorporated into all curriculum statements. The primary curriculum for language and mathematics, for instance, should be complemented by the provision of examples of children's work and learning that illustrated what learning outcomes mean in practice.<sup>240</sup>
- 4- Language, Religion and ICT education: NCCA's approach to consultation using social media platforms and emailing has allowed a bigger number of educators to offer their views on curriculum development. The new curriculum plans on breaking the primary years starting from junior infants into stages where outcomes in languages would be better and easily measured and tracked. Moreover, multi-belief education is also being considered to cater for all pupils with various beliefs. Last but not least, a digital strategy for schools from 2015 until 2020 was launched to integrate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into teaching. The goal is to realize the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning, and assessment so that the Irish pupils become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors, and global citizens to participate fully in society and the economy.<sup>241</sup>

While the primary education cycle has been slowly witnessing a reform to better cater for the needs of Irish pupils, the Junior Cycle, as seen in the second section of chapter 1 of this thesis, has been undergoing a new makeover lasting until the year 2020. This cycle features revised subjects and short courses, a further focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills, and new approaches of assessment and reporting. Schools have more freedom to design Junior Cycle programmes that meet the learning needs of all pupils. The new Junior Cycle will mean that the curriculum available in their schools is a mix of subjects and short courses as well as other learning experiences.<sup>242</sup>

In order to support pupils who have difficulties in the areas of literacy and numeracy, with learning disabilities which hinder them from fully participating in and benefiting from the Junior Cycle, who show clear signs of not coping with the experience of

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<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, p.17

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, p.18

<sup>242</sup> <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Junior-Cycle-is-changing/>

school at Junior Cycle and whose attendance and/or behaviour and attitude indicate a considerable degree of disengagement from school, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) was launched in 1996 by the NCCA and DES. The programme offers schools and teachers a more flexible approach than a traditional subject-based curriculum. It enables students to re-engage with their learning. It builds their basic skills of literacy and numeracy and their personal and social skills. It aims to ensure that each student benefits from their time in school and enjoys an experience of success.<sup>243</sup> The JCSP popularity has been expanding rapidly among schools<sup>244</sup> from only 32 schools in 1996 to reaching more than 250 schools.

According to the NCCA, the JCSP has at its core a student profiling system which is designed to fulfil three separate but related functions:

- A- A diagnostic function to assist teachers in diagnosing the student's strengths and needs, and to plan programmes of work which build on the student's abilities and address the main obstacles hindering progress.
  
- B- A formative function to support the teacher in breaking down the learning outcomes of Junior Certificate syllabuses and cross-curricular areas of learning into smaller, manageable learning targets. This step-by-step approach which is used in the profiling system enables students to successfully complete smaller units of work and in turn motivates students to attempt the next unit of work. Through profiling, the teacher engages in a dialogue with students about their learning. The teacher shares the learning targets of the lesson with students. The teacher discusses their progress through feedback and students record their progress.
  
- C- A summative function to provide students with a Student Profile which is an individualized record of the achievements which they have demonstrated over the course of the programme. The Student Profile describes their skills, knowledge, and achievements, including their personal and social skills.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> [https://ncca.ie/media/2496/the\\_revised\\_jcsp\\_programme\\_statement\\_.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/2496/the_revised_jcsp_programme_statement_.pdf)

<sup>244</sup> While the majority of settings providing the JCSP are post-primary schools, the JCSP is also offered in Special Schools, Children Detention Schools, Traveler Training Centers and Youth Encounter Projects.

<sup>245</sup> [https://ncca.ie/media/2496/the\\_revised\\_jcsp\\_programme\\_statement\\_.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/2496/the_revised_jcsp_programme_statement_.pdf)

Pupils who participate in the JCSP follow the same subject syllabuses as their peers in the normal Junior Cycle, although the syllabuses are often fewer in number and assessed in the same way as their Junior Cycle peers in the Junior Certificate examinations.<sup>246</sup> JCSP pupils gain a Junior Certificate outlining their achievements in the subjects taken but, in addition, they receive the Student Profile, mentioned above, which outlines the skills, knowledge, and achievements which they have attained during the course of the programme. On completion of the Junior Cycle, pupils have equal chances to those who attend the normal Junior Cycle and can progress to the Senior Cycle.<sup>247</sup>

Moreover, it has been outlined above that the Junior Certificate will then be replaced by the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) on a phased basis until 2020. There is a classroom-based component to the assessment which is based on work completed by the student during second and third year. The NCCA is developing a new report card for parents which will give them much more information about their child's learning progress.<sup>248</sup> Every school can, through widely defined curriculum choices, adapt its learning materials to suit the needs of almost every Junior Cycle pupil. During second and third year, students complete several Classroom-Based Assessments, which get added to the Junior Certificate marking system.<sup>249</sup> For a small group of students with special educational needs, priority learning units (PLUs) are provided. These components enable the statements of learning and key skills to become a reality for the students throughout their three-year Junior Cycle.<sup>250</sup>

On the curative front, the Irish Education system offers a Transition Year between Junior and Senior Cycle to its pupils. After acquiring the Junior Certificate, a pupil has the option to attend that Transition Year which provides him or her with the opportunity to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, without formal examinations.<sup>251</sup> It is a year which has been gaining a lot of popularity among pupils. More than 60% of Senior Cycle pupils opt for that transition year.<sup>252</sup> It is

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<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state\\_examinations/junior\\_certificate\\_programme.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state_examinations/junior_certificate_programme.html)

<sup>249</sup> <https://www.jct.ie/perch/resources/english/day-2-booklet-2-3.pdf>

<sup>250</sup> <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/>

<sup>251</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Post-Primary/>

<sup>252</sup> Coolahan et al, *Towards a Better Future*, p. 45.

officially designed to act as a bridge between the two secondary cycles by facilitating the smooth transition from the more dependent learning of the Junior Cycle to the more independent self-directed learning required for the Senior Cycle.<sup>253</sup> In other words, it offers the time and space for pupils who are unsure which educational or career road they wish to pursue to decide better or with more clarity for their future. Pupils get to sample a wide range of subjects and can therefore select the type of Leaving Certificate programme that they intend to follow. This Transition Year also offers work experience which allow pupils to experience adult and working life.<sup>254</sup>

What is also striking about this Transition Year is the involvement of parents before and during that year. When pupils are in the third year of the Junior Cycle, parents get invited to attend an introduction to that year. When drawing up the Transition Year programme, schools also tend to involve parents in the decision-making process and in the planning. Some parents make their expertise available to the school as visiting speakers. All parents are invited to contribute to the evaluation of the programme.<sup>255</sup>

Although, as already known, there is no end-of-year state examination at the end of that year,<sup>256</sup> the activity-based learning ethos of the Transition Year requires each school to engage in school-based assessment, which helps students identify their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as develop the skills of self-assessment and reflection. Assessment is ongoing, with portfolio assessment, project work, and exhibitions of students' work. Oral, practical, and written activities all form part of this assessment process. Pupils who have successfully completed the Transition Year Programme are usually awarded a certificate of participation by their school.<sup>257</sup>

As we already know, after the optional Transition Year, an Irish pupil has the option between three Leaving Certificate programs. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is more suitable for those at risk of dropping out. According to the DES website, the

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<sup>253</sup><https://www.pdst.ie/TY>

<sup>254</sup>[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary\\_and\\_post\\_primary\\_education/going\\_to\\_post\\_primary\\_school/transition\\_year.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/going_to_post_primary_school/transition_year.html)

<sup>255</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> This decision is made by the Department of Education and Skills to ensure that the focus of the year was learning-led rather than exam-driven.

<sup>257</sup>[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary\\_and\\_post\\_primary\\_education/going\\_to\\_post\\_primary\\_school/transition\\_year.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/going_to_post_primary_school/transition_year.html)



LCA is a self-contained two-year course, intended to meet the needs of those students who are not adequately catered for by the other Leaving Certificate programmes. It is a person-centered course involving a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject based structure.<sup>258</sup> It is designed for those students who do not wish to proceed directly to third level education or for those whose needs, aspirations, and aptitudes are not adequately catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes.<sup>259</sup> According to the NCCA, the LCA sets out to recognize the talents of all pupils and provide opportunities for developing personal responsibility, self-esteem, and self-knowledge, and helps students apply what they learn to the real world. The two-year programme consists of four half-year blocks called sessions. Achievement is credited in each session. Courses are offered in three main areas: Vocational Preparation, General Education, and Vocational Education.<sup>260</sup> Ultimately, the LCA focuses on the needs and interests of participants, using a variety of methodologies, making optimum use of the resources of the local community, and paying particular attention to the needs of the local region. There is a need to recognize that individuals differ considerably in the ways they process, assimilate, and recall information.<sup>261</sup>

Moving to other curative measures, it is important to discuss the work of Youthreach in Ireland. The Youthreach programme, funded by DES, provides two-year-integrated education, training, and work experience for unemployed dropouts without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age.<sup>262</sup> Youthreach centers provide their learners with the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to partake in society and to progress to training, further education, and employment. There are yearly almost 6000 Youthreach pupils in Ireland who enroll in or “return to or complete their education in a non-threatening learner-centered environment.”<sup>263</sup> There are more than 100 centers spread throughout the country and especially in disadvantaged areas. The Inspectorate of DES researched the effectiveness of these centers in 2006 and found that Youthreach learners “had

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<sup>258</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Post-Primary/>

<sup>259</sup> [http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/d9cc0686-b0d2-402a-9573-a3bd3977b00f/SCSEC\\_Leaving\\_Cert\\_Applied\\_programme\\_english\\_1.pdf](http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/d9cc0686-b0d2-402a-9573-a3bd3977b00f/SCSEC_Leaving_Cert_Applied_programme_english_1.pdf)

<sup>260</sup> <http://www.curriculumonline.ie/Senior-cycle/LCA/>

<sup>261</sup> [http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/d9cc0686-b0d2-402a-9573-a3bd3977b00f/SCSEC\\_Leaving\\_Cert\\_Applied\\_programme\\_english\\_1.pdf](http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/d9cc0686-b0d2-402a-9573-a3bd3977b00f/SCSEC_Leaving_Cert_Applied_programme_english_1.pdf)

<sup>262</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Learners/Information/Youthreach/>

<sup>263</sup> *An Evaluation of Youthreach*, Evaluation Support and Research Unit, Inspectorate Department of Education and Skills, Dublin 2010. <https://assets.gov.ie/25317/80331ad938754cee8606b475d7a5ca27.pdf>

positive learning experiences, improved their self-esteem and self-worth and enhanced personal and social development.”<sup>264</sup> In most centers, links were established with employers and other bodies to provide work experience and transfer and progression routes for learners – a source of motivation and hope for many who gave up on the mainstream education. The four phases which are adopted by most Youthreach centers and supported by DES are: Engagement, Foundation, Progression and Transition. The aim is to turn learners from having the status of instability, dependence, low employability, etc... into stability, dependence, employability, etc...<sup>265</sup> Accreditation was awarded to pupils at various stages throughout their time at a Youthreach center.

Another curative initiative worth mentioning is the introduction of the School Completion Programme (SCP). It is a targeted programme aimed, among others, at pupils at the Senior Cycle who are at risk of leaving school. It is funded by the Tusla Education Support Services (TESS),<sup>266</sup> which with over 4,000 staff has an operational budget of over 750 million EUR. SCP’s main goal is to retain pupils at school until completing the Senior Cycle. In doing so, they will be able to transit into further education, training, or employment.

There are 122 SCP projects covering, among others, 222 secondary schools.<sup>267</sup> These projects deliver the following immediate curative initiatives to pupils:

- a. Evidence based/evidence informed interventions at universal level to whole class/whole school groups
- b. Brief interventions for 8 weeks or less for pupils identified as needing an immediate short-term SCP led intervention.
- c. Targeted interventions to pupils with significant support needs who have been identified through the SCP Intake Framework.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Tusla is the Child and Family Agency in Ireland which is an independent legal entity, comprising HSE Children and Family Services, the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board as well as incorporating some psychological services and a range of services responding to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

<sup>267</sup> <https://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/scp/>

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

TESS engages SCP staff, Home School Community Liaison coordinators and Education Welfare Officers and offers them the adequate trainings in order to possess the right competencies to identify potentially weak pupils. The former would then offer the latter the right support to get back on track. Some of the direct initiatives included in the SCP are breakfast clubs, homework clubs, afterschool supports, mentoring programmes, therapeutic interventions, and others.<sup>269</sup>

Here is a summary table of the curative and preventative steps taken by DES:

**TABLE 6**

<b>Irish Initiatives to tackle the problem of school dropouts</b>	
<i>Curative</i>	<i>Preventative</i>
Transition Year between Junior and Senior Cycle	DEIS Schools and Programmes
The LCA two-year Programme	The Early Start Programme
Youthreach Centers	The National Childcare Scheme
School Completion Programme	The New Primary Language Curriculum and The Junior Certificate School Programme

Funding is not mentioned in this table, yet it is present on both levels. Similar to Germany, Ireland has always been investing in its education even during the financial problems of 2008. This investment is certainly paying off in the low numbers of school dropouts.

After presenting the curative and preventative initiatives taken by both countries, the next sections of this thesis will offer the reader a more qualitative view on the dropout phenomenon through various interviews carried out with German and Irish school dropouts as well as school personnel. We will start first however by outlining the methodology and analytical process used for these interviews to give more transparency, meaning and credibility to this work.

<sup>269</sup> <http://kilkennycarlow.etb.ie/youth-services-2/school-complete-programme/>

## 4. The Methodological Approach for the Interviews in Germany and Ireland

The interviews of this research, whether in Germany or in Ireland, were carried out in a semi-structured qualitative research method.<sup>270</sup> This chapter aims to offer the reader a transparent idea of the used design, methods, and evaluation in order to offer more validity and reliability to the gathered data. The interviews in Ireland were carried out in 2007 as the school dropout rate in the country was at 10% of the young population aged 18 to 24. Those in Germany were inducted in 2019 and 2020 while that rate was at that same level. This fact gives the research a common ground to begin with.

### 4.1 Semi-Structure Interviewing Method

The semi-structured interviewing method has been used for this research. It is an inductive approach with “an iterative and ongoing pursuit of meaning.”<sup>271</sup> The interviews were organized on the one hand through using the interview questions presented in Appendix 1 und 2 at the end of this thesis and on the other hand by allowing the participants for impromptu exchanges, which made them feel at ease and open to speak up their minds and hearts. Semi-structured interviewing provides a repertoire of possibilities since it is sufficiently structured to address specific topics related to the phenomenon of study, while leaving space for participants to offer new meanings to the study focus.<sup>272</sup> It also gives the researcher the opportunity to probe a participant’s responses for clarification, meaning making, and critical reflection.<sup>273</sup> The German and Irish interviews in the next chapter, through using this method, should give the reader an insight into the participants’ narrative of experience as the questions were structured to yield substantial multidimensional streams of data.<sup>274</sup> The interviews started from open-ended questions to a more theoretically-driven ones,

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<sup>270</sup> For more information on Semi-Structured Interview, check out these two books: Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardoff and Ines Steinke, (eds.) *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004) and Anne Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*, (New York University Press, 2013).

<sup>271</sup> Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond*, 18.

<sup>272</sup> Flick, *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, p. 255.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*.

eliciting data grounded in the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which this research has been conducted.<sup>275</sup>

Galletta makes it clear that semi-structured interviewing, through combining both empirically and theoretically guided questions, required researcher-participant reciprocity and reflexivity on the part of the researcher after the interview. Both reciprocity and reflexivity will offer an encounter with emerging analytic themes.<sup>276</sup>

Furthermore, comparable to this semi-structured research carried out by Alison While,<sup>277</sup> two main considerations for using this method of interviewing are considered valid for this research:

- a- The sensitivity and complexity of the topics discussed with school dropouts during the interviews and the exploration of their perceptions and opinions are well-preserved through this type of interviewing, which allow probing for more data and clarification conceivable. Probing ensures here reliability<sup>278</sup> and enables the interviewer to explore and clarify inconsistencies within respondents' accounts and can help respondents recall information for questions involving memory.<sup>279</sup>
  
- b- The personal histories of each school dropout cannot be fairly captured through a standardized and rigid interview method, hence the semi-structure method which allows the interviewer to validate the respondent's answers by detecting non-verbal indicators<sup>280</sup> and ensures that all questions are answered without any external support.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid*, 118.

<sup>277</sup> Alison While, *Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper*, (London: 1993), p. 328-334.

<sup>278</sup> S. Hutchinson and H. Skodol-Wilson, *Validity threats in scheduled semi-structured research interviews*, *Nursing Research* 41(2), 117-119.

<sup>279</sup> L. Smith, *Ethical Issues in Interviewing*, *Journal of Advance Nursing*, 1992, 17(1), 98-103.

<sup>280</sup> R.L. Gordon, *Interviewing: Strategy, Techniques and Tactics*, (Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1975).

<sup>281</sup> K.D. Bailey, *Methods of Social Research*, 3rd Edition, (New York: The Free Press, 1987).

## 4.2 The Design of the Interviewing Method

The setting of the interviews in Ireland was less bureaucratic than that of Germany as contacting the participants and arranging the meetings on the Irish isle were done through a simple call or an E-Mail. They were official and easily organized. In Germany, although the meetings were unofficial and had to be organized either face to face, on the phone or by E-Mail, they had to be proven to stem from a qualified reference.

All interviews in both countries were promised anonymity. Names, places, and sensitive information were replaced to respect the wishes of the participants yet useful data were presented to give the reader the information needed to get the necessary picture.<sup>282</sup>

The same interview questions were developed for Germany and Ireland. The questions with school dropouts were designed to start with an overview of family and social circumstances and delve deeper into school settings, relationships with teachers and peers, and look out for any signs of malaise and confrontations. The questions with school personnel were designed to understand the environment where teachers, school principals, and social workers work, how school dropouts spend their schooltime, and what challenges the former faces while trying to deal with and support the latter.

School dropouts from both Germany and Ireland were selected randomly. They were recommended by principals, teachers, and social workers. Both female and male participants were involved. In Germany, most school dropouts were interviewed outside any educational settings while in Ireland most were interviewed at or close to Youthreach centers which, as we know, caters for these dropouts. In Germany, the face to face interviews with the education personnel took place at their workplace or its vicinity whereas those with the school dropouts at or close to their homes. In Ireland, the interviews with the education personnel took place in their offices whereas those with the school dropouts at or close to their Youthreach centers.

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<sup>282</sup> D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

All interviews had to be organized in advance to give the participants time to reflect on the topic of dropping out. They were however not given the questions in advance so that their responses could be more spontaneous and upfront. The respondents were told that they could decide themselves whether they wish to answer a certain question or skip to the next one. Most interviews lasted about 30 minutes. The answers were documented while the respondents were speaking. Most respondents were reluctant to have their interviews recorded. As soon as an interview was over, all answers were edited and documented to give more accuracy to the interviews.

From the documented interviews in the following chapter, one will notice that a structure to the flow of answers emerges, yet additional information can be found as the school dropouts were encouraged to speak out their mind and digress should they wish. On most occasions, two-sided conversations were maintained to get the respondents more involved in the subject and give clarity to the raised topics.

### **4.3 Evaluation Through Kuckartz' Thematic Qualitative Text Analysis**

The interviews carried out in Germany and Ireland will be analyzed and evaluated using Udo Kuckartz' thematic qualitative text analysis.<sup>283</sup> Before discussing the relevance of the thematic analysis to the evaluation of this work's interviews, it is important to briefly highlight the importance of Kuckartz's qualitative text analysis. Kuckartz' work creates new ways in evaluating researches using these 6 points:

- 1- It is the categories<sup>284</sup>, the code-book, and the process of coding<sup>285</sup> that are central to the analysis.
- 2- It is a systematic approach that includes a set of clear rules for each of the individual steps of the analysis.
- 3- It involves classifying and categorizing all texts of the entire data set and not only selected parts of the data.

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<sup>283</sup> Udo Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practice & Using Software*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014).

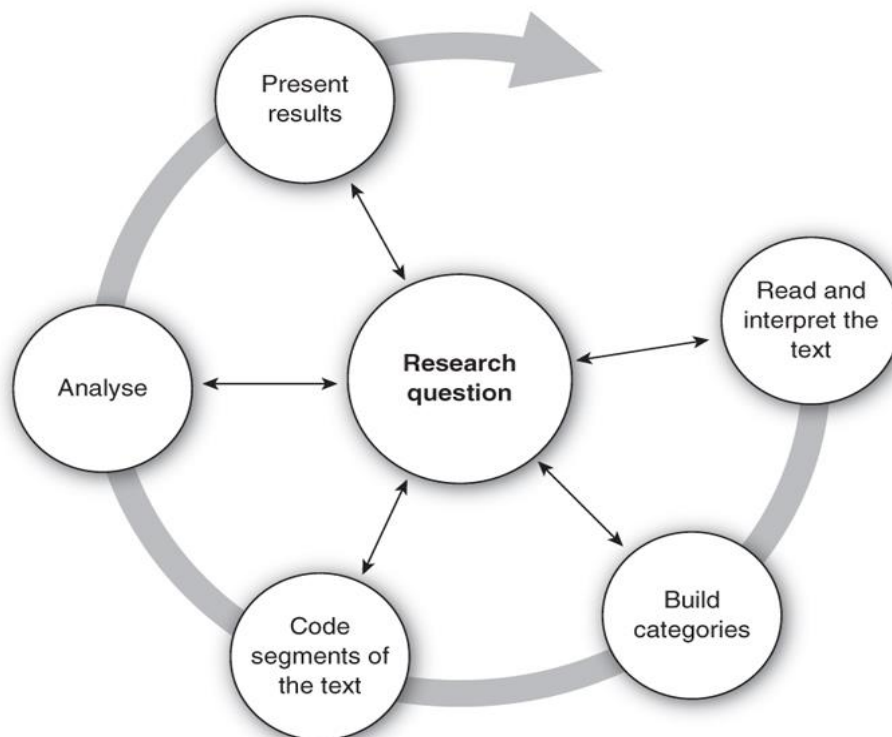
<sup>284</sup> According to Kuckartz, the term 'category' is usually used in the sense of 'class', i.e., a category is the result of some sort of classification.

<sup>285</sup> According to Bernard and Ryan, coding can be a tool for tagging and indexing a text and can offer a value code to indicate the amount of a particular characteristic, in H.R., Bernard and G.W., Ryan, *Analyzing Qualitative Data. Systematic Approaches*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2010).

- 4- It uses techniques to create categories based on the data.
- 5- It involves hermeneutic interpretation and reflection and is aware of the interactive form of the origin of the material.
- 6- It recognizes quality standards and aims for intercoder agreement.<sup>286</sup>

To give an initial general picture of how Kuckartz' qualitative text analysis works, Graph 3 below from Kuckartz' book<sup>287</sup> does this job. It all starts with carefully reading all the texts of the interviews and creating codes for relevant ideas, thoughts, and concerns. These codes and their recurrence hence allow for the creation of the main categories. Kuckartz' qualitative text analysis differs from classical content analysis in that it includes additional steps for iterations and feedback.

**GRAPH 3**



The research question is to identify the similarities and differences of dropping out in Germany and Ireland. Thus, this remains the main focus at all times during the

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, chapter 2.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, Chapter 3.



evaluation process. Simultaneously, the cycle of creating the categories for the interviews with school dropouts as well as educational personnel and analyzing them takes place during the analysis process. For Kuckartz, it is even possible to acquire additional data after the category system has been established and the majority of the data has been coded.<sup>288</sup> For the interview analysis of this thesis, it was feasible through grouping and comparing the various codes from the various relevant interviews to come up with the proper and suitable categories. Through hermeneutically and interpretively coding the data, Kuckartz emphasizes that the categories have more of a structuring and systematizing role and do not simply serve to transfer the empirical data into a number or relation.<sup>289</sup> For instance, after examining the responses of the German school dropouts in relation to their use of mobile phones within and outside their school environment, the category of “Digital Mobbing” came to light which somehow sheds the light on their common agony in that regard. Another example from the Irish interviews can be centered around the category “Siblings Influence”. Several Irish school dropouts discussed the influence of their brothers and sisters on their desire and ambition to stop pursuing further education. Due to various codes relating to this topic, that category came to light which allowed to highlight a common experience or ordeal among these interviewees. Such categories are not fixed at the beginning though and can, too, be adjusted by recoding certain data. Another advantage of this type of analysis is that one does not need to have all the data collected in order to begin evaluating them. For Kuckartz, it could be an ongoing process.

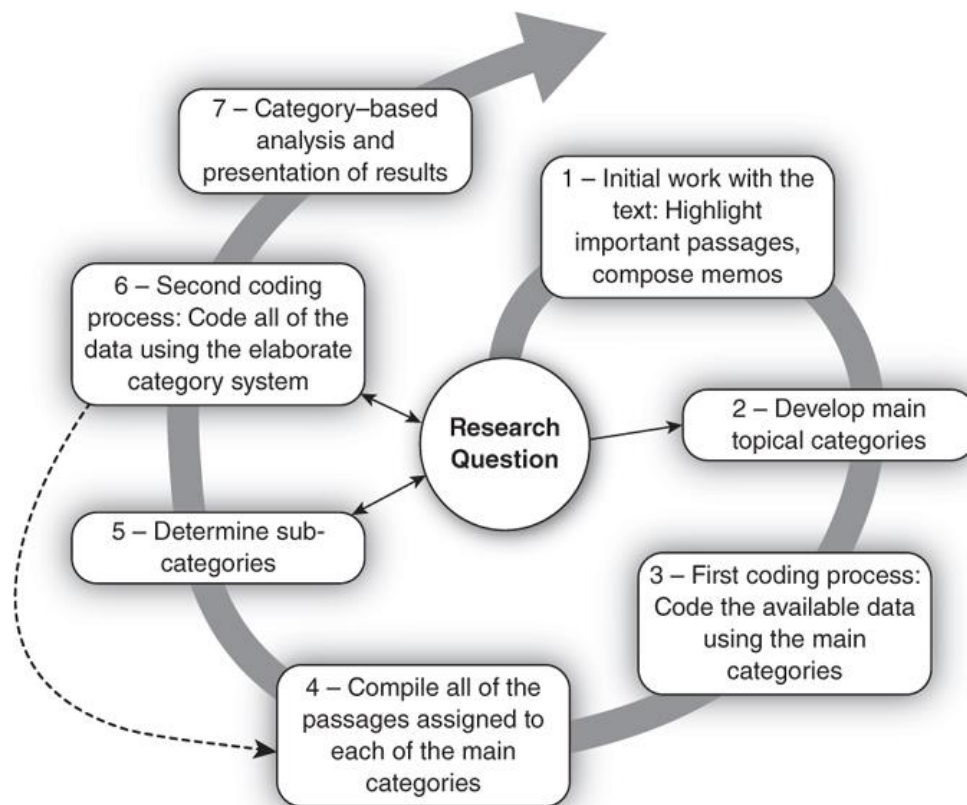
Moving on to highlight in more details the Kuckartz’ thematic qualitative text analysis used to thoroughly evaluate the interview data of this thesis, here is a graph from his book which should illustrate the various seven required steps.

#### **GRAPH 4**

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<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*



This thematic qualitative text analysis both involved the introduction of deductive and inductive categories for the thesis' documented interviews. Step 1 and 2 of Graph 4 initiated the search for codes and memos through careful reading of the interview texts, highlighting the important passages and in due course developing topical categories. Using the interview guides in the appendix 1 and 2 of this thesis, some main categories, through the first coding process or step 3, would have already been assigned to allow the logical flow of the interview process, hence deductive categorizing.<sup>290</sup> Step 4 would then strengthen the coding process through assigning codes and passages to the deductive categories. Examples of these deductive categories, mentioned in the educational personnel's responses in chapter 6 of this thesis, are "Lack of Qualified Teachers", "Peer Pressure", "Immigration Background", and others. Such categories and even sub-categories (step 5) got generated through the flow of the interview questions. Furthermore, using the hermeneutical and interpretative analyzing text methods, other categories would have been generated

<sup>290</sup> For Kuckartz, constructing categories based solely on the empirical data is often referred to as *inductive category construction*. Constructing categories based on existing theories about the subject and existing hypotheses is called *deductive category construction*.

inductively through the use of codes, memos<sup>291</sup> and case summaries.<sup>292</sup> Such inductive categories such as “Stressful Transition Period”, “False Expectations”, “Bad Manners” and others, mentioned in chapter 6 below, came as a result of following steps 1, 6, even 4 and 5 or the second coding process of Graph 4. These steps are parts of a cycle which could occur again and again and hence allow for a constant search of codes and assigning them to their proper categories.

The combination of both deductive and inductive analysis and the attempt to create the themes which school dropouts find as relevant make that choice of Kuckartz’ text analysis suitable. Following this thematic qualitative cycle, categories for this research were evaluated and streamlined to create the right combination and attempt to answer the research question mentioned above. Kuckartz makes it clear that:

In thematic qualitative text analysis, one text passage can refer to different main and sub-topics. Thus, one passage can be assigned to multiple categories. As a result, some of the coded passages will overlap and intertwine with each other.<sup>293</sup>

The analysis of the interviews was therefore exposed to a structured yet comprehensive method allowing to capture the core of what the interviewees attempted to share while neither leaving room for ambiguity nor missing out on important information. The interviews were clearly and thoroughly documented in the order of the interviewees’ answers and comments. That gives more authenticity to the flow of thoughts and accuracy to the ideas which were meant to be conveyed. The codes and memos were a result of a careful analysis of the texts, deductively and inductively, which led to the creation of the categories served to summarize the shared ideas, let alone comparing them between the German and Irish jurisdictions. More detailed explanations of Kuckartz’ analysis will be offered in chapter 6 of this thesis.

Overall, by using the semi-structured interviewing and the thematic qualitative text analysis, the next two chapters will aim at offering the reader a transparent and reliable approach to the gathering and analyzing of data.

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<sup>291</sup> Any peculiarities in the text or ideas that you may have while reading the text should be recorded as memos.

<sup>292</sup> Unlike memos, Kuckartz writes, case summaries should not contain your own ideas or even hypotheses that you may have developed while working through the text; instead, case summaries are fact-oriented and stay close to the original text. *Ibid*, Chapter 4.3.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 4.3

## **5. Interviews with Education Personnel and School Dropouts in Germany and Ireland**

Before beginning with our documentation of the interviews, it is important to note that more than 10 years ago, while the dropout rate in Ireland was over 10%, I researched extensively the reasons behind the Irish dropout phenomenon and interviewed several educational personnel and dropouts there using the semi-structured interviewing process with the intention of getting a qualitative perspective which could somehow explain that high rate. That research led me to visit several Irish cities<sup>294</sup> and arrange face to face interviews. Since then, the dropout rate in Ireland has halved standing currently at about 5%, while the dropout rate in Germany remained constant standing at above the European goal of 9%.

This chapter will compare twenty-eight interviews done in Germany<sup>295</sup> and Ireland, with fourteen educational officers and principals, i.e., seven personnel from each country, and with fourteen school dropouts i.e., seven from Germany and seven from Ireland. It will reveal some of their family and school backgrounds and compare their concerns and issues.

In doing so, the reader would get a concrete view as to how each school system reacts to the phenomenon of dropping out and be able, through using Kuckartz's thematic qualitative text analysis, to compare the struggles that school pupils of two different jurisdictions face. We shall start by outlining the interviews from Germany and afterwards those from Ireland.

### **5.1 Meetings with Educational Personnel and School Dropouts in Germany**

The interviews carried out in this section were held in 2019 und 2020 with both German educational personnel and school dropouts in Augsburg, the south of Germany, and

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<sup>294</sup> The Isle of Ireland is relatively compact to arrange interviews from different part of the country and get a better idea of the dropout phenomenon there.

<sup>295</sup> As Germany is 5 times bigger than Ireland, the interviews were concentrated in the region of Swabia, Bavaria, where urban as well as rural school dropouts were contacted and interviewed.

some of its rural areas. Seven school personnel as well as seven dropouts were unofficially interviewed at their schools or local cafes or even called over the phone due to the Covid-19 contact precaution measures. All participants were open, answered the questions without any pressure and requested their anonymity.

### **5.1.1 Meetings with Principals and School Personnel in Germany**

#### **5.1.1A Meeting with a Gymnasium Principal in the Inner City of Augsburg**

I met a Gymnasium principal in Augsburg on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 2019. For the anonymity's sake, I should call him Mr. Lang, who has been leading his school for about 5 years.

His Gymnasium opens its doors to about 800 pupils and offers employment to about 80 teachers. These teachers are mainly assigned by the ministry of Education in Bavaria to work at this school. Mr. Lang sees this phenomenon positive as well as negative.

This Gymnasium offers whole day tuitions to its pupils. About 150 pupils avail of this offer which, according to Mr. Lang, brings about a positive impact on their educational lives. He was proud to mention that his Gymnasium is a mixed school with almost 50% boys and 50% girls. This allows the boys and girls to interact with each other for a better communication outside the school life.

This Gymnasium attracts not only pupils from within Augsburg but also from outside the city. The train station is not far from the school which plays a very practical transport option. This pupil mix allows for sharing of different mentalities within the Gymnasium.

Mr. Lang spoke about three main scenarios of pupils leaving his Gymnasium. These are: pupils moving to different locations, pupils choosing a different school setting and pupils completely dropping out. The latter constitutes about 5 to 6% of the total number of pupils at this Gymnasium. This year, there have been 14 pupils who have chosen to completely drop out.

Mr. Lang's Gymnasium offers 3 education paths: economics, language and science. He mentioned that some pupils find learning a second language at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade somehow challenging, let alone choosing a third one at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

According to Mr. Lang, it is the pupil's achievement or marks which constitute the early signs whether a pupil remain or leave the Gymnasium. Another point is the pupil's social behavior with others especially when it comes to digitalization. Some pupils get abused through social media which could affect their self-esteem and get harmed psychologically. This will in turn affect their performance at the Gymnasium. Mr. Lang mentions that his Gymnasium takes this matter seriously through teaching programs in media use, through media scouts who watch out for any digitalization abuse and through tackling any such abuse cases without hesitation.

When it comes to the relationship between teachers and pupils, Mr. Lang believes that between the two parties there is no room for friendship. Any relationship should be based on respect. A teacher should be looked up to in order to bring about order to his or her classroom and be able to convey the lessons he or she organizes.

At this Gymnasium, there is a social worker as well as a psychologist working full time. These watch closely over the behavior of the pupils and offer any help needed. The pupils can avail of their professional support at any time during the schooling time.

As for the role of parents, Mr. Lang stresses on the continuous need for their involvement in the schooling lives of their children. The triangle connection between teachers, pupils and parents should always be taken seriously. Five to eight times a year, parents meet the relative teachers and discuss various topics which are relevant to their children's wellbeing. The parental council also plays a positive role in organizing various events and shares opinions on various issues relating to the internal school life.

Mr. Lang mentions that in the last years there has been an increase of pupils crossing the primary school (Grundschule) into the Gymnasium. Some of these pupils do not fit in at his school. Their parents wish that they try it first and see how they perform. This can lead to a feeling of failure within the pupil at a later stage when they are required to change schools. The pupils who are talented are recognized at Mr. Lang's Gymnasium. The challenged pupils are accompanied and offered alternative options when the road proves to be very difficult.

There is a social development team which is made up of teachers who offer support and opportunities to various students. There are different missing pieces of a picture which sometimes need to be discussed and dealt with to help pupils figure out what they need to achieve, according to Mr. Lang. Nonetheless, at the Sekundarstufe II, he says that that picture is almost complete. Therefore, pupils at that level should know better what they wish to do with their lives – one of these wishes is dropping out. They simply had enough of the schooling system.

Last but not least, the topic of motivation came up. Only well-motivated pupils can show the right deal of success. In order to maintain this motivation level, all parties need to play their role. Only then, pupils can prove that they are able to reach the goals which are expected from them.

Finally, Mr. Lang's main wish was that there would be more space at his Gymnasium. His classes are relatively big – about 26 pupils in a class. He hopes to have smaller groups where teachers can pay more attention to the weaker pupils. This would also minimize the stress on all parties and especially allow for the possibility of pupils to figure out their ways rather than simply drop out. He sees classes with up to 18 pupils as the better way forward for his Gymnasium.

### **5.1.1B Meeting with an Educational Psychologist of a Realschule in the South-East of Augsburg**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, I met the educational psychologist of a Realschule in the southeast of Augsburg. He welcomed me in his office, and we spent together approximately an hour discussing various issues relating to pupils who change course to join his school and his pupils who drop out as soon as they reach the legal age of leaving school. For the anonymity reason, I shall call him Mr. Jedrak. He was very open to discuss the questions which I raised.

Mr. Jedrak clearly states that most pupils who leave the Gymnasium to come to his school had faced the problem of scoring badly in certain subjects, i.e., which relates to developing a low self-esteem in these subjects – something which they inherited from their old Gymnasium. They also join with the fear of the “Arbeitsaufwand” or

workload which they were buried under in the past. This workload is so grave that it kills any motivation which they initially had at the Sekundarstufe I. Pupils feel that they could not breathe anymore or their lives are only centered around learning. They seek therefore a way out. Many of these pupils tell of long hours doing homework every day, which eventually kills their appetite for learning.

On the issue of pupils making the decision to join either the Gymnasium, Realschule or Mittelschule from an early age, Mr. Jedrak clearly says that when pupils are as young as 10 or 11 years old, it is easier to lead them. Whereas if that decision was made at a later stage in their lives, it may be that they make graver mistakes which they could regret in their later lives. Therefore, the early it is to lead them in the right direction the better it is for them.

Many pupils who leave the Gymnasium underestimate the workload which they still have to put in the Realschule, Mr. Jedrak claims. Some of them come with the assumption that they need not invest much work at all. This attitude leads them to even fail at the Realschule, get transferred to the lower school or Mittelschule and ultimately drop out after the 9<sup>th</sup> class.

On the other side, some parents decide from the beginning to send their children to a Realschule although with their marks from the Grundschule, they are entitled to attend a Gymnasium. The pupils in that category perform better, are happier with themselves and the pressure is not as high as in the Gymnasium. In other words, these pupils have a "Gymnasial" capability, yet their parents decide to keep them in the Realschule for their own psychological wellbeing. At a later stage, these pupils could decide to do an Abitur or any other leaving exam which prepares them for any career in life.

Mr. Jedrak claims that in the outskirts of Augsburg, a Realschule does not have a bad image as much as in the inner city. Pupils feel that they could study at their own pace without negative pressure. The transition from Gymnasium to Realschule can happen at any time during the Sekundarstufe I. However, timing is of the essence as some pupils make that transition and feel lost, which would lead them to their dropping out completely at the Sekundarstufe II. They have already developed a sense of failure at the Gymnasium, so they need a push or "confidence rebuilding" process in their abilities. This takes some time to regain and sometimes never gets the proper healing.



Mr. Jedrak believes that many pupils get led in the wrong direction and even the system fails them as opposed to them failing it. He claims that we need to rethink the pressure which we put on our children, yet we need nonetheless to stay behind their progress and studies. Otherwise, they will not do the job on their own.

### **5.1.1C Phone Conversation with a Mittleschule Principal in the Outskirt of Augsburg**

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2020, I phoned the principal of an about 400 pupil-Mittleschule in the outskirts of Augsburg. It is considered to be one of the biggest Mittleschule in the region. For the purpose of anonymity, I shall call the principal Ms. Flohe. The phone conversation lasted about 30 minutes. We followed some of the interview questions and tried to deal with issues relating to pupils as well as parents and teachers' struggles.

There are about 50 teachers working at this school with 48% male and 52% female pupils. Most of the pupils get transferred directly from the Grundschule at the age of 10 or 11 to this school. Very few pupils get transferred from the Gymnasium or Realschule to this Mittleschule which also prepares its pupils to do both the Hauptschulabschluss (after the 9<sup>th</sup> class) and Mittlere Schulabschluss (after the 10<sup>th</sup> class) at the end of the Sekundarstufe I. The latter certification is normally awarded by the Realschule and yet it is offered at Ms. Flohe's school. There are about 60 pupils this year who are going to go for the Mittlere Schulabschluss.

When asked about why pupils come to her school, Ms. Flohe was clear in saying that her pupils do not fit in other schools, i.e., Realschule and Gymnasium. They cannot perform at the level of the other pupils. Their school marks at the Grundschule decide their transfer into the relative school. She even had some pupils who were at a low level of handicap. The advantage for these pupils is that they get the chance to be taught by one teacher for a longer time and in different subjects. Thus, the level of trust and connection can be easily built upon over the years and the one-to-one support can be better provided. Ms. Flohe believes that pupils can be to a certain

degree pre-determined through different background reasons to attend her school. She even believes in genetic competence.

In relation to the parents' role in the achievement of their children, Ms. Flohe claims that parents find it very difficult to accept that their children cannot do better but attend the Mittelschule. At a later stage, they show more acceptance as they see their children's development and satisfaction. Parents get involved through representatives in the school and get to meet the teachers on some occasions during the school year.

Since the school attendance at the Grundschule and Sekundarstufe I is obligatory in Germany, parents would have to pay a fine if their children skipped school. Parents would have to pay an even higher fine if their children truanted or left school. Towards the 9<sup>th</sup> class, pupils who fail to get a certification still receive support and advice on whether to go for a certain job training. Some also choose to repeat the 9<sup>th</sup> class and get a second chance to pass the Hauptschulabschluss.

Teachers who are working at Ms. Flohe's school get specific training to work there. As a Mittelschule teacher, you cannot teach at a Realschule or Gymnasium. Mittelschule teachers earn less than teachers at other schools. There has been a lack of qualified teachers to teach at her school and some of them are not even getting the normal required training to teach there. Ms. Flohe sees a problem in the future in catering for her pupils, not to mention getting the right personnel for her school.

The problem relating to the spread of Covid-19 and the lack of examination is going to bring fewer pupils to her school, Ms. Flohe says, which is also going to bring about more pressure on the other schools. She wishes that the Sekundarstufe I would include strong and weak pupils together. She sees more benefits in doing that than separating pupils from an early age. Leaving school after the legal age of school attendance is a choice that pupils can be driven to make.

Finally, Ms. Flohe clarifies the need to explain to parents the importance of her school in the development of their children. Many feel ashamed to send their children to her school at the beginning. She claims that her school system is somehow allowing some children to fail.

### **5.1.1D Phone Interview with a Vocational School Principal in the East of Augsburg**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, I had a phone conversation with a principal of a vocational school in the East of Augsburg. For privacy reasons, I shall call her Ms. Kurz. The interview lasted about 30 minutes and we followed the structure of the interview questions.

Ms. Kurz's school is one of the biggest vocational schools in the region with about 2200 pupils – roughly half are male and the other half female. It boasts that it attracts pupils from distant places as it offers a very wide range of courses such as trade, transport, insurance, dialogue marketing, office management, bank personnel, IT, car sales studies and others.

The age group of the pupils at this school ranges between 16 and 22 years. Most of them come from the Mittelschule and some from the Realschule. A small number of pupils from the Gymnasium and some holders of an Abitur decide to join in. Thus, classrooms can have a varied selection of pupils with different competence – a fact which leads to some teaching problems within the classrooms, according to Ms. Kurz.

The school offers its pupils 4-month-probation period for them to realize whether the selected course is suitable or not. One can change courses and try something different. About 5% decide to drop out and pursue something outside the schooling system since they are not legally obliged to attend school anymore.

Since a vocational school has different settings than the Sekundarstufe I schools, Ms. Kurz claims that pupils who decide to drop out join in with a different expectation. They are required to attend 2 days of schooling and do practical training or take on various apprenticeships at companies. The overall time of schooling and working should not exceed a normal German working week. Learning while working could be challenging for some pupils as they need to follow a rigorous time schedule and show flexibility and integration in the workplace. Combining two environments in one while doing tests and proving to be competent at training could be fun but quite stressful at times.

There are about 50 teachers at Ms. Kurz's school. They are all well-paid and get to build stronger relationships with their pupils. Some classes tend to be bigger than usual – with more than 30 pupils in one class.

Parents tend to be less involved in their children's education although there is a parental council at this school. Children over 16 years of age have more independency and tend to follow their desires to achieve what they like while their parents exercise little influence on them.

The school has a social worker and a team of pupils who tackles critical issues among affected pupils. Yet Ms. Kurz says that there are many issues which do not get reported. These could be related to cyber mobbing and verbal or physical mobbing. The range of pupils' abilities and backgrounds are so diverse that they allow for such bad behaviors to occur. It is sometimes for the benefit of some pupils that they do not attend school more than two days a week.

Ms. Kurz argues that dropouts at her school are mainly those who had enough of the schooling and marking system or experience difficulties in the new school environment with other pupils. Some decide to join their family businesses while others take up an apprenticeship at a company without having to do any schooling. A small number of pupils quit completely and take a break from schooling before rejoining school to figure out what they want to do with their lives.

When asked if she had a wish to change something in her school, she admitted that smaller classrooms with no more than 22 pupils would be very desirable. That means for her school more space and surely more teachers. The Covid-19 crisis is making it difficult for pupils to get apprenticeships in companies, but she hopes that this will change very soon.

### **5.1.1E Phone Interview with a Higher Vocational School Principal in Augsburg**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, I phoned the principal of the Berufoberschule (BOS) and Fachoberschule (FOS) in Augsburg, Mr. Hahn (His name has been changed for the

anonymity's sake). The phone conversation lasted about 30 minutes and Mr. Hahn was very cooperative and offered further information when needed.

Mr. Hahn claims that his school caters for about 130 pupils. It stands at the same level as the Gymnasium, given that pupils who finish three years of vocational schooling and complete the Mittlere Schulabschluss attend his school. Pupils need to do two or three years of studies at his school and can at the end acquire the Technical Leaving Certificate (Fachgebundene Hochschulreife) or equally the general Leaving Certificate acquired at the Gymnasium.

Pupils at the age of 17 and above attend his school. They need to go through a probation time of three months in order to figure out if this educational institute is the right place for them. Mr. Hahn's school offers the preparation for the Mittlere Schulabschluss but very few pupils avail of it.

At this school, one can do further education in technical, design, social, administrative, and international economy studies. Mr. Hahn claims that despite the various courses offered, very few pupils are registered at his school, and it is therefore not so utilized as it should be, as some do not know the benefits that BOS and FOS could offer to its successful participants.

Moreover, 20% of pupils drop out yearly of his school. This high number boils down to the wrong expectation that pupils have when they arrive. Pupils who succeed need to bring along a commitment to attend, good performance and a hard-working attitude. Most of the dropouts fail due to their failure in their estimation of the workload required at this school.

There are 11 teachers working at Mr. Hahn's school. There are almost 28 pupils in every class. Most of them come from the Realschule. The majority are already involved in trainings and apprenticeships at companies. They earn money with additional jobs done at weekends.

The learning atmosphere at Mr. Hahn's school is very different from that of the lower schools. Pupils have already gone through years of vocational studies beside working. Most of them have social competence and thus problems within the classrooms such as mobbing, and others happen very rarely.

BOS and FOS teachers have a more practical approach to teaching as they have worked in companies themselves and know what the real working world requires. Mr. Hahn makes here the comparison between Gymnasium teachers and his teachers in such a way that he claims that his teachers know the world better outside the books.

Psychological support is offered through a priest and social worker who are employed at his school. Very few pupils take on this offer as they do not spend too much time there and therefore there is less interaction between them and the pupils.

When asked about his wish to change something in his school, Mr. Hahn said that an interdisciplinary project would be very helpful for pupils for one month without any marks. Through this project, pupils would be able to explore various fields which are not related necessarily to theirs and yet it might open their eyes as to what the others have on offer and what they can bring in from there into their own world.

All in all, pupils are old enough to make decisions for themselves and they still decide to drop out because the studies requirements are very demanding, and the easiest way is to continue earning money where they are already employed without further education.

### **5.1.1F Meeting with a Former Manager of the IHK in Swabia**

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, I met Ms. Böttcher, a former Manager of the IHK (Industrial and Chamber of Commerce Institution) in Swabia. Her real name has been changed to ensure anonymity. Whether a pupil looking for an apprenticeship or a business searching for workers, the IHK offers education to thousands of pupils, trains them with the cooperation of a vast number of companies and awards them with certificates which will enable them to have easier access to the workplace. Aged 16 years and over, pupils from all backgrounds such as Gymnasium, Realschule, Mittelschule, and others come together into one class and learn for a job or a career.<sup>296</sup> The IHK in

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<sup>296</sup> <http://www.ihk.de>

Swabia offers apprenticeships in commerce of all kinds, insurance sales, secretariat, bank office, medical care, elderly care, and many others.<sup>297</sup>

Ms. Böttcher worked many years for IHK and several years in management positions up to the position of vice-president of the education sector. I met her in a café in Friedberg for about three hours and discussed with her the various issues relating to the school system in Swabia, what the IHK offers the pupils of the Sekundarstufe II and why they decide to drop out despite having apprenticeship positions.

First and foremost, she states that the majority of the Realschule in Swabia are female-dominated schools. That means that male Gymnasiasten would have difficulty finding a place at a Realschule should the Gymnasium not suit them. This might push them either to struggle at the Gymnasium or even go to the lowest level and attend a Mittelschule. Ms. Böttcher even mentions that up to 50% of the pupils in Swabia have an immigration background which might affect the aspiration of some children, let alone the transfer of knowledge of educational options offered to them.

In Germany, every fourth apprenticeship contract at the IHK is dissolved. In Swabia, every fifth contract gets interrupted. 10% of these contracts are in the probation period. Some of the reasons for this interruption are theft, bad manners such as coming too late, absence of motivation, and others. There are branches at the IHK, in particular hospitality, which experience a much higher rate of dropping out reaching at almost 50%. One important point, which Ms. Böttcher further clarifies, is the wrong expectation which some pupils develop by choosing certain apprenticeship fields. She gave the example of someone wanting to work at Lidl (a low budget supermarket chain) and another at a prestigious shop. Although both have to deal with sales and customer service, the requirements to absolve these apprenticeships can be quite different. Thus, although pupils receive much information online and attend trade fairs and exhibitions, they still build the wrong expectation as to what a specific career requires. This was a source for disappointment for Ms. Böttcher that so many apprenticeships end up interrupted.

When asked about the teacher-pupil relationship at the IHK and how important it is to their success, she states that a teacher who understands and motivates a pupil can

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<sup>297</sup> <http://www.schwaben.ihk.de>

lead him or her easily into the right direction and create a trusting connection which can only be beneficial. On the other hand, teachers who only see the negative sides in pupils, such as being lazy, unconcentrated, stupid, and so on, can create feelings of incompetence within them. The younger the pupil is the riskier it is that a teacher can cause harm to his or her self-esteem and drive. She has even experienced within her inner circle how a teacher, through his engagement and dedication, managed to make out of a weak pupil someone who performed even better than the others who were way ahead of him at the beginning. Her wish is that teachers would accompany pupils with compassion and a pure desire to promote them in the right direction and show them understanding throughout their learning process.

In relation to the parents' engagement with their children's education at the Berufsschule or the IHK, Ms. Böttcher says that once pupils complete the various official school certificates such as Mittleschulabschluss, Mittlere Schulabschluss, Abitur and so on, the interest of the parents in their Berufsschule becomes weaker since the responsibility lies even more on the teacher or trainer to lead their pupils to succeed. Moreover, the meetings which parents had with teachers in the Sekundarstufe I on a regular basis become almost non-existent and transform into meetings between teachers and pupils to discuss various challenges and difficulties. In 2019, according to Ms. Böttcher, every second apprentice at the IHK was 18 years old and above, which means that parents would exercise very little influence on their children since they are seen as grown-ups. If an apprentice shows deficit in certain areas, the Agentur für Arbeit or the Employment Agency offers financial support for extra tuitions. Therefore, the role of parents becomes less and less influential when pupils reach that legal age of leaving school.

To sum up, Ms. Böttcher sees the need for more clarification and guidance to pupils in order for them to select the right career road and avoid dropping out from the Berufsschule or the IHK for that matter. She wishes that pupils adhere to certain codes of behaviour in order to keep their apprenticeships and get awarded the right certificates which would help them in their future.

### **5.1.1G Phone Interview with a Vocational School Principal in Königsbrunn**



On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2020, I phoned the principal of a Special Needs Vocational School in Königsbrunn. For the purpose of anonymity, I shall call the principal Mr. Hall. The phone conversation lasted about 30 minutes. We followed roughly the interview questions and tried to discuss the challenges that his school faces.

Mr. Hall's school caters for about 350 pupils of which 100 are full time and the others part time. The pupils who attend full time education are mostly in the year of so-called Work Preparation (Berufsvorbereitung) such as carpenter or construction apprenticeship. This preparation year allows pupils to learn some of the basic working skills and prepares them to apply for apprenticeships at a later stage. The remaining 250 pupils take part in one or two-day schooling and work at various companies. The fields of vocational education at this school are construction, metal, wood, and garden techniques, let alone nursing aid.

Mr. Hall's school is a private school that caters for special needs pupils, who come from different backgrounds of learning difficulties. Most of them make the transfer from the special needs school (Förderschule) at the Sekundarstufe I and a few pupils from the Mittelschule. They join at the age of 15 or 16 and do an Intelligence Test or equivalent to allow the school to get an idea of their learning competence. Some of the pupils who come to his school suffer from personal problems which should have been dealt with a long time ago, Mr. Hall claims. These pupils would rather need two to three years of preparation. Yet they get no more than a year. Some pupils have problems with basic behavioral practices such as punctuality, respect, proper sickness registration, reliability, and others. These practices could not be changed in such a short period of time which would normally cause some pupils to be rejected from their apprenticeships.

Mr. Halls claims that on average 10% of pupils drop out from his school. 30% to 50% of them do that in the first preparation year. These dropouts are not tough enough to cope with the school structure, he confirms. When they miss 17 days of schooling a year, that is when it shows that they do not fit in the schooling environment, should rather do a work placement at home, and attempt to get an apprenticeship the following year. There is also the possibility for them to repeat the preparation year at their school.

When asked about the relationship between teachers and pupils, Mr. Hall says that his teachers follow more of an authoritarian style where pupils must show respect, follow the rules, and know who is in charge. Teachers are not there to be friends with their pupils. Teachers at his school are certainly not well-paid enough. He claims that in comparison to other schools such as Gymnasium or Realschule, his teachers receive less money. This could lead to his school being unattractive to good teachers. Even within his school, there are certain teachers who do not get paid as much as others. He finds that system simply unjust.

In relation to the parental involvement at his school, Mr. Hall says that as soon as pupils reach the legal age of leaving school, their parents become less involved in the schooling system. Having said that, he says that in the preparation year, some parents get somehow more involved than in the other years. Should serious problems arise such taking drugs, bullying or others, parents will be contacted anyway. The behavior of some pupils reflects sometimes those of two or three-year younger pupils. The school takes that into account.

Moreover, the Agentur für Arbeit gets involved in the school by sending personnel who clarify various work topics and answer any questions which some pupils might have relating to the workplace.

Mobbing or bullying is a big topic at Mr. Hall's school. He calls it at times digital mobbing as it happens through chatting groups such as Whatsapp and others. He even mentions an example of someone taking a nude photo of a friend and sharing it around without the pupil's consent. Such bullying is dealt with seriously. Meetings at school with the presence of parents get arranged and the special therapeutic pedagogue who is employed at his school gets involved too. The latter plays an important role in creating a harmonious atmosphere around the school.

In order to reduce the rate of dropouts, Mr. Hall argues that he would need longer preparation years for some of his pupils. His school caters for refugees who are not necessarily special needs pupils, but they need to fit in somewhere. He wishes to have adequate teaching personnel. There is a high fluctuation rate among teachers at his school. He needs to constantly look for one or two new teachers every year. There are not many qualified special needs teachers. He even had to recently employ a language Gymnasium teacher to teach at his school.

One last wish which Mr. Hall expressed is the constant demand from the Education Department for new developments and trainings, recently in the digitalization. He would hope that teachers and pupils would be given more space and time to develop themselves without much external pressure.

### **5.1.2 Meetings with School Dropouts from Germany**

After laying down the semi-structured interviews with the German educational personnel in Augsburg and its regions, we shall move on now to present the details of the meetings with the German dropouts. Seven semi-structured meetings with German school dropouts will be highlighted below in order to offer some basis for comparison with the Irish dropouts at a later stage in this thesis. The meetings took place outside school or educational settings. They were promised confidentiality.

#### **5.1.2A Meeting with Dropout Twins from the Inner City of Augsburg**

I met the two brothers or twins in the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2020. I shall call them here with their first names to avoid confusion: Mark and Sam. Mark dropped out of the Gymnasium in the 9<sup>th</sup> class while Sam in the 10<sup>th</sup>. They come from a well-educated family. The father is a medical doctor while the mother is a teacher. They live in the city of Augsburg.

Mark and Sam are well-behaved children who come across as intelligent and bright. They are 17 years of age and love football. They play in clubs and take part in Taekwondo lessons. They consider themselves to be close friends and share many things together.

Mark and Sam were very good pupils at their Grundschule. They have fond memories of their teachers, and their notes were extremely good. They studied together and supported each other. The transfer to the Gymnasium was without any problems. They sat next to each other all along and felt like they were always a good team.

The problems started at home when their parents decided to move apart. Moreover, Sam got a girlfriend and Mark felt like the bond with his twin-brother weakened. Sam's girlfriend was a classmate of his and the two started spending more time together. Everything came too much for Mark that his performance at school started deteriorating. His notes were getting worse, and he felt he could not get the support which he needed.

When their father moved out of their home, their mother started showing signs of depression. Sam began studying with his girlfriend leaving his brother on his own. Mark felt he was left behind and could not concentrate on his studies. At the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> class, Mark was advised to change school and leave the Gymnasium. His mother was supportive of the move and Mark felt the need for a new start without the immediate presence of his twin brother.

Sam, on the other hand, felt the absence of his brother at the Gymnasium. The relationship with his girlfriend/classmate started deteriorating in the 9<sup>th</sup> class. However, he managed to get the marks necessary to move into the 10<sup>th</sup> class. However, he became unhappy and somehow lonely without his brother. At the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> class, he dropped out and moved with his brother into the Realschule. They both managed to get the Mittlere Schulabschluss or the Junior Certificate, yet they have not joined any further schooling since. They are still trying to figure out which roads they need to follow.

When it comes to their teachers at the Gymnasium, the twins claimed that they were strict and always demanded high performance. At some stage, Mark stopped learning which brought his marks down and prompted the Mathematic teacher to contact his mother. This was the beginning of the end of the good teacher-pupil relationship. He started disliking his Mathematic teacher, which also led to worsening his marks in that and other subjects too.

The unfortunate turn of events in the private lives of the twins within their family and their relationships with their peers had a very negative effect on their school performance. The absence of psychological support (which they admit they did not seek) as well as the break of the bond between them was too overwhelming to cope with alongside the high demands of the Gymnasium.

When asked about their mother's support in learning since she is a teacher, they said that she was in constant stress and was never really there for them. "She could barely support herself so how could she support us? Mark said.

The Realschule was a good move for the twins, yet it seems to have been well overdue. When asked if they regretted leaving the Gymnasium, they said it had been the right move. It was good that they moved back together into the same environment where they could support each other. The mother took her time to adapt to her new way of life without her husband. With the move into the Realschule and the settling-down of the mother in her new single life, the normal life came slowly back to their home. Yet that sudden change of schooling gave them a shock which they needed to work out. They are now outside any schooling system, and they assist a nearby restaurant with catering at the weekends.

### **5.1.2B Meeting with a Female Dropout from the Outskirt of Augsburg**

I met Ms. Reiß in the morning on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 at her home. She is 16 years old and out of school after having failed to pass the Mittlere Schulabschluss. She was not sure what to do next in her life. She did not want to repeat her class to give that Certificate a second try.

Ms. Reiß lives with her parents and half-brother. Her mother worked difficult hours as a nurse (various day and night shifts) and her father works at a successful company in Augsburg. Her half-brother went to a vocational school or Berufsschule and, after graduation, has been working full time at a local company.

Ms. Reiß dropped out of the Gymnasium at the age of 12 and recalls her wish to attend the Realschule after the Grundschule due to the reason that two of her best friends were going to be transferred there. She said her notes at the Grundschule were average, but her parents insisted that she attended the Gymnasium. They knew of the recommendation of the Grundschule which asked for her to join the Realschule, but they did not trust in that judgment. They believed that she should have a chance at a

better education level. According to her, her parents did not want her to miss out on better life careers in the future.

After asking to talk a bit more about her relationship at home, she said that it was a good relationship. Her parents talked about her studies only when she brought bad notes home. They wanted to assign a support teacher for her at home but that did not materialize. They would not talk about her school in front of family members or friends. She considered to be closer to her dad than her mum who had not had the time to support her in her studies.

When it comes to friendship, she mentioned the relationship with two girls with whom she spent most of her time after school. The girls come from the area where she lives. However, she said that they communicated mostly with mobile phones. Instagram and WhatsApp were typical everyday communication tools between them. She recalled some stressful communications with some other pupils whom she did not call friends, but she did not remember what they were about – some stupid stuff.

The first year at the Gymnasium was very challenging, she said. She found the subjects too difficult and did not manage to catch up with the rest of the classroom. Her notes were getting worse and very quickly found herself lost. It was difficult for her to make new friends and kept in touch with her two old friends at the Realschule.

The teachers were neutral, but she felt that they could have been more supportive. She did not like two of her teachers (English and Mathematic) because they could not really control their classes and the pupils were constantly misbehaving. Therefore, she could not really concentrate on these subjects. She said that other pupils should have received more support from external teachers as their notes in these subjects varied drastically.

She could not recall any of her teachers at the Gymnasium being supportive, let alone any whom she could trust as a friend. She wished that she would have received more support, yet it was too late. Her dad tried to arrange more learning support for her, but it was also too late. She could not imagine continuing at the Gymnasium any day longer. Although it was disappointing for her parents, she still believes that it was the right decision for her to break up and join the Realschule. She recalled that she had often got sick. She mentioned that she had unfairly received some bullying comments

from her classmates about her look and that she had been skinny. That made her very upset.

When she joined her two best friends at the Realschule, the world changed for her. She became happier. Her notes became slightly better, and she felt that it was the right decision. Yet she still struggled with studying. Her best friends were not fond of school either. She made it barely from one class to the other. The Mittlere Schulabschluss was very difficult to pass. Her dream is to go into Modelling.

Ms. Reiß claimed that she should perhaps have joined the Realschule straight after the Grundschule. She always felt that she was not good enough and was disappointing her parents. She said that classmates in general could be very mean to each other, and teachers should play a much bigger role at harmonizing their classrooms.

### **5.1.2C Meeting with a Male Dropout from the West of Augsburg**

I met Mr. Kapeindl for lunch on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 in Augsburg city center. He was thinking about joining the higher vocational school or Fachoberschule and doing an apprenticeship, but he has not made up his mind yet. He has currently no interest in attending school again. He is 17 years old and left the Realschule at the age of 16 after passing the Mittlere Schulabschluss.

Mr. Kapeindl lives with his mum, dad, and sister. His mum is a nursery teacher in Munich and father a self-employed consultant. His sister is older than him and studies in Augsburg. His father does not have a lot of time to spend with the family. His mother was the one who pushed hard that he continued schooling.

Mr. Kapeindl was a very good pupil at the Grundschule. His notes were good enough that he got easily transferred into the Gymnasium. The problems started with the pressure of constantly delivering. He felt that pressure from both the Gymnasium teachers and his parents. His father was adamant that he continued with the gymnasium in order to make a good career at the end.

Mr. Kapeindl's mother spent a lot of hours learning with him in the evening. He recalls learning until 9 or 10pm every night. This excess in learning, according to him, has

helped him navigate into the third year of Gymnasium yet he was not happy. This constant pressure made him hate the Gymnasium so much.

When it comes to his teachers, most of them were fair but always demanded high performance which even put more strain on him. Mr. Kapeindl's favorite topics were sport and geography. The other topics were there to get good notes. He found some time-off with his hobby of singing three times a week. Singing helped him breathe out and the concerts at the weekend were for him the ultimate joy.

At the beginning of the third year of Gymnasium, Mr. Kapeindl insisted that he moved to the Realschule although his notes were not bad. He was experiencing very bad stomachache. The pressure, he believes, was the main cause. His mother had noticed that he was struggling within and was unhappy. She supported him with his decision although his dad was totally against it. At the end, it was his wish which he followed, and he said that, by looking back, it was the right decision to have been made. He continued his Realschule until he got his certificate, yet he feels he had enough from learning and did not want to go through any schooling pressure anymore.

When it comes to friendship, he would get on with his school peers. He mentioned that there was bullying going on in the classroom, especially with an odd person who would behave in an eccentric way. But he was not affected by any of that. His best friend was from the singing club. Very few people, including his best friend, knew about him leaving the Gymnasium immediately. He felt he did not want to answer any questions as to why he left and moved into the Realschule.

The Realschule has helped Mr. Kapeindl enjoy learning at his own pace. The Gymnasium was so stressful for him that he was getting more and more sick and depressed. He believes that it was too early for him at the age of 10 to have moved into the Gymnasium. It would have been much better for him if he had waited.

He would hope that pupils at the Gymnasium do not have to go through the process which he had to endure. It was a dark pressurized side of his school life. He hoped that the other pupils can get to decide to stop or change course when the pressure becomes unbearable. He even said he would rather wish that pupils could learn at their own pace and do not have to crunch so much data at a short period of time. At the end, he stated that the school system could help many pupils succeed if they felt listened to and less pressurized into doing things.



### **5.1.2D Meeting with a Female Dropout from the North of Augsburg**

I met Ms. Rudhart who is 16 years old at her home on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2019. She is the daughter of a very good friend of my wife. Her mum accepted to allow me to interview her daughter who was about to drop out at the last year of the Mittelschule. I sat with Ms. Rudhart in her living room while my wife and her mother were sitting in the kitchen, so she had her space to open up and discuss what she felt comfortable with. Ms. Rudhart's dad is somehow a workaholic according to the family. He works as a taxi driver at the weekend and during the week he drives a truck for a logistic company.

Ms. Rudhart's parents show no real interest in her education, she claimed. They let her do what she thought was right. She was a very good pupil at the Grundschule, but she does not recall that she had to study very hard. At the first year of Realschule, things have changed, she said. Her notes worsened but she did not know exactly why. She confessed that she had not spent a lot of time studying. She got a mobile phone on her birthday and saw herself spending a lot of time with it, listening to music, playing games, chatting, and surfing. The first year at the Realschule was not bad. She liked her teachers and got on well with two good friends. This friendship cooled down a bit at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> class, but she could not tell why. This surely made her very sad and confused.

Ms. Rudhart is a lone child and does not have friends in the neighborhood whom she can call real friends. That is why she states that she spends a lot of time with her mobile phone and in her room. At the end of the second year of Realschule, she started becoming more isolated and thought of changing schools. When asked if anything else could have happened to strengthen that thought, she answered that she had felt betrayed by her two good friends. They circulated rumors about her which were not true. That made her very upset.

The combination of some bad notes and the deterioration of friendships at the Realschule made her feel that that place was not the right for her. None of her parents was there to give her good guidance. The beginning of the second year of Realschule was worse than the first year and she was advised to join the Mittleschule. Her parents

trusted her with her move and the school was supportive too. She felt happier that she went to the Mittleschule although she had not exactly known what to expect.

At the Mittleschule, her teachers were quite neutral. She could not find anyone to trust in there. They were good teachers although they did not pay more attention to her struggle with some topics. Her class was big, and she understood that it was somehow impossible for teachers to look after the need of every pupil. On the one hand, she said that she could have performed better with a bit more support. On the other hand, she stated that she disliked the school setting and especially doing homework. She has always done things on her own and her parents let her be.

Ms. Rudhart does not feel worried that she is dropping out of school. In fact, she sees that as a good opportunity to do an apprenticeship at her mother's workplace. Her mother believes in her daughter's ability to cope. Ms. Rudhart takes advantage of that trust.

When asked again about her two friends, she said they were ex-friends, and their friendships broke up for good. She said that once the trust was broken one could not win it back easily. She chats with some other friends online.

Ms. Rudhart regretted moving into the Realschule after the Grundschule. She thinks that the Mittleschule would have been better from the beginning. Everything which happened at the Realschule made her stressed, sad, and angry. She was not the only person who dropped out of the Realschule and now of the Mittleschule, she claimed. She hopes for a new start without any schooling and just making money through work.

### **5.1.2E Meeting with a Female Dropout from the South-West of Augsburg**

I organized a meeting with Ms. Kern in the afternoon of the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 at a local café across the street from where she lives. She is 17 years old and agreed to have this interview in the presence of her cousin. Her parents are both foreigners. They came to Germany when she was a baby. She speaks both Croatian and German. Most of her friends, she says, are foreigners too. She dropped out of the Mittleschule

this year and feels very happy that she can decide on her own not to attend. She says while giggling that she hates going to school.

Ms. Kern lives with her parents in a small flat. Her mother works as a self-employed accountant and her father runs his own logistics company. The latter comes very late home, and her mother works part-time. She is more present for her than he is.

Ms. Kern was a good pupil at the Grundschule, and she could tell of good memories there. Her teachers even recommended that she be transferred to the Gymnasium. Her parents did not expect anything from her performance, she claimed. If she had gone to the Realschule from the beginning, they would not have minded. They were neutral about her education but showed some interest in her notes. She did not feel any pressure from them.

Ms. Kern's parents could not help her much with her studies. They never discussed her performance at school in front of others. It was something private for them. The transfer into Gymnasium was smooth. She did not find any problems integrating and her notes in the first year were good enough. It all started to deteriorate in the second year.

In that year, the relationship at home between her parents started to become bitter. According to her, her father stopped returning home. Her mum said that he was having some personal problems. In fact, he was seeing another woman, which pushed her mother to ask for divorce. The whole atmosphere at home became poisonous and affected Ms. Kern very badly. She even felt responsible for the whole deterioration of her parents' relationship. She could not concentrate at school as before and stopped doing her homework as she had done before. At the end of that second year at the Gymnasium, her notes were so bad that it was recommended for her to repeat or go into the Realschule. She decided for the latter. Her mother did not really care much. She had her problems of her own. She stayed at the Realschule for two years, did not cope well there either and was moved down to the Mittelschule. After failing the Mittelschulabschluss, she repeated the 9<sup>th</sup> class, yet she realized that her performance was not getting better and decided to drop out before attempting to sit in the same test for the second time. Dropping out was like a freedom for her from the schooling system.

When it comes to peers, Ms. Kern had some cousins whom she feels very close to. She considers herself to be open-minded and never had problems making friends. She states however that the closeness with her cousins cannot be compared to other friendships which she made at school. She gets on with people and considers herself to be friendly.

I asked her if she blamed her parents for the fact that she was now a school dropout. She said that it was not bad to be where she was. It was not her dream to finish school. She would more likely work at her dad's company very soon. Therefore, she did not regret her move. She only felt sorry for the time her parents had to fight so terribly that her mother became very depressed.

When it comes to school, Ms. Kern claimed that she had a good relationship with her teachers. They considered her to be smart and competent. She said studying became more difficult at the second year of Gymnasium and her teachers got concerned about her notes. They even attempted to figure out what was going wrong. But her mother was not able to offer any help. She never revealed her home problems to anyone.

Ms. Kern never expected anything from her teachers in the sense of psychological support. She considered them to be there to teach and they were not supposed to help any further. She recalled meeting the social worker at her school who asked her some questions about her home and studies. She did not reveal anything about her parents' problems and said she would need to study more. At a later stage of her Realschule, things started to get better at home and her parents started seeing each other again but never returned to the earlier stage of being together. She claimed she should have changed the Gymnasium directly into the Mittelschule without passing through the Realschule or even transferred directly into the Mittelschule from the Grundschule. Changing so many schools was just a nightmare. Getting used to a new environment, meeting new classmates and teachers, and adjusting to a new system of learning were very stressful.

When asked about her recommendations to other pupils, she said pupils should try to enjoy their time at school and never be put into any kind of stressful situations. Parents and family play a big role in the success of their children. They should ensure a safe and happy environment to learn and succeed. However, any success is the result of one's own work so no one else can be blamed for it.

### **5.1.2F Meeting with a Male Dropout from Friedberg**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2020, I met Mr. Kadi at his local café. He is 19 years old and unemployed. He comes from a broken family. It all started when his mother, who comes from the Philippines, married his Turkish dad and the relationship between them did not work out well. Mr. Kadi spoke of how violent his dad was towards his mother. The latter had to flee her home to her parents while she was pregnant of him. Mr. Kadi grew up without the presence of his dad. He has two stepsiblings from two different dads.

At the Grundschule and Mittelschule, he claims to have been mobbed by his peers for looking different. His teachers were kind and supportive to him, which helped him with his school performance and marks. Yet the fact that his mother became absent from his life at the 6<sup>th</sup> class, and he had to move out to be looked after by his grandmother and grandfather brought more chaos into his life. He spoke of depression and even suicidal tendencies which he had to endure during that time.

A consequence which he had to go through is the fact that he was constantly hungry, and his grandparents did not have the means to give him money to buy food. Therefore, he would beg for food from his classmates.

In terms of learning, he had to be independent and study by himself. He claimed that his notes were good enough although he did not put so much energy into learning. He managed to pass the Mittleschulabschluss with good marks and was accepted into a vocational school. He did that for two years and attempted to do the Mittlere Schulabschluss. Unfortunately, he did not pass.

The failures started from that point on in his life as he was rejected from two apprenticeships (Children Care at the hospital and Sales at a local company) in the probation period and lately from the third one (Sales) this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

After passing the Mittleschulabschluss, he has taken on several mini jobs working at food retailers yet always for a short period of time before changing into the next. It seems that he could neither keep an apprenticeship nor a job for a long time. He does

not really have a friend whom he could confide in. He mentioned two people with whom he hung out, yet there were just superficial relationships.

Currently he is attending Kolping Akademie<sup>298</sup> in Augsburg, which caters, among others, for pupils who could not make it at the Berufsschule or other schools and need special trainings or courses before attempting to rejoin a school setting again. He was recommended there by the Job Centre in Augsburg.

All in all, Mr. Kadi is somehow lost and does not know where his life will lead him next. He still lives with his grandparents, has almost no contact to his mom or brother and is unemployed. He hopes the future will turn up more positive for him.

### **5.1.2G Meeting with a Female Dropout from Mering**

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2020, I met Ms. Lebdev at a café in Augsburg center. The name has been changed for the sake of anonymity. Ms. Lebdev is 18 years old and was born in Augsburg. She moved to Mering when she was 3 years old. Her father comes from Kazakhstan and works in a furniture shop. Her mother comes from Russia and works as a secretary. Ms. Lebdev has two younger sisters who are in the Realschule and Grundschule.

Starting with her Grundschule, Ms. Lebdev claims that she was mobbed by her teacher in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class through getting racist comments. She developed concentration problems which led her to being diagnosed by a doctor as having some form of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). She started taking tablets daily to help her overcome this problem. She claimed to have been shy in the classroom and yet super-active outside. She could not recall having close friends back then.

At the age of 10, she was transferred into a Mittelschule in her area, which she did not like. She kept on having physical problems manifested in stomachache and absence of appetite. Her teachers kept on asking her if she had anorexia as she looked thin. She felt that the world was against her and hated going to school.

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<sup>298</sup> <https://www.die-kolping-akademie.de/>

Things started getting better when she changed her school after the 6<sup>th</sup> class into a different Mittleschule and began receiving Occupational Therapy.<sup>299</sup> Her parents did not know how to really help her, she said, and there were constantly annoyed. The new school was a progress from the older one since the number of pupils was smaller and the teachers were somehow friendlier. At a later stage, she had a problem with the Sport teacher who would make fun of her in front of the others. Some of her classmates would poke at her old clothes which she found unfair. She did not seek the support of the social pedagogue at her school as she believed that he was not the right person to talk to him about such intimate issues. For her, he was more like a buddy who would chat with pupils especially when the marks are not good.

Ms. Lebdev considers herself to be sensitive and hard-working. She loved German and History and got very good marks in them. A positive turn for her occurred at the 8<sup>th</sup> class when she decided to stop taking the tablets and go for the Mittlere Schulabschluss. Her parents were not very knowledgeable with the German school system so they could not help that much but she said they provided her with extra teaching hours to improve her marks. She attended the 10<sup>th</sup> class and got good marks in the Mittlere Schulabschluss which she was very proud of.

After the Mittlere Schulabschluss, she joined a Berufsschule to become an Early School teacher. In the first two years, she worked at a creche and attended one day of schooling. Her colleagues were very mean to her, especially one person whom she thought she could trust. She was bullied after she spoke about her bisexuality to that person. That person spread mean rumors about her. Due to that bullying, she developed a burnout, was constantly tired, had a stomachache and vomited on several occasions. Moreover, at that creche, she felt under pressure due to the lack of staffing and the huge number of projects which were planned. She felt she was overloaded with work and had nobody who could support her. She sought some medical support, but that did not help. She dropped out of the apprenticeship and the Berufsschule and stayed at home from September 2018 until October 2019.

Ms. Lebdev believes that this apprenticeship had impacted her very negatively. She lost trust in people and her self-esteem was weakened. She has been attending Kolping since November 2019 and hopes to bring her life into the right direction. She

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<sup>299</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupational\\_therapy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupational_therapy)

is taking on some general economics lessons and will try to search for the right apprenticeship soon.

## **5.2. Meetings with Educational Personnel and School Dropouts in Ireland**

After presenting the semi-structured interviews which were carried out with German education personnel and school dropouts, we will turn now to lay down similar interviews with Irish educational personnel and dropouts in several parts of the island of Ireland.

The same number of people were selected, which should allow us at a later stage to analyze the gathered data and compare the findings in light of the literature and previous research.

### **5.2.1 Meetings with Principals and Educational Personnel in Ireland**

#### **5.2.1A Meeting with a School Principal in County Limerick**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, a principal of a secondary school in County Limerick who shall be named Mr. Ahern was interviewed. The school which is non-fee-paying is catering for 264 boys during the academic year 2006–2007. The school is known to be academic. According to Mr. Ahern, only a small number of pupils choose to leave school early each year.

Between September 2006 and June 2007 five students had dropped out of school. Four out of these students left school in fifth year of secondary education. The fifth student has left school in the sixth year even though he was constantly advised to sit his Leaving Certificate examination.



Mr. Ahern claimed that some students in his school are less academic than others. He went on to state that a minority of students are totally non-academic as they cannot relate in any way to the academic work in school. Consequently, they fall behind. In order to maintain their respect, most of them would seek a trade or an apprenticeship, which might give more meaning to their lives.

When Mr. Ahern was asked about the reasons that make students fall behind, he said that some students do not intentionally dislike school. There were many factors that would lead to this phenomenon. Some students do not get on well with their peers. This could trigger all kinds of psychological pressure that could distract them from their studies. Parents of these students do not encourage them enough to get them interested in education. They fall behind because of lack of support. Therefore, as soon as they reached the legal age for leaving school they would immediately choose to drop out.

In the last twenty-seven years, not even one student has been expelled from Mr. Ahern's school. Mr. Ahern admitted that some students were suspended yet never reached the stage of expulsion.

Of the factors that lead to dropping out from school, Mr. Ahern pointed out specifically to three. The first factor was related to students leaving school to get an apprenticeship. It seemed that they were being encouraged by their parents to do so. With the booming of the Irish economy, getting a job was becoming an easy task. These students would rather go for the easiest option. The second factor was related to the fact that some students did not want to be students anymore. The whole idea of coming to school, sitting in class, and following rules did not appeal to them. They looked for a change. The third factor was related to academic difficulties in school. Some students found school very hard academically. They found themselves not coping due to the difficulties of some subjects. They would rather opt for something less difficult and challenging. They were basically not academic, as stated earlier.

When Mr. Ahern was asked to elaborate further on all the above factors, he claimed that problems with dropouts arise in primary school. Their bad behaviour would have begun from a younger age. They arrived at secondary school with a bad reputation in

behavioral and academical matters. When they came to secondary school, it could be possibly too late to get them back on the right track.

In preventing students from dropping out, Mr. Ahern stated that schools should be made more attractive by offering more alternatives to those who are not academic. Students should have the choice to select the course that they wish to go for, be it practical or academical. Updating courses to suit the needs of society and students, and training teachers to make the learning process more exciting for students might be helpful in keeping weaker children in school.

### **5.2.1B Meeting with a Guidance Counsellor of a School in Limerick City**

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2007 a meeting with a guidance counsellor of a girls' secondary school in Limerick city was conducted. This guidance counsellor who shall be called Ms. Kelleher was very cooperative and helpful in answering the interview questions. The meeting lasted for over twenty minutes.

Ms. Kelleher's school looks after the educational needs of 400 girls. It is based in a disadvantaged area in the city center from which most of its students come. There would be a minority of enrolled students coming from the suburbs and countryside of County Galway. The school has a reputation for attracting students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ms. Kelleher mentioned that ten students had dropped out of her school this year. The common factor that led all of them to leave school early is the fact that they came from dysfunctional family units. As a result, they found themselves unable to cope in school. Ms. Kelleher noted that when parents are depressed and unable to cope with various problems one cannot expect their children to be cheerful and cope better. Most of these ten dropouts had problems with literacy and numeracy. Some needed to be psychologically assessed. Some were assessed and others were not, due to lack of resources.

When Ms. Kelleher was asked to explain further the factors that contributed to these students leaving school early, she said that the social settings of families, lack of support from parents for their children's education, generations of unemployment in some families, students' unpunctuality in arriving to school, and many other factors contribute, to a certain degree, to dropping out. These problems are manifested at the Junior Cycle, claimed Ms. Kelleher. Hence, it would be very rewarding to look into helping students in need from early stages before it is too late. Most of the dropouts, she said, had problems coming to her secondary school.

Ms. Kelleher was asked to focus on two of those ten dropouts who left school this year. The first girl who shall be called Rebecca was sixteen years old when she left school. She had passed her Junior Certificate. Rebecca's mother is a depressed woman, according to Ms. Kelleher. Her father has a drink problem. There would be some form of aggression in the house. For these reasons and others, Rebecca seemed to be also depressed. She was extremely quiet and frequently absent from school. Ms. Kelleher believes that Rebecca did not have a good relationship with her father. Her grades were average and so she did not have major academic problems. The second girl who shall be called Madeleine was also sixteen years old when she dropped out. She was in the early stage of doing her Leaving Certificate Applied when she left school. She lives with her mother as her father left home a long time ago. Madeleine's older sister had also dropped out from school and might have influenced Madeleine in deciding to drop out. Unlike Rebecca, Madeleine was quite troublesome in school. She had a psychological assessment and was shown to have low ability for education. She could be quite articulate in an aggressive way. Considered to be a leader among her peers, Madeleine had been the 'Anti-Authority' girl, according to Ms. Kelleher. She was not afraid to express herself. However, she would lack confidence in entering the world of work.

What is of a great concern to Ms. Kelleher is that a lot of the school dropouts that she has come across do not show a great interest in even getting a job after leaving school. They would rather stay at home and do nothing. Madeleine and Rebecca are two girls who left school to stay at home. The home model for both girls was very strong, bearing in mind the influences of Madeleine's sister and Rebecca's parents.

Madeleine's mother is a lovely woman, according to Ms. Kelleher, yet ineffective. Her house is undisciplined as everyone abides by their own rules.

When Ms. Kelleher was asked about solutions to the dropout phenomenon in her school, she answered that in the last few months, her school had tried to apply the School Completion Programme. She is anxious to know the outcomes of this programme. She claimed that school dropouts needed earlier intervention. As already mentioned, when they come to her school, it might be too late to deal with their problems. She said that the real problem lies with parental skills. Many parents lack skills to deal with their children in an appropriate manner. Consequently, Ms. Kelleher recommends home help to be offered to parents especially in the mornings. Home help could include support in preparing breakfast, encouraging children to take a shower, and put on their uniform, and so on. People who could be assigned to assist parents in getting their children out of bed and ready to go to school could make a huge difference in the attendance and concentration levels of some lazy, uninterested, tired, and late students. Ms. Kelleher ended the meeting by stating that so many dropouts are capable students who could have stayed in school if they had received the necessary resources from an early stage.

### **5.2.1C Meeting with a School Completion Programme Officer in the North Side of Dublin**

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2007, the School Completion Programme Officer of a school in the north side of Dublin, who shall be named Ms. Tracy, provided an interview in her office. Her school has 450 students of whom 150 are female. It is based in a deprived area in Dublin. Most families of low income send their children to this school. A lot of them, according to Ms. Tracy, live in modest houses provided by the Irish Government.

Out of the 450 students who attend school this year, 15 students come from a background where parents suffer from various addictions. These fifteen students sometimes arrive to school either so drugged or drunk that teachers would feel obliged to make them leave class. Ms. Tracy claimed that, in some cases, it would be useless

to contact the mothers of such children as the former could be in a worse state than the latter.

This school does not have any students from the minority communities in Ireland. It is known, however, to be a school that looks after students with learning difficulties. The School Completion Programme offers great help to a considerable number of students. Those who cannot cope at all in the school, would be advised to join Youthreach.

According to Ms. Tracy, those who find it hard to cope in school develop problems with literacy and numeracy. Eighty per cent of students do not complete homework on a daily basis.

When Ms. Tracy was asked about the factors that lead to dropping out, she mentioned three factors:

- a. Large numbers of pupils in a classroom
- b. Regular Absenteeism
- c. Lack of parental motivation.

Even though this school is a non-fee-paying school, there are other school costs which could put a burden on some unemployed parents. For instance, paying a registration fee of 150 euros in addition to the cost of uniform and trips could place financial strains on poor families.

Ms. Tracy claimed that two pupils per year are sent to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)<sup>300</sup> for psychological assessment as they require professional help. These pupils along with other weak pupils are offered extra learning

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<sup>300</sup> The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is an exclusive agency of the Department of Education and Science. The main aims of NEPS psychological work are to engage in individual casework with children and young people, provide a consultation service for teachers and parents and participate in school-based projects relevant to educational psychology and generally promote mental health in schools.

help and an after-school club to engage in various activities. The after-school club plays a big role in keeping some of these students off the street.

Ms. Tracy finally mentioned that discipline problems with these students create difficulties for teachers in the classroom. For that reason, the constant breaking of rules by these students makes it difficult on the school to hold on to them.

### **5.2.1D Meeting with a Guidance Counsellor of a School in the North Side of Dublin**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2007, the guidance counsellor of a secondary school in the north side of Dublin was interviewed. The guidance counsellor who shall be named Mr. Mooney has been teaching and working in that school for about thirty years. He identifies the differences between bad attendance, potential dropout, and unofficial dropout. Bad attendance could lead to potential dropout which could lead in its turn to unofficial dropout. An unofficial dropout, according to Mr. Mooney, occurs when a student regularly disappears from school and whose parents do not even care about his or her education. Some dropouts in Mr. Mooney's school, for whom education does not mean anything, had low self-esteem. Moreover, the lack of practical subjects for weaker students made some students give up on education and seek work.

Mr. Mooney presented three dropout files: those of John, Paul, and Peter. The common trend among these dropouts is that they had all left school as soon as they reached the legal age of leaving school in Ireland, i.e., sixteen years old. Paul and John left school because they had not liked it. Paul's family did not have any tradition of enrolling in college or university. John wanted to work and felt that staying at school was a waste of time and boring. Peter dropped out of school simply because he was not performing well enough. His father had promised to train him and offer him a job in his business when he left school for good. Thus, he found an alternative to education that could give more meaning to his life. After mentioning these profiles, Mr. Mooney stated that the rules at present should be bent to suit the needs of various students.

For instance, he believed that fifteen should be the legal age for students to be allowed to leave school rather than sixteen.

Mr. Mooney stated several reasons that have pushed many of his school's students to drop out. Absence of role models and lack of practical subjects seemed, he said, to be the major reasons for such an early leave. Besides, the demographic changes that Dublin had for the last fifteen years had changed the quality of students that his school used to get. In 1992, his school had approximately 570 pupils with 92 in sixth year alone. At the moment, the school has only 250 students with 30 pupils in sixth year. The pupils are coming to Mr. Mooney's school from various types of families around the north side and the inner city of Dublin. In the past, pupils used to come mostly from one particular area. This area has matured, and young people could not afford to buy the expensive houses around the school. They would rather buy a cheaper house in the suburbs and commute to work in town. By earning a lot of money, they would also wish to send their students to private schools where they could allow them to study in a more disciplined atmosphere.

Finally, Mr. Mooney mentioned that special needs and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students are less likely to finish their education. Three years ago, out of sixteen students in LCA, only six students completed the course.

### **5.2.1E Meeting with a Guidance Counsellor of a School in Cork**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2007, the guidance counsellor of a girls' secondary school in the south of Cork was interviewed. Being a non-fee-paying school, most of its students come from a middle-class background and a minority from a poor background (less than 10 per cent). The school is described as academic and does not offer the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. The guidance counsellor who shall be called Ms. Jackson claimed that even though schools in general, and her school in particular, offer practical subjects to their students, some schools do not suit the needs of certain students. Most parents who send their children to her school do so due to the good

reputation that the school has acquired. They wish to give their children the opportunity of doing their best in school in order to get to third level education.

Ms. Jackson believes that the positive academic education that is offered in her school has, to a certain extent, a positive influence on those who do not care much about education. However, she mentioned the case of a girl who had great self-esteem before she enrolled in the school. She had done a great deal of child minding her younger brothers. Her experience in school proved to Ms. Jackson that she was not an academically capable student. She was more practically oriented. However, her mother wanted her to complete her full schooling years and go on to third level education by following in the footsteps of her bright classmates. Ms. Jackson has witnessed a fall in the self-esteem of this student since her enrolment in school. She believes that it is better for the administration staff of a school to ask students what they need from education rather than imposing a curriculum on them.

The school has had three dropout cases this year and three last year. Last year, two of the three dropouts were twins. Both suffered from mental problems. When Ms. Jackson was asked to be more specific, she said that one was suffering from depression and the other from a compulsive disorder. They currently live with their father. Their mother left home after being diagnosed with mental health problems. Ms. Jackson stated that the two girls stayed together at all times and that they must have felt stronger with each other's company. One of them eventually wanted to become independent. She has gone off and has been staying at a sheltered housing. She has got involved in some voluntary work and received some training. She has come back for advice to Ms. Jackson who recommended her to seek an adult training course. The second twin left school soon after her sister. She stayed in private accommodation on her own. Even though she appeared to be stronger than her sister she was in fact weaker, and so became stronger with her sister's company. Ms. Jackson believed that she was not ready to come back to school. The third school dropout had left school to be an employee in Dunnes Stores (A giant retail company in Ireland) in Cork. She struggled to complete her Junior Certificate. Nonetheless, Ms. Jackson heard that she was progressing in her job and was pleased at having left school.

This year, two of three the school dropouts had gone on to become hairdressers. The first girl left when she was sixteen years old. Her parents were not educated to Leaving



Certificate level and so did not value education much. When she informed her parents that she was leaving school to become a hairdresser, they were very supportive. The second girl left when she was seventeen years old. She did not do her transition year. Instead, she got herself an apprenticeship. The third girl had completed her Junior Certificate and left school. Ms. Jackson believed that that girl was mature enough to know what she wanted. She supported her in getting an apprenticeship as an alternative to mainstream schooling.

Girls who think of dropping out will get all the support they need from the school, claims Ms. Jackson. If they are determined to leave, they will be encouraged to get educational support from Youthreach.

When asked about summarizing the factors that lead to dropping out, Ms. Jackson spoke of the absence of discipline at home, lack of peer encouragement, and parental negligence with regard to their children's education.

### **5.2.1F Meeting with a Guidance Counsellor of a School in the Inner City of Galway**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2007, the guidance counsellor of a secondary school in Galway center who shall be named Mr. O'Callaghan provided the interview in his office. He was interviewed for about twenty minutes to discuss the current status of dropouts in his school.

There are at present approximately 800 boys attending his school which attracts students from all over the city and surrounding areas. According to Mr. O'Callaghan, it is an academic school, and the majority of its students tend to complete their full education and go on to third level education.

When Mr. O'Callaghan was asked about the reasons for students dropping out of his school each year, he mentioned that depression, abuse, and death of a parent are the three major factors.

Mr. O'Callaghan mentioned that there were three students who were soon going to drop out of school. They all had a common plan which was to leave school in order to get apprenticeship. The first-year student comes from a rural background. He is not interested in school and not academically able either. He has already missed many school days. When it comes to doing schoolwork, he is very lazy. His homework is never done. Besides, he constantly gets himself into trouble with teachers for his bad behaviour in class. He has two brothers who had attended the school and successfully completed their Leaving Certificate. The second student's attendance is described as fine. He is an average student without any record of bad discipline problems. Mr. O'Callaghan described him as an academic person. Both his parents still live together at home. He is planning on leaving school with the consent of his parents in the hope of acquiring an apprenticeship. The third student is suffering from an attention deficit disorder. He does not cause any problems in class, as he gets few hours resource help each week. His parents are separated, and he lives with his mother alone. He is seeking an apprenticeship and as soon as he gets it, he will immediately leave school.

Having been working as a schoolteacher for five years, Mr. O'Callaghan has also been taking the responsibility of counselling. Due to the big number of students enrolling each year in his school, he is hoping that another guidance counsellor will be employed to help him out. When asked further about the factors for dropping out, he claimed that it boiled down to the socio-economic factor. Last year, a student was getting himself into a lot of trouble in school. He came from a relatively poor family who placed no value on education. This student lived with his single parent and had a brother who had already left school after completing fifth year. He wanted to have an income quickly and so decided to leave school and get an apprenticeship. His mother was quite supportive.

### **5.2.1G Meeting with a Regional Manager from the National Educational Welfare Board**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2007, the regional manager of Leinster North, Mr. Doyle, was interviewed in the National Educational Welfare Board office in Dublin city. The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) was established in 2002 and has a statutory function to ensure that every child either attends a school or otherwise

receives an education. In particular, the Board has a key role in following up on children who are not attending school regularly, and where there is a concern about the child's educational welfare. The Board also has responsibility for children who are being educated outside of schools (at home, for example). It also follows up on children who up to eighteen years of age leave school to take up employment. The Board is appointed by the Minister for Education and Science and its members are drawn from teachers, school management, parents, agencies, and services who work with young people, and a number of relevant Government Departments.<sup>301</sup>

When Mr. Doyle was asked about the factors that could lead to students truanting, he started defining the word truant as a student who misses school without the consent or knowledge of his or her family. Mr. Doyle went on to explain that students who come from disadvantaged and deprived areas would be more susceptible to the problem of truanting. He said that peer pressure as well as absence of aspiration and the desire for instant gratification tends to push some students away from attending school on a regular basis. On the one hand, parents have a legal obligation to ensure that their children attend school. On the other hand, the EWOs carry out the task of ensuring that parents and students comply with the legal procedures of the Educational Welfare Act of 2000.

Different poor attendance cases are given various priorities by the EWOs, according to their seriousness. Students who miss twenty school days without any explained reasons could trigger a follow up by the EWOs assigned to these schools. It is important to note that the law allows the EWOs to investigate poor attendance in the case of students between the age six and sixteen.

When it comes to home education, parents have an obligation to register their children on the NEWB Home Education Registrar. The quality of education provided by parents is assessed by the NEWB. When the assessment proves negative, the parents are either obliged to upgrade their methods of teaching their children or send them to

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<sup>301</sup> The NEWB was replaced by the Child and Family Agency TUSLA: On 1st January 2014 the Child and Family Agency became an independent legal entity, comprising HSE Children and Family Services, the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board as well as incorporating some psychological services and a range of services responding to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. For more Info, please visit: [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)

mainstream education. According to Mr. Doyle, there are an estimated 2000 to 4000 children aged six and over whose parents belong to the Home Education Network.

When asking Mr. Doyle on the influence of family on dropouts, he claimed that poor attendance is a symptom of a family malaise. He identified two types of families: families who are unable to support their children to attend school and families who are unwilling to support their children's education. The first type of family might be going through a hard time in terms of pressure from various sources, such as depression, psychiatric problems, housing issues, or personal difficulties. These problems might have a negative effect on the educational lives of the children of these families. The duty of an EWO is then to link these families with the appropriate agencies, be them social, housing officials, psychiatric units, or others, in order to secure early treatment for their problems. The second type of family considers education for their children to be valueless after a certain age or after Confirmation. There is a minority group of families in Ireland who also deem education for their girls after the age of twelve to be of no value. Even though dealing with these families could be very hard as these values are intrinsic to their culture, the NEWB has taken some of these families to court to enforce the Education Welfare Act, which should be implemented on all the residents of Ireland regardless of their cultural background.

With regard to peer influence on dropouts, Mr. Doyle stated that students spend more time with their peers than with their families. Most of the time these students are unsupervised and thus might get themselves involved in various unethical behaviour. Some youngsters lack a positive adult role model and so by mixing with certain types of peers they might not be able to distinguish between positive and negative actions. Other students tend to wander around on the streets at night and get involved in anti-social behaviour. One of the causes of such behaviour could be linked to the absence of a structured lifestyle that has failed to provide home.

With regard to the influence of schools on dropouts, Mr. Doyle mentioned that schools are about keeping rules. Even though poor attendance is a small percentage relative to a 91 per cent attendance rate in Irish schools, students are bound to find schools unsuitable for them. There are additional resources in schools to look after the needs of this small percentage of students, yet as the population of the country is growing the need for more schools and resources is necessary. He said that schools in

disadvantaged areas have a more disadvantaged group of students to deal with, due to a lack of support from parents who could be dependent mainly on the state for an income. In these schools, more additional resources are required to deal with some delicate cases. Concerning the new foreign communities in Ireland, Mr. Doyle emphasized the need for more English teachers to educate foreign students whose English is not fluent. Provision for foreign nationals in Irish schools is largely concentrated in vocational and community schools, according to a survey published in *The Irish Times* on Thursday 24 May 2007.<sup>302</sup> In the article, it was also shown that few private and fee-paying schools accepted the enrolment of foreign students. It is important to bear in mind that some foreign students come from a background where females do not possess a leading role in their culture. This specific enculturation makes it difficult for male students to listen to and take directions from female teachers and female school leaders.

With regard to school alternatives, Mr. Doyle claimed that Youthreach needs to be recognized by the Education Department as alternative centers for learning. Youthreach does not accept students less than fifteen years old. Every transfer from primary to post primary education should occur in mainstream schools. If students could not cope in first or second year of their post-primary education, they could look into other alternatives. The NEWB's main concern is to give the appropriate advice and lead a welfare approach appropriate to the best benefit of families and children. The EWOs' role is to try to identify the obstacles, attempt to overcome them, and make referrals to appropriate agencies. If all attempts fail with parents, due to rejection of all kinds of cooperation, then the NEWB may seek legal prosecution. Penalties for breaking the law embedded in the Education Welfare Act could be up to 630 euros or one-month imprisonment. Mr. Doyle concluded the meeting by stating that the real issue boils down to how available various services and resources are in the area where students live.

## **5.2.2 Meetings with School Dropouts from Ireland**

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<sup>302</sup> *The Irish Times, Few Foreign Nationals in Some Schools – Audit*. Published on Thursday the 24th of May 2007.

After numerous attempts to contact Youthreach and other public and private centers, some appointments with dropouts from Dublin, Cork, Limerick, and Galway were organized and seven of them will be presented here. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner. Dropouts were told to feel free to refuse answering any questions which they did not feel comfortable with. They were informed about the purpose of the research and were promised complete confidentiality. The interviews with all seven dropouts should also give the reader an idea of their family and school backgrounds.

### **5.2.2A Meeting with a Male Dropout from Dublin's North Side**

It has been two years since Paul left school. He was sixteen years old when he was expelled by the principal. Paul who is eighteen years old now is attending a Youthreach center in Dublin. He attended secondary schooling in the north side of Dublin. Paul was interviewed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2007 for about fifteen minutes. He was quite confident when he answered the interview questions. Paul's name has been changed to ensure anonymity.

Paul is the second youngest among his nine siblings. He has five brothers and four sisters. Three out of his five brothers left school early to seek jobs and one of his four sisters dropped out of school without managing to acquire an apprenticeship. Paul's dad worked in the army. He died when Paul was eight years old. His death saddened him greatly. His mum who has never gone to school lives with them at home and looks after their well-being.

Paul described his school as easy. He was just messing about as he was quite bored at school. By playing the fool, he wanted to kill time and accordingly to make his school days go faster. Paul described himself as a 'messenger'. He regrets messing about though as he knows now that his actions have led him to be expelled.

Paul did not trust any of his teachers. When he faced problems, he dealt with them himself. 'I do not need a teacher to wreck my head with advice and boring stuff', he said. Paul's favorite sport is boxing. Even though he has had two operations on his

head for swelling, he has never wished to give up his sport. He enjoys doing art when he does not feel like doing sport.

Paul does not blame anybody but himself for leaving school early. He said that if he had been wiser, he would not have fooled around much. Paul is attending Youthreach and enjoys his days there. However, he thinks that he might have had a better future if he had not been expelled from school.

### **5.2.2B Meeting with a Male Dropout from the Inner City of Galway**

Anthony was born in the inner city of Galway. He loves soccer and Gaelic football. Anthony lives with his parents and his four siblings in their family home. Anthony was interviewed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2007 after interviewing the Guidance Counsellor of his school Mr. O'Callaghan (The interview is outlined above). Anthony was in the process of leaving school. He has the full support of his parents. The Guidance Counsellor had no objection for Anthony to be interviewed. Anthony and his family's names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Anthony's parents are both working. His father is running his own cleaning business while his mother gives home support to old people. Both his elder brothers John (seventeen years old) and Patrick (twenty years old) left school. John left school at the age of fifteen after completing his Junior Certificate. He is currently unemployed and basically staying at home in the hope of getting a job. Patrick, on the other hand, did not manage to pass his Leaving Certificate. He was not interested in re-sitting his exams as he had been offered a full-time job in the company where he used to work on a part time basis during his last year in school.

His first younger sister Joanne who is nineteen years old completed Transition year and left school straight afterwards. She did a "Public Relations" course and is currently working in an office in Galway. Joanne took a year off after leaving school. Anthony's youngest sister Caroline is still in second year in a girls' secondary school in Galway city, which is five minutes away on foot from Anthony's school.

Anthony does not like school and claimed that he did not learn much. Everything is boring and he is fundamentally not interested in spending his time there. The teachers bore him, and he hates sitting in class. Anthony likes mathematics and English and so has no problems with numeracy and literacy. He gets himself into trouble in class as he tends to mess a lot.

According to Anthony, his father got him an apprenticeship and so he is going to leave school soon. He is aiming at becoming a carpenter in the future. Anthony claimed that his mother would rather see him completing his school education. Even so, she does not mind him going ahead with that apprenticeship.

My final question to Anthony was about his health. Anthony stated that he suffers from Asthma. However, he is slowly getting better.

### **5.2.2C Meeting with a Female Dropout from County Galway**

Sinead was born in Tuam, County Galway. She attended a girls' school in Tuam until she reached the age of sixteen. She left school and took a few months break before joining Youthreach. Sinead was interviewed in Youthreach on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2007. Sinead and her friend's names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Sinead's parents are both unemployed. They are members of the same minority community as Anthony. In fact, her dad has never had a job. Her mum has always been a housewife. Sinead is the third youngest of her seven brothers. Her five eldest brothers aged twenty-nine, twenty-seven, twenty-five, twenty-three and nineteen all left school early. Three of these five brothers have joined Youthreach and left. None of them is currently working. Her younger brother aged ten is attending a boys' school in Tuam. Her seventh and youngest brother is only three years old.

Sinead admitted that she did not like school. All the school subjects did not seem to appeal to her. As well as that, she did not get involved in any of the school activities. She has a very good friend called Ciara who was in the same class. Ciara had left school early before Sinead decided to do so. The former had attended a training center



in Tuam after she left school. Nonetheless, she did not manage to stay there for long. Both Sinead and Ciara are still good friends and still hang out together.

On enquiring about her attendance level in school, Sinead admitted that she had missed a week every month because she had places to go. When she was asked about these places, she said that she had gone with her family for some whole days on trips and for various activities.

Sinead has neither regrets for skipping school days nor leaving school early. Her father supported her in her decision. She prefers Youthreach to her school as she did not like the latter. Youthreach gives her more time and space to look at her options. She still does not know what she wants to do in the future.

#### **5.2.2D Meeting with a Male Dropout from the North Side of Cork**

Steven was born in Cork. He was interviewed in Youthreach in Cork on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2007. Steven's name has been changed to ensure anonymity. Steven has completed his Junior Certificate yet dropped out straight afterwards. At a later stage, he joined Youthreach.

Steven has three sister and no brothers. His eldest sister (twenty-four years old) left school just after completing her Junior Certificate. She is currently working and doing very well, according to Steven. His second eldest sister completed her education to Leaving Certificate. She is twenty-one years old and in the process of completing a childcare course. His youngest sister is nineteen years old. She passed her Junior Certificate but left school just before her Leaving Certificate. She is not working at the moment. Steven's mother is at home. She is working as a cleaner at a local school. Steven's father is in the army. Steven rarely saw him when he was young due to his father's demanding work. His father left the family for good a while ago. Steven does not have any news about him.

Steven attended a mixed school in the north side of Cork. It is important to note that the north side of Cork is disadvantaged compared to the south side. Steven suffers

from dyslexia. Hence, he has some problems with spelling. He admitted that he had not paid much attention in class, as he had found learning quite difficult. He did not see education as important. Steven understands now that it was a big step to have left school. In fact, he sees that the significant experiences which he gained at his various workplaces have helped him see the full implications of that step.

After he left school, Steven juggled several jobs, following in the footsteps of his eldest sister. Since she has been doing well in her career choices, their mother did not complain about him leaving school in the hope that he would do as well as his sister. Steven claimed that while he was working, he got involved with computers which helped him improve his spelling and reading skills. This improvement has pushed him to consider Youthreach and even aim to complete the Leaving Certificate Applied when the right time comes.

Steven's best friend passed his Junior Certificate but left school afterwards to join Youthreach. He confirmed that his friends did not have any influence on him with his decision to leave school. Steven praised Youthreach for allowing him to get work experience while getting paid at the same time.

When the reasons for leaving school were raised, he said that he had dropped out to get a job to earn money. Besides, his problems with spelling had made it difficult for him to catch up with the rest of his peers. Steven stated that he had blamed his teachers for everything, but now he understands that they were just doing their best to teach him. His parents were not of any help to him in his studies. They did not sit down with him to support him with his homework. His mother used to ask him if he had completed his homework. His answer was always positive, yet she never checked whether that was the case or not. Youthreach, according to Steven, keeps his parents more involved in his education and he recognizes that as a positive move.

### **5.2.2E Meeting with a Female Dropout from the Inner City of Cork**

Jessica was born in the inner city of Cork. She passed her Junior Certificate and left school shortly afterwards. She attended a school in the north side of the city. Jessica

was interviewed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2007 in Youthreach. She was very cooperative and friendly. All names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Jessica is the fourth youngest of five siblings in her family. She has one sister and four brothers. Her only sister is twenty-one years old. She left school before completing her Junior Certificate. She is not working at the moment. Her two eldest brothers (twenty and nineteen years old) also left school early before attempting their Junior Certificate. They are both working in Dublin. Her two other younger brothers (thirteen and eleven years old) are still in school. Jessica's mother and father are not working. They are both at home.

Jessica claimed that she never liked school. She did not like to be told what to do. She said, 'Teachers bully you', and that the principal of her second school was picking on her. When Jessica was asked about the reasons for getting picked on, she said that she did not know. Later, she mentioned that perhaps she had been late. Then she asked: 'Why should the principal come and ask me all the time about what I do?' She got suspended for three days because she was fighting with the principal. After this suspension she did not want to return to school. The school liaison officer referred her to Youthreach at the end.

She had a very good friend called Marianne who is still in school. Since Jessica left school, they have not been friends anymore. Despite losing her friend, Jessica has no regrets about leaving school. She is happier in Youthreach where teachers are friendlier and more understanding and approachable. The classes are smaller and so allow for more individual attention.

Her faithful best friend is her cousin. She had also left school because she had had to face the same problems, claimed Jessica. They are close friends and have a lot of things in common.

Jessica enjoys the work experiences offered to her in Youthreach. She is still trying to figure out what she wishes to do in the future. She likes to work with children.

When Jessica was asked again about the reasons for leaving school early, she replied that she was a poor attender. Her brothers lived in Dublin, so she had to miss school on various occasions especially when her brother got married. When her younger

brother got confirmed, she also had to miss some school days. Jessica hated to get out of bed so early in the morning. Her eye infection was also a major factor for causing her to skip school.

### **5.2.2F Meeting with a Female Dropout from the South Side of Limerick**

This case describes a student called Nicole from south Limerick who is sixteen years old. In September 2006, Nicole left school before completing her Junior Certificate. She was interviewed on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2007. She was open and friendly. She did not hesitate to answer any of the interview questions. Nicole's name has been changed to ensure anonymity.

Nicole's parents live together at home with her three brothers and three sisters. Nicole is the middle child. Her two older brothers left school and sought apprenticeships after completing their Junior Certificate. Only one of these two brothers managed to get a stable job. The rest of her siblings are still in school – two in primary education and two in secondary. Her third older brother is completing his Leaving Certificate this year. Even though her mother and father were not very supportive to her education, they were against her leaving school. Nonetheless, it was her decision to leave school and she was happy to join Youthreach as an alternative.

Nicole hated school and hence did not attend regularly. Teachers were constantly 'moaning at her' for being late. They had always given out at her, she claimed. After she dropped out, Nicole tried to go again to school. However, her school did not let her enroll again as she had missed so many classes. She was informed that it would have been impossible for her to catch up with the rest of her class. The school social worker recommended that she join Youthreach and continue with her education. Nicole took comfort in the fact that many of her friends had also left school, and a few had joined Youthreach.

While in school, Nicole liked art and English but hated Spanish and mathematics. She said that she preferred Youthreach to her school. She gets to be involved in various

work experiences and practical subjects such as craft, beauty care, and catering. She loves the outdoor activities organized by Youthreach.

### **5.2.2G Meeting with a Male Dropout from the Inner City of Limerick**

Alan was born in the inner city of Limerick. He passed his Junior Certificate and left school afterwards. He attended a boys' school in the inner city but found it very hard. Alan was interviewed on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2007. Anthony and his friend's names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Alan is the youngest of four siblings. He has three brothers and one sister. His eldest brother is twenty-six years old. He left school at the age of fifteen before completing his Junior Certificate. He is working at the moment. His second elder brother died when he was twenty-five years old. He also left school early before completing his Junior Certificate. His third brother is twenty-two years old. He left school at the age of sixteen after passing the Junior Certificate. He is not currently employed. His sister who is thirty-two years old has four children. She also left school early. According to Alan, his dad works from time to time, but he does not have a full-time job. His mother has never worked. Both his parents are living at home.

Alan found school to be very tough. His teachers were very hard on him especially in third year of his post-primary education. He had discipline problems in class because he was bored. Alan did not like any of his teachers, as he claimed that they had made jokes about him when he had not paid attention in class. He simultaneously acknowledged that school had been getting harder, as it had been difficult to catch up with the rest of his classmates.

Alan's best friend Derek is in Youthreach. He has been his best friend for three years. In fact, they were in different classes in the same school when they were younger. Then Derek went to a different school, and they got separated. They were united again when Alan was in fifth year and Derek in fourth year in their same school in the north side of Limerick. Alan had to be brought back to fourth year as fifth year was very challenging for him. Hence, they ended up in the same class. Alan and Derek used to

miss school regularly to go to town or play in the fields. Due to Alan's regular truanting, the guidance counsellor of his school visited Alan's home and discussed with Alan and his mum the next steps. They all agreed on Alan leaving school to join Youthreach. His mother was very supportive of this step.

Derek was obviously made aware of Alan's move to Youthreach. In fact, after Alan got a fair idea of what Youthreach had to offer him, he introduced its programme to Derek. Therefore, the latter, in his turn, followed on Alan's footsteps and his parents agreed on him leaving school early to join Youthreach.

When Alan was asked for the second time why he left school early, he replied that it had been quite hard getting up early in the morning, his books had been heavy to carry, and he had detested wearing his uniform for so long.

Alan has no regrets about dropping out of school because Youthreach appeals to him. His hope is to complete his Leaving Certificate one day and get a good job at the end.

## 6. Analysis of the Interviews and Meetings

### 6.1 Analysis of the Meetings with Education Personnel and School Dropouts in Germany

After thoroughly examining the seven interviews with the education personnel in Germany and following Kuckartz' thematic qualitative text analysis,<sup>303</sup> seven categories have been generated both deductively and inductively. Category 1, 2 and 7, presented below, were initiated deductively through the interview questions in Appendix 2. The remaining categories were a clear and direct result of the semi-structured interviewing and were initiated inductively. Kuckartz' step 1 and 2 of Graph 4 in chapter 4 allowed the thorough examination of each statement of the educational personnel. Yet the first coding process, which focused on teacher profile, motivation among pupils and mobbing within the school, solidified the choice of the deductive categories. Through the second coding process, mentioned in Graph 4, codes were created and inductively led to the generation of the categories below such as lack of clarity, lack of probation, the presence of stressful transition periods and so on. Within some of these main categories, some sub-categories emerge. For instance, in the first category, sub-categories such as low salary, huge workload, and high fluctuation get a center-stage. Another example of the emergence of sub-categories from the main category is category 6. The sub-category of false expectation arises with pupils believing that other lower schools do not require much learning efforts or strong commitment. All in all, the use of Kuckartz' thematic qualitative text analysis presented the possibility of generating these categories to bring accuracy and transparency to the above documented interviews. Here are the seven main categories:

#### 1- Lack of qualified teachers

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<sup>303</sup> Kuckartz writes in chapter 4 of his work: *Wide range of methods can be found regarding how to construct the categories with which thematic analysis can be conducted, ranging from creating the categories inductively using the data, to creating the categories deductively based on an underlying theory from the field or the research question.* Found in Kuckartz, Qualitative Text Analysis, 2014, Chapter 4.

- 2- Lack of motivation and interest in education among the dropout ranks
- 3- Lack of clarity of options for pupils and parents and hereby false expectations from their parts
- 4- Lack of probation period for pupils
- 5- Lack of male Realschule in Swabia
- 6- Stressful transitions into various schools and stressful atmospheres within certain schools
- 7- Digital mobbing and bad manners among dropouts

Starting with the first category, three school principals complained that they were having problems getting the right teachers for their schools. An important aspect of this problem is that most teachers get assigned to their schools from the Education Department and they rarely get the possibility to select their own teachers. Moreover, teachers are not fairly paid, according to two educational personnel, and that varies from a school type to another, which makes for instance teaching at the Mittelschule unattractive for many teachers. With big size classrooms, a fact which many educational personnel complained about, some teachers find themselves facing up to a huge workload and less time to cater for the weaker or the stronger pupils in their classrooms. A lack of concern, time and building a trustworthy relationship between teacher and pupil could lead to a feeling of detachment from the pupil towards the school. One last point in this topic which could be problematic is the various trainings which teachers from different schools receive. Good teachers get to teach at the Gymnasium whereas average ones get transferred to lower schooling systems, which may reflect the differences in teaching standards at German schools. All in all, several schools are having to deal with a high fluctuation of teacher relocation, which makes the adaptation for pupils in their schools harder and therefore the identification with their system more difficult.

Secondly, three school principals made it clear that a dropout is not someone who is not talented rather someone who had lost interest in the schooling system, let alone the motivation to carry on. Two educational personnel claimed that it is not that the dropouts failed the system, but the latter failed the former. They were made to fit into a schooling system, yet pupils are not puzzle pieces to be placed into a picture frame.



They get fed up with the marking system, wish to start delving into the real workplace and earn their money.

The third point is proved to be crucial in the development of pupils into dropouts and that is the lack of clarity of the German schooling system and its options especially for parents, according to three educational personnel. 50% of the families of pupils in Swabia have an immigration background and some do not fully understand the German schooling system as they themselves learned in different ones. The German system could be quite complex to grasp which could lead some parents to advise their children to choose the wrong schooling way – a way which proves to be failing them, without knowing that other routes could lead them to the same desired goal. Some parents and children develop false expectations for what a school or a class requires, according to two principals, which bring about bad surprises and disappointments.

Fourthly, two principals spoke about the short probation period which pupils go through when they enter the Sekundarstufe II. These probation periods last between 3 months to a maximum of one year. A couple of months might be too short to give the pupil an understanding of what he or she would like to pursue. Therefore, some pupils could reach a dead-end and must restart their vocational studies anew or drop out completely.

Fifthly, a fact which applies mainly to the Swabian region which this thesis attempt to a certain degree to tackle is that the Realschule cater for mostly female pupils. It is quite difficult to find a Realschule which welcomes male pupils. This means that when the Gymnasium or Mittelschule do not suit a male Swabian pupil, he would find it difficult to register in a Realschule. This could put a negative strain on those who find themselves under or overchallenged.

The sixth point which some principals mentioned is the stressful workload which some pupils experience, which pushes them to give up and escape. The joy of learning become absent as they have to take on so many topics and perform well enough in each one of them. When their marks prove insufficient, they get asked to go through another ordeal of switching schools, getting to know a new environment, and attempting to overcome that feeling of failure which they had endured. In many vocational schools, classes become a melting pot of pupils from different backgrounds

and levels. This create an uneasy atmosphere as some pupils were taught differently at their various previous Sekundarstufe I schools. The transition from a higher into a lower school could bring about false expectations from pupils who believe that lower schools do not require that much work or studying. These false expectations could lead to another shock and failure which a pupil would find even harder to deal with, hence dropping out. An interviewed principal found it positive that pupils get directed from an early age into different schooling systems, i.e., after the Grundschule, by claiming that young pupils can get more easily molded at an early stage. Yet the majority of principals admit that it is rather stressful for pupils, as the latter believes that if things do not go well, one can still transfer into another school. They consequently develop the feeling of non-commitment to remain in and fight for one stream of education, let alone hold on to a false expectation that lower schools are much easier.

The last point which two educational personnel found striking is the bad manners which some pupils possess when they take part in an apprenticeship at companies such as being late, impolite, stealing, and so on. These manners lead their employers to sack them immediately as such behaviors cannot be tolerated. Juggling work and studies is not easy for the Sekundarstufe II pupils yet good behaviors are something which should be even first and foremost taught at schools and adhered to. An interviewed principal made it clear that some pupils come with personal problems which should have been dealt with a long time ago. An important aspect of these bad behaviors is digital mobbing. Three educational personnel referred to this topic and expressed their concern as to the effects of such bullying exercise on the pupils. This must cause very stressful times for bullied pupils and leave them helpless and unable to cope. After the legal age of leaving school in Germany, pupils are somehow on their own, as parents tend to be less involved in their education. That responsibility gets transferred onto the Agentur für Arbeit or Job Centre and the teachers themselves. However, two principals mentioned that teachers are not there to be friends with pupils and there need to be that top-down relationship in order to maintain order and respect within the classrooms. Thus, a teacher whom a pupil in struggle would seek to trust in might be somehow difficult to find.

At the end of every interview, the seven education personnel were asked what they thought would be the best way forward in reducing the number of dropouts in their schools. After analyzing their statements and developing various memos, seven categories were inductively identified following steps 1, 2, 6 and 7 of Graph 4. These are as follows:

- A- Smaller classrooms where teachers can pay better attention to the needy pupils
- B- Separating weak and strong pupils within a school at times to cater for their aspirations
- C- Constantly finding ways to motivate pupils
- D- Clarity in what various schools offer and how their educational routes can lead to different or similar goals
- E- Teaching pupils what commitment means and what benefits it might bring in the long run
- F- Longer probation time at the beginning of the Sekundarstufe II to help pupils figure out what suit them best
- G- Qualified teachers and caring psychologists who can build an understanding and confidential relationship with pupils

We move on now to analyze the interviews carried out with the school dropouts in Germany. Following again Kuckartz' thematic qualitative text analysis and similar to the analysis done before,<sup>304</sup> the main concerns were first highlighted in forms of memos.<sup>305</sup> These were analyzed again and grouped into categories. Categories 1, 2 and 5 were deductively constructed since the structure of the interview questions was clear, for instance by raising the topics of the dropout's relationships with home,

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid. Kuckartz writes that the beginning of the thematic qualitative analysis process is marked by an interested, careful reading of the text and selection of particularly important text passages to highlight.

school, and peers. The remaining points were inductively formed through allowing the school dropouts to speak out their minds and deal with topics which they found relevant, hence the semi-structured method. Both deductive and inductive categories were conducted through the seven steps of Kuckartz' Graph 4. Several sub-categories can also be pointed out which emerged through this analysis. For instance, in the Home Problems category below, the sub-categories of divorce and lack of interest can be identified. Other examples of sub-categories can be pinpointed in the main category Bullying by Peers, where one remarks the influence of bullying due to appearance, bullying due to behaviour, and bullying due to sickness. After grouping these deductive and inductive categories together, these seven categories were generated:

- 1- Home Problems
- 2- Dislike of school setting and anxiety in changing schools at an early age
- 3- Pressurizing parents who prefer the Gymnasium for their children
- 4- Absence of support from and trust in teachers and psychologists
- 5- Bullying by peers
- 6- Digital Mobbing
- 7- Immigration Background

Every point will be dealt with separately to give the reader a clearer overview of what these dropouts share in common.

#### 1. Home Problems

Three of the dropouts whom I interviewed endured the process of separation or divorce between their parents. This process had a very negative effect on their performance. Children of separated or divorced parents might develop a sense of guilt for the deterioration of their parents' relationship, which could be manifested either

through bad behaviour, or bad grades, or negative attitudes, or others.<sup>306</sup> As a result, during and after the stressful separation of both parents, these dropouts experienced difficulties concentrating at school as their bad marks consequently pushed them to change school course.

Another aspect of the problems at home is the absence of interest and support which parents show and give to their kids. Two dropouts claimed that their parents would never really involve themselves in their schoolwork and had no expectation whether they got good marks or not. There is also the influence that the siblings have on them. Some of them take the bad performance of their elder siblings as an example or an excuse for theirs.

## 2. Dislike of school setting and anxiety in changing schools at an early age

Three out of the dropouts openly expressed their dislike of the school system, in all its forms of sitting in classrooms, learning for marks, and having a rigid schedule. They felt there were in a prison. When they dropped out, they expressed their feeling of freedom. Most of their classes catered for a big number of pupils and they even felt lost in the middle of it all.

Four dropouts, by looking back at their transfer from their Grundschule into the Sekundarstufe I, stated that they had made a bad move by going into the wrong school. Moreover, changing schools at the age of ten could come with a variety of anxieties, relating to either the school novelty, the encounter of new classmates, teachers, or even getting adapted to the new school formats. These dropouts spoke of their shock after entering the Sekundarstufe I as their expectation did not meet the reality. They were mostly overchallenged. This unknown field brought about negative feelings which affected their schooling life until the dropout period. They wished they would have chosen a different line of schooling. This changing of schools made them feel incompetent or as if they were not good enough. That feeling even persisted with

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<sup>306</sup> Robert Emery, *The Truth about Children and Divorce: Dealing with the Emotions so You and Your Children Can Thrive*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2004).

some pupils after changing from the Gymnasium, into the Realschule, and even into the Mittelschule until they dropped out completely. For others, that feeling of fitting in in a school only began to be realized when they associated themselves with and felt accepted by their classmates and teachers, not to mention adapting themselves to the average requirements of the lower schools.

### 3. Pressurizing parents who prefer the Gymnasium for their children

What is remarkable in the interviews which I carried out is that many of the dropouts started as Gymnasium pupils. Two of them began that road under the pressure of the parents who took pride in their children registering there. These parents wanted badly that their children perform, yet they were not prepared for that amount of schoolwork dedication.

Three dropouts spoke of their horror in having to spend so much time learning and giving up on so many activities and free time. Although they tried to succeed, the pleasure in learning was absent. The motivation began to die out until they saw a dead end. Moreover, they felt ashamed to tell others that they did not make it at the Gymnasium, and they had to transfer into the Realschule. One dropout even mentioned that moving into the Gymnasium was an early decision that he would have liked to have made at a later stage.

Two dropouts even spoke of their bad experience having to be separated from their best friends who joined the Realschule from the Grundschule and they themselves had to move into the Gymnasium. It was a separation for a couple of years before they eventually joined them at the Realschule.

### 4. Absence of support from and trust in teachers and psychologists

Three dropouts discussed the absence of teacher support during their schooling time. For several reasons, be them the size of the classroom or their inability to control their pupils, these dropouts found no connection with their teachers who were very demanding and did not project a feeling of trust. In other words, when they experienced problems with learning materials or schooling issues, they did not go to their teachers and discuss these topics with them.

What was even more striking is that six of these dropouts would not even go and seek help from the social worker or psychologist at their schools. These professional individuals are hired to look after difficult situations such as those which dropouts were going through. Yet it seems that they lacked the real connection with the pupils in need. The seventh dropout attempted to seek help, yet she lied to the psychologist about her real problem. Overall, it seemed that all dropouts had a problem opening up to someone at their school with their problems.

## 5. Bullying by peers

Four of the dropouts spoke about the experience of being bullied by their peers due to their physical appearance, clothes, telling bad rumors and others. This bullying was even extended to the apprenticeship location where colleagues were not tolerant or accepting either.

Due to various backgrounds, some of the dropouts behave and appear differently than their entourage yet the bullying could have been prevented through awareness, tolerance, and acceptance at different levels. Two dropouts even spoke of teachers bullying them for their skinny look and bad marks.

One dropout talked of her ADHD sickness which forced her to take tablets on a regular basis for several years. Yet this sickness did not find tolerance among her classmates, and she was constantly bombarded by hateful comments.

## 6. Digital Mobbing

A new form of mobbing which has been getting more attention lately is being materialized through social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and others. We call that form of mobbing digital mobbing. Two dropouts spoke about their ordeal which they endured through that type of bullying. They felt helpless and unable to react instantly to that misbehavior since they knew that these messages or photos which were circulated around swiftly without their consent, were meant to destroy their image and promote false news about their identity.

This mobbing has led them to become depressed, ruin their self-esteem and standing among their peers. By blocking the perpetrators, they would have felt isolating themselves even further, and by sharing these bullying comments with their school leaders or teachers, they would have felt ashamed and further humiliated. Therefore, it seems that most of these digital bullying activities go unnoticed by the school administration.

## 7. Immigration Background

Five out of the seven dropouts which were interviewed had an immigration background. Some of them have both parents as immigrants and others only one. In an open and modern country like Germany, one would automatically assume that this should not play a role in this dropout phenomenon. Yet in reality and after interviewing these five pupils, one can notice that their parents exercised an influence on them which was not necessarily helpful in motivating them in their learning process. This phenomenon is perhaps due to either some parents coming from different schooling systems and so the German system is unknown to them, or others being caught up in various social problems which occupy most of their times and leave them no time to support their children.



Some of these parents have two jobs to support their families, others do not speak the German language so fluently to understand how the schooling system operates and find it hard to communicate with the schooling body, others seem to underestimate the value of education in the lives of their children and perhaps were a bad role model in that regard. All in all, these parents were not a source of support for their children in their education and were neutral about or even disinterested in their performance at school. For these dropouts, they felt that they were left on their own and lacked a source of motivation to get good marks. They lacked a vision or a drive for the years of education which they were going through. As soon as they got the opportunity to break out of the system and start earning money, they immediately did so. It seemed to them that they belonged to the social class which their parents reached and no further. If their parents could not reach higher education, how or why would they? Some of them felt that they could work with their parents as soon as they were allowed to leave school and that would have fulfilled their desire and ambition.

## **6.2 Analysis of the Meetings with Education Personnel and School Dropouts in Ireland**

Similar to the analysis carried out with the education personnel's interviews in Germany following Kuckartz' thematic qualitative text analysis, this section will analyze the interviews with the Irish education personnel as well as the school dropouts. Starting with the interviews with the education personnel, the various memos and statements found in these interviews were compared and grouped into four categories. Category 1 and 3 were generated deductively through the interview questions whereas category 2 and 4 were formed inductively through the semi-structured interviewing process. The steps of Kuckartz' Graph 4 were also followed. For the deductive analysis, the first coding process was adhered to after highlighting the important passages of the interviews and composing their relevant memos. For the inductive analysis, the second coding process was the mean while following step 4 and 5 of Graph 4. Some sub-categories can also be identified. For instance, in the first category Parental Influence, one can highlight these sub-categories: Absence of value for

education, the presence of dysfunctional families, past unpleasant school experience. Another example of sub-categories can be identified in the main category: Personal Abilities and Attitudes. These sub-categories are literacy and numeracy problem, instant gratification, and continuous dislike for school. Here are the four main categories:

1. Parental Influence
2. Personal Abilities and Attitudes
3. Peer Pressure
4. Immigration Background Barrier

Each category is discussed and at the end, some of the recommendations that were proposed by the educational personnel are presented.

#### 1. Parental Influence

Most of the personnel that were interviewed from the various major cities in Ireland agreed that the absence of parental value of education is a major factor that contributes to dropping out. It is the absence of expectation from parents concerning their children's achievements in school that failed to motivate them to do their best.

Six of these personnel believed that families of dropouts are most likely to be dysfunctional. Bad attendance is a symptom of family malaise, according to a regional manager in the NEWB. These dysfunctional families might be unable to support their children due to illness, illiteracy, lack of skills in dealing with their children, or the inability to discipline them. In short, some of these families failed to set up a disciplinary structure for their children in their homes. The absence of such structure could lead to a chaotic lifestyle at home, and consequently in school, for these children.

Two educational personnel reckoned that parents' unpleasant experiences in their past schools would have an influence on their children's attitudes towards their schools. Such parental experiences could generate negative feelings in their children towards teachers, principals, and school rules.

## 2. Personal Abilities and Attitudes

Some educational personnel admitted that, due to literacy and numeracy difficulties, some students could not manage any longer to keep up with the rest of their schoolmates. They would rather choose the easiest option, which is to leave school early. Both literacy and numeracy difficulties could damage some students' self-esteem by making them a target for teasing and mockery.

Four personnel declared that most dropouts would leave school to seek an apprenticeship either offered to them by their family members or local employers. Lack of long-term vision together with searching for instant gratification could drive some students to decide to drop out. Consequently, if their future turns out unexpectedly different from their original plans, they might have a little chance to be accepted back in their schools.

Two out of these personnel believed that some students simply did not like school because of its whole structure. This attitude could drive them to leave school. Three other personnel argued that the current attitudes that dropouts maintained had been established and developed at an earlier stage in their primary education. Some students' educational, psychological, or even physical problems that were unnoticeable during their primary education could grow to become very serious in their secondary education, and in some cases too late to be cured.

## 3. Peer Pressure

Three education personnel blamed dropping out on peer pressure. They claimed that when a student mixes with the wrong group, he or she can be prone to getting involved in bad behaviour. A lack of supervision and the absence of a good role model were regarded as causes for the weakening of these students' performances in school. Here comes the dilemma of on the one hand spending time with the wrong peers and getting badly influenced by them or on the other hand showing that one does not belong to a certain peer group and getting bullied for it. It is when the pupils come together and are unsupervised, that bad ideas could come to mind.

#### 4. Immigration Background Barrier

There is an acute problem which cannot be ignored is the English language proficiency of some immigrant students. Mr. Doyle claimed that more and more schools have been welcoming foreign students whose English language skills are not up to standard. With the lack of support in this field, some of these students could fall behind and not manage to keep up with the rest of their classmates. For these students, this deficiency can make the whole educational process boring and uninteresting. By getting bored, they would tend to engage in breaking school rules, which might ultimately leave them on the edge of being expelled or drop out.

At the end of every meeting, members of school and education personnel were asked what they thought would be the best way forward in reducing the number of school dropouts in their particular schools and overall. After analyzing their answers, ten categories were inductively identified:

- A. Home help to parents who lack parental skills
- B. Home support to students in getting ready for school
- C. Early intervention in primary education
- D. Asking students what they need from school and education

- E. Offering pupils some alternatives, especially for those who are not academic
- F. Reducing the number of students in classrooms
- G. More parental involvement in their children's education
- H. Focus on social interaction in school among students
- I. A development of the existing practical programmes in schools such as Leaving Certificate Applied, the School Completion Programme, and others
- J. The need for Youthreach to be recognized by the Education Department

Moving on to analyzing the meetings with school dropouts in Ireland, one can observe several common memos of the randomly selected school dropouts from around Ireland. Step 1 of Graph 4 allowed to highlight the important passages from the interviews and compose the relative memos. These memos are subsequently grouped into six different categories which are formed as a result of at least five dropouts sharing common psychological, physical, parental, and educational features (Step 2, 3 and 6 of Graph 4). Categories I to IV and their sub-categories were created deductively, through following steps 1 to 5 of Graph 4 whereas the last two (V and VI) and their sub-categories were formed inductively, through steps 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6. These main categories are as follows:

- I. School Experience
- II. Parental Influence
- III. Sibling Influence
- IV. Close Friend Influence
- V. Literacy and Numeracy
- VI. Long-Term Sickness Impact

These six categories, following Kuckartz' qualitative text analysis, are designed to provide a picture of what a small fragment of Irish dropout shares. Several sub-categories were generated and can be identified below. Examples of these sub-categories are separation of parents, unemployment of parents, and low expectation in the main category of Parental Influence. Other examples of sub-categories generated through step 5 of Graph 4 from the main category Close Friend Influence are fear of losing a friend and attempting to fit in. Each of these six main categories is outlined below:

## I. School Experience

These interviews illustrated that most dropouts hated school and what it had on offer for them. They hated teachers, principals, and most certainly school rules. Most of these dropouts had no regrets about leaving school. In fact, they could not have waited any longer before they had actually dropped out. Their poor attendance reflected their dissatisfaction with the school education system.

Moreover, this research demonstrated that six dropouts had claimed to be 'school messers'. Their boredom in school must have been a factor in driving them to act the clown and misbehave in class. This is evident from the fact that these dropouts admitted that they had been 'messing about' and had known that this would have got them into trouble leading to either suspension or expulsion from school. Be that as it may, the majority of the dropout cohort willingly chose to leave school. Boredom seems to be a great factor in pushing some dropouts to seek a different route to mainstream education. Being bored, messing about, and basically hating school are the three main factors which were mentioned.

## II. Parental Influence

Parents tended to play a big role in the lives of the seven dropouts. The fathers of two dropouts died in different tragic accidents, and another had simply disappeared. These fathers would have left a big gap and an absence of a fatherly role model in the lives of these dropouts. John, the dropout from the school in the south side of Dublin, claimed that he had missed his father and would have wished him to be alive.

Five dropouts had both parents unemployed. These parents who mostly stayed at home and relied on government support set their children an example of a particular lifestyle. With regard to the remaining dropouts, their parents were engaged in basic work positions. Overall, the parents of all these dropouts were not in a position to create high expectations for their children.

Most parents of these dropouts did not offer any support for their children's education in mainstream schools. They were either busy with other activities or did not value education as essential in the future of their children. They saw the possibility of their children getting an apprenticeship as more important than completing their full second level education and going on to third level education. Some of the above case studies show that, although some parents initially objected to the idea of their children dropping out of school, they supported them in acquiring an apprenticeship. Some parents regard themselves as belonging to a lower social class than others and expect less from themselves let alone their children. These case studies indicate that the low expectation that parents have for their children contributes to their children's lack of motivation.

### III. Sibling Influence

Similar to the 'parental influence' section, the interviews show that more than half of the dropouts have older sisters or brothers who had left school before completing their Leaving Certificate. It is also important to note that few of the siblings of these dropouts have finished their full education. The siblings who have dropped out of school would, to an extent, have made the idea of dropping out seem permissible and possible. Some would have left school, sought an apprenticeship, and done well for themselves.

These could have been role models for their brothers or sisters. Consequently, their parents might have had less objection to their other siblings seeking an apprenticeship.

At the same time, some of the dropouts' siblings have left school, stayed at home, and remained idle. Some have tried to get an apprenticeship but failed. These siblings would not have set a "good" example for these dropouts. It is possible that giving up easily on education could have been sent as a clear message to the younger brothers or sisters. These dropouts would have taken comfort in the fact that their elder siblings had already dropped out. Some would also have spoken to their siblings about their plans for dropping out and most likely got approval from them.

#### IV. Close Friend Influence

Five dropouts of the case studies claimed that their close friends had chosen to drop out of school. In fear of losing a close contact with the latter, some decided to leave school and enroll in whatever their close friends had engaged in. In other words, four of these dropouts have joined Youthreach after knowing that their close friends had already made the move. By having a best friend, the dropout would normally share ideas and get approval from him or her. If a student has a hatred for school, teachers, or school rules, his or her close friend would tend to share the same feelings. An approval from a friend would mean a great deal in one's decision to drop out of school.

Other dropouts claimed to have been influenced negatively by their close friends. Even though dropping out was perhaps not directly linked to their relationship with the latter, spending considerable time with these close friends would not be calculated to support the dropout cohort in building a positive attitude towards education and school. Close friendships could even break up in the case of dropping out. In Jessica's case, she had lost her close friend after dropping out of school. This close friend stayed in school and did not follow Jessica's move.



In most cases, the influence that close friends exercise on each other is too important to be neglected. In observing the dropout interviews, close friends frequently stick together if one decides to drop out of school.

## V. Literacy and Numeracy

Some dropouts from these interviews had literacy and numeracy capabilities appropriate to someone much younger than them. Such difficulties could embarrass some dropouts in front of their classmates in school and reduce their peers and teachers' level of educational expectation of them. By having problems with reading, writing, and mathematics, these dropouts could have developed a low self-esteem and distrust in their potential. This poses the difficult question of the relationship between literacy and numeracy failure and different family and socio-economic circumstances that children experience. There is ample evidence available that the two are linked, and together exert a significant influence on students' decisions to drop out.

## VI. Long-Term Sickness Impact

One of the most staggering findings of the interviews is that most dropouts have been suffering from some kind of a long-term physical, psychological, or emotional condition. This may have contributed, to a certain degree, to a decline in the realization of a student's full potential in school. In addition, such physical, psychological, or emotional difficulties would tend to make for a different school experience than that of peers, an experience that could, at the least, have the potential to induce feelings of discouragement and low self-esteem. These feelings could also have contributed to different types of misbehavior in school. Such misbehavior could have led to breaking school rules and left the school administration little option but to suspend or expel such students.

Below are two table layouts of the summarized headlines given by the education personnel and school dropouts in both Germany and Ireland.

**TABLE 7**

Acknowledged Challenges by Education Personnel			Education Personnel's Recommendations	
<i>Germany</i>	<i>Ireland</i>		<i>Germany</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
Lack of qualified teachers	Parental influence		Qualified teachers who can build an understanding and confidential relationship with pupils	Home help to parents who lack parental skills
Lack of motivation and interest in education among the dropout ranks	Personal abilities and attitudes		Constantly finding ways to motivate pupils	Home support to students in getting ready for school
Lack of clarity of options for pupils and parents and hereby false expectations from their parts	Peer pressure		Clarity in what various schools offer and how their educational routes can lead to different or similar goals	Early intervention in primary education and before reaching the age of six for students or children who are facing difficulties
Lack of probation period for pupils	Immigration background		Longer probation time at the beginning of the Sekundarstufe II to help pupils figure out what suit them best	Asking students what they need from school and education
Lack of male Realschule in Swabia			Teaching pupils what commitment means and what benefits it might bring in the long run	Offering pupils some alternatives, especially for those who are not academic

Stressful transitions into various schools and stressful atmospheres within certain schools			Grouping weak and strong pupils within a school separately at times to cater for their aspirations	Reducing the number of students in classrooms
Digital mobbing and bad manners among dropouts			Smaller Classrooms where teachers can pay better attention to the needy pupils	Focus on social interaction in school among students

**TABLE 8**

Dropouts' Challenges in Germany		Dropouts' Challenges in Ireland
Absence of support from and trust in teachers and psychologists		School experience
Dislike of school and anxiety in changing schools at an early age		Parental influence
Home problems		Sibling influence
Bullying by peers		Close Friend influence
Digital mobbing		Literacy and numeracy
Immigration background		Long-term sickness impact

### 6.3 Comparison of the Analyses of Both Countries

After having analyzed the interviews carried out with the educational personnel and dropouts in both Germany and Ireland using Kuckartz' thematic qualitative text analysis, we will turn now to compare both these findings (i.e. categories), study what the educational personnel in each country see as relevant in the dropout phenomenon and highlight the similarities and differences in what the German and Irish dropouts

experience at their schools and outside, which push them towards that road of dropping out. In this phase and according to Kuckartz, the categories are further developed (Step 7 of Graph 4), and the entire data set can be analyzed again and prepared for the research report. Kuckartz further states that the more elaborate category structure can provide a basic structure for the research report and through this comparison, the category-based analysis gains sophistication, complexity, and explanatory power.<sup>307</sup> The comparison between the various categories will then be discussed to give the reader an elaborated and detailed overview of the common and unique perspectives in both countries.

Thus, this chapter will be divided into four sections:

- 1- German and Irish Educational Personnel's Common Perspectives
- 2- German and Irish Educational Personnel's Unique Perspectives
- 3- German and Irish Dropouts' Common Ordeals
- 4- German and Irish Dropouts' Unique Ordeals

Through the thorough examination of the interviews and initial categories, one can rather spot more differences than similarities between the interviews in both countries, which somehow shows how each jurisdiction differs from the other and what kind of school system pupils automatically develop in. Let us start with the first point:

- 1- German and Irish Educational Personnel's Common Perspectives

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<sup>307</sup> Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, 2014, Chapter 4.

Among all the points that the educational personnel in both Germany and Ireland discussed, they clearly agreed on two main categories: a- Lack of motivation and interest b- Expectation issues.

Regardless of which school or region or country a pupil is in, once he or she loses sight on the reasons why they get up every morning and go to learn, they gradually lose motivation and interest in what they do. This lack can also boil down to bad experiences with teachers, peers, families, subjects and so on. Most pupils who lose that positive kick to attend school and strive to perform well might nonetheless continue going to school either because they have to or there are no educational alternatives. Those who see a dead-end and decide to quit must wait until they are allowed to or reach the legal age of leaving school. Truancy becomes a pattern and parents get called in to explain their children's behavior. All in all, it is true that an unmotivated or disinterested pupil constitutes a high risk in joining the dropout cohort.

Moreover, the educational personnel of both countries spoke of the problems of expectation among pupils. Dropouts normally endure lack or false expectation of what the next steps in higher secondary education entail. For the Irish pupils, it is more the lack of expectation which they face up to. They are fed up with the system and do not expect any positive or beneficial changes in their lives if they stay in education. Whereas, for the German pupils, it is the false expectations which they suffer under as they embark into the Sekundarstufe II. The lack of clarification in their options lead them to getting shocked or disappointed by the choices they make as they enter the next level of secondary education. This shock results for some in breaking up or dropping out.

On the alleviation perspective, the German and Irish education personnel could agree on two categories too: a- Reducing the size of classrooms b- The need to stay motivated and commit oneself. It seems that classrooms in both countries cater for more than 25 pupils at a time, which leads to teachers being overchallenged to look after the need of every pupil in their classrooms. In teaching such a big number of pupils, the weak as well as the strong pupils might not get the attention and support which they seek. This can only have negative results on them in the long run. As for the need to stay motivated and commit oneself, we tend to forget to ask pupils what they want as opposed to directly instruct them. We need to clarify their options and

ask them for more of their own. In other words, pupils should be presented with suitable alternatives when the road proves to be closed.

## 2- German and Irish Educational Personnel's Unique Perspectives

Due to the differences in the education structure between Germany and Ireland, the education personnel had obviously different perspectives on the dropout phenomenon. The German personnel spoke, among others, of these four categories: lack of probation periods, stress in the transition phases, lack of male Realschule and digital mobbing. The Irish personnel, in their turn, focused on the following three categories: the dysfunctional families and their lack of value in education, peer pressure, and dropping out to seek an apprenticeship. We can see here that due to the format of the German school system that problems arise with lack of probation periods and a rise in stressful times for pupils who navigate through the years of education. What adds to it is the lack of school types<sup>308</sup> for pupils who wish to change and seek a particular educational path. For the Irish dropouts, the Irish educational personnel identified the focus on the "out-of-school" factors, such as family and peer background and their influences. Seeking an apprenticeship as soon as possible is something which perhaps concerns Irish dropouts more than German ones.

These differences in looking at the dropout phenomenon call equally for different resolutions. For the German pedagogues, it is naturally the longer probation periods, more separations between weak and strong pupils, and constantly looking for qualified teachers who are getting difficult to find. For the Irish ones, it is obviously more home support for parents as well as for pupils. The Irish personnel spoke of both early intervention in primary education and more parental involvement which are currently being applied. They called for more development of the programmes which look after potential school dropouts such as the Junior Certificate School Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied. One last thing is that they also suggested supporting and

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<sup>308</sup> In Swabia, it is the lack of Realschule for male pupils

enhancing the social interaction at school between pupils to prevent mobbing in all its kind.

### 3- German and Irish Dropouts' Common Ordeals

When asked both German and Irish dropouts about their experiences at school and what led them to the situations they were at, they all spoke about this common category: Dysfunctional families. Some of these parents were absent for their children or had problems of their own such as divorce, unemployment, poverty, abuse of substance and others and did not assist them in their studies. Some had a very low regard for schooling or education as they themselves did not achieve good levels either. Some of these parents had immigration backgrounds and were not so integrated in their societies that they could help their children integrate themselves better. Some of these parents could not communicate properly with the education personnel, which put their children at a disadvantage.

Another common category for these dropouts is dislike for school. Some spoke as well of anxiety and dissatisfaction. These pupils attend their schools only because they would get in trouble if they did not. They hate the whole system of sitting in classes, listening to teachers the whole day, sitting exams, and being expected to perform. Adding to that, it is not getting on well with teachers, classmates and receiving bad marks. All these factors contribute to them wanting to flee as soon as they get the chance. Not only is the school system for them unattractive, but it is also a cause of bad feelings, bad moods, bad behaviour, bad sleeping, and so on.

One last similarity in that common ordeal is this category: peer pressure. Both German and Irish dropouts revealed the bullying trauma from their peers, whether digital, verbal, or physical, inside or outside of the school walls. This bullying can cause serious psychological damage to pupils which makes them stop learning, eating, sleeping, interacting, and so on. Some peers even had a strong influence on some German pupils, for instance, to change schools to lower ones as they felt they were

left behind. One cannot underestimate how “fitting in” or “not fitting in” within a school group can lead to positive or negative experiences in and out of the classrooms.

#### 4- German and Irish Dropouts’ Unique Ordeals

Similar to the unique perspectives of the German pedagogues concerning the dropout phenomenon, the German dropouts expressed different anxieties to those of the Irish ones. An important category is the pressure from German parents on their children to join the Gymnasium after the Grundschule. Irish pupils would not understand that type of anxiety at an early age. Then, German dropouts face up to another pressure, of switching schools should the Gymnasium or Realschule or Mittelschule or Vocational schools prove unsuitable. These pressures from an early age put a lot of anxieties in the hearts of the German dropouts as they struggled to complete the Sekundarstufe I.

Another struggle which some German dropouts go through is this category: the absence of understanding and support from teachers and psychologists. According to most dropouts, these educational personnel are not there to offer them help when things do not go well. There is no trust and a sense of confidentiality which these pedagogues transmit to these dropouts. They would need to confide in other individuals and the risk is higher to receive the wrong advice and guidance.

As for the Irish dropouts, they mentioned different categories which led them to quit. Mainly they spoke about boredom and being the troublesome in class. Others highlighted the influence of their siblings on them, by not being a good role model in sticking to school and striving to get good results. A few had some long-term sicknesses which influenced them badly and affected their performance negatively at school. Last but not least, some Irish dropouts had serious problems with literacy and numeracy – something which made them unable to catch up with the rest of the class and consequently fall behind. These deficiencies made them feel stupid in front of the others and “as if they did not fit in”. Ultimately, they had no other choice but to seek recognition from sources outside school.



It seems that, for the Irish dropouts, external factors play more important roles in pushing some out. The pressure that they experience come mostly from their parents, siblings, and peers. Irish teachers get less negative reputation than those in Germany. The blame gets more directed to backgrounds rather than to those who are directly running and leading the educational institution.

Below are summarized tables of the common and unique categories presented in this chapter:

**TABLE 9**

German and Irish Educational Personnel's Common Perspectives		German and Irish Educational Personnel's Unique Perspectives	
<i>Common challenges</i>	<i>Common Recommendations</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
Lack of motivation and interest	Reducing the size of classrooms	Lack of probation periods	Dysfunctional families
Expectation issues	Staying motivated and committed	Stress in transition phases	Lack of value in education
		Lack of male Realschule	Peer pressure
		Digital mobbing	Seeking an apprenticeship
German and Irish Dropouts' Common Ordeals		German and Irish Dropouts' Unique Ordeals	
Broken families		<i>Germany</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
Immigration backgrounds		Pressure from parents to join the Gymnasium	Literacy and numeracy deficiencies

Dislike for school	Pressure through switching schools	Siblings' influence
Peer pressure	Lack of support from psychologists	Long-term sicknesses

## **7. The Links between the Literature, the Initiatives, and the Interviews**

After analyzing the interviews with the pedagogues and school dropouts in both Germany and Ireland using Kuckartz's thematic qualitative text analysis<sup>309</sup> and comparing them, this chapter will seek to draw some links between these interviews, the initiatives of the various education departments, and the research findings on the education system of both jurisdictions. It will allow to crystalize the relation between the influences of the system on the dropout and the effects of the dropout's personal decision to quit.

We will start by finding out the links between the German and Irish systems and the interviews, then move on to identify the connections between the literature on the dropout personal decision and the interviews, and finally lay down where the initiatives of the education departments of each jurisdiction reflect the aspiration for change from the education personnel and dropouts in the interviews.

### **7.1 The German and Irish School Systems Vs. The Interviews**

#### **7.1.1 The German School System Vs. The Interviews**

Due to the great influence of the Weimar School Compromise in 1919 and the unwillingness of the political parties during the Weimar Republic to unify their schooling systems into one,<sup>310</sup> Germany has mainly experienced up to this day a primary education of four years followed by different streams of Sekundarstufe I, which most German pupils need to choose from as early as ten years of age. Moreover, from the Bildungsbericht 2018,<sup>311</sup> it was also revealed that in German states where the Sekundarstufe I is more compact, i.e., by offering only two streams of education, fewer pupils tend to repeat school years and more pupils would attend the Gymnasium. We

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<sup>309</sup> Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, 2014, Chapter 4.

<sup>310</sup> Isabell van Ackeren, et al, p. 35.

<sup>311</sup> Bildungsbericht 2018, 95

have also seen that, according to that Bildungsbericht, there has been an increase in pupils changing schools during the first secondary schooling cycle in the last 20 years. By examining the developing statistics of the various schools in Germany, one can realize that a trend is taking place with more Gesamtschule and Integrated schools seeing the light (an increase of 20% at the Sekundarstufe I and 50% at the Sekundarstufe II). This has also led to less schooling options being offered at the Sekundarstufe I.<sup>312</sup> 10% of the school share in Realschule and Mittelschule have disappeared and the number of Gymnasiasten has gone down, in other words 65% of the Gymnasiasten change schools during the years of the Sekundarstufe I.<sup>313</sup> These statistics which were presented earlier in this thesis simply show the constant movement of pupils into various schools. Another important finding which the statistics showed us is that the German states which offer longer Grundschule years, i.e., 6 years or 2-year probation at the end of the Grundschule, had either the number of their Gymnasiasten remaining stable or increasing in the last 10 years whereas the percentage of pupils of the Gesamtschule or Integrated School has doubled. Through the interviews carried with both German education personnel and dropouts, their schooling structure was criticized as being stressful and bringing about a lot of anxieties, whether in the lack of probation times or the transitions to various schools from an early age. Some of the interviewed dropouts even expressed the negative pressure from their parents who wished that they joined the Gymnasium directly after the Grundschule. The nightmare began when they realized that they did not fit in, had to switch, and attempted to adjust into a new schooling environment. As seen in the first chapter of this thesis, Isabell van Ackeren et al describes the current German system as one which brings high risks, wrong roads, and even dead ends for some.<sup>314</sup> Some might see it as a flexible system, yet for them, it is unfair as it is more of a system that brings pupils to lower levels than to higher ones.<sup>315</sup> None of the interviewed dropouts had ever dreamt of getting to higher schools, let alone being able to improve their performance. By placing pupils in lower education levels at an early age, we could be somehow degrading their aspirations to perform better or to seek higher certificates and diplomas.<sup>316</sup> Apart from that stress and anxiety which the German dropouts have

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<sup>312</sup> More details in Chapter 1.1C of this chapter.

<sup>313</sup> <https://www.datenportal.bmbf.de/portal/docs/de/Tabelle-2.3.30.pdf>

<sup>314</sup> Isabell van Ackeren et al, p. 57.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

gone through, there is also the issue of false expectations which came up during the interviews. By switching schools or getting transferred into various transition schooling periods, it seemed that these dropouts had the wrong expectation in what the next move would bring. Some, for instance, had underestimated the difficulties of the lower schools where they were asked to move into. Others were surprised by what some apprenticeships require and did not have enough time to adjust to a certain workplace. These false expectations are somehow linked to how the German schooling system prepare its pupils to the move. Even parents develop certain misunderstandings of the schooling streams where they would push their children into – a reality which does not bring them forward.

### **7.1.2 The Irish School System Vs. The Interviews**

In Ireland, after the second world war, we have seen that the Primary Certificate examination which was introduced on a compulsory basis after 6 years of primary education was proven to have a more negative effect on the narrowing of the curriculum. This led to its abolition in 1967.<sup>317</sup>

Even the Intermediate Certificate and the Group Certification which were brought about to test pupils after two or three years of junior secondary schooling were proven to be incoherent and unmatching to the respective curriculum.<sup>318</sup> These two testing were also replaced in 1989 by the Junior Leaving Certificate after 3 years of Junior Cycle. This meant that, ever since, Irish pupils have proceeded to the age of 15 or 16 without having to sit in a standardized national exam. That decision to postpone the pressure of exams can be felt in the answers of the Irish dropouts who did not speak of any pressure coming from changing schools or sitting decisive exams at an early age. They discussed mainly the pressure stemming from outside school, i.e., parents, siblings, and peers.

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<sup>317</sup> Raftery and Hout, *Maximally maintained inequality: Expansion, reform and opportunity in Irish education, 1921-1975. Sociology of Education* 66: 41-62.

<sup>318</sup> Crooks & McKernan, *The Challenge of Change*, p. 99.

Moreover, Ireland has seen a shift into more vocational education, which has been helping pupils find less academic and more practical quench to their career thirst. Towards the end of the seventies, the traditional restrictions on vocational education were abolished, a comprehensive curriculum was founded, and vocational schools were brought within the ambit of a more integrated post-primary system, which then saw the further creation of community schools that were designed to deliver a comprehensive curriculum, incorporating both academic and vocational subjects.<sup>319</sup> This has resulted in doubling the attendance at secondary schooling, which meant dropping out after primary education was reduced dramatically.

What is also remarkable in Ireland is the constant search for ways to keep the schooling system attractive to all pupils, even those at risk of dropping out. As we have seen above, the Junior Cycle is currently witnessing a makeover with a new framework adopted since 2014. It will see the implementation of a revised Junior Certificate called the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. There is a classroom-based component to the assessment which is based on work completed by the student during the second and third year of the Junior Cycle. A new report card for parents which will give them much more information about their child's learning progress has also been under development.<sup>320</sup> From the interviews with the Irish dropouts, one can pinpoint the lack of expectation that parents show their children when it comes to performing. This new framework, however, is supposed to get them more involved. It specifically includes, as shown earlier, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) which projects are related to identifying potential school dropouts and devising a programme suitable to their needs.<sup>321</sup>

Schools using the JCSP have identified it as a suitable programme for those who have difficulties in the areas of literacy and numeracy, with learning disabilities which hinder them from fully participating in and benefiting from the Junior Cycle, who show clear signs of not coping with the experience of school at Junior Cycle and whose attendance and/or behaviour and attitude indicate a considerable degree of disengagement from school. The interviews with the Irish dropouts have exactly

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<sup>319</sup> *John Walsh, Eamon de Valera*, p. 130-145.

<sup>320</sup> [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state\\_examinations/junior\\_certificate\\_programme.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state_examinations/junior_certificate_programme.html)

<sup>321</sup> [https://ncca.ie/media/2496/the\\_revised\\_jcsp\\_programme\\_statement\\_.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/2496/the_revised_jcsp_programme_statement_.pdf)

reflected that need of improving their literacy and numeracy capabilities.<sup>322</sup> In fact, after examining the educational assessment of some of these dropouts, it was noticeable that half of them suffered from these deficiencies. This new development has surely been a direct response to that need.

## 7.2 The German and Irish Personal Dropout Decision Vs. The Interviews

### 7.2.1 Home Background

Several renown German and Irish authors such as Ricking, Hillenbrand, Dunkake, Knollmann, Kellaghan, and others have revealed in their books the importance and influence of parenting in the lives of their children when it comes to dropping out. Parental issues whether physical or mental play a crucial role in pushing their children into corners which could be disturbing and eventually lead them to decide for other roads. In the interviews carried out with both German and Irish dropouts, divorce of parents,<sup>323</sup> their lack of support,<sup>324</sup> being unemployed for longer period,<sup>325</sup> their absence of acknowledgment,<sup>326</sup> as well as their low education background<sup>327</sup> caused a significant negative influence on them. The authors, mentioned above, discussed these factors in more details in their books and showed that sometimes the indirect influences which parents exercise on their innocent children could also place major impacts on them deciding to become dropouts in the longer run. Most interviews with both Irish and German dropouts started by discussing their broken homes or families which resulted in their isolation or moving into a different home and ultimately shrinking their aspirations to achieve better. The education personnel in both Germany and Ireland spoke of lack and false expectations from parents towards their children. When parents do not value education and see no benefit in it, how can their children be

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<sup>322</sup> Chapter 4 of this thesis, Section 4.2, Part V.

<sup>323</sup> Hillenbrand, and Ricking, *Schulabbruch: Ursachen – Entwicklung – Prävention*. p. 153-172.

<sup>324</sup> Knollmann, Al-Mouhtasseb and Hebebrand, *Schulverweigerung und psychische Störungen*, p. 434-449.

<sup>325</sup> Ricking, 2011.

<sup>326</sup> Kellaghan, *Relationships between Home Environment and Scholastic Behavior in a Disadvantaged Population*, 1977.

<sup>327</sup> Dunkake, *Der Einfluss der Familie auf das Schulschwänzen*, 2007.

expected to develop a value for it? And when things go wrong and their performance does not add up, how can they decide to restore things and strive for better results?

Two more factors which were considered to be influential on the personal decision to drop out are:

- 1- Pressure from families to attend higher schooling
- 2- Immigration background of parents

Unlike what the Irish dropouts experience, German dropouts face up sometimes to unusual pressure to attend higher schooling although they are not ready for it. Some of the interviewed dropouts expressed their frustration with their parents who wanted them to enroll in the Gymnasium, in the unsuitable school. That led them to feeling overchallenged at first, then skipping school, repeating class, moving schools, and ultimately giving up. That experience develops in them a sense of failure and a feeling of not belonging. Michael Wagner in his work *Soziologische Befunde zum Schulabsentismus und Handlungskonsequenzen*<sup>328</sup> raised this issue and argued that changing schools could have a very dramatic influence on pupils who find themselves fighting to find their feet in a new strange environment. Some pupils would not manage to adapt at all and have to be degraded into the lowest school until they decide to drop out completely. Repeating a class might seem for some to be the right solution yet this, too, can bring along bad feelings for the affected ones who are seen by the others as a failure or too old to hang out with.<sup>329</sup>

Last but not least, it is the issue relating to the immigration backgrounds of parents which got a major highlight. Hintz, Grosche and Grünke spoke about the difficulties which such backgrounds bring directly and indirectly to the dropouts, such as language problems, cultural differences, tradition conflicts, and parental contact barrier with educators.<sup>330</sup> Zick also revealed the anxieties and stress which pupils of these

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<sup>328</sup> Wagner, *Soziologische Befunde zum Schulabsentismus und Handlungskonsequenzen*, 2009.

<sup>329</sup> Wagner, Dunkake, and Weiß: *Schulverweigerung. Empirische Analysen zum abweichenden Verhalten von Schülern*. 2004.

<sup>330</sup> Hintz, Grosche und Grünke, *Schulmeidendes Verhalten bei Kindern und Jugendlichen mit Migrationshintergrund*, 2009.



backgrounds endure in order to attempt to fit in.<sup>331</sup> Among the common ordeals of some of the Irish and German dropouts, they both spoke about that issue which has truly affected their integration and made them somehow a target for bullying. Such experiences accumulate in the hearts of these individuals, make them hate the atmosphere of the school and ultimately help them decide to seek other environments where they feel more welcome or better integrated. This feeling of malaise at school can be connected to the feeling of disinterest in what the school offers – a point which both educational personnel during the interviews agreed on. That feeling of disinterest can only lead to bad performance and eventually to dropping out.

### **7.2.2 Teacher's Influence**

After discussing the link between home and the dropout, it is important to clarify the connection or influence between teachers and dropouts, since it seems that pupils spend more time at school than at home. Thus, the shaping of thinking and character also gets underway under the influence of these pedagogues, who have a big mission in teaching groups of roughly 25 pupils in a classroom. Three crucial factors which can be central to the lives of these teachers are:

- 1- Recognition
- 2- Salary
- 3- Appeal

In most countries where the rate of dropouts is below 10% such as Luxemburg, Netherlands, Finland, and so on, teachers are very well estimated in their environment and are well paid. Moreover, a teacher needs to be qualified and his or her position should be sought and admired within society. These factors motivate teachers and help them see their job as a privilege. In doing so, one hopes that teachers transfer that sense of good luck into their teaching practices. When both dropouts in Germany

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<sup>331</sup> Zick, *Psychologie der Akkulturation: Neufassung eines Forschungsbereiches*, 2010.

and Ireland were asked about their experience with their teachers, they rather discussed the memories of a very bad relationship. Teachers could not control their classes, did not show them understanding and support, and did not radiate a sense of trust and confidence.

These findings can also be found in both German and Irish literature. Scott Bold in his book *Listening and Learning*<sup>332</sup> discusses this topic and reveals how intimidating that relationship for some dropouts could be. He even goes further to claim that good relationships with teachers could ultimately define whether a pupil succeeds or fails. This is a big statement from Bold and there is a lot of truth in it, which shows the big role teachers can play on an everyday basis in the lives of their pupils. In some German literature on the other hand, Baier et al,<sup>333</sup> for instance, spoke clearly about how damaging the atmosphere of a classroom can be on pupils. They insist on the importance of the teacher's role in creating harmony in their classrooms which leads to creating a good connection between pupil, teacher, and school. If that connection does not exist, there is a risk that a pupil loses interest or motivation in staying and performing. A classroom atmosphere can be so toxic on a dropout that he or she would become physically and mentally ill – which creates the beginning of truanting.

As stated at the beginning, the amount of time which pupils spend with their teachers could be more than with their parents. This time could be easy or difficult to bear. A teacher has a lot to say when it comes to making that time useful for all his or her pupils. Baier et al also revealed the importance of acceptance by teachers. A teacher can excel in his or her topic, be great in managing his or her classroom, yet treats pupils differently or even unfairly. This treatment or lack of acceptance can also lead to bad feelings within some pupils – feelings of not fitting in, not being good enough, not belonging and so on. According to Beck and Malley,<sup>334</sup> most children fail in school not because they lack the necessary cognitive skills but because they feel detached, alienated, and isolated from others and from the educational process.

That bad teacher-pupil relationship can be underestimated. Good pupils could turn into bad achievers through the influence of unfair teachers. Moreover, teachers can be compared to football coaches, in that a feeling of teamwork can be created in a

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<sup>332</sup> Boldt, *Listening and Learning*, 1994.

<sup>333</sup> Baier et al, 2006

<sup>334</sup> Beck & Malley, *A pedagogy of belonging*, 7(3), 133-137.

classroom or that of troublesome competition between pupils (not necessarily in relation to school marks). Pupils can hate their topics, bring bad notes, feel less competent, miss out on materials, fail, and ultimately decide to drop out.

When asked about their teachers, many dropouts cannot recall instances of exam papers or topics. Yet they could recall acts of kindness or unfairness from teachers towards them. That shows the importance of being humane, kind, and fair as a teacher which would leave more positive impact on pupils than perhaps specific papers, exams, notes, or grades.

The topic of psychologists or social workers' influence was also discussed during the interviews. Some of these personnel were remembered by the dropouts as uncaring individuals who were there to create an image of coolness and neutrality. They were not a source of help to these dropouts whom I interviewed. Therefore, when the adult world at the schooling level seems to be unfair, the dropouts may turn towards their peers and friends which will be discussed in the next section.

### **7.2.3 Peer Pressure and Digital Mobbing**

Both German and Irish pedagogues agree in their books on the enormous influence peers exercise on pupils and their decisions to drop out. In her research *Der Einfluss der Peers auf Schulverweigerung*,<sup>335</sup> Samjeske highlighted the danger when good pupils hang out with others who are potential school dropouts. She even spoke of the threats that peers eventually place on others, which could lead in some cases to mental and physical disturbance. Jeremy Finn in his article *Withdrawing from School*<sup>336</sup> also discussed the pressure stemming out from peers and argued that the idea of being left alone can be graver than hanging out with the wrong group. Therefore, it can happen that some pupils get intertwined with a risk group where, in order to fit in, they would have to change certain behaviour and attitude towards school, teachers, and learning.

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<sup>335</sup> Kathrin Samjeske, *Der Einfluss der Peers auf Schulverweigerung*, 2007.

<sup>336</sup> J. D. Finn, *Withdrawing from School*, 1989.

These findings reflect the answers which I got from both dropouts and educational personnel. Furthermore, both German and Irish dropouts expressed their negative experiences with certain peers in terms of bullying and being pushed into wrong corners. Others revealed the indirect pressure which surfaces out of fear from being left alone. Some pupils, after losing their peers to a different lower school, felt great anxiety which had a negative impact on their schooling performance, concentration, and success. Peer pressure and even bullying can have many aspects and lead to different repercussions. From a simple nasty comment to a physical fight, behaviors of peers can lead to serious impacts on sensitive and non-sensitive pupils. The worst-case scenario is when a pupil gets psychologically disturbed by his or her peers that he or she would stop learning, constantly feel sick, and eventually drop out. No one should underestimate the power of peer pressure.

Nowadays, this power can be easily manifested digitally, in the form of messaging or texting, sharing stories, video calling, video sharing, posting on various social platforms, and so on. Some German pedagogues whom I interviewed revealed the serious effects of that digital mobbing on the wellbeing of pupils and how some words or shared photos could lead to trauma for some pupils who feel helpless and destroyed. Digital mobbing is spreading very fast as many pupils have access to a mobile phone and have social media accounts – again in order to fit in with the trend. Although many schools forbid the use of such devices on their premises, it does not mean that they could control it outside the school walls. The effect of that digital mobbing is nonetheless felt inside the school.

Several German researchers such as Ricking,<sup>337</sup> Pühr et al,<sup>338</sup> Schreiber-Kittl und Schröpfer<sup>339</sup> have tackled that sensitive topic and found that extended media consumption can lead to several mechanism of actions which in its turn influence negatively the pupil's school performance. It is a very tricky trend which is difficult to control in a world where home schooling and getting in touch digitally has been spreading more than ever. As simple as commenting on a picture as being ugly can cause deep disturbance in the inner self of a pupil who does not know how to react in order to make the situation better and brush up his or her image.

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<sup>337</sup> Ricking, 2011.

<sup>338</sup> Pühr, Herz und Ricking (Hg.), *Problem Schulabsentismus*, p. 11-18.

<sup>339</sup> Schreiber-Kittl und Schröpfer, *Abgeschrieben?*, 2002 (Übergänge in Arbeit; 2).

Facing up to the challenge of digital communication among pupils, some become unfair targets which, although it might seem at first harmless, it could be worse than a physical attack. While a kick could harm for a second, a mean digital message could harm for weeks. Baier et al<sup>340</sup> discussed that level of violence in their book *Schülerbefragung 2005: Gewalterfahrungen, Schulabsentismus und Medienkonsum von Kindern und Jugendlichen* and showed that in most cases violence in all its forms does not get reported and the harm does not get spotted until late. The remedy, therefore, becomes too difficult to find, since the psychological damage would already have occurred.

These types of mobbing will lead to bad performance at school<sup>341</sup> and results in pupils being often sick – something which the interviews with the dropouts revealed. Bad performance alongside sicknesses cannot but lead to dead-end roads at schools.

#### **7.2.4 Detachment from School**

It has been stated on several occasions that several children fail in school not because they lack the necessary cognitive skills but because they feel detached, alienated, and isolated from others and from the educational process.<sup>342</sup> Both German and Irish dropouts, during the interviews, agreed that they lost connection with the school and hated the whole system reflected in being in class, listening to teachers, sitting exams, and being expected to perform. There is nothing that could make them feel attached to their school.

Ricking, Schulze and Wittrock, in their turns, stated that the more a school involves pupils with school activities the more they feel attached to it.<sup>343</sup> Yet these school dropouts were not involved in extra-curricular activities which brought them any kind of connections to the school. Some of them sought that connection outside by taking on part-time jobs, hanging out with peers, and getting engaged in various addictive

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<sup>340</sup> Baier et al, 2006

<sup>341</sup> Wagner et al, 2004.

<sup>342</sup> Beck & Malley, *A pedagogy of belonging. Reclaiming Children and Youth*, p. 133-137.

<sup>343</sup> Ricking, Schulze und Wittrock (Hg.), *Schulabsentismus und Dropout*, 2009, p. 33.

behaviors.<sup>344</sup> Some Irish dropouts also mentioned the influence of their siblings on them by being a bad role model and more importantly their bad school marks made them feel more alienated from that system as if they did not fit in at all.

The education personnel interviewed in both Germany and Ireland clearly identified the disinterest among dropouts in their schools. These pupils see their time spent in classroom as a waste of time. They are the wrong pieces of the puzzle. They are there because they have to, otherwise they would rather be somewhere else. Truancy, for Wagner,<sup>345</sup> starts from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class, i.e., at the age of eleven and twelve. The early signs of dropping out become more and more visible and so as soon as they get entitled to leave, they would not hesitate.

That feeling of detachment from school is central to the decision of many to quit. It is either that the system failed to build a link with them and bring them on board or they failed the system as they could not find any common ground with it.

What is striking is the absence of affiliation which psychologists and social workers are expected to offer to these dropouts. No one spoke positively about any of their roles or support to them during their struggles. That shows that with the absence of involvement in extra-curricular activities and positive connections to teachers and pedagogues, a dropout might feel that as if he or she were not even welcome to be at this place. Their detachment can easily lead them to decide to drop out and go to a place where they feel more at ease, and better guided.

### **7.3 The Education Departments' Initiatives Vs. the Interviews**

As discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis, both the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), alongside the education departments of four German states, and the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland (DES) have taken several curative and preventative measures to tackle the dropout phenomenon in their states

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<sup>344</sup>J.P. Anderson, *Drink in the Babies Bottle*, check the following website: <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/81222>

<sup>345</sup> Wagner, 2009.

and countries. These measures will be compared with the recommendations given by the education personnel in both Germany and Ireland during the interviews to give the study a more qualitative and down-up perspective.

### **7.3.1 The German Education Departments' Initiatives Vs. the Interviews**

By comparing the curative and preventative measures taken by BMBF and the four different German education departments with the education personnel's recommendations during the interviews, one can automatically realize that the measures fall short of and lack clarity of what the recommendations revealed.

The first two recommendations A and B<sup>346</sup> highlighting the need for smaller classrooms and separating weak from strong pupils at times have not seen concrete measures taken at the education departments' level. Recommendation E follows suit and cannot be seen to be a focus among these measures. Teaching what commitment means could be regarded as an important value which pupils learn to adhere to should the turn of circumstances become challenging.

Recommendation C which clearly addresses the need to constantly find ways to motivate pupils can be hardly identified through reading the curative and preventative measures. Most likely this was meant to be indirectly achieved and especially with the curative measure of Lower Saxony which goal is to promote extra-curricular activities. What could be missing here is the direct answering calls to that desire which make pupils excited about and interested in going to school day after day.

By examining recommendation D and F from the German interviews, one can realize that these should be taken more seriously and dealt with extensively. These recommendations deal with clarity of school's offers and longer probation times. Before taking on educational roads which are abundant and varied in the German system, there should be better awareness and more trainings offered to pupils and parents in order for them to select wisely what is best for the former's future. On the

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<sup>346</sup> The German recommendations can be found in Section 6.1 of this thesis.

one hand, BMBF offers career orientation activities to pupils and on the other hand, schools in all four German states focus on integration and inclusion. Yet perhaps a more focus should be placed on clarifying the roadmaps and highlighting the statistics relating to the retainment and transition in various schooling systems. Lower Saxony offers longer probation years and Bavaria offers a vocational preparation year which could be seen as heading into the right direction. Nonetheless these transitions periods are limited and short, if not absent, when it comes to transiting into the Sekundarstufe II.

The last recommendation deals with recruiting qualified teachers, sociologists, and psychologists. This point is at the heart of the efforts of all education departments in Germany. They are constantly striving to offer trainings to their teachers, building networks of support, and filling vacant positions. One point worth mentioning is that some principals complained that the education department of their relative state assigns certain teachers to their school, which they find unhelpful. Perhaps there should be better communication between the different parties as to how to employ the right teacher to the right environment.

### **7.3.2 The Irish Education Department's Initiatives Vs. the Interviews**

When it comes to comparing the DES measures with the recommendations of the education personnel in Ireland, one can notice that the first two recommendations<sup>347</sup> have not been addressed in a direct manner. There is a big need for home support to both pupils as well as parents within their own environments. This topic does not get enough attention which could be compared to attempting to deal with the flame of a fire rather than the source of it. Home can be considered as one of the main causal factors regarding the dropout phenomenon.

Recommendation D and E fall short of getting a listening ear from the Irish education department. How often do children get asked or surveyed as to what they see as important for keeping them motivated at school? Do they get to choose other

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<sup>347</sup> The Irish recommendation can be found in section 6.2 of this thesis.



alternatives to pure academic teaching methods? DES has been active in reforming its primary schooling, yet its secondary level has not had its reform share yet.

Recommendation F, which is similar to the first German recommendation, touches on the importance of having smaller classrooms where not only weak pupils get extra support but also the strong ones get enough challenged. There are surely attempts and discussions around this topic at DES meetings, yet no concrete measures or laws have been implemented or agreed upon to deal with this important factor.

One last recommendation by the Irish education personnel which has also fallen on deaf ears is recommendation H which tackles the strengthening and fostering of healthy social interaction between pupils. It seems that the overall DES measures tackle and focus on the relations and communications between teachers and pupils. What is also needed is the focus and awareness of building positive and healthy relationships between pupils within the classrooms, on the school premises, and outside the school walls.

The remaining recommendations, i.e., C, G, I, and J, have been somehow dealt with by DES through their curative and preventative measures. All the four preventative measures highlighted in section 6.2 of this thesis reveal the active steps taken by the department to identify the weaker students before reaching secondary education and supporting them in their education moves. The Leaving Certificate Applied two-year programme as well as the school completion program have been gaining on popularity among pupils and getting more financial funding and educational backing. Even Youthreach has been expanding its locations and consequently its support in the attempt of attracting dropouts and leading them into the right directions. Therefore, the recommendations of the Irish education personnel regarding these programs and institutions have been dealt with by DES.

Last but not least, these education personnel spoke about the importance of involving parents in the education of their pupils. This step has seen the light with the implementation of the new primary schooling program. Parents get contacted, involved, and asked to give feedback.<sup>348</sup> Perhaps this should be extended to the secondary level even though pupils have passed the legal age of leaving school and

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<sup>348</sup> The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has developed a new report card for parents which will give them much more information about their child's learning progress.

can make their own decisions. Parent's involvement in school and in their children's performance at the last road stretch of their schooling is seen to have direct and indirect influence on the latter's performance.<sup>349</sup> Perhaps offering support to parents whether pedagogical, psychological, and/or even financial could be proven to reflect positively on the lives of these dropouts who might feel that they are not left alone when they need a good companion or advice.

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<sup>349</sup> Ricking, *Desintegration in Zeiten der Inklusion*, 2011 and Kellaghan, *Relationships between Home Environment and Scholastic Behavior in a Disadvantaged Population*, 1977.

## 8. Recommendations for Both German and Irish Systems

Comparing two educational jurisdictions with all their similarities and differences, their historical and political development backgrounds, their educational measures and decisions on different levels, and some of their dropout personal experiences can give the reader an idea of the immense complexity and seriousness of the dropout phenomenon.

Even on a European level where a series of strategic measures have been taken<sup>350</sup> such as European funding to all members states,<sup>351</sup> clear dropout benchmarks (9%), and the introduction of the European Qualifications Framework,<sup>352</sup> one can notice the different positive and negative outcomes which each European member state brings onto the common platform of attempting to reduce the number of its school dropouts. Each country aims at saving itself the burden of having to deal with individuals who would fail the proper integration into society.

Examining the German and Irish educational format as well as their respective educational departments' curative and preventative responses to this problem, let alone some of those at the European level, the recommendations to tackle the dropout issue will be divided at two main levels:

1. National Level
2. Local Level

Working hand in hand at both these levels, we may be able to piece the missing puzzles of the overall dilemma of reducing the number of school dropouts. Whether in Germany with its 16 different states, each state responsible for its own education, or in Ireland where the number of immigrants has gone up since the Celtic Tiger boom, we will highlight below and in two sections various recommendations and steps which

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<sup>350</sup> GHK Consulting Ltd, Anne-Mari Nevala, et al, *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, June 2011. p. 139.

<sup>351</sup> This funding in Germany and Ireland has been highlighted in the previous chapter.

<sup>352</sup> EQF is a framework which defines levels of learning in terms of learning outcomes. This allows school dropouts to accumulate their successes in units, rather than having to repeat a full year or course.

could be followed in order to support those who are struggling with education to find their feet, in other words to be successful and positive contributors to society and, above all, themselves.

At both those levels, we shall see that the aim for all affected parties should be clear and simply defined: *Bonding with the School System*. Bonding, in this context, is a step further than connecting or belonging. It is that pure inner joy of associating oneself with one's schooling environment and willingly wishing to be part of it. It even entails a sense of pride which partly forms the identity of a person. This is not only meant for the pupils at risk, but also for teachers and parents alike. Every party needs to feel that bond with the education system and play its part in strengthening that connection which pupils build from as early as pre-schooling with their schooling environment. According to the European Study on reducing the number of school dropouts, a sense of belonging is crucial in fostering a sense of trust and respect from the pupil side towards teachers and the school system.<sup>353</sup> That can be done through creating an encouraging, supportive, and positive atmosphere where teachers, too, feel respected and strongly connected to their workplace.

We shall examine now in details how at the national and local level, that sense of bonding can be realized.

## **8.1 National Level**

The national level, in this context, would cover the decisions made by the education departments for the relative countries as well as for the different federal states within a country, such as in Germany. This level is crucial for the overall vision and a necessary source of funding which the schools and lines of education would need. This level requires a lot of input and feedback from pupils, school personnel, educational personnel, parents, and other stakeholders, in order for the politics to choose the right path of reducing the dropout numbers. Several states actively use the means of research and interviews to ask pupils, teachers, and parents about their opinions and experience of their educational systems. At such level, several

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<sup>353</sup> *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, p. 15.

recommendations could be highlighted, yet the focus should always remain the same, as mentioned above, to foster the bond which pupils have with their educational institution. These measures can be divided into seven points as follows:

- I- Simplifying Education Through Stages
- II- Early Recognition and Preventative Intervention
- III- Developing an Adaptive Curriculum
- IV- Raising the Vocational Education Standards
- V- Allowing for Smoother Transition Periods
- VI- Investment and Funding
- VII- Compulsory Education

All these seven points should allow the education decision makers at a national level to strengthen that feeling of bond which pupils should develop in order to continue on their education roads until reaching the qualification goal.

When it comes to the first point, offering from as early as pre-schooling a good quality and free of charge schooling could prove crucial in creating a successful bonding start of pupils towards their education environment. Several education researches done by Reynolds and Rumberger confirm the importance of successful early childhood education (i.e., primary education) in raising the likelihood of completing high level education.<sup>354</sup> Once one realizes that the problem of school dropout is not necessarily a particular year of education rather a succession of years of cumulative disinterest and dislike towards the whole education system, one can perhaps understand better the need for overall intrinsic solutions. Moreover, complicating an education system for pupils with a lot of choices, education routes, exams, transition periods, and so on can have a negative effect on their development. Attempting to box them into categories and abilities from an early age can hinder their attempt to express fully their

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<sup>354</sup> R. Rumberger, "What can be done to reduce the dropout rate?" In Gary Orfield (Ed.), *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2004), p. 243-254 and Arthur Reynolds, Ou Suh-Ruu, and James W. Topitzes. Paths of effects of early childhood intervention on educational attainment and delinquency: A confirmatory analysis of the Chicago child-parent centers, *Child Development* 75:1299 – 1328, 2004.

abilities at a later stage. In their book *Guiding at-risk youth through learning to work: Lessons from across Europe*, Irving et al confirms that some pupils feel lost in an education system where the pathways have become so complex with tailor made solutions and second chance opportunities.<sup>355</sup> It seems that the Irish Education Department has figured out a more simplified way of following the progress of a pupil through stages of completion and recognition rather than a crucial test at the end of many years of learning. Following closely the progress of a pupil through shorter stages and completed units<sup>356</sup> would more likely foster the bond of a pupil towards achieving more and getting more recognition for his or her development. This simplification could be integrated in all stages of the education system up to the higher level of education, not just with the LCA in Ireland or the 2003 Vocational Training Act in Germany.<sup>357</sup>

On the second recommended point, it is important for the education institutions to realize the significance of early detection of the particular problem(s) facing a school dropout. According to Gracey et al, disengaging from education typically becomes more engrained throughout secondary education yet for some pupils it begins at primary level.<sup>358</sup> We can all agree with the fact that early detection and intervention can prove more cost-effective than reintegration actions.<sup>359</sup> Therefore, national tracking system as well as preventative measures should be strengthened in order to assist pupils should they move schools and avoid repeating the same mistakes over again. Studies carried on national level in Austria has shown that an early warning system can reduce the number of pupils receiving low marks and consequently limit the number of pupils dropping out of school due to poor education outcomes.<sup>360</sup> Sharing information and preventative actions between various institutions could prove quite helpful in the long run. By realizing the need of a pupil for extra support and showing him or her the care which they need would automatically strengthen the bond between them and the educational set-up regardless of its location. A school becomes

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<sup>355</sup> P. Irving und A.M, Nevala, *Guiding at-risk youth through learning to work: Lessons from across Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010.

<sup>356</sup> These stages are presented above in chapter 6 of this thesis in the Irish section.

<sup>357</sup> German Federal Ministry for Education and Research, *German National Report for the Peer Learning Activity on One Step Up*, 2009.

<sup>358</sup> Sarah Gracey and Scott Kelly, *Changing the NEET mindset: Achieving more effective transitions between education and work*. (London: Learning and Skills Network, 2010).

<sup>359</sup> *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, p. 59.

<sup>360</sup> Barbara Riepl, *Jugendliche SchulabbrecherInnen in Österreich; Ergebnisse einer Literaturstudie*, 2004.

a place of trust and refuge when problems arise. Whether in Germany or Ireland, the pupil needs to be constantly placed at the heart of the common vision when it comes to engaging with school dropouts.<sup>361</sup>

Regarding the core of the education system, i.e., the curriculum, this cannot remain stagnant and non-reflective of the composition of the school, area, and country. There is no perfect curriculum, yet there can be one which speaks more to pupils, to their current needs, interests, and visions. A curriculum is like the menu of a restaurant. No matter how sophisticated and fancy a restaurant can be, if the food is tasteless, the whole place becomes unattractive. Curriculum reform, which is initiated at a national level, does not only require the introduction of a greater choice of curriculum subjects, a more appropriate instructional environment for them to be promoted, and a better cooperation between school and other educational agencies, as Lamb et al argues,<sup>362</sup> but it also emphasizes the need to shift the focus from subject-based to skills-based curricula, together with an emphasis on the recognition of key competences of pupils.<sup>363</sup> It also calls for specific policies which address the individual and diverse needs of school dropouts and their individual learning styles and paces. These measures should ultimately help motivate the at-risk pupils to get back on track and strive to reach the goal of accreditation, which will help them get easily into the marketplace. That motivation is a form of restoring that bond with the school. Ireland has been successful at reforming its curriculum, yet this needs to spread further into its Senior Cycle, whereas Germany needs to encourage its states to do more in this regard.

The fourth point is related to the importance of the vocational school standard. Both in Germany and Ireland, vocational schools tend to attract a lot of pupils at risk of falling out of the mainstream education. The standard of these schools and the certifications which they provide to their pupils are crucial in getting them into the workplace. Walther and Pohl made it clear that dropping out is more common in vocational routes, partly because these schools attract pupils who are academically weak and socially

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<sup>361</sup> *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, p. 22.

<sup>362</sup> Stephen Lamb et al, *Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia* Report for the Queensland Department of Education and the Arts Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne, 2004.

<sup>363</sup> ReStart, *Innovative Approaches to ESL in England and Wales*, London: Olmec., 2007.

disadvantaged.<sup>364</sup> The recommendation could be found in Switzerland and Austria whose vocational route has a higher status and is fully integrated with specific enterprises – a fact which reduces dropping out from these schools.<sup>365</sup> By offering recognizable accreditation at the end of their vocational studies, pupils would be encouraged to complete what they have started. Last but not least, Lamb and Rice speak of provision of work-based training contracts such as apprenticeships<sup>366</sup> which are proven to be of major importance to strengthening that bond between pupils and vocational schools. A successful example of vocational training is the *Ammattistartti* in Finland,<sup>367</sup> which is aimed at school dropouts and young people who are struggling with their career direction. This programme enables pupils to try out various vocational courses, visit work and training places, access professional career guidance and so on in the aim of exploring different career and job opportunities before selecting their study or employment route. The LCA in Ireland is a similar example of the *Ammattistartti* yet at a more limited level.

The fifth point to be examined can be very decisive to many pupils. This is the Transition Periods between primary, lower, and higher secondary schooling. Germany and Ireland do not apply national tests for pupils to transition from primary to lower secondary level, yet in Germany the notes in the primary level decides which road a pupil follows at the next secondary level. From the lower secondary level or Sekundarstufe I to the higher secondary level or Sekundarstufe II, Germany is still following the standard national test whereas Ireland is changing it to a combination of practical tests during the last two years of the lower secondary level along with the national test. In the Netherlands and especially in the Hague, summer schools have been especially set up to allow for that smooth transition for pupils from the various schools to the next in order to prevent pupils from dropping out in the first years of their new schools.<sup>368</sup> Moreover, Thrupp, Lauder and Robinson spoke of the risks that

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<sup>364</sup> A. Walther and A. Pohl, *Thematic Study on Policy Measures Concerning Disadvantaged Youth*, Study Commissioned by the European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs in the Framework of the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006, Tübingen: Institute for Regional Innovation and Social Research (IRIS), 2005.

<sup>365</sup> Kendall and Kinder, *Reclaiming Those Disengaged From Education and Learning*, 2005.

<sup>366</sup> Stephen Lamb and Susanne Rice, *Effective Intervention Strategies for Students at Risk of Early Leaving: Discussion Paper Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning*, University of Melbourne, 2008.

<sup>367</sup> Aini-Kristiina Jäppinen, *Onnistujia opinpolun siirtymässä: Ammatilliseen peruskoulutukseen ohjaavan ja valmistavan koulutuskokeilun (ammattistartti) vaikuttavuus*. Loppuraportti. Opetushallituksen julkaisu, 2010.

<sup>368</sup> *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, p. 79.



transiting young pupils to lower schools can have on the socioeconomic segregation between schools. They called for structural reforms which examine the conditions of the transitions between schools.<sup>369</sup> One does not want to set one's children to fail when the transition to another school fails. We need to keep again that bond between the pupil and the next school so strong that the latter feels connected to the next educational environment he or she steps into. That could be done through fostering their readiness and implementing a constant progress check which gets considered for the transition decision rather than only a one-time final exam. In Ireland, the transition from Senior Cycle to third level education could be the next reform idea for the Irish education department. In Germany, following the reforming transition steps of the Irish education system might prove to them to be quite helpful.

The second last recommended point which should also be considered at a national level is investment and funding in education. In Ireland, a cost benefit analysis showed that for every 1 EUR invested in pre-primary education alone generates a return of 7.10 EUR, which reduces the problem of school dropouts at a later stage.<sup>370</sup> Most people could easily understand the benefit in investing in education and reducing the number of school dropouts to the overall harmony and wellbeing of societies. In the UK,<sup>371</sup> Ireland<sup>372</sup>, Finland<sup>373</sup> and other European countries, allowances are given to pupils who remain at education or get reduced or cut if they do not. These allowances could also take the form of tax relief, grants, subsidies, or scholarships. It has been shown that pupils who take up work for more than 10 hours a week to support themselves or their families can feel the burden of juggling both work and education, which could lead to their dropping out.<sup>374</sup> Moreover, investing in digitalization, renovating schools, new schools, constant teacher training, evolving teaching

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<sup>369</sup> Martin Thrupp, Hugh Lauder and Tony Robinson, *School composition and peer effects International Journal of Educational Research* 37, 2002, p. 483–504.

<sup>370</sup> National Economic and Social Forum, *Report no. 31: Early Childhood Care and Education*, Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum, cited in Children's Rights Alliance, *Is the Government keeping its promises to children?* Report Card 2011, Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance, 2005.

<sup>371</sup> Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme in the UK is a scheme to pay an allowance to young people between the ages of 16 and 19 from lower-income groups to support their participation, retention and achievement in full-time education.

<sup>372</sup> Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) was 200 EUR per week or 100 EUR for young people at risk of leaving school early although they would receive the full amount if they pursued a relevant training course.

<sup>373</sup> A law has been passed in Finland, which reduces the amount of benefits (*toimeentulotuki*) for those unemployed, young jobseekers who refuse to *apply* for a study place.

<sup>374</sup> D. Byrne, and E. Smyth, *No Way Back, The Dynamics of Early School Leaving*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute, 2010.

materials, involving parents, extra-learning support for weak pupils, extra-curricular activities can help strengthen that bond which pupils develop towards their schools and help them remain until graduating. As we know, both Germany and Ireland are investing in their education. Investment can never be enough yet should be efficiently spent and certainly not reduced. This should always remain a constant and consistent process.

The last point which can be implemented at a national level is the introduction of compulsory education at the age of 5 until the age of 18. Germany and Ireland currently have their education age obligation from 6 until the age of 16. Historically, it has been shown, as presented in the previous chapters, how prolonging compulsory education has helped keeping pupils in school. Both German and Irish societies need more qualified personnel than ever due to a market that relies on demanding qualifications and expertise. Prolonging compulsory education comes with a lot of challenges yet sometimes if people were to be pushed to do something, they might go the extra mile. Schools would need to come up with ideas to constantly motivate their pupils and offer them alternative educational roads. In Greece, for instance, it has been shown that starting with education at the age of 5 helps with reducing school dropouts in the long run.<sup>375</sup> Some countries such as the Netherlands and Hungary have extended their compulsory education to the age of 18.<sup>376</sup> Discussions in other European countries have also followed suit.<sup>377</sup> Other countries such as Romania and Italy have relatively focused on compulsory years, rather than a particular age, which would eventually allow a pupil to get an upper secondary certification.<sup>378</sup> All in all, prolonging the compulsory education route and creating pathways for pupils at risk or no risk might help create even a stronger bond between pupil and school. Only through a healthy and solid bond, at-risk pupils can feel attached to their schools and thrive to achieve what could be beneficial for them in the future, even if their routes after education take different turns.

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<sup>375</sup> *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, p. 88.

<sup>376</sup> In the Netherlands, the prolonging of compulsory schooling age up to 18 has been directly linked to reducing the number of school dropouts. *Ibid*, 89.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid*.

## 8.2 Local Level

After looking at the measures which could be taken to strengthen the bond between pupil and school at a national level, we will move on now to examine the steps at a local level and for the same bonding purpose.

We have seen above that there is no single remedy for the dropout problem. Some of the recommendations in this section have, to a certain degree, been discussed separately in several educational books and by many pedagogues. The real change here is the focus on the bond. The role of politicians and most importantly pedagogues is not to lose sight of the goal which is to strengthen that bond.

The recommended points which will be highlighted below are a result of a thorough examination of the recommended ideas from both education personnel in Germany and Ireland, let alone those at a European level, and the concerns of the dropouts in both countries.

These local points will be divided into five S sections: Surrounding, Space, Substance, Support and Safeguard.

### A- Surrounding

This first S section relates to the environment at home, outside home, school, and market where a pupil grows in and out. Examining the surrounding of a pupil can predict somehow his or her future conditions. If the surrounding is toxic and cold, in the cases of parental problems and disinterest, siblings and peer conflicts, stress from teachers and classmates, disorganization, absence of inclusion, and market difficulties, a pupil's mind might not be clear to function properly and healthily. A toxic surrounding would hinder a proper growth and bond with the school, where a pupil should visit on a regular basis. It is truly the warmth and acceptance which a pupil gets from its various surroundings that could create that sense of bonding within. That means in reality and in the words of Lamb and Rice: ...making at risk students and also their families feel less 'out of place' in school while increasing trust in students,

as part of raising their expectations...<sup>379</sup> A school social pedagogue who is employed at a school should get the right intensive training to observe that surrounding and come up with ideas to create a more harmonious environment for the pupil. Some of these ideas could encompass on the one hand parent education programmes designed to improve their understanding of how best they might help their children and how their actions and relations at home could influence the atmosphere for their children<sup>380</sup> or on the other hand teacher education programmes designed to create an anti-bullying understanding and commitment among pupils. A local political decision could also support an encouraging environment of employing apprentices or boosting dual trainings.

## B- Space

Space to find your feet is important for the development and healthy growth of pupils. Both education personnel in Germany and Ireland pointed out that the number of pupils in classrooms should be reduced. Having a ratio of 30:1 is simply challenging and does not permit the teacher to cater for the needs of their pupils – weak and strong alike. Teachers can be skilled and trained to deal with problems of school dropouts, yet the size of classrooms and the number of challenging pupil cases do not allow them to be responsive to every situation.

Moreover, pupils need to space outside of school in extra-curricular activities to deepen their knowledge of what they have learnt at school and bring in a fun factor to the whole learning process. It has been shown the importance of these activities in strengthening that bond with the school. In the findings of Anne-Mari Nevala et al, “Extra-curricular activities can not only help students to catch up and to revive their interest in learning, but also help them to re-build a positive relationship with the school and its staff, as well as provide fulfilling activities which can boost self-esteem and reduce frustration.”<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Lamb and Rice, *Effective Intervention Strategies for Students at Risk of Early Leaving*, 2008.

<sup>380</sup> *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, p. 20.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

In addition to that, the emergence of second-chance schools in Ireland or various vocational schools has helped create a space for at-risk pupils and dropouts and give them a second opportunity. In Poland, that emergence of second-chance schools has assisted in reducing the number of school dropouts through offering flexible delivery opportunities (weekends and evenings) and extensive psychological support.<sup>382</sup> The bond would have been revived with education although it has been lost with a particular institution.

Last but not least, the inclusion factor for immigrant pupils is crucial to reducing their dropout rates. An immigrant pupil could struggle more than the local pupils with language, let alone cultural challenges. He or she needs the space to strengthen these abilities, to feel accepted and capable of catching up with the rest of their class, perhaps through the institution providing “non-distorted presentations of migrant children in the curriculum, text books and in school life”<sup>383</sup> or “temporary reception/integration classes and recruiting teachers’ assistants to help pupils integrate.”<sup>384</sup> Currently, there are not many European countries which cater for that space to the migrant pupil population.<sup>385</sup> The inclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils in the whole format of what is normal can also help give space to these individuals and allow them to grow in a safe environment. This could be done through awareness.<sup>386</sup>

### C- Substance

The third S which matters in reducing the number of school dropouts is substance, in other words the learning materials and offers which pupils in all walks of education lines receive. When substance is attractive and speaks to the needs and aspirations of pupils, let alone those at risk of dropping out, then the tendency of them remaining in education becomes higher. According to Prof. Roger Dale, “school wide

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<sup>382</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>385</sup> Youth Forum Jeunesse, *Policy paper on early education leaving*. Adopted by the General Assembly Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 13-15 November 2008.

<sup>386</sup> House of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills, *Staying in Education: A New Way Forward, School and Out of School Factors Protecting Against Early School Leaving*, 2010.

interventions focus largely on a range of curricular innovations, for instance the introduction of more vocational and technical education, or greater cooperation with other agencies, including workplaces. There is considerable emphasis on the need to move from subject-based to skills-based curriculum and the recognition of key competences..." Second Chance programmes have been introduced to "rescue" those who have already left school early. These have been most successful when they have offered alternative experiences to conventional schooling, but generally it is considered better to try to ensure "first chance" success."<sup>387</sup> Curriculum innovation should remain the focus at a local level, not only at a national one, and while the format and composition of schools change, it should follow the stream. Implementation and analysis could be a top-down process, yet in order to meet the right decision, the information sourcing remains a down-top phenomenon. Understanding what drives the motivation of pupils in completing education means understanding what speaks to their minds, hearts, and dreams. Lamb et al stresses the importance of reforming curriculum, teaching and assessment practices to create a more inclusive learning environment within schools.<sup>388</sup> Ireland has been attempting to restructure its primary and lower secondary level curriculum, as seen above. It would also be reasonable to spread that innovation to its higher secondary level. Germany, on the other hand, needs to focus on renewing its curriculum format to meet the needs of its ever-changing pupil composition and backgrounds. Both education personnel in Germany and Ireland suggested the need to clarify the routes for pupils, find substance which motivates them and extend probation time. Perhaps, as it is done in the state of Lower Saxony, pupils need to be asked what they expect from education.

To sum this up, GHK Consulting has stressed on the importance of reviving secondary school curriculum and hereby training teachers to be fit in making it attractive and fitting to their pupils' aspirations:

Reviewing secondary-level curricula to ensure they are sufficiently tailored to the individual and offer flexible learning pathways and individual learning plans which meet the needs of learners in terms of content (both academic and vocational) and learning styles. In tandem, teachers then need to be provided with appropriate continuing professional development opportunities to ensure that they have the competences to work with new methods of teaching and learning. Consider providing supplementary tuition (individual or small group tuition) as a way of minimizing the number of students

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<sup>387</sup> Roger Dale, *Early School Leaving, Lessons from Research for Policy Makers*, Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2010, p.7.

<sup>388</sup> Lamb et al, *Staying on at school*, 2004, p.69.

who are required to repeat a year and helping to stop individual students from falling behind, before these have a serious impact on their educational achievement and increase their risk of dropping out.<sup>389</sup>

Repeating a year and having to learn the same boring materials would not ignite the interest of a pupil. Research suggests that year repetition does not necessarily lead to better achievement; in fact, it can result in weaker performance by the student concerned after being labelled as a repeater.<sup>390</sup> We will talk more about the kind of support which pupils need in the next S section.

#### D- Support

With the surrounding, space and substance sections presented, it is important that pupils get the right support to develop their potentials. Support comes with qualified and well-trained teachers, interested and aware parents, and right political investment in education and potential market. These various sectors of support can be developed at a local level to ensure that first three S factors are properly intertwined for the benefit of the pupils.

We cannot speak enough of the role of parents, teachers and even peers in their positive or negative influence on the dropout. Whether in Germany or Ireland, we have seen above that the lack of support from these sources and the bullying which gets generated from various corners can play out very negatively in weakening the bond with the school system. Therefore, there should be clear rules and awareness from all sides on their roles in supporting pupils with their education and bond with their school.

Two important actions are considered to be of major influence: Mentoring and Monitoring. Newburn and Schiner discuss the importance of one-to-one mentoring in strengthening the literacy and numeracy abilities of weak pupils and working on re-establishing the connection with the school.<sup>391</sup> The proper guidance and advice are crucial in helping these pupils set up themselves in the right path to success. This can

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<sup>389</sup> *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, p. 23.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>391</sup> Tim Newburn and Michael Schiner, *Young People, Mentoring and Social Inclusion, Youth and Justice Youth Justice*, 2006, 6, p. 23-41.

also be done through cooperation between qualified teachers and parents.<sup>392</sup> A lack, or inefficiency of this mentoring support is shown to be a contributor to the dropout process.<sup>393</sup> In Germany as well as in Ireland, although the presence of mentoring is there, it should be evaluated and assessed to prove its efficiency. This mentoring could also be strengthened through peer support, as it is done in Finland and the Netherlands, where mentors are older students, who are trained to give support to the other younger and weak pupils.<sup>394</sup> For a young pupil who lacks a positive relationship with their teacher, a mentor can bridge that gap to a certain extent. Some of these mentors are also trained to tackle bullying situations, as it is done in Austria through the peer mediation system.<sup>395</sup>

Mentoring is however not complete without monitoring. According to GHK Consulting, monitoring systems are poorly developed in the EU.<sup>396</sup> New monitoring systems are needed to follow up on individual cases, coupled with their absenteeism and truancy in order to allow for early warning and reaction. This would mean that tailored information on dropouts and at-risk dropouts can be extracted at any time through a national monitoring system to allow for coordinated and progressive efforts.<sup>397</sup> In Ireland and Germany, there are systems in place to track the absenteeism of pupils. Yet there is not a national database to track the movement of weak pupils and allow for better support to them in long term, as in the Netherlands for instance, where an improved student registration system was introduced offering complete, reliable and up-to-date figures nationally, regionally and for each municipality and district.<sup>398</sup> The new, improved system ensures that national authorities have regular and reliable information on the level of dropouts and allows them to assess the effectiveness of new practices. This registration system known as the 'Education Number' offers an abundance of information available for the formulation of policy, where good practices can also be shared between the regions.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, p. 15.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid*, p. 98.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid*.



Another aspect of support can be seen to be emerging through all day-schooling or afternoon schooling. Germany has been gradually introducing such offers. That support is not only meant for pupils but also parents who work full time. This support can only be effective through structured learning and the employment of qualified teachers.

Last but not least, the local market could play an important factor for dropouts. In some countries such as Ireland and Spain, where businesses looked for young workforce, there seemed to have been more dropouts seeking immediate earnings.<sup>400</sup> In other countries where the social security is not so developed such as Poland and Lithuania, people tend to stick to education until they receive a degree. Germany seems to play on both sides of that coin. Ute Walther et al highlight the evidence which implies that in the long term, earnings and employment opportunities are more likely to be limited for most school dropouts.<sup>401</sup> For that reason, the local market, i.e., companies and businesses, should be made aware of the risks of employing young people who have dropped out of education without completing their secondary education or without being engaged in a dual apprenticeship.

## E- Safeguard

When it comes again to keeping that bond strong between pupil and education, one needs not only to tackle the problems that pupils face along the way, but also make them immune or resilient to these challenges. Luthar et al stresses the importance of educational resilience which refers to protective or preventative strategies.<sup>402</sup> In other words, training pupils to be aware of any injustice, report it, and deal with it. Allowing pupils to stick together for what is good for the individual rather than allowing the weak to be bullied or driven into unwanted corners. Building resistance also means maintaining positive adaptation by pupils despite any experience of significant

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<sup>400</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.

<sup>401</sup> Ute Walther et al., *Youth transitions, youth policy and participation*. Research Project YOYO. Working Paper 1, 2002.

<sup>402</sup> S.S. Luthar, D. Cicchetti and B. Becker, *The construct of resilience. A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work*, *Child Development*, 2000, 71, p. 543–562.

adversity.<sup>403</sup> Dealing with the problem after its occurrence takes more effort than attempting to prevent it from the beginning. That Safeguard section promotes focusing on the positive outcomes and goals in all areas of the schooling system. It concentrates on developing positive feelings within the pupil such as self-confidence, self-reliant, academic competence, goal oriented, cohesion, and others.

Safeguard also entails the importance of collaboration. That means that the school dropout problem should never be seen as a one-party problem. In order to avoid duplication of work, a more efficient coordination between education, social, and employment authorities is required.<sup>404</sup> In Germany as well as in Ireland, collaboration is existent and at various levels, yet it should be expanded to allow safeguarding at the school level before pupils get pushed to change schools, most likely get degraded, and try to adjust to a different environment. Safeguarding the competence of a pupil should be done at a local level while allowing all parties to offer their resources to avoid repetition of classes, changing to a lower school, or even dropping out altogether. That collaboration should allow the adoption of a whole child approach which looks at all factors which could strengthen the resilience of a pupil. Such collaboration should include, not only authorities from education, youth, social, health and employment spheres, but also partners, parents, NGOs, and the youth sector.<sup>405</sup>

Last but not least, safeguarding the attendance of pupils could also be done through some sort of policing and fining. Specially trained police officers in Germany, for instance, control typical youth meeting points and enforce the attendance of truant pupils through contacting the relative school and parents. This has helped significantly improve the attendance of pupils.<sup>406</sup> Parents would also ultimately be fined should they not control the attendance of their children. Ireland does not involve the police or any forms of fining when it comes to truancy.

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<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>404</sup> *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, p. 14.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>406</sup> K. Brettfeld, D. Enzmann, D. Trunk, und P. Wetzels, P., *Das Modellprojekt gegen Schulschwänzen (ProgeSs) in Niedersachsen: Ergebnisse der Evaluation*. University of Hamburg, 2005.

## Conclusion

In light of the European efforts to tackle the challenges of school dropouts and reduce their numbers in several European jurisdictions,<sup>407</sup> this work has attempted to delve into the dropout spheres of Germany and Ireland. These two countries where I personally lived for almost two decades and worked as a secondary school teacher share an abundance of similarities yet differences too. The goals of this thesis were to understand how the German and Irish school system as a whole and the personal decision of a German and Irish dropout are linked and affect each other.

In the last ten years, Ireland has managed through several educational restructuring steps to reduce the number of its dropouts in half standing at about 5% of its young population aged 18 to 24, whereas Germany has remained at just above 10%. Germany has, however, lower unemployment rates than that of Ireland excelling at offering a wide range of vocational schooling, apprenticeships, and dual trainings to its pupils. In several international testing schemes such as PISA, TIMSS and others, Irish pupils at the age of ten and fifteen tend to perform better than their German counterparts and Ireland has proven to have the highest number of pupils in third level education than any other country in the European Union.

The first two chapters of this work presented the fields where dropouts grow and the factors which move them at a personal level to make the decision to drop out. Hand in hand, the first chapter laid down in each jurisdiction the historical development of the school system beginning from the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to this current moment. Several political and educational choices were responsible for the formation on the one hand of a complex school system in sixteen different states in Germany and on the other hand of a more unified system in the Republic of Ireland. These decisions have led Germany to endorse the starting age of schooling at six and lasting until sixteen while Ireland unofficially from four until sixteen. Germany's primary schooling lasts half the years in comparison to that of Ireland with the former splitting its pupils into several schooling lines as early as ten years of age whereas the latter allows for a smoother transition of all pupils into Junior Cycle at the age of twelve. Higher secondary schooling, be it academic or vocational, in both countries begins at the legal age of

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<sup>407</sup> GHK Consulting, Anne Mari-Nevala et al, *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, Brussels 2011.

leaving school yet Ireland allows for a year transition period while Germany, with its wide range of academic and vocational lines of education, allows for an uncomplicated transition into different schools should the current prove to be unsuitable. This thesis shows that the schooling system in its structure in Germany is more demanding at an early age and focuses on segregating pupils as early as ten years of age into different schooling levels than that of Ireland. Irish pupils do not face the hurdle of making important educational choices at any early age. German pupils must make a Sekundarstufe I entry decision or have it made for them by teacher and/or parents. That step could lead them to feeling superior or inferior in respect to other classmates depending on where they land, let alone being classified into different competency levels from an early age. Irish pupils do not get exposed to such feelings before reaching the Senior Cycle. The transition period into Senior Cycle or Sekundarstufe II tends to receive more value in Ireland than in Germany. It gives Irish pupils the time to discover their inclinations and abilities to follow the educational lines which suit them most. The Irish Junior Cycle, too, has been reformed to make the schooling transition a mix of academic and vocational choices (subject and skilled-based curriculum). The German schooling system is flexible with its various educational roads yet does neither allow for sufficient transition periods nor lay enough importance on the pupil daily performance in class as much. Exams there tend to be decisive in either promoting pupils or not. German parents tend to be more confused and put under unnecessary stress when it comes to transiting their children into various educational levels. Irish parents do not face that stress. In the contrary, they get more involved in the last two years of the Junior Cycle to assist their children with the transition into the Senior Cycle. Last but not least, there have been several ongoing discussions to reform the Irish Senior Cycle in Ireland to make it less oriented towards summative assessment and more towards formative one. Germany has yet to make that move. Assessment should serve the curriculum in both countries and not dominate it. In terms of vocational schooling at the Irish Senior Cycle or the Sekundarstufe II, Ireland can learn from Germany in promoting more dual trainings and apprenticeships at companies whereas Germany can prolong the transition period for its vocational schools in order to allow the pupil to make a clearer decision.

The second chapter summarizes to a great extent what has been found in some researches on school dropouts as it shows the similarities and differences between

German and Irish dropouts' personal decisions and dilemmas. These could be detected at home, school, and among peers. This chapter deals with each of these three realms and attempts to compare the ordeals of the German and Irish pupils within each realm. When it comes to the home realm, one can notice the negative influences of parents on their children which lead them to develop negative mindsets towards education. Belonging to a particular background or ethnicity can also generate prejudices against pupils – this phenomenon however has been more researched in Germany than in Ireland. Regarding the school realm, bad relations between teacher and pupil could lead the latter into developing a mindset of disguising respective subjects and ultimately school. Researches in both countries have shown that healthy and respectful teacher-pupil relationship can have positive influences on pupils, which would motivate them to perform better. A teacher should however be well-trained and well-paid to be satisfied in his or her position. Finally, concerning the peer realm or the realm outside home and school, it has been shown that for both Irish and German pupils, the bullying of peers and the influence of their dropout counterparts are too important factors to be ignored. The decision to drop out can be a decision to escape the turmoil and the hurt which have been caused by one or several external sources on one or several occasions. Therefore, it seems that the personal decision for a German or an Irish pupil to drop out can be in many ways traced to similar causes within the three defined realms.

The third chapter presents the curative and preventative initiatives taken by the various education departments in Germany and Ireland to tackle the dropout phenomenon. These initiatives show the limited extent of support which is offered to schools and pupils in both countries. Alongside the twelve initiatives endorsed by the BMBF, this thesis summarizes some of the main initiatives taken by the education departments in four of its states from south to north, i.e., Bavaria, Thüringen, Lower Saxony, and Schleswig Holstein. In Ireland, DES has been taking several restructuring steps to modernize and adapt its whole education system to suit the needs of all pupils, including those at risk of dropping out. Eight main curative and preventative initiatives have been highlighted. The preventative measures taken by Ireland are shown to be more effective than by Germany as they deal more extensively with reforming the previous schooling cycles, such as with the Early Start Programme, the New Primary Language Curriculum and the Junior Certificate School Programme. Germany tends,

in that regard, to focus more on implementing projects, offering seminars and trainings, allocating budgets, and so on. On the curative front, Ireland promotes the school completion programme, endorses the Leaving Certificate Applied and supports the Youthreach centers. Germany, on the other hand, supports the integration of pupils with migration background, provides more all-day schooling opportunities, and offers career orientation activities, among others.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to outlining the methods carried out in interviewing the participants and analyzing their gathered data. Twenty-eight interviews with teachers, principals, pedagogues, and school dropouts were carried out in Germany and Ireland. The setting of the interviews in Ireland was less bureaucratic than that of Germany. The same interview questions were deployed for Germany and Ireland. Galletta's semi-structured interviewing<sup>408</sup> was the chosen interviewing method as it follows on the one hand the structure of the interview questions yet on the other hand allows the interviewees for impromptu exchanges, which makes them feel at ease and open to speak up their minds and hearts. It also gives the researcher the opportunity to probe a participant's responses for clarification, meaning making, and critical reflection.<sup>409</sup> The analyzing method was in some way as flexible as the interviewing method. This thesis uses Kuckartz's thematic qualitative text analysis<sup>410</sup> which both involves the introduction of deductive and inductive categories. Through using the interview questions in the appendix of this thesis, some main categories would have already been assigned to allow the logical flow of the interview process, hence deductive categorizing. Simultaneously using the hermeneutical and interpretative analyzing text methods, other categories would have been generated inductively through the use of codes, memos, and case summaries. The combination of both deductive and inductive analysis and the attempt to create the themes which school dropouts find as relevant make that choice of Kuckartz' text analysis suitable. Thus, the analysis of the interviews was exposed to a structured yet comprehensive method allowing to capture the core of what the pedagogues and dropouts attempted to share while neither leaving room for ambiguity nor missing out on important information.

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<sup>408</sup> Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond*, 2013.

<sup>409</sup> Flick, *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, p. 255.

<sup>410</sup> Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, 2014

Chapter five and six are then dedicated to presenting the twenty-eight interviews and analyzing them. The main categories, generated from Kuckartz' s analytical method, are laid down. The German education personnel's concerns are grouped into the following seven categories: Lack of qualified teachers, lack of motivation and interest in education, lack of clarity of options for pupils and parents, lack of probation period for pupils, stressful transitions into various schools, lack of male Realschule in Swabia, and digital mobbing. They recommend these steps to tackle the above issues: smaller classrooms, grouping weak and strong pupils separately, constantly finding ways to motivate pupils, clarity in what various schools offer, teaching pupils what commitment means, longer probation time at the beginning of the Sekundarstufe II, and employing qualified teachers. The analysis of the German dropout interviews reveals the following six main categories: Home problems, dislike of school setting and anxiety in changing schools, absence of support teachers and psychologists, bullying by peers, digital mobbing, and immigration background. The analysis of the Irish education personnel interviews revealed the following four categories: parental influence, personal abilities and attitudes, peer pressure, and immigration background barrier. They offered the following recommendations to tackle the problem: Home help to parents who lack parental skills, home support to students, early intervention in primary education and before reaching the age of six, asking students what they expect from school and education, offering pupils some alternatives to academic learning, reducing the number of students in classrooms, more parental involvement in their children's education, focusing on social interaction among students, development of the existing practical programmes in schools, and the need for Youthreach to be recognized and supported by the Education Department. The Irish dropouts' interviews analysis revealed the following six categories: School experience, parental influence, sibling influence, close friend influence, literacy and numeracy, and long-term sickness impact.

These categories shed the light on the common and unique perspectives of these individuals. As for the pedagogues in both countries, it has been shown how they were united in the ideas of lack of motivation and interest among pupils and lack or false expectation. Due to the complex schooling system in Germany, pupils as well as parents struggle to figure out what the next step in education stores for them. In Ireland, it seems that it is more the lack of expectation from parents and surrounding

for their achievement. Although they all agree on the concept of reducing the ratio of pupil in classrooms, they differ mainly in the lack of probation periods and stress in the transition phases in Germany on the one hand and the dysfunctional families and dropping out to seek an apprenticeship in Ireland on the other hand. The dropouts in both countries are united in their responses on their unsupportive and broken families due to various background reasons. They also express their hatred of the school set-up, their disconnection to it, and their bad experiences with their peers. They differ on the topic of pressure from parents and understanding of pedagogues on the one side and the feeling of boredom and the influence of siblings on the other side. For German dropouts, parents exercise too much pressure on them to perform while the pedagogues at school do not transmit an image of trust and support to them. For Irish dropouts, it is more the feeling of boredom and failing to reach certain standards in literacy and numeracy, let alone having their siblings as bad role models for them, which somehow contribute to their failure.

By bringing together the researches of both school systems and the literature around the personal decisions to drop out in the first two chapters, the initiatives taken by the various education departments in Germany and Ireland in chapter three, and the interview analyses in chapter six, one could clearly understand some trends and connections regarding the dropout phenomenon in both countries, which created chapter seven. Firstly, due to the stress regarding transitions and different school levels in Germany, a desire to have less options, and clearer roadmaps throughout the school years has been manifested. There is also a developing tendency to simplify the German schooling system and have pupils avoid transferring into lower schools from an early age. On the Irish side and since the schooling system is already a simplified one, there have been calls to reform the curriculum and make it more attractive to weaker pupils, by developing subject and skill-based assessment processes, involving parents directly, promoting step by step progress and making vocational schooling more attractive. Secondly, one can draw many similarities in what the dropouts expressed in their interviews and what the literature revealed about their personal decision to drop out. Their backgrounds can influence their behaviour to a great extent. Whether in Germany or Ireland, broken families, immigration background and peer pressure can exercise an immensely negative influence on their decision to drop out. Some pressures could be avoided directly and indirectly through home



support for parents, more awareness and better tolerance for pupil's background differences, smoother transitions into Junior Cycle or Sekundarstufe I and Senior Cycle or Sekundarstufe II, longer transition periods, tailored support by teachers, social workers, and psychologists. Vocational education should be constantly made more attractive and connection to the workplace should be made more accessible. Thirdly, testing and examining pupils in both countries should be constantly studied and reformed to make learning more fun and less stressful for pupils. The anxiety surrounding exams and ending up in an education streamline where a particular pupil does not wish to be can have a grave effect on one's desire to continue and persevere until getting the relative certification. German and Irish pupils could be better off through receiving tailored topics which speak to their minds and aspirations in the workplace. Fourthly, acknowledging German and Irish teachers for their work and making their profession desirable and well-paid. Providing teachers with the necessary trainings and teaching materials could enhance the relationship with their pupils and bring or keep the latter onboard. The majority of dropouts expressed their dislike for school mainly due to bad relationships with teachers. Fifthly, the topic of bullying and peer pressure takes a center stage in this research. German and Irish dropouts spoke of their ordeal especially with digital mobbing which is spreading faster than ever. Schools tend to be helpless when it comes to controlling such pressures. More trainings for pupils on respectful behaviour and healthy use of media tools should be provided and taken seriously. All in all, by feeling detached from school, whether in German or Irish schools, the dropouts seek their fulfillment in outside sources and wait for the opportunity to quit school for good.

Before moving on to summing up some recommendations for the school system and the dropout, it is worth mentioning that the measures taken by the education departments in Germany and Ireland fall short of and lack clarity of what the recommendations from their pedagogues revealed. Topics such as commitment, motivation, clarity, engagement, smaller classrooms, social interaction, and others fall on deaf ear when it comes to the departments' central focus. Pedagogues in both countries should be constantly listened to as they can reflect clearer pictures of the real issues taken place on the ground.

The last chapter of this thesis has attempted to present some recommendations for both countries in particular to help them with further reducing their number of school dropouts, although these might also be useful for other jurisdictions. In order to assist all parties concerned, one needs to have a goal and methods to reach it. The goal has been clearly identified as “strengthening the bond between pupil and school”. This bond is seen as a step further to a simple connection or an identification. A bond is defined as a sense of pride and joy which a child develops with an institution. It might be regarded as unattainable, yet one should constantly strive to reach it. This goal should not only be set for pupils, but also for teachers, pedagogues, and parents. When all parties concerned feel that bond to the school, they may do their best to bring the best out of their pupils. With the purpose of reaching that goal, measures have been identified at a national and local level. Starting with the national level, i.e., at the 16 different Department of Education levels in Germany and at the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland, seven recommendations have been thought through. These are:

- i. Simplifying Education Through Stages
- ii. Early Recognition and Preventative Intervention
- iii. Developing an Adaptive Curriculum
- iv. Raising the Vocational Education Standards
- v. Allowing for Smoother Transition Periods
- vi. Investment and Funding
- vii. Compulsory Education

While Ireland is on the track of reducing its number of dropouts following these lines, Germany should focus more on implementing some of them. Having said that, neglecting the constant need for innovation and listening to our pupils could also bring the Irish percentage up. Thus, the Education Departments should constantly look into each of these seven points and attempt to revitalize their curriculum, make the roads sensical, simple and rewarding to their pupils, develop a system of warning and prevention as it may benefit all parties in the long term and prove to be less costly, make the skilled-based tuitions at vocational schools both attractive and prestigious in

the eyes of companies and society, allow a proper and constant funding for various internal and external activities within the school, and finally attempt to raise the compulsory age of leaving school as it has proven to be beneficial in reducing the number of school dropouts. All in all, the Education Departments through all these steps should never lose sight of the goal which is solidifying that bond with the school to become a place where pupils not only identify themselves with but also feel the joy and see the benefits in being part of that system.

These measures cannot however be fixed at a national level alone. The local actors be them school principals, teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, parents as well as peers, can all play a role in reducing the number of school dropouts and reinforce that pupil-school bond. For the sake of achieving that at a local level, these 5 S or Sections have been identified:

- 1- Surrounding
- 2- Space
- 3- Substance
- 4- Support
- 5- Safeguard

To put it in a nutshell, the first S, which is Surrounding, relates to the environment at home, outside home, school, and market where a pupil grows in and out. If the surrounding is toxic and cold, in the cases of parental problems and disinterest, siblings and peer conflicts, stress from teachers and classmates, disorganization, absence of inclusion, and market difficulties, a pupil's mind might not be clear to function properly and healthily. The second S, which is Space, is connected to the size of classrooms and the extra-curricular activities which could motivate pupils and make learning more fun. Space can also be related to second-chance schools which cater for the needs of certain pupils, let alone those coming from more challenging family and country backgrounds. The third S, which is Substance, concerns once again the curriculum yet at a local level. Understanding what drives the motivation of pupils in completing education means understanding what speaks locally to their minds, hearts,

and dreams. Training teachers to bring that substance forward in an attractive and fun manner plays a big role in that section too. The fourth S, which is Support, comes with qualified and well-trained teachers, interested and aware parents, and right political investment in education and potential market. Mentoring and Monitoring are seen to be the pillars of this section. Mentoring pupils in need should be widely encouraged, evaluated and assessed to prove its efficiency as monitoring the development of pupils can help a wholesome progress regardless of which institutions these pupils might belong to or be transferred into. All day-schooling are proven to be supportive to both pupils and parents. Companies and businesses can also play a crucial role in assisting pupils to have an easy foot in the marketplace. The fifth and last S, which is Safeguard, is correlated to protecting all what can be achieved with the other S sections, and that is through making pupils resilient and immune to potential problems. Awareness of any injustice, identifying bullying behaviors, reporting, or dealing with bad feelings, and collaborating on what is good for the individual and the whole can all be part in realizing this section. Safeguarding could also be enforced through some type of policing or fining as some parties might always try to push the boundaries, sometimes to the disadvantage of pupils.

Both Germany and Ireland can learn from each other at these national and local levels, mentioned above, for the purpose of strengthening the bond between pupil and school. For Germany, Ireland can be a role model in constantly searching for ways to make its curriculum more attractive, simplifying its school phases, allowing for longer transition periods, offering second-chance schools, and modernizing the assessment processes. For Ireland, Germany can be a role model in offering its pupils more dual trainings, promoting apprenticeships, rewarding companies for such moves, allowing more flexibilities and support in changing courses, offering more free pre-primary schooling years, providing more extra-curricular choices, and controlling truancy through policing.

At a national level, the German and Irish Education Departments should continually seek to invest in their school systems as the needs for pupils become more complex in a world which is getting more digital. At a local level, the schools as well as parents in both countries should constantly learn to listen to the demands and challenges of their pupils or children in order to keep them motivated and bonded with their systems.

These recommendations could also provide support to other jurisdictions at an EU level and worldwide. The benefits which one can see through comparing just two jurisdictions are immense and an eye-opener. What more benefits can one even get by comparing other jurisdictions with each other?

## Appendix 1

### Interview with Dropouts

#### *A. General Questions*

1. What did you like and dislike about going to school?
2. What reason ranked first in your decision to leave school?
3. If your best friend came to you and told you that he or she was going to drop out of school, what would your reaction be?
4. Did you miss a lot on schooling days before dropping out?
5. What type of work are you doing now? What are your plans for the near future?

#### *B. Family influence*

6. To what degree would you say that your whole family both understands and accepts each other?
7. To what degree would you say that your family both understands and accepts you?
8. Did your family encourage and help you in your plans to leave school and/or get a job?
9. Do your family's friends share the same value for education as your family does?
10. Can you think of any examples of your being influenced by your family's friends or relatives?

#### *C. Peer Influence*

11. Did your parents have a say in what friends you hung out with?
12. Did you witness any bullying from your peers towards you or others?
13. How many years of schooling did most of your close friends complete?
14. Did you have any friends who accepted you as you are?
15. How do you think that your friends influenced you in deciding to leave school?

#### *D. Other Influences*

16. At the point of your decision to drop out, from whom did you seek help?
17. Which person do you judge to have been most influential to you in your life?
18. If you needed to make a big decision, to whom did you go for advice?
19. Was there anyone at school who supported you in difficult times?
20. How would you judge the support of your teachers and school social workers?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Interview with Teachers/School Counsellors/Principals**

1. How many pupils have dropped out from each class in your school so far this year?
2. Is there a period during the schoolyear when pupils tend to drop out most?
3. Are there any early signs for pupils who drop out? What are they?
4. Is assessment an accurate method to detect signs for pupils dropping out?
5. Do you think that pupils could have teachers as friends? Why or why not?
6. How could teachers improve their relationships with their pupils?
7. Do you think poor teacher-pupil relationships could make some pupils drop out?
8. How effective is the role of a psychologist and/or social worker at your school?
9. How do you think school or parents could contribute to a better relationship between pupil and teacher?
10. What measures could be effective in influencing a pupil to behave properly in class?
11. Have you encountered any bullying situation in your school? How is it dealt with?
12. What recommendations would you suggest for reducing the number of dropouts at your school and in general?

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## Zusammenfassung

Schulabgänger sind Schülerinnen und Schüler, die einen Bildungsgang nach Vollendung der Vollzeitschulpflicht verlassen, ohne in einem anderen Allgemeinbildenden Bildungsgang zu wechseln und ohne zumindest den Hauptschulabschluss erreicht zu haben.<sup>411</sup>

Angesichts der europäischen Bemühungen, die Herausforderungen von Schulabgängern zu bewältigen und ihre Zahl in mehreren europäischen Ländern zu verringern,<sup>412</sup> befasst sich diese Arbeit, mit dem Thema der Schulabgänger in Deutschland und Irland. Diese beiden Länder, in denen ich persönlich fast ein Jahrzehnt gelebt und als Sekundarschullehrer gearbeitet habe, teilen eine Fülle von Ähnlichkeiten, aber auch Unterschiede.

Ziel dieser Arbeit war es zu verstehen, wie das Schulsystem als Ganzes<sup>413</sup> und die persönliche Entscheidung eines Schulabgängers<sup>414</sup> miteinander verknüpft sind und sich gegenseitig beeinflussen. In den ersten beiden Kapiteln dieser Arbeit wurden daher die Bereiche vorgestellt, in denen Schulabgänger aufwachsen und die Faktoren, die sie auf persönlicher Ebene bewegen, die Entscheidung für einen Schulabgang zu treffen. Das erste Kapitel zeigt beide Länder in der historischen Entwicklung des Schulsystems vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zum gegenwärtigen Zeitpunkt.<sup>415</sup> Mehrere politische und pädagogische Entscheidungen waren einerseits

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<sup>411</sup> Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2008 und 2010 jeweils S. IX

<sup>412</sup>European Commission, *Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda*. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Brussels, 31.1.2011 COM(2011) 18 final.

<sup>413</sup><sup>413</sup> Isabell van Ackeren, Klaus Klemm, und Svenja Mareike Kühn, *Entstehung, Struktur und Steuerung des deutschen Schulsystems: Eine Einführung*, (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2015) und John Coolahan, *Irish Education: its history and Structure*, (Dublin: ColourBooks Limited, 2005).

<sup>414</sup> John Coolahan, Sheelagh Drudy, Padraig Hogan, Seamus McGuinness and Aine Hyland, *Towards a Better Future, A Review of the Irish School System*, (Dublin: The Irish Primary Principals Network and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, 2017) und Heinrich Ricking, *Desintegration in Zeiten der Inklusion. Neue Erkenntnisse zum Dropout und ihre Konsequenzen für die schulische Förderung benachteiligter Schüler*, (Oldenburg: Oldenburger VorDrucke, 2011).

<sup>415</sup> Michael, B. and H. Schepp, *Die Schule in Staat und Gesellschaft. Dokumente zur deutschen Schulgeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, (Göttingen und Zürich: HansenSchmidt, 1993) und Tom Walsh, *The National System of Education, 1831-2000*. In *Essays in the History of Irish Education*, Ed. Brendan Walsh, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

für die Bildung eines komplexen Schulsystems in 16 verschiedenen Bundesländern in Deutschland und andererseits für ein einheitlicheres System in der Republik Irland verantwortlich.

In den letzten zehn Jahren hat Irland mehrere Umstrukturierungsschritte im Bildungsbereich durchgeführt, um die Zahl seiner Schulabgänger auf etwa 5% ihrer Schüler zu halbieren, während Deutschland bei knapp über 10% geblieben ist.<sup>416</sup> Deutschland hat jedoch eine niedrigere Arbeitslosenquote als Irland und zeichnet sich dadurch aus, dass es seinen Schülern ein breites Spektrum an Lehrstellen und dualen Ausbildungen anbietet.<sup>417</sup>

Wie schon erwähnt, ist jedes Bundesland in Deutschland für seine Bildung verantwortlich und bietet seinen Schülern unterschiedliche Bildungswege.<sup>418</sup> Einige deutsche Schüler finden es schwierig, die Schule von einem Staat in einen anderen zu wechseln. Irland zudem hat ein einheitlicheres System, wobei das Ministerium für Bildung und Qualifikationen allen Schulen eine klare Vision bietet.<sup>419</sup> Im ersten Kapitel kann man sich ein Bild davon machen, in welchem Schulumfeld sich die Schüler, geschweige denn die Schulabgänger befinden.

Das zweite Kapitel fasst zusammen, was in einigen Forschungen zu Schulabgängern festgestellt wurde. Es zeigt gewisse Unterschiede zwischen den persönlichen Konflikten und Herausforderungen deutscher und irischer Schulabgänger.<sup>420</sup> Diese konnten im Elternhaus, in der Schule und unter Gleichaltrigen festgestellt werden. Einige deutsche und irische Forscher haben auf wesentliche Probleme hingewiesen, die bei diesen Schülern große Schwierigkeiten hervorrufen und sie zur Entscheidung drängt, die Schule vollständig zu verlassen. In diesem Kapitel wird auch die andere Seite der Medaille vorgestellt, auf der Schulabgänger - unabhängig davon wie fürsorglich ihr Schulsystem ist - persönlichen Faktoren ausgesetzt sind, die zum Scheitern führen können.

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<sup>416</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training)

<sup>417</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268830/unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/>

<sup>418</sup> [https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht\\_Schulsysteme\\_Laender](https://planet-beruf.de/fileadmin/assets/PDF/Uebersicht_Schulsysteme_Laender)

<sup>419</sup> <https://www.education.ie/>

<sup>420</sup> Clemens Hillenbrand und Heinrich Ricking, *Schulabbruch: Ursachen – Entwicklung – Prävention. Ergebnisse US amerikanischer und deutscher Forschungen*. In: Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, 2011, und Scott Boldt, *Listening and Learning: A Study of the Experiences of Early School Leavers from the Inner City of Dublin* (Dublin: Marino Institute of Education, 1994).

Im dritten Kapitel werden die kurativen und präventiven Initiativen vorgestellt, die von den verschiedenen Bildungsministerien in Deutschland und Irland ergriffen wurden, um das Phänomen des Schulabgangs zu bekämpfen. Diese Initiativen zeigen das begrenzte Ausmaß der Unterstützung, die den Schulen und Schülern in beiden Ländern angeboten wird. Neben den zwölf vom BMBF<sup>421</sup> befürworteten Initiativen werden in dieser Arbeit einige der wichtigsten Initiativen der Bildungsministerien in vier Bundesländern von Süd nach Nord, d.h. Bayern,<sup>422</sup> Thüringen,<sup>423</sup> Niedersachsen<sup>424</sup> und Schleswig-Holstein,<sup>425</sup> zusammengefasst. In Irland hat das das Bildungsministerium<sup>426</sup> mehrere Umstrukturierungsmaßnahmen ergriffen, um das gesamte Bildungssystem zu modernisieren und an die Bedürfnisse aller Schüler, einschließlich derjenigen, die vom Schulabgang bedroht sind, anzupassen. Es wurden acht wichtige kurative und präventive Initiativen hervorgehoben. Die von Irland ergriffenen präventiven Maßnahmen erweisen sich wirksamer als die von Deutschland, da sie sich stärker mit der Reform der bisherigen Schulzyklen befassen, z. B. mit dem Early Start Programme, dem New Primary Language Curriculum und dem Junior Certificate School Programme. Deutschland konzentriert sich in dieser Hinsicht eher auf die Durchführung von Projekten, das Angebot von Seminaren und Schulungen, die Bereitstellung von Haushaltsmitteln usw. Im kurativen Bereich fördert Irland das Schulabschlussprogramm, das Leaving Certificate Applied und unterstützt die Youthreach-Zentren. Deutschland hingegen unterstützt die Integration von Schülern mit Migrationshintergrund, bietet mehr Ganztagsangebote und Aktivitäten zur Berufsorientierung an, um nur einige zu nennen.

Das vierte Kapitel ist der Beschreibung der Methoden gewidmet, die bei der Befragung der Teilnehmer und der Analyse der gesammelten Daten angewandt wurden. Achtundzwanzig Interviews mit Lehrern, Schulleitern, Pädagogen und Schulabgänger wurden in Deutschland und Irland geführt. Die Umrahmung der Interviews in Irland war weniger bürokratisch als das in Deutschland. In Deutschland und Irland wurden die gleichen Interviewfragen verwendet. Als Interviewmethode wurde das Semi-

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<sup>421</sup> <https://www.bmbf.de/en/index.html>

<sup>422</sup> <https://www.km.bayern.de/>

<sup>423</sup> <https://www.gfaw-thueringen.de/>

<sup>424</sup> <https://www.mk.niedersachsen.de/>

<sup>425</sup> <https://www.kmk.org/>

<sup>426</sup> <https://www.education.ie/>

Structure Interview nach Galletta<sup>427</sup> gewählt, da sie einerseits der Struktur der Interviewfragen folgt, andererseits aber auch den Befragten die Möglichkeit gibt, sich spontan auszutauschen, so dass sie sich wohl fühlen und offen sind, ihre Meinung zu sagen. Sie gibt dem Forscher auch die Möglichkeit, die Antworten der Teilnehmer zu hinterfragen, um sie zu klären, zu verstehen und kritisch zu reflektieren. Die Analysemethode war in etwa so flexibel wie die Interviewmethode. In dieser Arbeit wird die thematische qualitative Textanalyse von Kuckartz<sup>428</sup> verwendet, die sowohl die Einführung deduktiver als auch induktiver Kategorien beinhaltet. Durch die Verwendung der Interviewfragen im Appendix 1 und 2 dieser Arbeit wurden bereits einige Hauptkategorien vergeben, um den logischen Ablauf des Interviews zu ermöglichen, also eine deduktive Kategorisierung. Durch die gleichzeitige Anwendung der hermeneutischen und interpretativen Textanalysemethode wurden weitere Kategorien induktiv durch die Verwendung von Codes, Memos und Fallzusammenfassungen gebildet. Die Kombination von deduktiver und induktiver Analyse und der Versuch, die von den Schulabgängern als relevant empfundenen Themen zu erstellen, machen diese Wahl der Textanalyse von Kuckartz geeignet. So wurde die Analyse der Interviews einer strukturierten und dennoch umfassenden Methode unterzogen, die es ermöglichte, den Kern dessen zu erfassen, was die Pädagogen und Schulabgänger mitzuteilen versuchten, ohne dabei Raum für Unklarheiten zu lassen oder wichtige Informationen auszulassen.

In den Kapiteln fünf und sechs werden dann die achtundzwanzig Interviews vorgestellt und ausgewertet. Die Hauptkategorien, die sich aus der Analysemethode von Kuckartz ergeben, werden dargelegt. Die Interviews aus Deutschland und Irland versuchten die tatsächlichen Bedenken, Kämpfe, Visionen und Hoffnungen der Schulabgänger aufzudecken. Aufgrund der Komplexität der Schulsysteme, Gesellschaften, Arbeitsmärkte, persönlichen Hintergründe, Bestrebungen und anderer, waren die Interviews aufschlussreich, da sie sowohl Ähnlichkeiten als auch Unterschiede im Schulabgänger-Kampf zeigten.

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<sup>427</sup>Anne Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*, (New York University Press, 2013).

<sup>428</sup>Udo Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practice & Using Software*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014).

Durch die ersten sechs Kapitels,<sup>429</sup> konnten einige Trends und Zusammenhänge in Bezug auf das Schulsystem verstanden werden. Die Zahl der Gesamtschulen und Integrierten Schulen hat aufgrund des Stresses durch die Schulübertritte und unterschiedlichen Schulniveaus in Deutschland zugenommen, sowie der Wunsch nach weniger Optionen und mehr Konsistenz während der Schuljahre.<sup>430</sup> Es entwickelt sich das Bedürfnis das deutsche Schulsystem zu vereinfachen. Auf irischer Seite wurde gefordert, den Lehrplan zu reformieren und es für schwächere Schüler attraktiver zu gestalten, indem ein neues Verfahren zur Bewertung des Junior-Zertifikats eingeführt wird, bei dem die Eltern direkt einbezogen werden. Die Fortschritte werden stufenweise gefördert, um eine reibungslosere Übergangszeit zu ermöglichen.<sup>431</sup> Es finden sich viele Ähnlichkeiten zwischen den Interviews mit den Schulabgängern und der Literatur über ihre persönlichen Entscheidungen, die zum Schulabgang führen. Diese wurden in drei Abschnitte unterteilt: Einfluss vom Elternhaus, Lehrern und Gleichaltrigen. Probleme in diesen Bereichen wurden vorgestellt und diskutiert, um zu zeigen, wie sie möglicherweise zu einem Gefühl der Distanzierung von der Schule führen. Die Interviews bestätigten, was in der Literatur auf diesen drei Ebenen behauptet wird und zeigten die immense Aufgabe, die auf den Schultern vieler Einzelner ruht, um die gesunde akademische und persönliche Entwicklung von den gefährdeten Schülern zu ermöglichen.

Bevor wir zu den Empfehlungen für das Schulsystem und die Schulabbrecher kommen, sollte erwähnt werden, dass die von den Bildungsministerien in Deutschland und Irland ergriffenen Maßnahmen hinter den Empfehlungen der Pädagogen zurückbleiben und nicht klar genug sind. Themen wie Engagement, Motivation, Klarheit, Verbindlichkeit, kleinere Klassen, soziale Interaktion und andere stoßen auf taube Ohren, wenn es um den zentralen Fokus der Ministerien geht. Den Pädagogen in beiden Ländern sollte stets Gehör geschenkt werden, da sie ein klareres Bild von den tatsächlichen Problemen vor Ort vermitteln können.

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<sup>429</sup> Durch die Zusammenführung der Forschungen beider Schulsysteme, der Literatur zu den persönlichen Entscheidungen, die Initiativen der verschiedenen Bildungsministerien in Deutschland und Irland und den durchgeführten Interviews und deren Analysen.

<sup>430</sup> Bildungsbericht 2018

<sup>431</sup> <https://ncca.ie/>

Im letzten Kapitel dieser Arbeit wurden einige Empfehlungen für beide Länder vorgestellt, um ihnen dabei zu helfen, die Anzahl der Schulabgänger weiter zu senken. Das Ziel wurde eindeutig als „Stärkung der Bindung zwischen Schüler und Schule“ identifiziert. Diese Bindung wird als ein Schritt weiter als eine einfache Verbindung und Identifizierung angesehen. Eine Bindung ist definiert als ein Gefühl des Stolzes und der Freude, dass ein Kind mit einer Institution entwickelt. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, wurden Vorgehensweisen auf nationaler und lokaler Ebene festgelegt. Beginnend mit der nationalen Ebene, wurden sieben Empfehlungen für beide Länder ausgesprochen. Diese sind:

- I- Bildung durch Stufen vereinfachen
- II- Früherkennung und vorbeugende Intervention
- III- Entwicklung eines adaptiven Lehrplans
- IV- Anhebung der Berufsbildungsstandards
- V- Ermöglichung von leichteren Übergangsperioden
- VI- Investition und Finanzierung
- VII- Schulpflicht

Bildungsministerien in beiden Ländern sollten dauerhaft jeden dieser sieben Punkte überprüfen und versuchen ihren Lehrplan zu revitalisieren, um die Wege für Schüler sinnvoll, einfach und lohnend zu gestalten und ein System der Warnung und Prävention zu entwickeln. Die Vorteile für die Beteiligten sollen langfristig und wirtschaftlich sein. Der Fachunterricht an Berufsschulen soll in den Augen von Unternehmen und Gesellschaft attraktiver und bedeutender gemacht werden. Eine angemessene und konstante Finanzierung für verschiedene interne und externe Aktivitäten soll innerhalb der Schule ermöglicht werden. Beide Ministerien sollen schließlich versuchen, das Alter der Schulpflicht zu erhöhen, da sich diese Maßnahmen als vorteilhaft erwiesen haben, um die Zahl der Schulabgänger zu verringern.<sup>432</sup> Alles in allem dürfen die Bildungsministerien durch all diese Schritte keinesfalls das Ziel der Bindung an die Schule aus den Augen verlieren, damit die

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<sup>432</sup> GHK Consulting, Anne Mari-Nevala et al, *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies Education and Culture, Brussels 2011, p. 88.

Schule ein Ort wird, an dem sich die Schüler nicht nur identifizieren, sondern auch Freude verspüren können und die Vorteile des Systems erkennen.

Diese Empfehlungen können jedoch nicht allein auf nationaler Ebene festgelegt werden. Die lokalen Akteure, seien es Schulleiter, Lehrer, Pädagogen, Psychologen, Eltern oder Gleichaltrige, können alle dazu beitragen, die Zahl der Schulabgänger zu verringern und die Bindung zwischen Schüler und Schule zu stärken. Um dies auf lokaler Ebene zu erreichen, wurden diese 5 S oder Abschnitte identifiziert:

- 1- Surrounding (oder Umgebung)
- 2- Space (oder Raum)
- 3- Substance (oder Substanz)
- 4- Support (oder Unterstützung)
- 5- Safeguard (oder Schutz)

Das erste S, *Surrounding*, bezieht sich auf die Umgebung des Elternhauses, in der ein Schüler aufwächst. Wenn die Umgebung nicht förderlich ist, bei Problemen und Desinteresse der Eltern, Konflikten zwischen Geschwistern und Gleichaltrigen, Stress durch Lehrer und Klassenkameraden, Desorganisation, fehlender Inklusion und schwierige Wirtschaftliche Lage, kann sich der Geist eines Schülers möglicherweise nicht angemessen und gesund entwickeln. Das zweite S, *Space*, hängt mit der Größe der Klassenzimmer und den außerschulischen Aktivitäten zusammen, die die Schüler motivieren und das Lernen unterhaltsamer machen. Das *Space* kann auch mit zweite-Chancen Schulen gebracht werden, die sich um die Bedürfnisse bestimmter Schüler kümmern, ganz zu schweigen von denen die aus schwierigeren, familiären und ländlichen Verhältnissen kommen. Das dritte S, *Substance*, betrifft erneut den Lehrplan, jedoch auf lokaler Ebene. Zu verstehen, was die Motivation der Schüler zum Abschluss einer Ausbildung antreibt, bedeutet es zu erfassen, was zu ihren Gedanken, Herzen und Träumen spricht. Auch in diesem Bereich spielt es eine große Rolle, Lehrer auszubilden, um dieses *Substance* auf abwechslungsreiche und unterhaltsame Weise voranzubringen. Das vierte S, *Support*, besteht aus qualifizierten und gut ausgebildeten Lehrern, interessierten und bewussten Eltern und richtigen politischen Investitionen in Bildung und potenziellen Wirtschaft. *Mentoring* und *Monitoring* sind die Säulen dieses Abschnitts. Die Betreuung bedürftiger Schüler



sollte bewertet werden, um ihre Effizienz darzustellen. Die Überwachung der Entwicklung der Schüler kann zu einem gesunden Fortschritt beitragen, unabhängig davon, zu welchen Einrichtungen diese Schüler gehören oder in welche Schulen sie versetzt werden können. Alle Tagesschulen unterstützen nachweislich sowohl Schüler als auch Eltern. Auch Unternehmen und Betriebe können eine entscheidende Rolle dabei spielen, den Schülern zu helfen, einen guten Einstieg in die Wirtschaft zu ermöglichen. Das fünfte und letzte S, *Safeguard*, korreliert mit all dessen, was mit den anderen S-Abschnitten erreicht werden könnte, indem die Schüler widerstandsfähig und immun gegen potenzielle Probleme werden. Das Bewusstsein für Ungerechtigkeiten, das Erkennen von Mobbingverhalten, das Melden oder der Umgang mit schlechten Gefühlen, die Zusammenarbeit bei dem, was für den Einzelnen und das Ganze gut ist, können Teil der Realisierung dieses Abschnitts sein. Das *Safeguard* könnte auch durch eine Art von Polizeiarbeit oder Geldstrafe durchgesetzt werden.

Sowohl Deutschland als auch Irland können auf diesen oben genannten nationalen und lokalen Ebenen voneinander lernen, um die Bindung zwischen Schüler und Schule zu stärken. Für Deutschland kann Irland ein Vorbild sein, da Irland ständig nach Wegen sucht seinen Lehrplan attraktiver zu gestalten, seine Schulphasen zu vereinfachen, längere Übergangszeiten zu ermöglichen, zweite-Chance Schulen anzubieten und die Bewertungsprozesse zu modernisieren. Für Irland kann Deutschland ein Vorbild sein, wenn es darum geht Schülern mehr duale Ausbildungen anzubieten, Lehrstellen zu fördern, Unternehmen für die Unterstützung zu belohnen, mehr Flexibilität bei Kurswechseln zu ermöglichen, mehr kostenlose Vorschuljahre anzubieten, mehr außerschulische Wahlmöglichkeiten bereitzustellen und Schulschwänzen durch polizeiliche Maßnahmen zu kontrollieren.

Auf nationaler Ebene sollten die deutschen und irischen Bildungsministerien kontinuierlich versuchen, in ihre Schulsysteme zu investieren, da die Bedürfnisse der Schüler in einer zunehmend digitalen Welt komplexer werden. Auf lokaler Ebene sollten sowohl die Schulen als auch die Eltern in beiden Ländern ständig lernen, auf die Anforderungen und Herausforderungen ihrer Schüler bzw. Kinder zu hören, um sie zu motivieren und an ihr Schulsystem zu binden.