

Combining work and study to reduce youth unemployment

A dual education system in Spain -- combining work and study -- could potential lower youth unemployment and drop-out rates, as seen in Germany.

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In Spain, youth unemployment is an epidemic, affecting more than half the country's under-25 population. The problem is weighing on the national economy and also the professional and personal aspirations of an entire generation.

As a result, there is a clear need for vocation skills to boost students' job qualifications and technical training and, thus, employability. How? By combining theoretical learning in classrooms with paid apprenticeships at companies in a dual education system.

Dual education is already a success in other EU countries, such as Germany, Austria and Denmark, where it has proven effective in combating youth unemployment. While in Germany a dual, work-study approach currently accounts for 70 percent of professional training offerings, in Spain it represents a paltry 2 percent.

A number of factors may contribute to Spain's limited success with dual education so far, including a lack of commitment from many of its companies, the relatively low importance of industry in its economy, a stigma associated with vocational training and, finally, the popularity of university studies and advanced professional training.

These are some of the conclusions highlighted in [the study on dual education](#) in Spain coordinated by [José Ramón Pin](#), director of the **International Research Center on Organizations** (IRCO) at IESE and holder of the [José Felipe Bertrán](#) Chair of Governance and Leadership in Public Administration.

A remedy for youth unemployment

Although there is still a long way to go, the report shows that Spain is starting to invest in dual education. More specifically, the government has adopted a series of measures that include incentives for the students, schools and businesses that engage in this model of vocational training.

The report indicates that all stakeholders -- including trade unions, employers, civil servants, educators, families and students -- must effectively get involved and work together to develop the dual education system to its potential.

The role of small businesses is vital for ensuring a quality dual education system. In Germany, for example, regulations make it possible for most small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage in this type of training. In fact, business involvement has been key to the success of the system.

By studying Germany's experience, Spain's public authorities, business community and educational system should be able to adapt the dual education system to best fit the particular dynamics seen in Spain. The objective is for young people to prepare themselves to practice a trade in the short term and enter the job market as soon as possible.

Dual education could also be an effective tool for reducing Spain's drop-out rate, which sits at 25 percent.

More than just red tape

The IRCO study shows that a barrier to properly implementing the dual education system in Spain is its administrative decentralization and education policy.

Each of Spain's 17 autonomous communities, plus the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, regulates the professional training initiatives within its territory. As a result, companies looking to train young people must get past a series of obstacles in their path. The report looks to the experiences of NH Hotels, Airbus and Nestlé as three of the case studies in this area.

Another challenge cited by companies in the report is the culture shock and even social rejection that exists at various levels with regard to dual education in Spain:

- Some employees treat students at work with suspicion, viewing them as

competition.

- There is a shortage of experienced tutors who know how to work with trainees.
- Some parents are too protective.
- There is no active search for synergies between schools, families, governments and businesses.
- Some schools have misgivings or fears that they will be replaced by companies in the role of preparing students.
- Some teachers are not committed to the dual education system.

10 good practices

Professor José Ramón Pin moderated a focus group attended by relevant government offices, trade unions, businesses, schools and foundations. The result is a set of 10 good practices to address Spain's problems with dual education:

- Simplify administrative procedures and cut red tape.
- Facilitate the job of training for companies.
- Provide social support for the role of trainee.
- Support the role of the tutor within the enterprise.
- Raise the status of dual education.
- Regulate online training.
- Provide incentives for schools and businesses.
- Involve all of the stakeholders in the value chain.
- Offer a legal framework to provide security.
- Encourage the exchange of ideas among stakeholders in forums.

Optimistic outlook

Although a change in mind-set and greater commitment are still required, the past two years have shown that change is underway, with some autonomous communities launching projects to fuel optimism for the future.

Notably, in 2014 the percentage of Spanish students enrolled in dual education programs doubled compared to the previous year. The number of centers offering this type of training has also doubled, while the number of companies involved has tripled, climbing from 513 to 1,570 in just one year. Furthermore, Spain's government has shown clear interest in promoting this type of training for the future.

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