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4.1 History and Social Parameters of the Education System

4.1.1 Cornerstones of the Historical Development

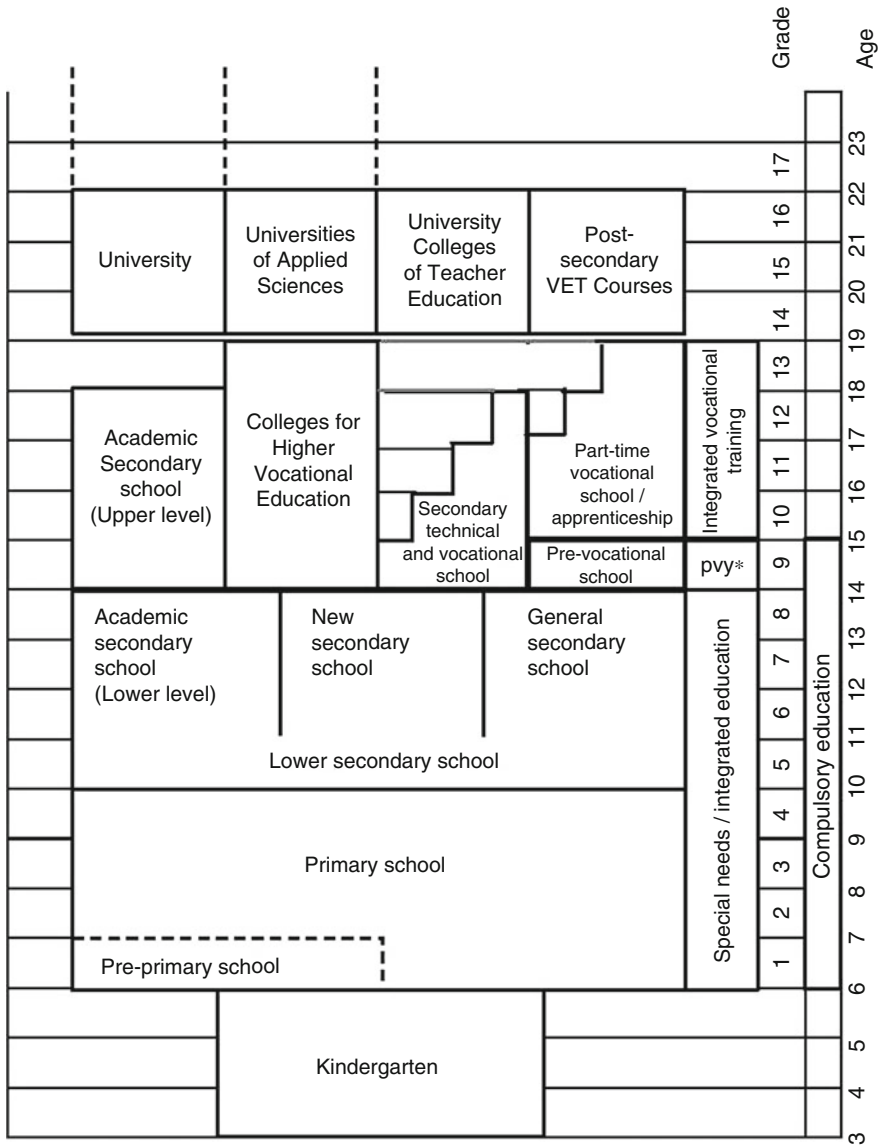
The Austrian education system developed intermittently in phases during the monarchy, the First Republic (from 1918), and the Second Republic (from 1945). It has been characterized by progressive ideas on the one hand and by a conservative, even reactionary, grip on the prevailing status quo on the other. This chapter will show how the two perspectives developed over the course of two centuries.

In 1770, Empress Maria Theresa decreed that schooling should always be a political issue. The state – and not the church – should be responsible for a functioning school system. Just 4 years later, the school system was restructured by educationalist Johann Ignaz Felbiger. Pursuant to a general school ordinance based on topographic perspectives, three types of elementary school were established: normal schools (Normalschule), i.e., model schools for the development of “best practice” in the region; secondary schools (Hauptschulen, later also called Bürgerschulen) in larger towns; common schools (Trivialschulen) in smaller locations. School was compulsory for children from 6 to 13 years. Apprentices also had to attend compulsory “repeat” lessons on Sunday until they were 20 years old. At the same time, money was set aside for the relevant textbooks.

These innovations were not accepted without resistance, although Emperor Joseph II was intent on promoting them as free education and an extension of the present school network. Following his early death in 1790, reaction was raised against centralism and against “unnecessary lessons that went too far for peasants” (Engelbrecht 1984, p. 129).

Even the grammar schools (Gymnasiums), at that time largely organized by Jesuits, were subject to strong state control under Maria Theresa and – moderately – exposed to enlightening impulses. With the annulment of the Jesuit Order (1773), the path toward reform appeared to be free. However, under the successors of Joseph II, these reforms ground to a halt: the 5-year school education, the class tutor system, the traditional curriculum restricted to relatively few (nonscientific) subjects, and the restrictive manageable access were initially retained. Emperor Ferdinand I knew how to avoid far-reaching change. It was only after the revolution in 1848 that a new course was set. Subsequent to a failed draft drawn up by philosopher and Herbart-follower Franz Exner on the reorganization of the whole education system, in 1849, a new paper entitled “Draft Organisation” compiled by him and Prussian classic philologist Hermann Bonitz formed a sound basis for the reorganization of the grammar school. Grammar schools

Austria



* Pre-vocational year

covered 8 years and integrated two philosophy-based years that counted toward university education. In contrast to the Humboldt-based grammar schools, lessons were evenly distributed between languages and history, as well as mathematics and natural science. Optional music lessons were also offered. Lessons were given by

university-trained teachers and content was prepared in two 4-year cycles, not least to support and maintain “multifaceted interests” propagated by Herbart. Bonitz later applied this concept also in Prussia at time when in Austria, concerns on the course of neo-absolutist tendencies were being expressed in conservative circles. However, the draft would have been much bolder if it were left to the will of the undersecretary of state of the newly established Ministry of Education, Ernst von Feuchtersleben in 1848. He had previously proposed unifying secondary schools and lower grammar schools to form a comprehensive school, the Progymnasium, giving equal rights to all languages spoken during the monarchy and establishing secondary modern schools (Realschulen) as secondary schools that did not teach Latin. Although not all liberal ideas saw the light of day, the establishment of a specific Austrian grammar school can be described as a major educational achievement of the nineteenth century. Another would be the Reichsvolksschulgesetz (the law on federal elementary schools) of 1869 which secured a formidable basic education, quite remarkable for that time, for all children regardless of social, ethnic, or religious background. The 7-year general secondary school gave numerous pupils access to the new-established academic institutions or universities for technology, animal health, agriculture, and commerce, and for the arts.

However, for a long time, this path was only open to boys. Even the 1848 revolution did not give the decisive impetus for the education of girls. Attempts to create a breakthrough with girls’ schools and diverse efforts from women’s associations only met with modest success. With some in part mortifying arguments and measures, girls were denied the full Matura, the university entrance certificate, and thus access to university. Until 1900, they could only achieve this indirectly and only then use it abroad. Only after the turn of the century did the situation regarding the education of girls begin to improve slowly, but this was not without its setbacks. This was certainly helped by the creation of a third type of school, the Realgymnasium, a higher secondary school that was established as a concession to reformers in 1908.

In contrast, vocational schools, which with their focus on technical, commercial, and typical women’s professions developed quickly in the nineteenth century and which also provided new educational options for the rural population, were not able to provide university entrance.

Only after the First World War and the collapse of the monarchy did the Republic of Austria face up to (re)organizing its state system. Educational policy was prioritized, thanks to the initiative of the first Minister of Education, undersecretary of state Otto Glöckel. Glöckel did his utmost to instigate educational reform measures and again pursued the idea of uniform middle school that had already had a long, if somewhat unsuccessful, history behind it. His argument highlighted improved educational opportunities for children of industrial and agricultural workers and for girls. After 1920, he triggered heated debates on the issue of education which were not only carried out in part on the streets but were also closely observed from abroad. However, Glöckel’s ideas found no consensus in the country, being instead regarded as partisan politics which they remain today. In contrast, his forward-thinking demands for reform were favorably received

in Vienna where he was president of the newly established Vienna school council, until a provoked conflict with the Catholic Church also put an end to this movement.

School laws passed in 1926 and 1927 bear a distinctive conservative character. The new curriculum for the basic school (4 years primary school plus 4 years secondary school) consciously carried out some elements of educational reform: coeducation in the higher secondary school remained strongly restricted, clear structure in this area was only partially achieved. In contrast, despite apparent defects, particular success was achieved by the new 4-year lower secondary school attended by a large proportion of youths. This provided school leavers who had achieved well with the chance to attend the higher secondary school by taking a 1-year transfer course.

4.1.2 Key Phases of Reform and Innovation in Education Policy

Although temporary changes were introduced during the fascistic corporate state (1933–1938) and the Nazi dictatorship (1938–1945), once the Second Republic was established, these laws from the 1920s were reinstated. Policy was provisional until both coalition parties, the Christian Social Party (ÖVP) and the Social Democrats (SPÖ), agreed on a new school organization law in 1962 which was then followed by other laws (in particular regarding curricula and school times). Both parties were anxious to create a legal base to educational policy and succeeded in raising the status of school laws to “constitutional level”; thus a two-thirds majority in parliament was needed for any resolution or change.

Laws introduced included extending compulsory education to a ninth school year, setting up a polytechnic course in Year 9 to expand the professional horizons for future apprentices, setting up post-secondary pedagogical academies as training colleges for future primary and secondary modern school teachers, who had previously only had to take part in in-service training with a final examination and the upper secondary form, used as a feeder for the pedagogical academy. The 5-year higher vocational school was granted the right to award university entrance qualifications. Soon after, however, there was broad consensus that this law succeeded more in maintaining the status quo than that in providing impetus for new developments.

International developments – characterized on the one hand as an “educational catastrophe” and on the other hand as an “explosion scolaire,” motivated primarily by the rise in general interest in higher education, especially among girls and women – called for an educational offensive: ideas for this were however diversified. This was reflected most clearly in a policy statement issued by the minority Social Democrat government under Bruno Kreisky (1970), expressing a strengthened will for reform (comprehensive schools, full-day schools, providing academic training for all teachers, reorganizing the dual system of vocational education, adult education). The year previously, both parties had jointly spoken about the need for a parliamentary school reform commission, for experiments on the restructuring of

schools for 10- to 14-year-olds, and for the integration of pupils with disabilities, all of which would help justify policy decisions on education and make decisions independent of cliquish thinking. A center for school experiments and school developments was set up to accompany the academic research. Despite the high financial outlay, central reform efforts were impeded by the Conservatives. Contrary to the results of the school experiments, which pointed toward the introduction of a comprehensive school system, a new school model, the general secondary school (*Neue Hauptschule*) was introduced (no tutor groups but three “streams”) in addition to the academic secondary school (AHS); supporters of the integration of the disabled had to wait until the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 to witness the first phase of implementation. After 1985, the trend to send children to an AHS rose sharply; in Vienna, more than 80 % and in conurbation areas 50 % of pupils of a single year attended an AHS. In some places, the new general secondary school degenerated into a “school for the rest.”

4.2 Fundamentals, Organization, and Governance of the Education System

4.2.1 Education Policy Goals

Based on the government’s program for 2007 and 2008, Austria’s current education policy for the school system can be summarized as follows:

- Targeting a general increase in the quality of education, in particular by guaranteeing vocational educational provision until the age of 18, which aims at keeping the proportion of young people without any vocational training as low as possible. This is to be achieved through measures primarily targeting the enhancement and assurance of quality and further developments in teacher training.
- Improving equality of opportunity so that success in school is not dependent on social or family background, primarily by removing the artificial barriers between the various parts of the education system.
- Integrating pupils with special needs, especially also children from immigrant families.
- Promoting lifelong learning and the resulting greater weighting to adult education. In this regard, strategies are to be developed to certify informally acquired qualifications.
- “Europeanizing” education by emphasizing foreign language learning and establishing/expanding collaborations with other countries and international schools.

The key factor for universities is to “increase the number of graduates and thereby the level of education of Austrians and to increase the number of working professionals” (Regierungsprogramm 2008, p. 202). In addition to converting the

university system in line with the Bologna architecture, government policy is aiming to improve conditions at universities by enhancing the provision of support and by aligning curricula more to the employability of graduates. Students are to be supported through more intensive consultation and the introduction of induction phases which should also help maximize student retention.

4.2.2 Legal Framework

The School Organization Law (*Schulorganisationsgesetz* – SchOG) provides the legal basis for Austrian schools setting out the aims, organizational framework, and structure of the school system and was followed by the School Instruction Law (*Schulunterrichtsgesetz* – SchUG), which regulated school-internal processes, especially the task of assessing school performance. According to the School Organization Act, schools “shall give young people the knowledge and skills required for their future lives and occupations and train them to acquire knowledge on their own initiative” (Article 2 SchOG). Young people should “be guided to pass independent judgement and to understand their social environment, be open to the political and ideological thoughts of other, be enabled to take part in Austrian economic and cultural life and contribute to the common responsibilities of mankind, living in freedom and peace” (Article 2 SchOG).

According to this legislation, all types and forms of schools in Austria are bound by the same objectives, i.e., curricular content of individual subjects is less important than the fostering of personal attitudes and behavioral patterns of children and adolescents. Furthermore, regulations govern central issues of the education system, in particular curricula and the nature of assessing performance.

Universities are called upon “to serve academic research and teaching, and the advancement, appreciation and teaching of the arts, and thereby to contribute to the personal development of the individual, and to the welfare of society and the environment,” (Article 1 Universities Act 2002). In addition, they conduct “scientific, artistic, artistic-pedagogical and artistic-scientific training, qualification for professional activities requiring the application of scientific knowledge and methods, as well as teaching artistic and scientific skills at the highest level,” (Article 3).

4.2.3 Management of the Education System

The management of the school system is the responsibility of federal, state, and local governments. Since 1962, school laws in Austria can only be changed given a two-thirds majority in parliament. This provision was by and large repealed in 2005 – without however affecting issues – creating the opportunity to adapt the school system to take account of regional needs or rash changes on the labor market.

In terms of accountability, local authorities are responsible for kindergartens, state governments are responsible for primary schools and general secondary

schools, and the federal government for academic secondary schools including lower grammar school classes. This distinction primarily affects the function of the employer for teaching staff (“state teachers” vs. “federal teachers”), the function of the maintaining body (local governments, states, federal government), and the responsibility of the school boards (district school inspector provides another level of hierarchy at state level). This interrelationship of district, state, and federal government as administrative and management organs has produced a system that is both complex and cost intensive.

In line with a centralist tradition, the school system was managed in the form of classic input management, i.e., through laws, regulations, and decrees, monitored for compliance by the school boards. At the same time, democratically controlled school experiments guaranteed that the education system was adapted to meet ongoing developments in society. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the trend has been toward deregulation and decentralization. Since then, a broad political consensus has arisen implying that future school developments should be professionally anchored in the context of the individual school and that the necessary leeway has to be provided for the following aspects of school governance:

- The administration of financial resources
- The extended participation of the school community in decision-making
- The implementation of a general curricular framework in a concrete way
- The organization of instruction regarding content and time schedules (Bachmann et al. 1996, p. 27)

This means increasing the autonomy of the school and its staff regarding regional and national development projects through an educational policy that is increasing, based on the results of national evaluation programs and international comparisons.

If it was not evident before, the Universities Act 2002 opened the door to replacing the notion of centralist input management with a management philosophy based on agreeing targets for key performance indicators that grants universities a degree of autonomous leeway and at the same time envisages accountability in the form of performance reports.

4.2.4 Financing

While kindergartens have to be generally privately financed by parents (even if local governments pay subsidies) in principle, no costs accrue for pupils attending state schools. Transport to and from school is free. Textbooks are also provided free of charge. In recent years however, a contribution of 10 % from the pupils has been introduced for both transport and textbooks.

The costs of schools are directly and indirectly borne by the federal government. The Länder are fully compensated for the expenses incurred by schools within their area of competence by the federal government in the process of fiscal adjustment.

Individual schools receive “value units” for hours taught. A basic component is sufficient to cover the cost for the standard curriculum and a second component through which schools can finance additional programs, e.g., courses or non-compulsory activities. Maintaining and operating a school is the responsibility of the owner of the school. The promotion of school autonomy is achieved on the financial level by giving schools global budgets for their overheads. They are also allowed to earn money to a restricted degree by renting premises or selling advertising space.

Since 2001, tuition fees of 360 € per semester are to be paid to study at university. From 2009, this is to be refunded to all students who complete their courses on time (plus one semester tolerance). Except for this fee, university study is free. Students have to finance materials themselves.

4.2.5 Public and Private Educational Facilities

In the 2007/2008 school year, about 5 % of primary school pupils, 5 % of general secondary school pupils, and 15 % of pupils from the lower level of academic secondary school attended privately financed schools. In the upper level of secondary school, 15 % of upper level academic secondary school pupils, 19 % of pupils in technical and vocational schools, and 10 % in training colleges attended a private school (Statistik Austria 2008b). More than one-third of students at pedagogical academies, for the training of teachers in the compulsory education sector, attended a private (confessional) facility in 2007. These figures indicate how increasingly important the private education sector has grown.

The University Reform Act of 2002 allows private universities to be established. For courses starting in 2007, a total of 1.6 % of students attended a private university. Since then, the figure has risen strongly (to 2.9 % of enrolling students).

Private schools run by an officially recognized church can claim to have their teaching staff paid by the state, but have to bear the costs of school maintenance themselves. Other private schools do not have a right to financial support from the state. As a rule, however, they do receive small subsidies. In an international comparison, private education in Austria is still on a modest scale, but has been expanding somewhat in recent years, especially in the tertiary sector. The elite nature of private education plays is significant in guiding choice.

4.2.6 Quality Management

The institutionalized system for assuring the quality of the Austrian school system comprises the following key components:

1. There is a legal base for curricula and timetables for all forms, types, and levels of school described in framework curricula or for curricula with core and extension elements (e.g., the curriculum for the lower level of secondary

- education valid since 2000). School autonomy enables schools to create their own local variations based on these curricula and timetables.
2. Teaching materials, especially textbooks, are only permitted for use in lessons following an evaluation procedure.
 3. The training of teachers is precisely regulated. Since 2007, training for general compulsory school teachers is carried out in 3-year courses at tertiary level teacher training colleges; teachers at other schools, including academic secondary schools, require a university degree. Both forms of training require extensive practical phases before teachers can be employed full time at schools.
 4. Head teachers are selected following a regulated evaluation procedure and receive extensive in-service training following their appointment, with some differences among the Länder.
 5. Together with heads of school, school inspectors carry out professional reviews of teaching staff and monitor the educational work in schools. The organization of inspectorates is based on local government administrative areas for compulsory schools, on the Länder for higher secondary schools, and within the Länder depending on the form of the school. Ultimately, the inspectorates are responsible to the Ministry of Education.
 6. The central authorities are the departments within the Ministry of Education that are responsible for the individual school forms. These departments can pass regulations and decrees in reaction to problem situations in schools arising from development projects, further education, or legal initiative.
 7. In addition, education statistics permitted under the Education Documentation Act 2002 are capable of reconstructing individual educational profiles for use in research work.

These statutory forms of quality assurance have not yet envisaged any objective measure of school achievement. The overall assessment of pupil performance is carried out by those teachers who have taught the relevant subject. The review of education standards that began in 2009 under the guise of the newly established Federal Institute of Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System introduced a stronger output-oriented strategy of quality assurance. In addition to the institutionalized forms of quality assurance, in the last few decades, numerous forms of local evaluation methods have been developed that have been realized in line with school autonomy.

The quality strategy for universities of applied sciences established since 1993 is based on a model of accreditation. Institutions pre-dating 1993 are subject to accreditation every 4 or 5 years, which also checks for an ongoing, efficient model of quality assurance. However, accreditation does not prescribe any particular form of quality assessment. In practice, many universities of applied sciences focus on the rigorous evaluation of teaching and the standardization of internal processes.

A central evaluation ordinance was passed in 1997 for universities, which envisaged the binding evaluation of teaching and research. With the autonomy of

universities implemented in the Universities Act 2002, responsibility for evaluation was shifted to the individual universities. In the field of research, models of peer evaluation, international rankings, and the development of quality indicators were implemented. Support for the implementation of these strategies is provided by the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance.

4.3 Overview of the Structure of the Education System

The Austrian school system can be characterized by the following general features:

- Nine years' compulsory education (not necessarily compulsory schooling).
- Free access to public schools.
- The principle of coeducation at public schools.
- Continuous internal assessment of school achievement by teachers. Pupils' achievements are graded on a scale ranging from 1 (very good) to 5 (insufficient). A grade of 5 in a school report requires the pupil to repeat the school year, unless a conference of class teachers allows the pupil to pass on or unless the pupil passes resit examinations.
- Two types of schools, general secondary (*Hauptschule*) and academic secondary schools (*allgemeinbildende höhere Schule*) on the lower secondary level.
- High percentage of young people opting for the dual system of vocational training (apprenticeship), which involves attending a vocational school and a place of work.
- Academic secondary schools, vocational training colleges, and other upper secondary level forms that all provide the same access rights to university study.
- The differentiated secondary vocational school system, especially with regard to entitlement to study at a university.
- The separate training (despite identical school curricula) for general lower secondary school teachers (pedagogic academies) and for academic lower secondary school teachers (universities).

4.3.1 Pre-primary Education

Kindergartens are not part of the Austrian school system although there is documented evidence that they influence later scholarly achievement. Measured internationally, Austria is falling behind when it comes to the care of children, especially of 3-year-olds. Seventy percent of 3-year-olds and 93 % of 5-year-olds visit a kindergarten. However, this does hide regional and social differences. In a bid to improve the educational chances of children, especially those whose mother tongue is not German, preschool education focusing on language skills is to be given greater priority in the future.

4.3.2 Primary Education

If necessary, primary school is preceded by a preparatory year for children who are not quite mature enough to attend a primary school. General schools include the “normal” primary school until the end of Year 4 and the appropriate level in special school. Pupil numbers in both types of primary school are in decline (from 2001 to 2007 by 12 %, since then by a further 3 %). This is due in the normal primary school to falling birth rates and in special schools to the increased introduction of integration classes, not only in primary schools but also in general secondary schools. In the same period, the proportion of immigrant children whose mother tongue is not German has risen significantly. Lessons are organized in a 5-day week with between 20 and 25, 45-min lessons: with – among other subjects – languages (7 lessons) ranking higher than mathematics (4 lessons) and general studies (3 lessons). The number of children in a class must not exceed 25. From an organizational point of view, the first 2 years of primary school form a basic unit of assessment (*Grundstufe I*), which means that no child can fail Year 1, thus avoiding the burden of having a negative start at school.

4.3.3 Lower Secondary Education

The lower secondary schools include the *Oberstufe* of the primary school (only available in some regions), the general secondary school (including schools specializing in sport, music, or IT), the appropriate level of special school and the polytechnic school, Year 9, which primarily serves to meet the requirements of compulsory education, and the 4-year lower level of the 8-year academic secondary school (including *Gymnasium*, *Realgymnasium*, and *Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium*). This means that after Year 4, an important decision is made for a pupil’s subsequent school career. At present, 68 % of pupils in a school year attend a general secondary school (a rising trend) and 32 % an academic secondary school. At general secondary schools, many of which also integrate special needs of children, German, English, and mathematics are usually taught in three levels of ability which has a strong influence on career chances, true for pupils even in the first (highest) level. Entrance to an academic secondary school – corresponding to the logic of the system, a school for high achievers – is decided by recommendations from the primary school teacher, based on scholarly performance and also social and regional factors. Girls are overproportionally represented in academic secondary schools. Each school teaches 45-min lessons across 120 weeks of the academic secondary school; slight differences apply between the different types of school (*Gymnasium*, *Realgymnasium*, and *Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium*). Poor academic performance may lead to pupils repeating a school year or changing to the general secondary school.

4.3.4 Upper Secondary Education

The upper secondary schools include academic and vocational schools. The latter include (compulsory) vocational schools, intermediate vocational schools (*Fachschulen*), and upper vocational schools (focusing on technical, industrial, hand-crafts, agricultural, forestry, business, and commercial professions) as well as the training facilities for kindergarten teachers, educators, and social education workers. Since 2007/2008, these three facilities are no longer part of the school system; they were converted to pedagogic academies (13 locations, including eight state-run and five private academies); they remain under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and are responsible also for the in-service training of school teachers.

Pupils from the top ability level or those with at least a grade 2 (good) in the second ability level are entitled to attend all of the intermediate and higher schools in the upper level of secondary education without having to take an entrance test, provided sufficient places are available. Entrance calculations are mainly based on school achievement in the last 3 years. Grades in the second and third ability levels are adjusted by two points to facilitate comparison. A grade of 2 (good) in the second ability level is equivalent to a grade 4 (sufficient) in the top ability level. Pupils in the third ability level cannot meet entry requirements, even if they achieve a grade 1 (very good).

Pupils staying on at school after Year 8 are distributed as follows across the various schools of upper secondary education (ninth year of school 1990/1991–2006/2007):

Type of school	PTS ^a	BMS	BHS	AHS-Oberstufe	Total (%)
Proportion 1990/1991	23.4	26.5	29.3	20.8	100
Proportion 2006/2007	23.1	20.2	32.4	24.3	100

Key: ^aPolytechnic schools (PTS) here count as a facility for pupils in Year 9 at secondary schools. Vocational colleges start after Year 9.

BMS intermediate secondary technical and vocational schools, *BHS* upper secondary technical and vocational schools, *AHS* academic secondary schools

4.3.5 Special Forms of Upper Level of Secondary Education: Second Chance Provision

For pupils who have cut short their school career the first time around and for people in employment, there is a wide variety of special programs available, including (evening) classes leading to upper secondary schools and universities; different types of vocational, technical, and professional schools; and academies for trade, social workers, kindergarten teachers, and others.

In addition, there is also the possibility of gaining a partial university entrance qualification, the vocational matriculation examination, and the certificate of general educational development. Requirements to be admitted to the vocational

matriculation examination include having completed an apprenticeship or at least 3 years at intermediate vocational school. As a rule, a vocational matriculation examination consists of four parts: German, mathematics, English, and a specialist subject from the student's professional experience. A number of institutions, including the Economic Promotion Institute (*Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut*), offer relevant courses. Another option is the certificate of general educational development. The aim of such a certificate is to offer students who have not matriculated a restricted university course in a single discipline. Completing this certificate allows the student to study this subject in all Austrian universities.

4.3.6 Tertiary Sector

Austria – when measured in terms of population – has a broad network of universities (16 universities, 4 art universities, and 11 private universities) which also include former special technical, commercial, arts, and veterinarian universities; but paradoxically, it is one of the countries with a relatively low academic rate (15 % compared to the OECD average of 24 %). Neither the 25 universities of applied sciences set up since 1995 with their total of 288 courses nor the 11 private universities – with their largely specialized orientations – have been able to improve the country's weak position in international standings. The government's educational policy is hoping that things will change once the tertiary sector has been realigned in accordance with the Bologna architecture. It is also hoping that the strong influence of social background on academic success will minimize by abolishing tuition fees and granting scholarships to those in social need.

4.3.7 Adult Education

The responsibility for adult education programs is spread across many institutions in Austria. In 2004, the Austrian Institute for Research in Vocational Education surveyed 1,775 relevant facilities for its study "Quality Assurance and Development in Austrian Adult Education." The main bodies responsible for adult education include the Ministry of Education with its subordinated Federal Institute for Adult Education, the Labour Market Service, the Länder, the local governments, the chambers of commerce, professional associations, the churches, the political parties, and the EU (through project funding).

The Länder network *Weiterbildung* represents the collaborative effort of regional working groups on adult education, the public libraries, and other adult education facilities at Länder level. The Conference of Adult Education in Austria (*Konferenz der Erwachsenenbildung Österreich*) has been in operation since 1972 and brings together ten non-profit-making providers in an independent forum.

A large proportion of adult education deals with professional development. It mainly fulfills professional needs – instigated by individual companies – and

nonprofessional personal development. Attendance at professional courses and the number of private providers of training is significantly lower than in other EU countries.

4.4 Developments in the Current School System

4.4.1 Transfer Between School Years

Austria is one of the few countries to retain the separation of pupils after Year 4. With the exception of special schools, from Year 5, there are two paths through the lower level of secondary education: the general secondary school and the academic secondary school. The Austrian system envisages that pupils with a good level of school achievement in Year 4 of the primary school are deemed by their teachers to be ready for the academic secondary school. This is usually based on grades achieved (“very good” or “good”), regardless of their validity. In a bid to cope with over-demand, in recent years, an increasing number of academic secondary schools have begun to only accept pupils with any “very good” grades. Pupils with “satisfactory” grades can be recommended for the academic secondary school at a school conference. Alternatively, pupils can sit an entrance examination. This option is almost exclusively taken up by pupils of a higher socioeconomic status of the parents.

All other pupils attend the general secondary school. Here, following an observation period of several weeks – at least however by the end of the first semester – pupils are streamed into three ability groups in German, English, and mathematics. Pupils with an academic secondary school recommendation have to be assigned to the first ability group. Pupils achieving well in a lower ability group may be “upgraded” to the next higher group (this is however relatively rarely used); more often, poor achievement may lead to pupils being “downgraded” to the next lower group. Being in the upper ability group in Year 8 is an important determinant of pupils’ chances in higher levels of school, in particular at secondary schools offering university entrance qualifications and at upper secondary technical and vocational schools. Pupils in the first ability group in all three subjects, or who have achieved “good” grades in the second ability group, are entitled to transfer to an upper secondary school. In fact, this means that in Austria, after Year 4, there is not just a bipartite split but a multiple division of pupils.

This differentiation has serious consequences for a large proportion of pupils: there are over 90 % of academic secondary school pupils, but just 35 % of general secondary school pupils subsequently attend an upper secondary school. Given a huge overlap in performance between school types and ability groups, this system is difficult to justify on the basis of documented achievement. An international overview (cf. Thonhauser and Pointinger 2008, p. 211) of the duration of integrated schools and of pupil differentiation reveals that neither the early separation of pupils nor a longer period of shared schooling *per se* has a negative or positive effect on average achievement gathered for the PISA study. However, it is striking that in all those countries that perform clearly better than Austria, separation is at

least 2 years, often 4 or 6 years later than in Austria. Nevertheless, the average performance of 15-year-old pupils achieved elsewhere is still an obviously insufficient argument for common schooling at the lower level of secondary education.

Research on school careers indicate that girls have greater educational aspirations than boys, that educational aspiration is largely dependent on the social status of the parents, and that there are significant regional differences in aspirations. Research data also reveal a double negative effect for smaller districts: (a) a trend toward stricter assessment of achievement and (b) higher aspirations in terms of pupil achievement relating to academic secondary school entrance (*ibid.* p. 223).

Since Austria has been taking part in PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), much more is known than before about key requirements for school achievement at the lower level of secondary education: about reading competence of pupils from Year 4. In 2006, Austrian pupils ranked mid-table (position 20). In comparison to other participating countries, Austria has:

- A relatively small proportion of pupils that has achieved the highest measured level of competence
- A relatively large gap between the best and the worst readers
- A significant overestimate of pupils' own reading abilities and only a modest indication of motivation in reading (Bos 2007)

4.4.2 Quality Trends and Assurance

From discussions that have taken place on trends in quality and on quality assurance during the last 20 years, a number of phases can be identified. Subsequent to international discussions on school quality, since the 1990s, there have been numerous attempts to take over quality assurance concepts and models from business and to adapt these to schools (TQM, ISO 9000, EFQM). These have been assigned to concepts of local profiling, which anticipated an increase in quality by making individual schools more appealing by improving pedagogical processes and making local changes and by being better able to meet regional needs and the individual learning needs of pupils. However, such a quality strategy also resulted in "bucket schools" and "bucket classes" that had to accept pupils who did not meet the appropriate requirements for the specializations on offer elsewhere.

Since the mid-1990s, the school program concept has been discussed as the core of an overall strategy. This sees trends in quality primarily as a process of acquiring information and transferring it to all levels of the school system. In this way, teachers receive information on the quality of their lessons, schools on the level of their performance, regions on the suitability of their offers for regional demand, and the whole educational system should gain information on the actual efficiency of the whole system based on a network of system monitoring measures. Individual schools should be able to set, implement, and evaluate their own development goals and thus take part in a continuous process of development. An integrated effort compiled by a working group (cf. Eder et al. 2002) was however not implemented.

Generally, the development and discussion of quality programs is characterized by the close interplay of educational administration and research, expressed in the commissioning plans that are then elaborated by researchers with relevant pilot projects being conducted. In the implementation phase, however, politicians were often indisposed to make the recommended changes to coherent concepts and instead sought to make the most of political opportunity by taking out isolated elements and making these binding.

The first PISA results were less than pleasing for Austria and triggered new discussions on improvements in quality. On the one hand, these focused on the formulation and measurement of education standards, while on the other hand, they focused on raising the quality of leadership in schools and on the continual improvement of taught lessons (cf. Haider et al. 2003; the establishment of a “Leadership Academy” and the QIBB Project in vocational schools). The most advanced proposal concerns the introduction of education standards. Following a number of pilot projects relating to their implementation and testing in schools and to their measurement, a set of statutory regulations is imminent. The notion envisages standards for German and mathematics at the end of the primary school and in addition for English at the end of the lower level of secondary education and the end of the upper level of secondary education. From 2012, standard tests are planned for one-third of pupils in each year; feedback is also envisaged for the pupils, the teachers concerned, and the schools. Furthermore, a partially standardized *Matura* – the university entrance qualification – should help bring a degree of objectivity into final examinations at the end of the academic secondary school.

Measures to monitor the education system – with participation in international comparative studies, the ongoing measurement of education standards, and the compilation of a national education report – are already quite advanced. An efficient infrastructure for this was largely created with the establishment of the Federal Institute of Educational Research, Innovation, and Development in 2008. In contrast, only few quality development measures have been implemented at school level. Independent of central discussions or of concepts in progress, in some parts of the school system, large autonomous quality projects have been initiated in reaction to special problem situations:

- Numerous schools are now testing changes to the practice of assessing achievement by using descriptors in addition to numerical grade and work targeting direct achievement (portfolios, work diaries, learn targets).
- Individual groups in school boards are testing a data-protected evaluation of individual schools on the basis of a quality framework in a bid to develop an understanding for its activities.

4.4.3 Dealing with Special Problems

Structurally, the special problems of the Austrian school system mainly concern the large number of pupils at risk – pupils that, in the PISA domain, only achieve the lowest

levels of competence – especially in the general secondary school and the lower level of the academic secondary school. These problems are presumably closely linked.

In a process that has more or less been ongoing since the 1970s, a greater proportion of pupils is attending the academic secondary school compared to the general secondary school with the result that in urban areas, significantly more than half of an age cohort attend an academic secondary school. This process is supported by the increasing numbers of pupils in urban areas with the university entrance qualification from an academic secondary school. All attempts to improve the appeal of general secondary schools for pupils and parents by profiling and specializing or by developing new models of school (cooperative middle schools) have fallen on barren ground. Even the experiment of introducing an additional comprehensive type of school, the “new middle school,” initiated in 2008, appears to be having little success. In the first year, virtually, only general secondary schools took part in the experiment.

A series of subsequent problems are also related to this structural problem. Because high achieving pupils are not taking part, what is being witnessed in urban areas is the birth of “bucket schools,” which, given the composition of pupils and the poor image of general secondary schools, are not really offering their pupils a supportive environment for development. The side effects include on the one hand a relatively low level of competence of pupils – in PISA terms, 20 % of pupils score the two lowest levels of ability – and a level of violence primarily in urban general secondary schools and in intermediate secondary technical and vocational schools that are fed by the general secondary schools. At a political level, there are currently no promising plans in sight to solve this problem.

In a bid to counter the shortfall in basic skills identified in the PISA study, a series of measures were introduced to support educational development. This included the IMST development project designed to offer teaching staff individual support to improve the quality of natural science and mathematics lessons. Since the publication of the first PISA results, schools have been provided with diagnostic instruments to improve pupil reading skills. These serve to help schools identify weak readers at an early stage and offer key training to promote reading competence. There are currently no reports on the success, or not, of these measures.

Generally, efforts in recent years have increasingly attempted to reduce or avoid underachievement at school by introducing incentives. Based on school achievement in the first semester, teachers are called on to forecast whether they expect to see learning problems in the second semester. If so, binding plans have to be drafted in collaboration with pupil and their parents. The reduction of the maximum number of pupils in a class to 25 – a measure introduced in 2008 – has not fulfilled its aim of enabling teachers to provide individual support to pupils.

4.4.4 Measures to Integrate Pupils from Autochthonous Minorities and Pupils from Immigrant Families

Roughly 830,000 non-Austrian nationals live in Austria (or approximately 10 % of the overall population). Of these, about 750,000 do not speak German as their first

language (these are primarily southern Slavs and Turks). At the beginning of primary school, many of them can only speak little German, if at all. Therefore, one of the greatest political challenges currently facing the country is how to ensure that these pupils are given opportunities for personal development and are ultimately integrated into their new homeland. Migration-related multilingualism will continue to remain a central feature of compulsory schooling. However, political opinion on integration strategy is split.

This is reflected in provisions for autochthonous minorities as well as for statutory provisions and private initiatives for immigrant children. School laws and provisions for kindergartens that fall within the competence of the Länder vary in their degree of minority-friendliness: unlike in Burgenland, provisions in Carinthia are somewhat restrictive, and there are a number of projects, some private, in Vienna.

For schools, the regulation on having lessons in their mother tongue and the concept for German lessons is of central importance. Pupils who do not speak German and children from mixed families are allowed to take part in native language lessons with their own curriculum as a voluntary exercise (in primary schools), as an elective (in lower and higher levels of secondary education) or, where applicable, autonomously by schools. There are two competing concepts regarding German as a second language: immigration-critical groups argue in favor of a language course that would precede normal school and begin with a compulsory kindergarten year; more immigration-friendly groups prefer to see second-language acquisition in dealings within a manageable community willing to integrate. On the one hand, the latter concept is without doubt more elaborate, but it does promise more success and corresponds better with democratic principles and is supported by a series of measures either already undertaken or announced (cf. De Cillia 2006):

- Granting the status of an exceptional pupil to school beginners with little knowledge of German for a period of 12 or 24 months
- Addenda to curricula “German for pupils whose mother tongue is not German” that assume that children mainly take part in lessons
- Initiatives for mother tongue lessons parallel to German as a second language
- Assistance for head teachers and teachers at primary schools with immigrant children (“Let’s take the first steps together”)
- Materials for mother tongue lessons with immigrant children (e.g., the trilingual magazine Trio)
- Efforts of integrating parents in the educational process (e.g., as part of “Mummy’s learning German” courses)
- Efforts to employ mother tongue teachers integrated in teams of competent teachers (to date with only modest success)

Success in any of these measures cannot be expected however without a more universal development within society to generate a more immigrant-friendly environment.

4.5 New Developments

The following issues are currently dominating educational developments: language courses for young children (in particular for children from immigrant families), the implementation of education standards, the broad introduction of new middle schools, the reorganization of teacher training, and efforts to have education policy decisions founded in empirical studies.

The field of language courses for young children is currently still work in progress. Decision-makers are grappling with a suitable organization form – kindergarten or preschool, selected groups of children with difficulties, or integrated support in mixed groups – and the scheduling and function of diagnostic tests. There is now political consensus that effective support – not only for children from immigrant families – is indispensable. This program, initiated in 2008, has now been reinstated after being put on ice in 2010.

Following a long period of preparation, 2008 saw education standards anchored in law. In an international comparison, Austria does however manifest a number of idiosyncrasies: skills testing at the end of schooling levels (Year 4 and 8), commitment to norm standards, justified by the needs of a differentiated school system, and the separation of standard verifications of school achievement (cf. Altrichter and Kanape-Willingshofer 2012).

Political discussions dealt primarily with who was to receive feedback of test results and what the consequences of targets not being achieved would be. At present, feedback is given relevance to different levels, i.e., pupils receive feedback on their achievement; teachers see the average scores of their classes, but not the achievement of individual pupils; school heads receive average scores for their school, but not the results of the individual classes, etc. Here, objections were raised mainly by teacher representatives afraid that teachers could be made largely responsible for the failures of their pupils. It is still to be seen what concepts will prevail in the near future. While the measurement of education standards can be seen as an instrument for monitoring the education system without really interfering in the work of the school, the introduction of a central *Matura* for 2013/2014 does signify a break with system tradition, whereby teaching staff were responsible for drafting their own examinations. In view of the considerable resistance from teachers, the introduction of the central *Matura* was postponed for 1 year.

Following the completion of limited school experiments, initiated in 2008/2009 and covering 10 % of schools, the new middle school was not introduced as originally conceived as an additional offer but as a nationwide replacement for the previous general secondary school as a standard form of lower secondary education. All general secondary schools are to be converted to new middle schools by 2015/2016. Thus, the introduction of the new middle schools as a real comprehensive school failed because of the resistance of conservative powers (ÖVP and the teachers' union)¹. Pupils will still be separated after Year 4. The new middle

¹Going against party lines, the recently re-elected governor of Tirol (from the conservative ÖVP party) recently announced school experiments for real comprehensive schools in his state.

school does away with streaming in the form of permanent ability groups, focusing instead – supported by an additional non-teaching lesson in key subjects – on individual differences with subjects.

Another building site currently affects teacher training. The competent ministries are currently working to draft a common system of training for all teachers – teachers at compulsory and higher schools for which pedagogic academies and universities are at present responsible. In the meantime, there is political agreement that a 4-year bachelor course is to form the basis of all teacher training, which can then be extended to include a master's degree. Kindergarten teachers will still not be required to have an academic education.

However, it has still not been decided what institution will accept the initiative, and afterwards be chiefly responsible, for the reform. Several universities have reacted by establishing Schools of Education comprising all the required components of teacher training such as specialist departments, instructional methodology, education, teaching practice, and further training. In some cases, collaborations are being developed between teaching colleges and universities.

Development projects are increasingly being implemented drawing on academic evidence. To support relations between research and development, the Federal Institute of Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System was founded, with offices in Graz, Salzburg, and Vienna. Its responsibilities include applied educational research, quality development, monitoring education, and drafting education reports. Accordingly, the institute will be responsible for organizing participation in the major international assessment programs (PIRLS, PISA, TIMSS, cf. Eder 2012) and for accompanying current national reform projects – education standards, language teaching for young children, the new middle school, the central *Matura* – and the National Education Report for Austria to be compiled every 3 years. The latter will not only contain a whole range of relevant data but also evaluative contributions from renowned academics on important issues dealing with the school system. Overall, this represents a foundation for using empirical evidence as an important principle in evaluative reviews of political reform projects.

Generally, the positive development of empirical research in education has continued over the last 10 years. Results are not only coming more into public light; they are also influencing educational policy decision-making (cf. www.oefg.at).

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