

DUAL STUDIES IN STATE SCHOOLS OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION. CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Annotation. The aim of the article is to signal the indications in favour of conducting dual studies in higher education, to present the model of dual studies in state higher vocational schools created by the author and to discuss the conditions of implementation of the model and its benefits for the socio-economic development on regional and local level. It must be highlighted here, that the proposed model is the result of the research and analyses carried out by the author, observations of state higher vocational education and the author's experiences in managing one of the higher schools belonging to this sector.

Keywords: higher vocational education; state schools of higher vocational education; dual studies.

INTRODUCTION

State schools of higher vocational education undertake and realize numerous enterprises in cooperation with employers – in particular micro, small and medium, running local and regional businesses. However, they are usually operational, and sometimes even ad hoc enterprises. It is much less frequent that the cooperation is strategic, taking such forms that would allow to correlate, to a larger extent, long-term needs of the cooperating parties (Zimny, 2017, p. 245-247). In view of the fact that employers expect from state schools of higher vocational education, above other things, practical education of students, and in this way their proper preparation for professional work, while among key expectations formulated by students there prevail issues connected with preparation for entering the labour market and increasing the volume of practical classes it can be stated that the particularly desired form of cooperation between higher schools and employers is conducting dual studies.

The aim of the article is to signal the indications in favour of conducting dual studies in higher education, to present the model of dual studies in state schools of higher vocational education created by the author and to discuss the conditions of implementing the model and its benefits for the socio-economic development on local and regional level. It must be highlighted here that the proposed model is the result of research and analyses carried out by the author, observations of state higher vocational education and experiences gained by the author in managing one of the higher schools belonging to this sector.

ARGUMENTS FOR DUAL STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Polish education system, including higher education system is, to a large extent, based on the principle of the transfer of knowledge and not of skills. As a result, which is given attention by the authors of reports elaborated within the framework of the following BKL editions, the graduates of schools of different levels do not have the relevant for the labour market cognitive competences related to analytical skills, using and creating knowledge. These schools also do not learn the proper behaviours necessary for the labour market, such as availability, work motivation as well as interpersonal competences, which, in the employers opinion, are commonly indispensable, and at the same time they are deficient in people looking for work (Górniak, 2015, p. 20-21). However, it is worth highlighting that the employers are also to be blamed – particularly in case of the solution recommended in order to decrease the aforementioned incongruity which are the apprenticeships offered to students. 64% of students complain about the lack of the sufficient places, and many of them assess the apprenticeships negatively. In the recent years there were created, as a result of the amendment to the Law on Higher Education, legal frameworks allowing greater involvement of employers in shaping the competences in higher schools – above other things through dual education. The 2011 amendment enabled higher schools to conduct studies of practical profile with the participation of economic entities provided that the way of conducting and organizing these studies should be

specified by a written agreement between the higher school and the economic entity¹. In turn, the 2014 amendment allowed the higher schools an alternate organization of education on practical profile courses which include at least 3-month vocational training – in form of didactic classes realized at the higher schools and in the form of practices taking place at the employer's premises (The Law of 11 July 2014).

Dual studies, as a form of organization of the education process prepared and realized in agreement with the employers and based on simultaneous obtaining academic knowledge at university and gaining practical experience at work, has a wide appeal in various European countries, while the broadest experience in this respect belongs to Germany. The attempts to conduct studies in this form have also been made, to a different extent, by some universities in Poland. Due to the practical profile of studies and the proximity of local labour market the greatest potential for dual studies seems to be in state schools of higher vocational education². Therefore, these schools should, to the extent greater than before, make efforts to organize the education process in such a way so as to create the right conditions for students to reconcile education and work, as well as to aim to obtain cooperation with entities in which students would be hired as employees – within the framework of the employment contract (most likely part-time employment) or civil law contract. Such a solution would allow students the simultaneous use of knowledge obtained by them in practice and in this way better preparation for labour market. Consequently, the employers would have the opportunity to get trained workers, adjusted to their requirements and expectations. In turn, higher schools, apart from fulfilling their basic task that is educating students in order to obtain and update knowledge and skills necessary in professional work, would benefit in the form of improving its image resulting from the growth of its graduates' employability. Thanks to realizing dual studies state schools of higher vocational education would become at the same time the initiators of creating a local triangle of mutual interests in line of: university – student – employer, and it would also contribute to, to a certain extent, keeping graduates on the local and regional labour market.

MODEL OF DUAL STUDIES IN STATE SCHOOLS OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Parallel obtaining knowledge by students during studies at the university and gaining experience at work requires, on the one hand, close cooperation with employers, and on the other, changes in the organization of the education process. When it comes to the latter issue, there are generally possible three alternative solutions, namely: realizing didactic classes on specified days of the week and allocating the remaining days for work (e.g. Monday-Wednesday at university; Thursday-Friday at work); realizing didactic classes during specified weeks and allocating the remaining weeks for work given that it would take place alternately (e.g. one week at university, another week at work etc.); realizing didactic classes for several consecutive weeks in the semester and allocating the remaining weeks for work (e.g. referring to winter term: October-November at university; December-January at work). The choice of a particular solution should result from agreements between state school of higher vocational education and employers, given that the solution should be, for organizational reasons, unified for students of the same course and year of study. The most beneficial seems to be the first of the presented solutions, which is not necessarily the easiest to implement from the organizational perspective, but, in the author's opinion, it would allow, to a greater extent, the participating persons to feel that they are at the same time students and workers and in this way it would foster simultaneous education and work. In case of adopting such a solution, it would be

¹ The amended provisions said that the aforementioned contract can specify: the possibility of conducting classes with students, in particular practical ones, by the employees of the economic entities; the participation of the economic entity in elaborating the curriculum; the way of funding the studies by the economic entity; learning outcomes; the way of realizing apprenticeships and practices. See: The Law of 18 March 2011 amending the law – The Law on Higher Education, the Law on academic degrees and titles and degrees and titles in Arts and the Law on amendments to certain other laws, Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 84, Item 455, Article 1 (117). It is worth highlighting here that in the aforementioned article the legislator refers only to the cooperation with economic entities. The specific nature of numerous study courses, in particular from the field of humanities and social science, makes them possible to be run not in cooperation with economic entities but with entities operating in the fields of culture, education, social assistance etc., including self-government entities and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, it can be assumed that referring only to economic entities is either a negligence on the part of the legislator or a deliberate omission according to which the economic entities are those that have been entered in the National Register.

² In fact, some of them conduct studies in this form – particularly on technical courses. However, generally speaking, the level of involvement of state schools of higher vocational education in realizing dual studies is very low, which is confirmed by the results of the survey carried out among university authorities (Zimny, 2017, p. 231).

reasonable to gradually increase the number of days at work during completing subsequent semesters, that is, in other words, reversing the relation between obtaining knowledge and gaining experience.

Quite apart from the proposed solutions, which concentrate on the organization of the education process, it must be highlighted that in the case of first-cycle studies dual studies should be realized not earlier than from the third semester. Although studies in state schools of higher vocational education are run within practical profile, during the first two semesters there prevail general and basic subjects which makes (and should be) the early stage of studies to a large extent general academic. What is more, the first year of studies should be more selective-adaptive for students referring to their further education, that is having or not having the status of student, and also selective referring to their participation in dual studies. More precisely speaking, the point is that dual studies should be realized not by all the students of a given course and year of study, but by part of them – at least the half. Such a solution would have two advantages. Firstly, assuming that students would be recruited for work by employers according to their exam results, command of foreign languages and a job interview, employers should be provided with the possibility of choosing the best candidates for work among the broader range of students. Secondly, including in dual studies only part of students should foster mutual competition among them, assuming, of course, that dual studies are connected with them possibility to get a job, and consequently getting remuneration, would be perceived as a specific reward for good grades and activity for the school, city etc. It is worth signalling here that, apart from gaining practical skills necessary in a particular profession, students should be preparing their theses related to the issues of functioning of the workplace, preferably in relation to specific employer's needs. Summing up, graduates of state schools of higher vocational education participating in dual studies would not only obtain the title of Bachelor or Engineer (first-cycle qualifications), but also the possibility of gaining relevant professional experience, and some of them would also have the opportunity to be employed right after they graduate. Running dual studies in the discussed schools was presented in picture 1 in the form of the appropriate model.

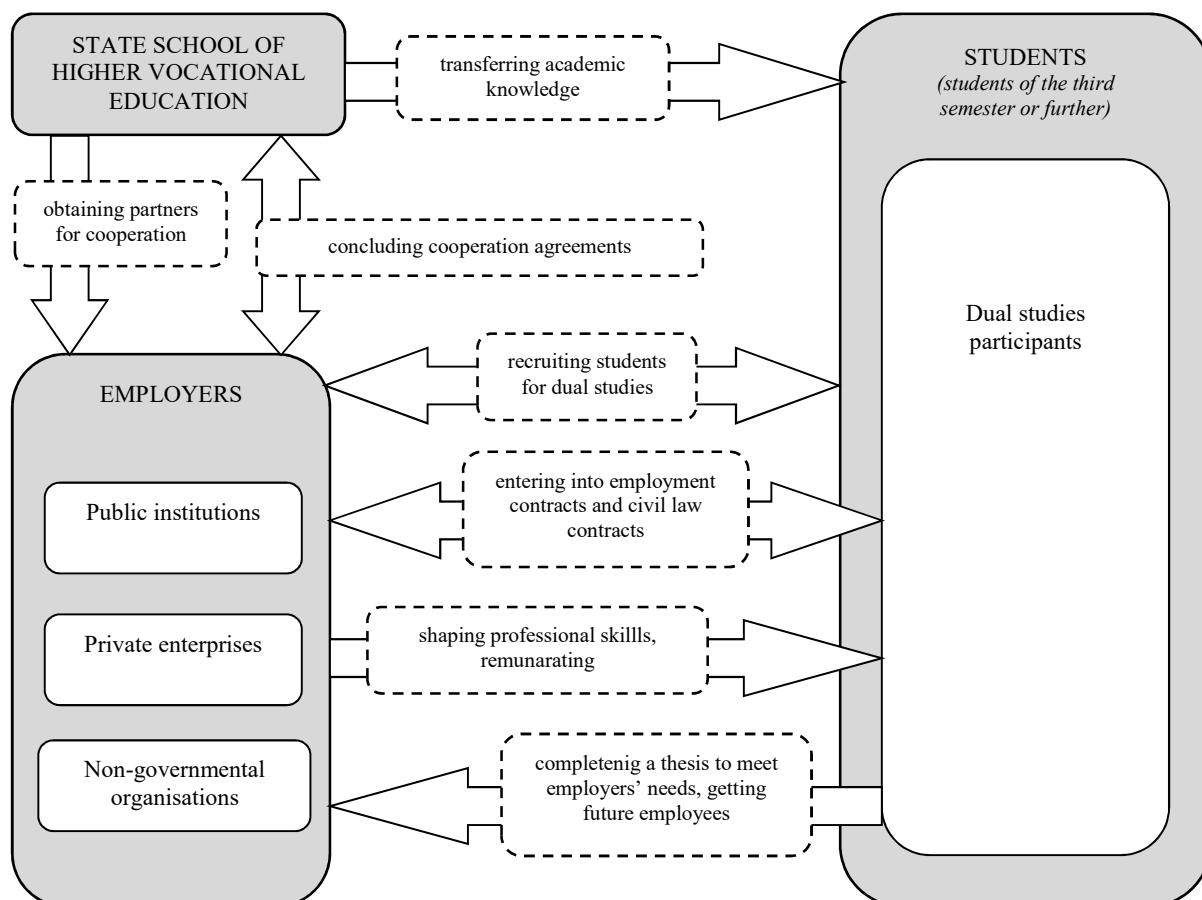


Figure 1. Model of dual studies in state schools of higher vocational education

CONDITIONS OF IMPLEMENTING THE MODEL AND ITS BENEFITS FOR THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Convincing employers of the merits and profitability of employing students part-time (or in the framework of civil law contracts) while they are still studying at higher school is the crucial condition of implementing the model of dual studies. The main argument which could be used for this purpose by the university authorities, assuming it would be they who endeavor to get partners for cooperation, is highlighting the possibility of the involvement of employers in shaping students' skills and attitudes as future workers. It is not about activities for creating human resources for the needs of various economic entities, but about activities aiming at professional preparation of students to meet their needs, that is for work in a particular company. It would be reasonable that the university authorities should highlight here the fact that no higher school is capable of shaping graduates who could meet the expectations of every company. The employers' involvement at the stage of studies would allow to reduce the costs of later selection and adaptation for work among graduates. The possibilities of involving employers, and in particular private enterprises in conducting dual studies would be, to a significant extent, determined by the structure of economic entities operating in the environment of state schools of higher vocational education – both with regard to their size and sector. It could be expected that the cooperation in the discussed aspect would appeal, to a greater extent, to large entities (however, we cannot obviously exclude a significant interest from numerous smaller companies) and those which operate in sectors suffering from staff shortage, and, at the same time, in sectors characterized by increasing or stable development prospects.

Parallel obtaining by students academic knowledge at university and gaining practical experience at work would undoubtedly bring a range of benefits for socio-economic development. Apart from the obvious issue, that is increasing graduates' employability and keeping them, at least to a certain degree, on the local labour market, and consequently slowing down the process of flight of young people from the area where state schools of higher vocational education operate, it must be highlighted that implementing dual studies by the discussed schools would contribute to creating the triangle of mutual interests of: university – student – employer. It could be assumed that the proper long-term cooperation of these three parties would yield long-term positive relations in social and economic sphere. The relations would probably affect changes in the way of perceiving the needs and expectations of the partners representing different fields of activity, and at the same time it would contribute to embedding specific rules of conduct – particularly among students participating in dual studies. It also cannot be excluded that the abovementioned relations would orient the behaviours of particular students, shaping their daily activities and behaviours (Stecyk, 2016, p. 237). Furthermore, the trilateral, close cooperation between the university, students and employers oriented towards better preparation of graduates for the labour market and oriented towards obtaining by employers trained workers would translate into building a network of contacts on regional and local level, contributing to, in the long run, reducing transaction costs.

Implementing the model of dual studies by state schools of higher vocational education could contribute to regional and local developments also as a result of building mutual trust among particular parties involved in the realization of dual studies. The broader and deeper the cooperation of the discussed schools with employers would be, the more the rays of trust being the specific expression of social capital could overlap and have a broader range consequently affecting the development of the city, district and subregion. The great correlation among the discussed entities would make the entities become more flexible and systemic changes taking place in the region where they operate would occur with their participation. Alternate organization of learning at higher school and at work would fit in with the assumptions made by the learning region, oriented towards creating intangible resources such as: knowledge, skills and competences which play a growing role in explaining developmental processes. It is worth highlighting here that the principle which should be adopted by learning regions in their activity is supervising the developmental process whose profile is relevant to the needs of regional labour market (Longworth, 2006, p. 16). Therefore, it can be expected that implementation of the proposed solution in the form of the most effective form of professional training, would be the direct answer to the needs of the labour market and an indirect answer to the developmental problems and challenges of the regions where the state schools of higher vocational education operate.

CONCLUSIONS

Organising practices for students, conferences, seminars, festivals of science, debates and discussions forums as well as consulting curricula are undoubtedly significant forms of cooperation of state schools of higher vocational education with employers. However, this cooperation should take more advanced forms which would allow, to a greater extent, to correlate the needs of higher schools and employers, and, additionally would foster, in case of success of joint enterprises, building partner relations between the parties. Dual studies, being one of the most advanced forms of the discussed cooperation, are relatively difficult to realize due to the necessity to study at university and work in a company at the same time. Nevertheless, the possibilities of conducting these studies are quite diversified depending on the profile of the university. Definitely greater possibilities in this case have these state schools of higher vocational education in which there prevail technical courses than these higher schools where there prevail humanities and social science courses.

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