



DUAL APPRENTICESHIP



Policy adoption of the Mexican Model of Dual Apprenticeships

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This research summary is part of an international comparative study about the policy adoption of the German model of dual apprenticeships in India and Mexico. The study attempts to contribute to an informed understanding of the motivations of policymakers to adopt the dual apprenticeship model, the influence of business and German cooperation actors on this decision, and how this global policy idea was re-contextualised in the case of Mexico.

KEY FINDINGS:

- In a context of declining prestige of the 'maquila' model based on low-cost competitiveness, the development plans of President Peña Nieto focused on improving the productivity of the economy.
- The adoption of the dual model of apprenticeships by the Ministry of Education was expected to raise the level of technical skills among vocational schools' graduates.
- Chambers of commerce played a key role at the political level convincing the government of the feasibility of the proposal and at the service delivery level in its implementation.
- Private and public German actors collaborated with Mexican stakeholders in the adoption of dual apprenticeships through technical and financial cooperation.
- The Mexican Model of Dual Apprenticeships (MMFD) was the result of a purposeful translation of some of the principles of the German model into the Mexican context.
- The MMFD became a small vocational education and training subsystem with high standards of training.



Background of the study

Isolated experiences of dual training had taken place in some industrial regions of Mexico during the '90s, such as the first dual training programme pilot partnership between CONALEP (vocational education provider) and Mercedes Benz in the State of Mexico between 1993 and 1998. However, dual apprenticeships did not penetrate the agenda of the federal government of Mexico until a high-level meeting between President Peña Nieto and Chancellor Angela Merkel in October 2012. Soon after, the Undersecretary of Upper Secondary of Education announced the intention of the Mexican government to study the adoption the dual model of apprenticeships in a seminar organised by COPAMEX (Mexican chamber of commerce) and its German partners in February 2013. Before the end of the year, the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) had already created a steering group of the “Mexican Model of Dual Formation” (MMFDⁱ) with CONALEP, COPARMEX and CAMEXA (German Chamber of Commerce in Mexico), and launched its first pilot scheme in 11 Mexican states.

In this study, we set out to answer two main research questions: *What were the main drivers that guided the adoption of the German model of dual apprenticeships in Mexico? And what contextual and institutional circumstances might explain the way in which it was translated into the Mexican context?*

Research results

The government agenda: economic productivity

The economy of Mexico has seen a decline in the international competitiveness of its exports, which has steadily slowed down its economic growth and aggravated the exposure of its labour market to global economic fluctuations like the recent Great Depression. After decades of intense trade-liberalisation and export-oriented development policies, the ‘maquiladora’ model of low-cost manufacturing based on tax exemptions and cheap labour was struggling to compete with the lower production costs in China and in other Asian emerging economies. In order to respond to these economic challenges, in 2013 the new centre-right government administration of President Peña Nieto announced a plan to increase the productivity of the economy and accelerate economic growthⁱⁱ. An inter-departmental strategy was put in place to coordinate all the actions of the different ministries towards the objective of ‘democratising productivity’.

These new economic plans and ideas led to the problematisation of the whole education sector. In a country where less than 60% of adults had some secondary education, the lack of adequate human capital was identified as one of the main causes of the poor productivity of the economy, justifying the start of a political period of intense reform activity in education. In the field of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), reports indicating a shortage of skilled technicians in companies connected to global markets contrasted with the poor labour market returns of secondary TVET graduates. The Mexican government interpreted this mismatch as proof of the low labour market relevance of TVET schools and the need to upgrade the technical skills of young people through a greater involvement of employers in the provision of training.

The lobbying from the chambers of commerce

One important driver of the adoption of the policy in Mexico was the ability of the Mexican and German chambers of commerce (COPARMEX, CAMEXA) to present the strengths of the dual model as perfectly aligned with the objectives of the economic productivity agenda of the Peña Nieto administration. The selection of the MMFD was discursively justified as a policy solution to the difficulties of many companies to be competitive in global markets, what was attributed to the low level of technical skills among TVET graduates and to the difficulties to recruit highly qualified technicians. Another important driver of the reform was the existence of dual apprenticeship initiatives with German companies operating at local level across the country because it reinforced the idea that the policy proposal was feasible in the Mexican context. The framing and selling strategies from COPARMEX and CAMEXA were key in convincing government officials at the SEP:

“It was a seminar organised by CAMEXA and the German Embassy [...] They invited us, and I think COPARMEX was very involved [...] I thought there were opportunities because we saw successful experiences. And I think that was one of the main motivations for us. It had worked well with German companies [in Mexico] I even remember that my boss said: if this is so good, why we have not done it yet?”

(Policymaker, SEP)

COPARMEX and CAMEXA managed to be politically influential because they had hard and soft resources at their disposal. The principal hard resource CAMEXA was the knowledge of the German apprenticeship model and experience of transferring this model to other countries. In terms of soft resources, the most important driver was the prestige of the German brand because of the good performance of its economy. COPARMEX lacked the technical knowledge and expertise in dual apprenticeships but it could offer a network of 65 business centres spanning Mexico’s most important cities in all federal entities. According to Coparmex’s own figures, the organisation represents roughly 36,000 entrepreneurs that generate 4.5 million jobs and 30% of Mexico’s GDP. Therefore, Coparmex could be a strategic partner to scale-up the MMFD and support its expansion into all states and economic sectors. Furthermore, Coparmex could frame the implementation of this programme within a discourse of corporate social responsibility, promoting youth employment, the creation of better-paid jobs and increased quality of education.

Institutionalization of the Mexican Model of Dual Apprenticeships

The federal government turned the initial pilot programme of MMFD into an institutional track available to all upper secondary education students through an education reform in June 2015ⁱⁱⁱ. This political decision received the support from German cooperation (BMZ) with a signature of a Memorandum of Understanding that secured financial resources to strengthen the operation of the model and its expansion to all the states of the federation, however no changes were introduced in the labour law. This, while undoubtedly proved useful in expediting the formalisation of the model by avoiding possible trade union blockades, at the same time left the apprentices without the legal recognition of appropriate labour rights.

At the same time, the role of the chambers of commerce was well established as a central actor in the governance and operation of the model, mainly through facilitating the engagement of individual companies and the monitoring and certification of the quality of training at the workplace. For instance, COPARMEX is directly responsible for recruiting individual companies for the programme and organises the external certification of the occupational competencies of apprentices according to the more demanding standards developed by CAMEXA and other stakeholders within the National Council for the Standardization and Certification of Labour Competencies (CONOCER). The involvement of the chambers of commerce has been key to convince individual companies and the Mexican government of the importance of the quality of training at the workplace, but this focus on the quality of training has been at the expense of its expansion.

Table 1. Policy adoption timeline of dual apprenticeships in Mexico

2008	•CONALEP starts to get involved in local initiatives of dual apprenticeship training with German companies in Mexico
2009	•The German Embassy in Mexico brokers a cooperation agreement between CONALEP and the German Ministry of Education (BIBB)
2010	•CAMEXA takes part in knowledge exchange events about the dual apprenticeship model with chambers of commerce in Germany
2012	•CAMEXA starts to collaborate with CONALEP to expand local initiatives of dual apprenticeship training •President Peña Nieto met Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin to discuss economic development plans and energy investments
2013	•Creation of a Technical Committee of the MMFD with participation of COPARMEX, CONALEP, CAMEXA and SEP •Public announcement of the plans to create the MMFD
2014	•Signature of an Bi-lateral Cooperation Agreement for the Development of the MMFD between Mexico and Germany
2015	•End of the pilot phase •Approval of the education reform that institutionalizes the MMFD

Source: Authors' elaboration

Way forward

Policymakers in Mexico designed, together with chambers of commerce and German partners, a TVET sub-system that tried to emulate the characteristics of the dual apprenticeship model in Germany. The option adopted by the Mexican government may certainly be very effective to train a 'blue collar aristocracy' for international companies but it will be difficult to expand to other companies and sectors of the economy given the demanding institutional requirements for its operation, suggesting a possible trade-off between access and quality when transferring the German model of dual apprenticeships to other contexts.

ⁱ Mexican Model of Dual Formation Official Website:

[http://mmfd.com.mx/#:~:text=El%20Modelo%20Mexicano%20de%20Formaci%C3%B3n%20Dual%20\(MMFD\)%20busca%20la%20vinculaci%C3%B3n,de%20lograr%20una%20educaci%C3%B3n%20integral](http://mmfd.com.mx/#:~:text=El%20Modelo%20Mexicano%20de%20Formaci%C3%B3n%20Dual%20(MMFD)%20busca%20la%20vinculaci%C3%B3n,de%20lograr%20una%20educaci%C3%B3n%20integral)

ⁱⁱ http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5299465&fecha=20/05/2013

ⁱⁱⁱ Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) Agreement 06//06/15 establishing dual training as an educational option for the upper-secondary level

http://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5396202&fecha=11/06/2015