

Sophie Lacher

PROMOTING EQUAL ACCESS IN GERMAN ADULT EDUCATION: NAVIGATING RESOURCE MOBILISATION AND THE COMMITMENT TO “LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND”

ABSTRACT

This article examines how access to adult education (AE) in Germany meets the principle of “Leaving No One Behind” and explores the dynamics and challenges of the sector. It categorises AE into company-based AE, individual vocational AE, and non-vocational AE, and examines the complexities and challenges of mobilising resources for these sectors. Using Schuetze’s (2009) theoretical framework on the financing of lifelong learning, this study critically examines the allocation of resources within the German AE landscape. Drawing on current policy documents and recent research, the analysis highlights key policy adjustments needed to ensure equitable access to AE for all. While Germany has made progress in certain areas, the research points to partial compliance with the principle of “Leaving No One Behind” and highlights persistent inequalities that are inadequately addressed by existing policies. This article calls for more inclusive and comprehensive approaches and emphasises the need for a strategic mobilisation of resources.

Keywords: resource mobilisation, adult education, educational equity, Leaving No One Behind, Germany

SPODBUJANJE ENAKOPRAVNOSTI DOSTOPA V NEMŠKEM IZOBRAŽEVANJU ODRASLIH: VPRAŠANJE MOBILIZACIJE VIROV IN ZAVEZANOST, DA »NIKOGAR NE PUSTIMO OB STRANI« – POVZETEK

V članku proučujemo, do katere mere dostop do izobraževanja odraslih v Nemčiji izpolnjuje načelo »Nikogar ne pusti ob strani«, ter raziskujemo dinamiko in izzive v tem sektorju. Izobraževanje odraslih kategoriziramo kot izobraževanje odraslih v podjetju, individualno poklicno izobraževanje odraslih in nepoklicno izobraževanje odraslih ter ob tem raziskujemo kompleksnosti in izzive mobilizacije virov na tem področju. Na podlagi teoretičnega ogrodja financiranja vseživljenjskega učenja, ki ga je zastavil Schuetze (2009), naša raziskava kritično proučuje dodeljevanje virov v nemškem izobraževanju odraslih. Analiza na podlagi sodobnih političnih dokumentov in raziskav pokaže ključne prilagoditve, ki bi bile potrebne, da bi dosegli pravičen dostop do izobraževanja odraslih za vse. Nemčija je sicer na nekaterih področjih napredovala, vendar le delno sledi načelu,

naj »nikogar ne pusti ob strani«, obstoječe politike pa še vedno nezadostno naslavljajo trdovratne neenakosti. Zato pozivamo k bolj vključujočih in celovitim pristopih ter poudarjamo potrebo po strateški mobilizaciji virov.

Ključne besede: mobilizacija virov, izobraževanje odraslih, pravičnost v izobraževanju, Nikogar ne pusti ob strani, Nemčija

INTRODUCTION

Education is not only important for children, young people, and young adults, who generally go through the school and training system, but also for people of all ages. This underlines the importance of lifelong learning, which includes that “people should be enabled and encouraged to continue learning throughout their lives” (Schuetze, 2009, p. 376). In general, lifelong learning is seen as an “umbrella concept” based on different interpretations and (economic) interests (Schuetze, 2009, p. 376). This complexity often leads to market-oriented goals being prioritised over the holistic development of individuals and communities, potentially neglecting critical and emancipatory aspects of education (Lima & Guimarães, 2011). At the same time, lifelong learning is also described as a public good and a human right for all (Duke et al., 2021). However, adult education (AE) is often given the least attention in the context of lifelong learning, as several studies confirm (International Council for Adult Education [ICAE], 2020). As a result, AE is underfunded in many countries and has fewer resources than other areas of education (ICAE, 2020). Resources are understood as the various goods, services, and institutions that an individual or organisation can access, either directly or indirectly, and include psychological, physical, institutional, temporal, and material or monetary categories (Hummelsheim, 2010, p. 140). In order to promote AE in the context of lifelong learning, resources must be mobilised from politics, companies, and individuals (Schuetze, 2009). States and their policies also have an interest in promoting this learning, because only if they offer their population learning opportunities for competent action can the states become competitive on the global market. Furthermore, social participation and the promotion of social equality are important for social peace. Demographic changes in many industrialised countries, such as shrinking populations and shrinking workforce, also pose a challenge (Pack et al., 2000, p. 10). In addition, AE structures in many countries can disadvantage people with lower skills and limited resources, making access to learning challenging (Schuetze, 2009, p. 376). Furthermore, rapid technological change, environmental challenges, and global threats to peace, security, and democracy have increased the demand for AE, as noted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018).

Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations [UN], 2015, p. 17). It includes the principle of “leaving no one behind” (Duke et al., 2021, p. 13). To achieve this, every citizen must have access to learning opportunities, which includes aspects related to education, employment, and social protection policies

(Dunbar, 2019). Therefore, national governments and supranational organisations such as the European Union (EU) provide financial incentives to support AE. However, access, attainment and the structures of AE as part of lifelong learning vary widely from country to country (Palmer, 2020). Furthermore, the diversity of AE is a challenge as it is difficult to fit into an organisational structure (European Parliamentary Research Service, n.d.).

In order to understand how resources are mobilised for AE in the context of lifelong learning, a case study is appropriate due to the diverse structures mentioned earlier. This is also important because the political commitments of SDG4 are closely linked to existing national strategies, planning, and monitoring mechanisms (UN, 2017). The focus is on improving existing systems to achieve the global goals of SDG4 (UN, 2017). The following article therefore focuses on Germany as “a high-income, comparatively large EU Member State” (Singh et al., 2022, p. 104). The main question addressed by this article is: “What are the main challenges and potential strategies for mobilising resources to ensure equal access to AE in Germany, with a particular focus on the principle of ‘Leaving No One Behind’, especially in the context of different segments of AE?”¹

To investigate the research question and thus the access to and mobilisation of resources for AE in Germany, this paper uses policy documents and statistical data from policy sources (national and supranational, e.g. from the EU) and systematically examines selected policy measures in the three segments of AE in Germany (see Figure 1) with the help of research findings from AE research. The results are then analysed on the basis of Schuetze’s (2009) model for financing lifelong learning, which is presented in the following section as a conceptual framework. This is followed by an overview of the German AE system to better understand and contextualise the analysis. Following, the three segments of AE funding in Germany are presented. Subsequently, the current challenges and strategies proposed by policy makers and stakeholders related to the principle of “Leaving No One Behind” in Germany are explained and discussed on the basis of current policy papers and laws at national and EU level. In this way, the research question can be addressed, facilitating a discussion on the political adjustments required to ensure equal access to AE for all.

SCHUETZE'S MODEL FOR FINANCING LIFELONG LEARNING AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Schuetze (2009) has identified three different models for the conceptualisation of lifelong learning, each reflecting different policy objectives. The first, the “emancipatory or social justice model”, focuses on using education to ensure equality of opportunity and fairness in society, and argues for a comprehensive and utopian concept of lifelong learning for

1 In the context of AE in Germany, the terms “Erwachsenenbildung” (adult education) and “Weiterbildung” (continuing education) are often used interchangeably in policy documents and legal texts, which can lead to confusion (Lattke & Ioannidou, 2021). While a detailed explanation of the distinction among these terms is beyond the scope of this article, the term AE will be used as a basic, common term.

all, with an emphasis on equity and inclusive education (Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). In contrast, the second and third models are more limited in their scope. The second model, the “mixed state-market model”, views lifelong learning as appropriate for a modern economy and society, and “for all who wish, and are able, to participate” (Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). This model focuses on facilitating different learning purposes and removing institutional barriers, particularly through technology enabled distance and online education (Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). The third model, the “human capital model”, focuses on AE and skill development to meet the changing demands of the labour market (“Lifelong learning for finding or keeping jobs in a changing labour market”; Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). The third model views lifelong learning as a strategic tool for a knowledge-based economy and emphasises the central role of a highly skilled and adaptable workforce as a driver of industrial innovation and global competitiveness (Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). This model shifts the responsibility for skills development to the individual worker and thus differs from prior views that emphasised industry-based AE (Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). The divergent goals of these models require different resource allocation strategies and funding mechanisms tailored to the different actors involved.

The question of financing is about who should bear the costs: either the beneficiaries or those who have the capacity to pay (Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). Funding models generally fall under individual, organisational, collective, or government funding (Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). Most lifelong learning financing systems are mixed models that recognise that benefits are shared between multiple parties (Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). These models cover a wide range of learning activities, even if they do not cover every aspect, such as early education (Schuetze, 2009, p. 377). There are various funding mechanisms, often under country-specific names, with the different prototypes categorised according to the primary cost-bearer, whether individual learners, employers, or the state.

In the current German context, the model for financing lifelong learning may reach its limitations. While the state remains an important actor in the monitoring and promotion of educational provision, it is adapting due to factors such as internationalisation, global competition, and diminishing public resources (Lima & Guimarães, 2011). This adaptation has led to a greater emphasis on individual responsibility for education, viewing learning as an investment akin to financial capital (Lima & Guimarães, 2011). Furthermore, the model may not fully account for the impact of digitalisation and changes in the German labour market, which requires constant updating of skills due to technological advances and the transition to a knowledge-based economy. In addition, the changing role of the public and private sectors in Germany, in particular the increasing involvement of private companies in employee training and changes in government education funding policies in response to economic changes and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may not be adequately reflected. To answer the research question, it is also necessary to examine how the different types of resources, including financial, technological and political support, are specifically allocated and utilised in the context of Schuetze’s models in the German AE context. Despite these limitations, the use of Schuetze’s framework for

financing lifelong learning, with a focus on the AE sector, provides a well-established theoretical framework for the analysis. This approach improves comparability with existing research and provides a structured way of understanding the complexities of AE funding as part of lifelong learning funding. The following section provides an overview of the AE system in Germany as the basis for the analysis.

OVERVIEW OF THE SYSTEM OF AE IN GERMANY

Germany is a federal country with smaller units called *Laender* (states or provinces) and *Kommunen* (local authorities) under the responsibility of the states. This federal structure gives states a certain degree of autonomy, with responsibilities that also include education and infrastructure. Matters of national importance, such as foreign policy and defence, fall under federal jurisdiction, creating a separation of powers between different government levels (Bulmer, 2017, p. 3). Article 20, paragraph 1 of the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany) sets out the responsibilities of the federal government and each of the 16 states (Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection, 2022). Educational responsibilities and the financing of education systems are determined by political and administrative processes. Public spending on education is divided between the federal government, the *Laender* and *Kommunen* based on educational policy objectives and specific requirements (European Commission [EC], 2023). The *Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung* (BMBF; Federal Ministry for Education and Research) is responsible for education policy at the federal level, while the *Laender* have their own education ministries. Despite the autonomy of the *Laender* in education matters, there are nationally applicable laws and regulations on AE. The federal government oversees vocational AE outside schools, sets principles for academic AE, conducts research into the effectiveness of AE, and initiates new projects through experimental programs (Nuissl & Pehl 2000, p. 17). Collaboration between the federal government and states exists, with financial assistance provided by the federal government for significant municipal educational investments (BMBF, n.d.). Legislative responsibility is also shared, with proposals for extracurricular education and training drafted by the federal government requiring the approval of the *Bundesrat* (Federal Council), which is composed of representatives of the *Laender*, as laid down in the German constitution (Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection, 2022).

The German Education Council's definition of AE as "the continuation or resumption of organised learning after the completion of an initial phase of education of varying length, typically following the start of employment or family responsibilities" (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2001, p. 4, translated) guides this concept, with a focus on formal education. However, AE also includes non-formal and informal activities known as *Allgemeine Weiterbildung* (general continuing education) or *Allgemeine Erwachsenenbildung* (general adult education). These cover a wide range of courses, from literacy programs and secondary education for school qualifications to language, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), soft skills, family education, and leisure-oriented courses (Lattke & Ioannidou, 2021). Participation in AE is typically voluntary, although there are always

exceptions (e.g. integration measures or training measures for the unemployed with compulsory participation).

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND POLITICAL STRATEGIES IN GERMANY

In order to subsequently examine the research question and thus the access to and mobilisation of resources for AE in Germany, the paper uses policy documents and statistical data from policy sources (national and supranational, e.g. from the EU) and, with their help and research findings from AE research, analyses selected measures in the three segments of AE in Germany (see Figure 1). This segmentation is carried out by the Adult Education Survey (AES; BMBF, 2022), which is conducted in Germany every two to three years as part of the EU statistics, but also independently at even shorter intervals than desired by the EU due to national interests. The AES provides valuable insights into the population's participation in AE (BMBF, 2022). It classifies participation in AE into three segments as shown in Figure 1. The funding structures for AE in Germany vary depending on the type of education and come from various sources, including the state (the Federation and the Länder), local authorities, the private sector, providers of AE institutions, private households, and the Federal Labour Office (Nuissl & Pehl, 2000, p. 26). When considering the three segments, in addition to funding, it should be noted that other resources such as support systems, guidance services and motivational initiatives (psychological resources), the physical infrastructure such as classrooms, libraries and the technical equipment necessary for AE (physical resources), the administrative and organisational structures that support AE (institutional resources) and the provision of time for both learners and teachers (time resources) must be expended in order to realise participation in AE.

Figure 1

AE segments in Germany based on the AES

<i>company-based adult education (AE)</i>	<i>individual vocational adult education (AE)</i>	<i>non-vocational adult education (AE)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation takes place entirely or predominantly during paid working hours or paid leave for education purposes (as part of employment) • the resources for this adult education activity are provided by the employers by financing the adult education and releasing their employees from work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adult education activities are primarily carried out for professional reasons • the individuals and their families or the state (in funding programs for defined target groups) bear or subsidise the costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adult education activities are attended more for private reasons • the individuals and their families bear the costs • in some cases, there are indirect support measures by the state (e.g. through tax refunds)

Note. Adapted from BMBF (2022).

Public spending on education in Germany amounted to 4.1% of GDP in 2018, which was below the EU average of 4.6% (EC, 2019b, p. 3) and just at the lower end of the 4-6% recommended by the UN (2017). While real investment in education has shown some growth, the EC reports an investment gap in education and infrastructure in Germany (EC, 2019a, p. 6). Although Germany has achieved a relatively high participation rate in AE of 60%, which has increased over the years (BMBF, 2022), the participation rate is below the EU average (EC, 2023, p. 15; Eurostat, 2023). In addition, the EU recommends reducing inequalities in access to AE, which are often influenced by socio-economic background (EC, 2023, p. 19). The most recent Adult Education Survey (AES) in Germany shows that of people aged 18 to 64, 71% of those with a high school diploma have participated in at least one AE activity (BMBF, 2022, p. 35). This percentage drops significantly to 60% for individuals with an intermediate school-leaving certificate and further to 44% for people with a low school-leaving certificate (BMBF, 2022, p. 35). This underlines the fact that the higher the level of education, the higher the participation in AE and illustrates the unequal access to AE at the individual level. This pattern, unchanged since 1991 (BMBF, 2022, p. 35), is often referred to as the “Matthew Effect”, in which those with more educational resources tend to acquire even more (Walberg & Tsai, 1983). The federal government’s efforts to counteract this trend are primarily aimed at low-skilled workers and people with low literacy skills, but are often geared towards the needs of the labour market.

The AES shows that of the 60% of respondents who stated that they had taken part in AE, 48% had participated in company-based AE (BMBF, 2022, p. 25). The model of company-based AE segment (see Fig. 1), often referred to as “single employer funding” (Schuetze, 2009, p. 383), makes employers responsible for the AE of their employees, a necessity arising from the need to adapt to the changing demands of the labour market. While employers have to release their employees from work and are primarily responsible for company-based AE, or at least for supporting their employees in doing so, they are encouraged to take advantage of measures offered by the *Bundesagentur für Arbeit* (Federal Employment Agency) affiliated with the *Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales* (BMAS; Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs), such as *Bildungsgutscheine* (education vouchers), which are mainly aimed at people without usable vocational qualifications who are at increased risk of unemployment (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.-a). This system allows employees, those at risk of unemployment and the unemployed to apply for and use education vouchers issued by the Federal Employment Agency for accredited education providers. As a result, AE activities are subsidised by the state on the basis of individual entitlements (vouchers) (Schuetze, 2009). In particular, state support for company-based AE in Germany places a strong emphasis on ensuring employability and preventing unemployment, with a particular focus on low-skilled workers. This focus is evident in laws such as the *Qualifizierungschancengesetz* (Qualification Opportunity Act) of 2018 (Bundesgesetzblatt, 2018) and the *Arbeit von morgen-Gesetz* (Work of Tomorrow law) of 2020 (Bundesgesetzblatt, 2020). The focus of these laws is on the promotion of AE in the context of structural change, which means that digitalisation and automation are given considerable priority.

In Germany, many employees (excluding e.g. civil servants, freelancers), regardless of their level of education, have a legal right to *Bildungsurlaub* (educational leave) in 14 out of 16 states. This means that employers must grant their employees paid leave for AE (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund [DGB], 2022). The content of the AE measure does not necessarily have to be related to the employee's job (DGB, 2022). The right to educational leave is five days per year, or ten consecutive days within two years (DGB, 2022). Germany is a signatory to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 140 on educational leave, which aims to promote vocational training, general and political education, and trade union education (Düwell, 2001). However, because of Germany's federal structure, it has been and remains the responsibility of the *Laender* to enact their own legislation on educational leave. From a financial perspective, employers continue to pay wages during educational leave, similar to regular leave (DGB, 2022). However, employers are not responsible for covering course fees, teaching materials, or travel and accommodation costs, which employees have to bear themselves, although they can later claim these expenses on their tax returns. This system is referred to as "parafiscal (collective) funding" (Schuetze, 2009, p. 383). Interestingly, although almost 77 per cent of employees express an interest in continuing training, only one to two per cent actually use their legal entitlement to educational leave (DGB, 2022). There may be several reasons for this, which cannot be analysed in detail in this article. However, possible challenges in the perception of educational leave are highlighted as part of the discussion.

The costs of participation in AE outside of employment, both individual vocational and non-vocational AE (see Figure 1), need to be recognised by individuals at first sight. Simultaneously, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to exacerbate existing inequalities and social divisions (Hüther & Klös, 2022; Käpplinger & Lichte, 2020). There are various providers of individual vocational AE and non-vocational AE offers. However, the state indirectly supports AE through financial support to *Volkshochschulen* (adult education centres), which can then offer reduced course fees, and through the possibility of tax rebates for certain AE measures. *Volkshochschulen* mainly offer general AE. This recognition of AE as a public good has historical roots dating back to the Weimar Constitution of 1919 (Lattke & Ioannidou, 2021). Even today, the Continuing Education Act is still in force in 14 out of 16 German states. *Volkshochschulen* continue to operate under the mandate of "education for all" (Süssmuth & Eisfeld, 2018, p. 763, translated). Their core mission is to ensure that AE is accessible to everyone within the framework of public responsibility (Rossmann, 2018). They aim to meet a wide range of interests and educational needs through a comprehensive and diverse educational program (Rossmann, 2018). Therefore, the comprehensive supply of adult education centres in various forms of public sponsorship in Germany is of great importance (Rossmann, 2018). According to the understanding of adult education centres, education "includes more than the ability to learn throughout life, the willingness to learn and the acquisition of knowledge. Education encompasses the individual acquisition of world-related attitudes (mindsets) and behaviours (ethical positions)" (Süssmuth & Eisfeld, 2018, p. 764, translated). The implementation of this comprehensive claim to participation correlates

with multilayered structural principles, including the principle of voluntary participation, the diversity of methods and media and integration into a multi-level political structure (Seitter, 2018). In addition, the guiding principle of “comprehensive openness” (Süssmuth & Eisfeld, 2018, p. 764, translated) includes the self-image and commitment of adult education centres to reach the educationally disadvantaged and to provide a broad, participant-oriented educational offer (Süssmuth & Eisfeld, 2018). Despite the policy emphasis on these aspects and the increasing importance of AE, the challenge of structural underfunding of public AE in Germany remains (Meisel, 2019). Although adult education centres receive public funding and share responsibility for “education for all”, they do not receive full funding (Meisel & Sgodda, 2018). Instead, the funding structure of the institution mainly consists of three main sources (Huntemann et al., 2021, p. 14):

1. Basic institutional funding by states and municipalities: approximately 35% of revenue.
2. Contributions from participants: on average around 33%.
3. Public funds raised from the federal government, states, municipalities, and the EU (including projects): make up around 28% of total financing.

Consequently, the work of adult education centres is characterised by demand- and supply-orientation (Meisel & Sgodda, 2018, p. 229). Funding for public AE is provided by the federal states or their municipalities, but the institutions must position themselves on the market or the various quasi-markets such as employer-funded or individually-funded or mixed-funded/co-funded AE by offering appropriate courses and securing funds through national or EU funding.

The diversity of institutional size, technical resources, and course offerings of adult education centres reflects the different resources provided by local authorities and the dependencies on state and local authorities through different organisational structures. Despite these differences, the adult education centres offer a wide range of courses with reduced participation fees for everyone with the help of state subsidies and their mission statement. In addition, (political) foundations, religious groups, and associations often offer additional educational programs with reduced or no participation fees, either self-financed or through funding partnerships with government agencies at various levels (Horn et al., 2023). Consequently, political decisions play a role in the selection of topics and priorities in this context. In contrast, private providers generally operate on commercial principles and may set participation fees, which can lead to the exclusion of certain groups. In addition, certain communities, such as environmental initiatives or certain professional groups, may organise training initiatives that are eligible for project funding. Funding announcements at state, federal and EU level can strategically emphasise specific issues that often align with the key challenges described by the OECD (2018, p. 3). These challenges include environmental issues related to climate change and resource scarcity, economic changes driven by rapid advances in research and digitalisation, and uncertainties arising from globalisation that can lead to economic risks and potential crises.

In addition, the federal ministries address important social needs by providing financial support for both full-time and part-time integration courses. Mastering the language of

the host country is considered a crucial skill for the successful integration and active participation of migrants in society (Homrighausen & Saif, 2021). Integration courses serve as a nationwide language support program for adults with insufficient German language skills. These courses are a central measure of the federal government's integration efforts and are primarily funded by the state, specifically by the *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (BAMF; Federal Office for Migration and Refugees; Homrighausen & Saif, 2021). The BMBF also regulates and monitors the content, organisation and implementation of these measures. In addition to the general integration courses, the Federal Government offers other special integration courses, including literacy courses, courses for learning the Latin script as a second script, and vocational language courses (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.-b). In order to take part in such a course, individuals need a certificate of eligibility issued by the BAMF (n.d.-b). The integration courses comprise a total of 700 teaching units and consist of a basic language course, an advanced language course, and an orientation course (Homrighausen & Saif, 2021). While the primary goal of integration courses is to promote social integration, their importance for completing training and securing employment is also emphasised (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.-b). Vocational language courses are clearly geared towards employability and are aimed at integration into the labour market (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.-b). The costs of integration courses and vocational language courses must be at least partially covered by the learners themselves (BAMF, n.d.). However, depending on factors such as citizenship, residence status, economic situation, and personal circumstances, individuals can often apply for substantial co-financing or full funding of these courses by the BAMF or their employer (BAMF, n.d.). The courses take place at accredited training providers (BAMF, n.d.).

There are also initiatives in which Germany cooperates with the EU. One example of this strengthening of European cooperation and promotion of AE is the ERASMUS+ program (EC, n.d.-a). This program provides funding for various AE activities, including teacher training, curriculum development, and the creation of new learning materials. It also supports the development of new AE learning models, such as online and flexible learning pathways, while promoting the exchange of good practice and innovations across the EU (EC, n.d.-a). In addition, the EU has introduced several policy measures to support AE in Germany and other member states. These include "Europe 2020 – A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth" (EC, 2010), which sets targets for improving education and training across the EU, and the "New Skills Agenda for Europe" (EC, n.d.-b), which aims to ensure that Europeans have the skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. This focus on the demands of the 21st century, including digitalisation, automation, globalisation, rapid change, and transformation, is also reflected in Germany's policy programs. However, the EU acknowledges that Germany faces both an investment gap in education and infrastructure (EC, 2019a, p. 6) and lags behind the EU average in terms of individuals and their basic digital skills, which affects the readiness of the workforce (EC, 2023, p. 64). While Germany has initiated some measures, such as the Work for Tomorrow Act and a German Recovery and Resilience Plan (GRRP) to address climate change and digital transformation (Federal Ministry of Finance, 2022, p. 34), it is clear that more

sustained public investment, greater emphasis on upskilling and retraining programs, and increased investment in education and research are essential to provide equitable training opportunities for all adults (EC, 2019b, 2020b, n.d.-b).

INTEGRATING SCHUETZE'S LIFELONG LEARNING PARADIGMS WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF "LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND"

In answering the research question about the challenges and potential strategies for mobilising resources to ensure equitable access to AE for all in Germany, with a focus on the principle of "Leaving No One Behind", the analysis reveals a complex interplay of policies, paradigms, and practices. Schuetze's (2009) conceptual framework, which divides AE into different paradigms, provides a valuable basis for critically examining the challenges and strategies of resource mobilisation in Germany.

The preceding analysis highlights that Germany can be classified as a "mixed state-market model" (Schuetze, 2009, p. 384), characterised by:

uneven access to, and uneven participation in, learning, based primarily on socio-economic background. Although the state pays for public education as well as some special programs for those under-served by the public system, state intervention is patchy and normally starts too late [...]. The market has nothing to offer that would help the poor learners or drop-outs since they are normally too poor to pay or to borrow money from the capital market. Moreover, some forms of state financing discriminate against the economically disadvantaged, especially tax credits or reductions that are available only for those families that do have a taxable income. (p. 384)

For example, although the German state pays for public education through the adult education centres and some special programs for the low-skilled, the state measures only consider specific target groups with a focus on the labour market. This is characteristic of conservative welfare states like Germany, which have high social spending with distribution based on family and work status, and moderate wage differentials influenced by the statutory minimum wage but different wage structures across sectors, while social democratic welfare states (e.g. in Northern Europe) typically have generous social spending and low wage differentials due to high minimum wages (Markowitsch et al., 2013). According to the "human capital notion" (Schuetze, 2009, p. 378), individual workers are responsible for acquiring and updating their skills or acquiring new skills in order to improve their employability and career opportunities (Schuetze, 2009). In the segment of company-based AE (see Figure 1), employees are supported at least in part by employers, who in turn may apply or partially request support from the state, thus indirectly supporting individual employees in line with the principle of the human capital concept. Outside the labour market or without the background of maintaining or promoting employability, participation in AE is mostly self-financed and receives little state support. An exception

is the adult education centre described above, which is supported by the state but still has to charge course fees due to the financing model. This also illustrates the characteristics of the human capital model, which is clearly at odds with the principle of “Leaving No One Behind”.

Schuetze’s (2009) third model, the Social Emancipatory Model, with the principle “Life-long learning for all who wish, and are able, to participate” (p. 377), is found in Germany’s intention to use European funding for various initiatives, including a digital education campaign, strengthening social participation and building a pandemic-resistant health system (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, 2023). There are also efforts to promote inclusion, with Germany allocating a significant share of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funding to social inclusion programs (EC, 2023). These efforts are aimed at addressing educational inequalities, especially among those not born in the EU, which are influenced by socio-economic background (EC, 2023, p. 64), and are disadvantaged by the Matthew Effect explained above. Furthermore, as a member of the UN, Germany has committed itself to the 2030 Agenda. However, these efforts still seem to be political concepts rather than an actual guiding principle of continuing education policy.

To further explain the integration of Schuetze’s (2009) paradigms and strategies highlighted above, it becomes clear that these strategies are deeply rooted in the overarching ideals embodied by these paradigms. The social justice paradigm (Schuetze, 2009) encompasses Germany’s intention to address historical inequalities by targeting policies at marginalised and vulnerable groups. This is manifested in initiatives targeting low-skilled workers, migrants, and disadvantaged groups. Subsidised integration courses, vocational training programs, and support mechanisms for the unemployed are examples of this paradigm. However, the inclusion of labour market aspects in the policy agenda can be traced back to the goal of maintaining prosperity and competitiveness, which is also dominant in the strategies of the EU and the OECD (e.g., EC, 2020a; OECD, 2018).

In addition, Germany is committed to improving education globally through the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015), which in turn promotes peace and thus also improves trade opportunities for Germany. The mixed state-market paradigm (Schuetze, 2009) provides skills to adapt to a dynamic labour market. Company-based AE, state-supported adult education centres, and integration courses reflect the commitment to diverse learning opportunities. Despite these provisions, inequalities in access are evident in that, for example, only employees can participate in company-based AE, and even in the case of government-subsidised educational measures, the costs have to be (partially) borne or laid out by the individual. Even if there are mechanisms to get these costs reimbursed through tax returns, this system can exclude people with few financial reserves from AE. The human capital paradigm (Schuetze, 2009) recognises individual responsibility and is consistent with the German approach of involving stakeholders in resource mobilisation through multiple sources of funding, allowing participants to invest in their own learning journeys.

When Schuetze's (2009) model is combined with the central principle of the research question, "Leaving No One Behind", a comprehensive narrative emerges that is consistent with the essence of the principle. Lifelong learning paradigms provide a lens through which we can understand how resource allocation strategies aim to bridge educational inequalities in AE. The social justice paradigm embodies the ethos of inclusivity and ensures that marginalised individuals are not excluded because of financial or social constraints. The mixed state and market paradigm seeks to create pathways that enable everyone to participate in learning, regardless of background, and is therefore consistent with the spirit of inclusivity. The human capital paradigm, while emphasising individual responsibility, seeks to enable all members of society to actively engage in lifelong learning, in line with the mission of the principle. However, the complexity of implementing such strategies should not be underestimated. As exemplified by the German approach, a mix of funding mechanisms is emerging to bridge the gaps, yet inequalities in access persist.

Schuetze's model also highlights the complexity of estimating and allocating resources, which is critical to realising the ambition of "Leaving No One Behind". This applies not only to financial resources, but to all types of resources (see Hummelsheim, 2010, p. 140). Germany's complex landscape, characterised by diverse funding mechanisms, demonstrates the multifaceted nature of resource allocation under different paradigms. Challenges emerge in accurately quantifying the resources needed to achieve inclusive AE while balancing economic gains and societal transformation.

By synthesizing Schuetze's model with the "Leaving No One Behind" principle, the discussion goes beyond theoretical foundations to offer a comprehensive perspective on how resource mobilisation strategies interact with lifelong learning paradigms. This synthesis not only enriches the discourse, but also provides a nuanced analysis of the complicated interplay between resource allocation and the overarching goal of ensuring equal access to lifelong learning for all in Germany. At the same time, other aspects that influence policy, such as demographic and technological change, should also be considered. As the model was developed back in 2009, it has some limitations, as explained in the introduction.

DISCUSSION: MOBILISATION OF RESOURCES FOR AN "AE FOR ALL IN GERMANY"

Germany faces structural challenges in light of trends towards de-globalisation, supply chain restrictions and protectionism (Hüther & Klös, 2022). Addressing these challenges and increasing resilience to the impact of the pandemic will require harnessing new technologies, evolving business models, and promoting increased private and public investment (Hüther & Klös, 2022). Furthermore, low-skilled workers face various barriers to further education, including demotivation, negative learning experiences, fear of failure, time pressure, financial challenges and organisational hurdles (Pfeiffer, 2019; Seyda, 2019). Empirical studies also show that low-skilled workers are less likely to participate in AE programs that use digital media and also have less experience with digital media in general (BMBF, 2020, p. 36). This inequality, coupled with an underestimation of the

importance of (digital) AE, poses a challenge for the implementation of the political program and the principle of “Leaving No One Behind”.

In addition, all individuals have to finance at least part of their individual vocational and non-vocational AE. Although the state provides support structures for all, supporting adult education centres as a basic learning infrastructure and counselling services, the structures are often complex. This also poses a challenge in terms of the Matthew Effect described above. Educational disadvantage in childhood and adolescence is difficult to compensate by mobilising resources in adult education. Due to the lack of funding and the promotional organisation of AE, resulting in different regulations, there is unequal access both financially and in terms of the quality and scope of AE opportunities, which can vary regionally. Moreover, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to exacerbate existing inequalities and social divisions (Käpplinger & Lichte, 2020). This does not correspond to the ideas and principles of AE as part of lifelong learning and the “Leaving No One Behind” principle of supranational organisations such as the EU, OECD, or United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), although their reforms can certainly promote adjustments in Germany.

With regard to the strongest AE segment, company-based AE, there are measures to support it, but the individuals are dependent on the willingness of their employers to promote AE or have to bear some of the costs themselves (e.g. educational leave). Moreover, policy strategies to promote AE are often labour market oriented. There are also financial burdens for employees in relation to educational leave: the described low take-up of educational leave despite high interest may be partly due to the complex process of researching, selecting and applying for suitable educational opportunities and to a lack of knowledge about the individual entitlements. However, the guidance structure in Germany is characterised by a multiplicity of services and providers addressing different target groups at different phases of life (Käpplinger, 2020). This diversity allows for low-threshold and target-group appropriate access, but at the same time leads to a lack of transparency about the further education market and the offers (Käpplinger, 2020). This can make it difficult for some people to navigate and can lead to them being left behind in terms of educational opportunities for all. In addition, guidance often takes place in AE institutions, making it unclear whether guidance is independent and impartial (Käpplinger, 2020). Furthermore, employees have other responsibilities, such as family responsibilities, which make it difficult to take advantage of opportunities such as educational leave, since, for example, the cost of childcare may be associated with opportunities that require more travel time than to the workplace or a trip. Representative bodies such as trade unions mainly advocate AE but do not cover the costs. As a result, not all employees have equal access to educational leave.

In addition, there are measures for the integration of refugees and migrants, but their funding also depends on certain government regulations and they are labour market oriented. Thus, it is clear that the federal government actively supports AE as a response to societal challenges such as integration. This support is not limited to funding programs

but also includes monitoring and regulating participation through certificates and accreditation mechanisms. Measures are not always fully funded. This also applies to general AE, as explained in the context of adult education centres. These centres, due to their historical background and basic principles, uphold the principle of “Leaving No One Behind”. However, despite the educational policy demands of these aspects and the growing importance of AE, there is, as already mentioned, the problem of structural underfunding of public AE in Germany (Meisel, 2019). As a result, people have different access to AE depending on their socio-economic status, the region they live in, etc. This also highlights a point of criticism from a lifelong learning perspective: on the one hand, it is generally accepted that basic education and professional development are financially supported (Jost & Kvatchadze, 2021), while on the other hand, the promotion of general AE is often discussed critically (Jost & Kvatchadze, 2021). Lifelong learning encompasses the concepts of formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning (Tissot, 2004). However, as explained above, Germany also primarily promotes AE opportunities in formal and non-formal learning contexts, which may constitute barriers to participation in AE for certain groups of people.

CONCLUSION

On the one hand, the explanations show that Schuetze’s (2009) model seems to be a suitable approach for analysing German policies in the context of the principle of “Leaving No One Behind”. On the other hand, it becomes clear that different actors are responsible for mobilising resources for AE in Germany. AE providers always participate in different markets and quasi-markets to attract participants and secure funding, and there are also state programs to support participation in AE. These are often regulated through accreditation of providers and certificates of eligibility. State funding for AE is often closely linked to the labour market. Adult education centres play a special role in individual vocational and non-vocational AE and have a clear social mandate with their principle of “education for all”. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in participation in AE, which are due to educational attainment, but also to life circumstances, socio-economic, and migration backgrounds. Policies appear to be partially effective in tackling exclusion. Policies that benefit all people, regardless of age, employment and educational attainment, would be useful. However, this would likely require Germany to invest more resources, as called for by the EU (EC, 2023). It must also be noted that the costs of AE measures often have to be borne in part or in full by the participants themselves. Financial support programs that are accessible to all people would be helpful here. In the long term, Germany as an export nation will benefit from a generally highly educated population. In this context, integration courses should also be made accessible with a minimum of bureaucracy in order to make Germany attractive as a country of immigration and to counteract the shortage of skilled workers. In some cases, the influence of the EU and its political agenda is also evident, for example, through corresponding funding programs. In general, the topic of human capital is at the top of the agenda in almost all political programs. Generally,

however, based on the funding programs and legal provisions analysed, the focus is more on labour market-oriented AE rather than on AE in the sense of lifelong learning and the principle of “Leaving No One Behind”. In order to realise the idea of AE in the context of lifelong learning for all people, more resources are needed, which necessitates new forms of AE in the sense of a “learner-based model of lifelong learning” (Schuetze, 2009, p. 387). Corresponding political policy would also be advisable for Germany.

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