Dual Vocational Training Students in Andalusia: Perspectives and Challenges

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Abstract: The implementation of the dual vocational training policy establishes horizontal training between schools and the labour market, contributes to educational continuity and is an effective measure against early school leaving. In addition, it has a link with the business sector that enables labour integration and also participates in the training and qualification of students. To approach it, we start from a historical overview of education, where we analyse the different laws passed in recent decades and investigate dual vocational training as an effective policy for training for employment and training of skills, abilities and competences necessary for the acquisition of a job. To this end, we present a study in which we make visible, through interviews, the perspective of students in relation to vocational training in the autonomous community of Andalusia. The majority of those interviewed gave a positive assessment of these studies. Moreover, the interviews show how this educational policy has a positive impact on the labour market insertion of the participants.

Keywords: dual vocational training; education policy; labour market

1. Introduction

In order to understand the current model of education, it is relevant to consider the importance of legal reforms. In this sense, the power of politics, in its legislative and executive component, adopts, in its attempt at transformation, the most transcendental decisions on education: firstly, those educational priorities and objectives that meet the needs of the student body, and secondly, the organisation of the education system, curricular content, teaching methodologies and the training and selection of teachers at different levels or stages of education [1]. In the 1990s, with Europe in full development, the Spanish Vocational Education and Training (hereinafter VET) system evolved significantly in order to train students in education to be useful for employment and for their insertion in the labour market. With the extension of compulsory schooling to sixteen years of age, and in order to ensure the continuity of a considerable number of students within the formal educational itinerary, a type of training was introduced in 1994. This training had a professional profile and it aimed at students with a low performance in their studies or in a situation of vulnerability. In this sense, all the reforms carried out up to the present day have been based on the precepts of inclusion and vocational training development, although, in practise, there is a debate between comprehensiveness and segregation, exclusion and inclusion, and precariousness or dignity [2]. In this way, measures and reforms that contribute to the improvement of the education system and the labour market are implemented in order to support the transition from education to employment.

Following these considerations, throughout the history of education in Spain, VET has undergone a variety of forms and references that have alternated in order to guarantee an increasingly effective and quality learning system. However, from the emergence of VET to the present day, there are several milestones, without much social and political
consensus, that have accompanied the course of the different actions [3]. Following this logic, the field of VET is particularly sensitive to the changes in successive educational reforms; i.e., it is very complex to address a transformation in the educational system due to the complexities of the system itself, wrapped in circumstances where the participation of educational actors is scarce, political consensus is almost non-existent and the economic budget does not reinforce the new academic requests. In addition, the lack of time, voices resistant to change, the contradiction of objectives in the norm, the extensive bureaucracy in the process, the absence of social transformations or the inability to manage the work teams are not up to the task of inescapable changes to improve the system [4].

It is important to clarify that, in the emergence of the different educational reforms that have been made in Spain, the focuses of action that have been carried out to respond to two fundamental questions are relevant: one, how can compulsory and post-compulsory education be implemented in the educational system in a coherent and productive manner? And, two, how can VET be included within this secondary education in a way that guarantees access to these studies?

VET, in its initial approach, with the General Education Act of 1970, was conceived as an educational mechanism to guarantee access to and permanence in the education system for students who were close to leaving school in a disadvantaged situation, coming from minority groups and with socio-economic problems (see Table 1). This stage was also intended to ensure minimum levels of educational quality and would help to reduce educational inequalities in the promotion of the different grades. However, this idea, with a positive approach towards the most vulnerable groups, meant, in the collective imagination, a significant loss of academic value and the discrediting of these studies [5]. However, although its creation originated with little legitimacy and social support, already in the final stage of Franco’s regime, it did represent an innovative transformation for the education system.

**Table 1. General Education Law.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Key Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>General Education Act [<a href="https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/1970/08/06/pdfs/A12525-12546.pdf">https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/1970/08/06/pdfs/A12525-12546.pdf</a> (accessed on 5 February 2024)]</td>
<td>Structure of education in General Basic Education (EGB). Free education. Promote equality of educational opportunities. Compulsory schooling from 6 to 14 years of age. Baccalaureate (BUP) + Orientation Course from 14 to 18 years old. VET with innovative aspects organised in three levels: FP1 and FP2 as a pathway after EGB and BUP and FP3 as a short exit after the first cycle of university studies (section that was not implemented).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration.

The General Education Law was in force until 1990. It was at a time of greater democratic consolidation that the Organic Law for the General Organisation of the Education System in Spain (LOGSE) was designed and enacted, with a social democratic government that tried to combat the current problems of the time: a high rate of school failure and the discrediting of vocational training, with premature routes between the academic and professional pathways. However, this educational system, in force until 2006, defined secondary education from a comprehensive point of view, with a more flexible curriculum and the elimination of the double qualification for accessing, on the one hand, baccalaureate studies and, on the other, vocational training. However, an analysis of this resulted in students who were unable to pass compulsory education being restricted in their access to these professional studies, and in turn, Social Guarantee Programmes (PGSs) were designed to
facilitate this referral to the labour market [6]. This resulted in stigma and a disconnection from the education system that did not help in the very aim of the law (see Table 2).

Table 2. Organic Law for the General Organisation of the Educational System.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Key Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Organic Law for the General Organisation of the Educational System [6]</td>
<td>Structure of education in General Basic Education (EGB). Free education. Promote equality of educational opportunities. Compulsory schooling from 6 to 14 years of age. Baccalaureate (BUP) + Orientation Course from 14 to 18 years old. VET with innovative aspects organised in three levels: FP1 and FP2 as a pathway after EGB and BUP and FP3 as a short exit after the first cycle of university studies (section that was not implemented).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration.

It was not until 2006, after a change of central government, that a new educational reform was implemented called Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education, better known as LOE, which repealed the previous government’s law (LOCE), which had little effect (see Table 3). With this new law, the second cycle of lower secondary education was reorganised and there was a significant change for students who did not manage to finish secondary education. The PGS gave way to the Initial Vocational Qualification Programmes (PCPIs) with significant changes in their interpretation. Firstly, students with promotion problems could obtain a qualification and continue post-compulsory studies. Secondly, these studies were integrated into the national qualifications system, at VET level 1, and with a significant percentage of students who then continued on to the CFGM [4].

Table 3. Organic Law on Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Key Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Source: own elaboration.

It was in 2013 when, after a new change of government, another new educational reform was approved, which gave rise to Organic Law 8/2013, of 9 December, for the improvement of educational quality (LOMCE) (see Table 4). With a similar structure to the previous ones, following the parameters of the LOGSE in terms of the primary, secondary and baccalaureate cycles, we can find sufficient evidence that they are raised with the new proposal. In this way, the subjects are grouped into core, specific and free configuration subjects. In the last year of ESO (fourth year of ESO), students can choose to enrol in subjects focused on vocational training or the baccalaureate. Also, at the end of each cycle (six year of primary, fourth year of ESO and second year of baccalaureate), level tests were implemented, graded by staff from outside the school. And finally, for vocational training, another curricular design was implemented. The PCPIs were repealed to give way to Basic Vocational Training, which begins in the third year of ESO and with the particularity of obtaining the secondary school diploma or being able to access the CFGM.
Not content with so many educational modifications over the last few decades, in 2020, with another change of government, the foundations were laid for the creation of a new education law, the Organic Law for the Modification of the Organic Law on Education (LOMLOE), which once again introduced changes in the education system and transformations far removed from the previous law. In this sense, and in view of the current transformations, VET acquires a decisive role as a safe route to employability (see Table 5). In this way, access conditions are made more flexible, where bridges are established with the rest of the education system and greater importance is given to basic training cycles aimed at students with specific educational support needs (SENiS). Likewise, there is a notable intention to dualise training (dual vocational training) to ensure that students come closer to companies and to provide work experience for faster and more productive labour market insertion.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Key Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Source: own elaboration.

Based on the above, and taking into account the educational changes that have taken place in the Spanish context, this paper focuses on the importance that students attach to VET and on understanding, in a more decisive way, the educational and employment transitions of those who undertake these studies. In view of the question posed, numerous national and international studies have been carried out that provide interesting contributions on the social, educational and economic factors that converge to make VET a reality [7]. Likewise, it is essential to focus on the students’ impressions, which requires an effort to perceive the educational processes that are being forged in relation to the school, the curriculum and the labour market. Furthermore, without losing sight of the dual vocational training dimension, it is important to focus on the main actors in the educational phenomenon, on the one hand, the teaching staff and, on the other, as mentioned above, the students, as both are the mainstays involved in the teaching and learning process. Consequently, it is important to take into account their different experiences within the school
context and to make their needs and expectations visible by making them the protagonists of their own lives [8].

2. Dual Vocational Training as a Training Policy towards Employment

In the Spanish political debate on the importance of moving towards more linear transitions between training and employment, the dual vocational training model is strongly supported. The alternation between theory and practise, which nods to the German VET model, which takes into consideration its socio-economic benefits, low unemployment rates, improved student skills and greater youth integration into the world of work [9], has been positioned in the current context as the best alternative to facilitate employment for young people, improve their skills and adapt them to business demands [10]. With this perspective, and taking into consideration that vocational training studies bring with them a bias that harms the group that attends them, it is true that, in recent years, VET has been presented as a viable and real alternative that facilitates labour market insertion. In this sense, measures have been promoted that respond to a new, innovative VET that overcomes imposed social stereotypes and enjoys more credibility and respect [11].

This is stated in the latest Adecco report [12] on employment, which devotes an intense analysis to check employability and the relationship with VET. Following the importance of these lines, the number of jobs grew in Spain once the COVID-19 health situation was normalised, which brought with it positive growth in terms of employment levels. With regard to VET, it is important to consider the importance of the different curricula of the training cycles, where training in the educational centre and practical activity in the workplace enhance both theoretical and practical learning. In this way, student participation in the company in a more active way will lead to a closer link with the labour market and will adapt more positively to its demands; i.e., the transition from the educational system to the professional world will be carried out more efficiently. However, in order to achieve the latter, there must be two important keys to consider: on the one hand, a close connection and collaboration between companies and VET centres and, on the other hand, quality teaching and qualification for students [13].

In the Spanish case, before the impact of the economic crisis and before considering dual vocational training as a more viable and effective formula for integrating young people into the labour market, the importance of work in the company was already conceived, although not with the same interpretation. In this sense, in terms of training for employment, there was training in the workplace and non-work placements and, with regard to university training, the practicum. However, from Europe and in favour of duality, there has been a rethinking of the ways to promote and encourage new learning for students, more focused on practise, action and experience, simultaneously with the accumulation of theoretical knowledge, which is also important in the young person’s career [3].

In this way, the importance of acquiring specific training, more focused on the company as opposed to that considered as general, with more continuity of the academic model, will contribute to the possibility of a more effective labour market insertion; i.e., it has a better fit and adaptation to the type of work required by a given company [14]. Likewise, given the importance of dual vocational training, Organic Law 3/2022, of 31 March, on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training, was passed. This law is more concerned with socially and economically transforming today’s society, providing higher professional qualifications throughout life and generating a greater connection between the world of work and the formal education system. Thus, dual VET will contribute to a significant improvement in employability after the impact of the crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic and will contribute to the eradication of early school leaving [15].

In line with these considerations, there are several studies that indicate that students who complete a VET cycle have more chances of finding a job. Therefore, with an innovative dual proposal that is close to employment, it will increase the chances of finding employment [16–19]. In this regard, we present the most significant data in relation to employment. To this end, we include a comparison in which we can see how the percentage
of students who have studied dual vocational training is higher for both intermediate and higher levels (see Table 6). In this way, it is a great advantage for the labour market insertion of graduates [20]).

Table 6. Affiliation of intermediate vocational training and advanced vocational training graduates in 2019–2020 by dual/non-dual mode and vocational family in the first year after graduation (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Family</th>
<th>Intermediate Vocational Education</th>
<th>Higher Vocational Education</th>
<th>Difference between the Two</th>
<th>Intermediate Vocational Education</th>
<th>Higher Vocational Education</th>
<th>Difference between the Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dual</td>
<td>No Dual</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dual</td>
<td>No Dual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and Sporting Activities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and Management</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Arts</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce and Marketing</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and civil engineering</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity and Electronics</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and Water</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Manufacturing</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality and Tourism</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Image</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Industries</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science and Communications</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation and Maintenance</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Furniture and Cork</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety and Environment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural and Community Services</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Vehicle Maintenance</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average STEM Families</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Industrial Families</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average ICT Families</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared by the authors using EDUCAbase [20].

However, if we compare the German VET system with the Spanish model, we can find a society that is more committed to vocational training. The backbone of its law, which originated in 1968 and was amended in 2005, is the perfect example of consensus and balance, very equidistant from Spanish education policy. Moreover, all the bodies in charge of German vocational training have a notorious influence on the decisions they make, committed to the learning of the students, to the objectives, to the time structure of the training and to the contents. Furthermore, in each company, staff councils are formed, represented by employers and employees, which establish a working relationship that
3. Materials and Methods

Within the framework of the national project’s challenges and challenges in the implementation of dual training in Spanish vocational training, financed by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, a study is carried out with the aim of analysing the different youth transitions towards vocational training. Its interest lies, after a historical review of the different educational laws and the importance of vocational training for employment, in looking at the different experiences and expectations of the different social agents involved in the educational system who pay special attention to vocational training as an itinerary that facilitates the transition from school to work. The aim is, therefore, to establish those particularities to improve the impact of these studies.

Although the aforementioned project has a broader perspective, for this work we are going to approach the research from a qualitative perspective by conducting 10 semi-structured interviews in order to make the situation of VET students visible. This number of interviews was conducted because it was the point at which theoretical saturation was reached, starting to obtain repetitive information that did not bring novelty to the research [21]. For the selection of the participants, iterative and saturation sampling [22] was carried out and the distribution of the interviews was carried out in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia.

In order to carry out this study, an interview script is proposed that addresses different thematic blocks related to the implementation of VET in Andalusia.

Specifically, the thematic blocks were as follows:

1. Educational trajectory prior to the FFD: this includes questions on what their educational trajectory prior to the FFD has been like.
2. Other previous educational trajectories: in this block, we ask students to refer to relevant information about their lives (family, health, housing, etc.) that they consider may have contributed to their educational decisions.
3. Non-formal or informal learning: they are asked about their previous work experience and learning outside the formal education system.
4. Transitions to VET: questions are included on knowledge of the cycle studied, motivations for studying it, and the selection process, among others.
5. Experience during VET: this section asks about their experience with VET, whether or not their expectations were met, and relationships with classmates and teaching staff, among others.
6. Advantages, challenges and challenges of the FPD: this includes questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the VETD.
7. Transitions after VET: they are asked if they have pursued other studies and about their entry into the labour market after VETD, experience and conditions.
8. Projections: this final block aims to make the interviewee reflect on how they perceive their professional future.

In order to carry out this study, we propose an interview script that addresses different thematic blocks related to the implementation of VET in Andalusia. To this end, we consider it important to approach how the dual mode is being instituted, the involvement within the business sector and the access to the labour market from the students’ point of view.

The interviews were conducted in the first two quarters of 2021 with an average duration of 1 h. They were recorded and, in order to guarantee ethical standards, the anonymity of the actors was guaranteed with an informed consent form that informants had to read and sign. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted online. The participants resided in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia and came from the provinces of Granada, Malaga, Almeria, Seville and Cadiz. Finally, a content analysis [7,23] was carried out to analyse the ideas expressed in each of the interviews, where the meaning of the words, phrases and topics addressed show an important interest for the interviewer and
provide information about the answers given, so that, in their analysis, the content of the messages is made explicit and systematised. Specifically, through content analysis, we have contributed to the study of dual vocational training as an employment policy, youth trajectories, training and work transitions, and the experience of students in terms of their experience, motivation and future prospects. The Atlas.ti programme was used for the analysis. Finally, the interviews were transcribed to facilitate their subsequent analysis.

4. Results

The results are arranged and organised into five themes for a more coherent approach to the situation of students studying vocational training. In this way, the aim is to observe the continuity of training and subsequent labour market insertion from the perspective of the subject, the central protagonist of our research.

4.1. Current Trajectories since the Economic Crisis

Getting a stable job that is conducive to a more realistic approach to emancipation is crucial to ensure an independent life. For this, the importance of VET is crucial because of its contractual relationship with the labour market. The impact of the 2008 economic crisis meant a social transformation with social dangers for young people who wanted to embark on an independent life. Deprived of work and without education, they were left unemployed and with difficulties in continuing with their life expectations. Faced with this situation, vocational training, although it already had a tradition, albeit with a negative connotation, in education is gaining momentum and, after numerous reforms and important changes, is emerging as a course of study that can bring about a new approach to integration. For instance, in recent years, VET has received greater media and political attention with great contributions from external influences such as the European Union (EU) and the OECD [24] that have awakened the importance of professionalisation. The dual perspective, therefore, is beginning to emerge as a powerful mechanism capable of providing the necessary competences, attitudes and skills for learners, focusing on more specific training linked to a specific job.

However, the life course of young people should be approached according to the specific experiences lived in a given social context, that is, in the time and place where they live, and relate to their environment. These characteristics imply contemplating the social and economic scenarios in which they relate, bearing in mind that personal biography is the reflection of certain social and educational conditioning factors that we have to consider [13] and that indicate transformations in the trajectories towards employment. First, we find those trajectories of young people with a fragile and unstable silhouette, which show a lack of structure with important work breaks and problems to continue with a more stable employment; that is, the professional activity is carried out in a submerged way or with a precarious economy. Secondly, we find the precarious trajectories, related to job rotation, unemployment and unstable employment, with the need for training and readjustments of future expectations for emancipation, which obliges the subjects to endure continuous moratoriums until they find a home. Thirdly, we make visible those working trajectories linked to low-skilled jobs, proposed at the demand of the labour sector they wish to occupy and which determine intermittent situations of unemployment, job rotation and low qualification. Fourth, there are those trajectories defined by high social and professional expectations in a scenario that differs greatly from them, characterised by confusing and difficult opportunities. This type of transition implies an emancipatory setback and is defined by trial and error, described by a lengthening of school life, previous work experiences, failures in the school–work transition and a constant readjustment between the expectations created and the achievements attained. And, finally, there are those considered early success, which follow a linearity between the end of studies and insertion in the labour market, which leads to successful itineraries without breaks [25].
4.2. Transitions to the Academic–Professional Pathway

The transition from school to the world of work is one of the most important moments in a young person’s life. It represents a delicate stage of working life, in which negative outcomes can have harmful and long-lasting effects on their professional future [17]. The period between completing compulsory education and entering the labour market involves several situations to consider: on the one hand, young people entering the labour market for the first time in their first experience do not have high qualifications or the skills, attitudes and knowledge required for a specific job. On the other hand, lacking work experience makes it more difficult for them to get a job contract, which perpetuates existing inequalities among young people [26].

Therefore, access to VET studies can provide a viable approach to professional activity, where we find different moments of access to these studies: one, students linked to VET from the academic pathway after completing compulsory secondary education or baccalaureate, two, students who enter from university studies, and three, adults who resume their studies through this training pathway after a long period of unemployment or failure in the labour market [15].

Student E1_Granada. In the first year of baccalaureate I didn’t know about the existence of this cycle (refers to the higher cycle of VET in early childhood education) and when I got to the second year a classmate of mine enrolled and she kept telling me more and more things that I was more passionate about […] and it helped me to decide to do the VET earlier.

Student E2_Malaga. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to do a degree or not, and well, the truth is that I did the best I could do, doing the cycle has been a total and positive change for me.

Student E3_Malaga. First I decided to study teaching and I did quite well in my degree […] but I wanted to do something else and I met a friend who had done a cycle and I had something in mind […] which is another way out of the labour market.

With the considerations offered, we can corroborate certain forms of access to vocational training studies; in addition, as we have been able to observe, the pupils continue to doubt whether to undertake university studies or to opt for this more professional training. Also, the importance of the context and the peer group is relevant for them to opt for one qualification or another. Also, one of the characteristics of access to these VET studies is that it leads to the enrolment of students who choose to continue their training once they have completed their university studies, as an access route that is more directed towards work practise and continuity in a specific job.

4.3. Educational Pathway to Vocational Training from a Social Perspective

As discussed at the beginning of this paper, the analysis of the educational laws that have prevailed in Spain since the advent of democracy has already revealed a distorted reality regarding the pursuit of these studies. Throughout its history, VET has not managed to establish itself as a clear pathway to the labour market, with a negative connotation for the students enrolled in it. Thus, at the origin of VET, it was thought of as alternative training for the lower classes, studies considered minor within the educational system and with a lower rank than the baccalaureate. This diversification of itineraries towards more technical or academic studies has had a different repercussion in the school context. As school enrolment rates increased and the popular classes gained access to school, responses to the curriculum were not long in coming, highlighting “a more selective and noble pathway, and a second pathway for applied studies” [27] (p. 1).

This consideration created a stigma in society towards VET studies, linked to students who did not achieve good grades or failed some subjects. It is also necessary to point out that while university studies are aimed at more prestigious occupations, vocational training prepares and qualifies students for jobs with less status, which has gradually and over time led to a loss of prestige for these studies. However, in the analysis of the different educational reforms, it is necessary to take into consideration that no law aims to “equalise
prestige between occupations, so the basis of the supposed lack of prestige of VET lies in social stratification, not in the educational system” [6] (p. 17).

**Student E5_Sevilla.** Socially I think it is not valued very much, although I see that parents are giving it more and more importance.

**Student E1_Granada.** Before I finished Bachillerato they asked me, “What are you going to do? In my case, I said: well, I’m going to do vocational training in early childhood education and they told me: but you have very good marks, how are you going to get into vocational training, if that’s for fools.

In relation to the above, although vocational training is acquiring greater academic and professional consideration, we can still observe that there is still a negative stigma attached to these studies, which are still socially undervalued.

### 4.4. Expectations on Duality in Vocational Training

Faced with the dichotomy over the importance of VET and its impact on the world of work, the idea of dualising training and work, following the German example, is beginning to gain strength and momentum. In Spain, it has recently been protected by Royal Decree 1529/2012, of 8 November, which stipulated the foundations for the progressive implementation of dual education in our country. The main characteristic that stands out among its lines is the alternation between an educational institution and professional work, understood as an apprenticeship, in a specific job [28]. In this way, the underlying logic takes into account the importance of learning by doing that fosters, through a series of methodologies, tools and instruments, professional work in a given workplace. To this end, cohesion and professional and training balance between all learning agents and environments is essential; i.e., the safe and smooth transition of students to the world of work must be ensured [18].

Thus, since the beginning of dual VET, there has been a significant increase in enrolments for these studies. However, at present, difficulties are still encountered in the training–work connection, which causes drawbacks in the attempt to adapt to the labour market, promoted by a mismatch between supply and demand and the limitations encountered to qualify students from work practise in an increasingly changing context, precarious and with high unemployment [29]. Likewise, in order to accommodate these shortcomings and respond to the training needs that they present, dual VET, within the political, educational and labour spheres, represents one of the strategic axes to contribute to the improvement of employability, professional performance and retraining [30].

**Student E10_Cádiz.** This process has given me, above all, information about the reality in a centre [. . .] it has given me a perspective of how things can really be done, to see the shortcomings and the things that need to be improved. Above all, I see that dual training gives you the perspective of the reality of work and the reality of the sector where you are going to work in the future.

**Student E8_Cádiz.** In my degree, the internship is very important because you really realise whether or not you like what you are doing [. . .] the dual degree helps you to have more internships that can help you find a job [. . .]. You do the dual training in a centre and when you finish you want to find a job, and you say that you have done work experience in a centre, then maybe the company can ask for you [. . .] the truth is that it helps you to find a job [. . .]. In my centre there is an educator who did an internship there and they hired her.

In contrast to what was pointed out in the previous section, where the discourse on these VET studies is directed towards a stigmatised social assessment, we can see how the students who finally opted for dual vocational training extrapolate, with their reflection, a personal satisfaction and an important motivation in relation to their personal development and with prospects of integration into the labour market.
4.5. Level of Integration with Other Important Actors in Dual Training: Teachers and Company Tutors

In order to initiate the necessary procedures for the implementation of dual vocational training in school, an annual call for applications is established by the Regional Ministry of Education and Sport. The management team, teaching staff and companies that require it submit a project for assessment and acceptance. For this, it should be based on two essential parameters: one, that it refers to the Andalusian business context, characterised by medium-sized and small enterprises and, two, taking into account the socio-productive fabric where the study centre is located [31]. In this way, the different projects carried out should be coordinated between the educational centre and the work centres, in accordance with training, learning and qualification parameters; i.e., the students will be trained practically and theoretically from a specific training and work context, which will improve their chances of accessing the labour market. To this end, the figures of the teacher and the work tutor will be essential in the students’ trajectory [15].

Student E6. Almería. *I am delighted with the journey I have had, I am very happy, they treat you like another educator, it is a joy, you are one of them, they don’t leave you aside, they always try to keep you within their circle of teachers.*

Student E7. Almería. *The relationship I’ve had with them has been very good, I can’t say anything else, I still have a good relationship with them today, the truth is that when they see that they are interested or that something is difficult for you, they want to help you and they are always on top of it, do this, do that [. . .]. And with the teaching staff at the work centre, wonderful, I can’t have any complaints. They welcomed me in such a way that I always felt like one of them, they didn’t make any differences.*

Student E4. Sevilla. *We have a training tutor at the centre and a work tutor assigned to us and the truth is that it’s perfect [. . .]. For example, in my class I have implemented the assembly, it was something that wasn’t done and I have been able to put it into practice [. . .]. The truth is that they let us be ourselves, we really become teachers there.*

After the reflections provided, it can be seen how experience in the company contributes positively to the competences of the students, who reflect a very positive personal opinion and refer with great affection to the centre and their tutors, which has a beneficial effect on the quality of their teaching.

4.6. Challenges and Social Challenges of VET from the Students’ Perspective

In order to address social challenges, education, and especially VET, has a key role to play in improving the current context in which we find ourselves. Accommodating the most vulnerable groups, understood as categories of people (young people, women, people with functional diversity, and foreigners, among others) with an exposure to social risks, where they express the need to obtain resources that allow them to counteract these difficulties in order to actively participate in the political, economic and social system [32], is a fundamental priority. In this sense, we should take into consideration different situations: firstly, the participation and stimulation, within the educational system, of quality training that provides students with sufficient qualifications to approach the labour market in a more successful way—that is to say, to assume a series of competences that help them to face the different structural changes—and, secondly, to ensure that education responds to the Sustainable Development Goals, guaranteeing education based on quality, equity and inclusion with the challenge of promoting learning opportunities and facilitating well-being and living conditions, enabling gender equality and reducing inequalities [18].

In this way, VET has currently been changing the discourse and has become “the driving force behind training policies” [33] (p. 145). With a bidirectional structure, it must strive to contribute to training, qualifications and skills to promote and ensure cohesion in the face of society’s challenges. To this end, the parties involved in the educational and employment process should be connected (family, teachers, guidance counsellors, students, companies, social agents, etc.) and take into consideration all the opportunities that these
studies offer for the new situations of the labour market, in continuous transformation and change. To this end, “flexible programmes are required, which take into account both individual needs and the needs of the community and companies” [33] (p. 146). In this way, it is essential to offer innovative, attractive and practical VET as a possible and safe method of integration and VET.

**Student E3_Málaga.** I would like to encourage other people to study vocational training because it is really quite enriching and to say that for me, at the moment, I am very happy and quite integrated with what will be my future profession and, without a doubt, I don’t regret having studied vocational training.

Finally, we can confirm that the completion of these studies has a positive impact on the students, highlighting personal, academic and professional development that will result in better job opportunities in the future.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Dual VET is presented at a European level as a fundamental strategy in terms of active employment policies [34], where two main models of VET are highlighted: one, the apprenticeship model, which makes it easier to get a first job, and two, the school model, which makes it easier to change jobs in the future. In this sense, as reflected throughout this study, dual VET could be an important step in facilitating the school–work transition, while allowing students to participate in teaching–learning processes that are more experiential and connected to the world of work [35].

According to the results of this research, a very positive disposition is confirmed, on the part of the students, to undertake dual VET studies. In this sense, a high level of motivation and a confident perception of access to the labour market can be observed. With these premises, if we relate their involvement, motivation and expectations to employment, we can highlight an increase in productivity, perfecting, in the workplace, all the skills and competences acquired; i.e., students will be more willing to increase production and to provide their experience with better actions that enable a greater dose of quality to the work performed [36]. However, in accordance with the data obtained, it is considered necessary, along the lines already indicated in [37], to continue implementing measures aimed at improving the social image of VET. To this end, it is advisable to create policies that improve the attractiveness of these studies, changing the negative perception towards a realistic, innovative proposal aimed at greater success in terms of integration into the labour market.

Despite the organisational limitations it may have, the importance of professional practise and the connection established between theoretical and practical content becomes evident. Furthermore, the completion of these studies enables a valid professional qualification for the company and the acquisition of work skills that will enable an approach to the labour market [28]. This way of organising learning enables higher professional qualifications for students and accentuates those work skills necessary for the performance of a profession. This assessment is further emphasised in the expectations that students have in relation to duality as an educational policy that can improve labour market insertion and bring them closer to future employment [12]. Following these considerations, the transitions from the academic pathway to the world of work are crucial moments in a young person’s life. Depending on how they occur, their chances of reaching emancipation will end in different ways; i.e., those students who achieve a good qualification will have better chances than those who fail or drop out of school.

On this issue, the students participating in this study consider that studying dual training has very positive aspects. Firstly, it brings them closer, with a higher probability, to finding a job. Secondly, experience is gained in the workplace, which is so necessary when looking for a job. And finally, they gain skills, abilities and attitudes that will facilitate professional development. However, these impressions are still compromised by the social perception of these studies, which are considered to be of lesser value than other types of training, such as university education.
In short, after what has been investigated, it is important to continue with future studies to find out to what extent dual vocational training is achieving the aim of training and integration into the labour market. In this sense, they support better employability in those students who study dual VET, where positive results are obtained among the countries that include this modality among their different educational pathways [18].

Finally, as possible future lines of research, this study enables continuity in several directions: firstly, analysis of this educational policy in the reduction in early drop-out from education and training; secondly, the implementation of a study related to the motivations and job expectations of students graduating from different degrees to see if their studies helped their integration into the labour market; and finally, to know the business perception of this VET and the advantages, opportunities or drawbacks that the legislation caused in its new forms of personnel management and productivity.


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**Notes**

1. The acronyms of the different laws and educational levels covered in the text are explained below to facilitate understanding (in Spanish the acronyms, in English the definition): EGB (Educación General Básica) BUP (Old Baccalaureate) LOGSE (General Organic Law of the Educational System in Spain) FGS (Programas de Garantía Social) CFGM (Intermediate Level Training Cycle) CFGS (Higher Level Training Cycle) LOE (Organic Law of Education) LOMCE (Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación—Organic Law on the Quality of Education) PCPI (Initial Vocational Qualification Programme) LOGSE (General Organic Law for the Improvement of the Quality of Education) LOMLOE (Organic Law for the modification of the Organic Law on Education) FP (Vocational Training) FPD (Dual Vocational Education and Training)

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