Looking into the 'black box': An exploration of the dynamics behind the success and failure of job training for unemployed youth

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ALMP   Active Labour Market Policy

BA   German Federal Employment Agency ("Bundesagentur für Arbeit")

ESF   European Social Fund

GDP   Gross Domestic Product

GEM   Global Entrepreneurship Monitor

GSOEP   German Socioeconomic Panel

ILO   International Labor Organization

IZA   Institute of Labor Economics

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OLS   Ordinary least squares regression

OR   Odds ratio

REZ   Regional Purchase Centre of the German Labour Agency

SDT   Self-determination theory

SES   Socio-economic status

SGB II/III Second/Third Book of the German Social Code

t1   Time 1 (first survey wave)

t2   Time 2 (second survey wave)

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background: Youth unemployment and the widening inequality gap in Germany

Youth unemployment has become a pressing issue worldwide since 2008, when the global financial crisis began to show its effects.[1] In 2018 the average unemployment rate for under-25-year-olds in countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was 11.1 percent, which in most countries is at least twice as high as the unemployment rate for adults (OECD, 2019). This has critical effects for the welfare, economic development and social stability of societies and represents a major challenge for policymakers. At first glance, Germany's youth unemployment rate of 6.2 percent in 2018 (OECD, 2019) makes the labour market situation for young people in Germany look comparatively encouraging. However, these figures deserve a closer look.

Firstly, studies showed that the decline in overall unemployment rates in Germany between 2005 and 2008 following the Hartz reforms, a major labour market policy reform, was largely determined by factors other than the actual integration of the unemployed in formal full-time work. Among those stand out demographic factors, an increasing uptake of non-standard work[2] and participation in labour market programmes (Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung, 2016; Rothe and Wälde, 2017). Secondly, in 2018 the long-term unemployment rate for youth[3] as a share of their total unemployment rate amounted to 22.3 percent, thereby exceeding the OECD average of 15.2 (OECD,

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[1] Youth unemployment is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as comprising those people aged 15-24 who are without work, but available to and actively seeking work (International Labour Organization, 1982).

[2] Non-standard work refers to labour conditions other than full-time employment within the social security system, such as temporary or part-time employment (Rothe and Wälde, 2017).

[3] Long-term youth unemployment is here defined as people aged 15-24 being unemployed for 12 months or longer. Also in the next category of 6 to 12 months unemployment duration, Germany's rate is above the OECD average with 14.6 percent vs. 11.4 percent.

2019). Overall, the youth unemployment rate is almost double the rate for those aged 25-54 (3.2 percent, OECD, 2019). These figures show that the prospering economic development enjoyed by Germany in the past did not benefit young people in the same way as it did the middle-aged population, and that their risk of becoming - and remaining - unemployed is notably higher (Hartig, Jozwiak and Wolff, 2008; Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011; Eichhorst, Wozny and Cox, 2015). This is exacerbated by the fact that the long-term unemployed in Germany also have a particularly long unemployment duration by comparison to people in other European countries: About two third of the long-term unemployed in Germany are without work for at least twenty-four months (Spermann, 2015; Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung, 2016). Regional problem clusters stand out in this context: In East Germany unemployment rates are consistently higher than in the Western provinces. Berlin, where the empirical work of this research focuses on, is one of the areas with the highest youth unemployment rates in the country (10 percent in 2016, Statista, 2016).

A particularly vulnerable group in the German labour market are low-educated youth:[4] Young people without a vocational qualification are up to three times more likely to be unemployed than their peers with a qualification, and even up to eight times more likely than those who have completed tertiary education (Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011, see Figure 2 and Section 1.4 for more details on the Germany vocational training system). In 2017, 83 percent of young people receiving unemployment benefits under the Second Book of the Social Code, the law regulating social assistance in Germany, did not have a vocational qualification or any other professional degree. These figures illustrate the insider-outsider structure of the German labour market, where the vocationally qualified are likely to not have much difficulty in finding sustainable work, but people without such qualification are at high risk of "getting stuck" in unemployment. Over recent years, a widening

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[4]"Low-educated" is defined by the European Union as those with an education level from 0-2 according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which is equivalent to pre-primary to lower secondary education.

of the gap between the employment prospects of higher and lower educated people could be observed: The percentage of the unemployed without any secondary education rose from 17 to 24 percent between 2015 and 2017 (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2017). Figure 1 shows that since the end of the global financial crisis in 2009, the ratio between the unemployment rates of young people with no or lower secondary education compared to those with upper secondary (but no tertiary) education has continuously increased in Germany. While in 2003 the rates of the two groups were identical, in 2018 the lower educated were almost three times as likely to be unemployed as their better educated peers (Eurostat, 2019, see Figure 1), demonstrating that youth unemployment is increasingly composed of the low-educated. As shown in Figure 1, this pattern does not represent a general trend in European countries but is specific to Germany.

Figure 1: Relative risk of unemployment for low-qualified youth compared to qualified youth in Germany
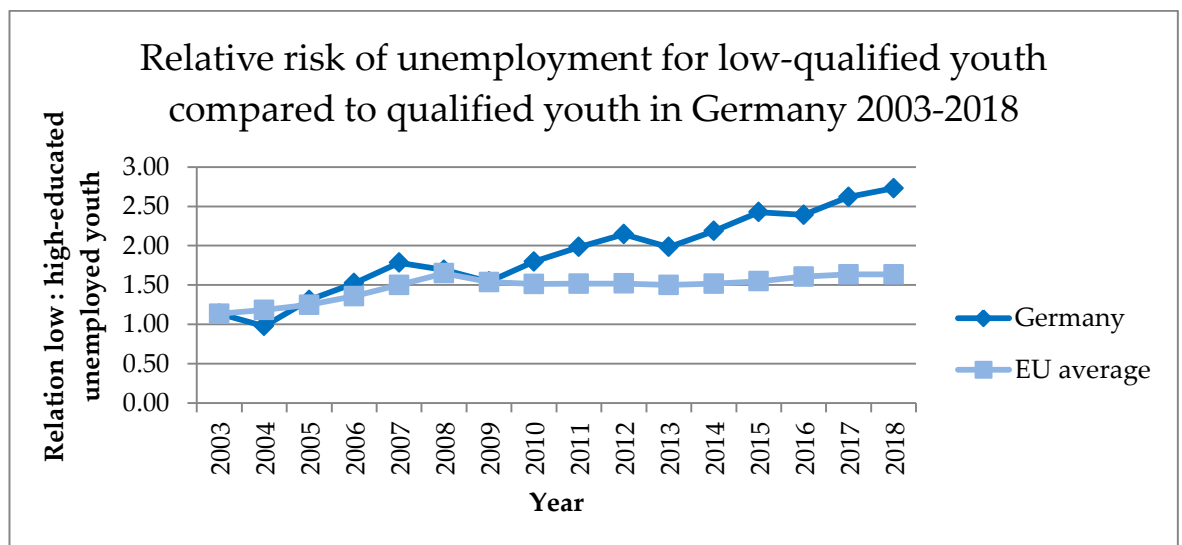
Source: Own elaboration, based on data from the European Labour Force Survey (Eurostat, 2019b). *Calculation: Low-qualified youth unemployment rate (ISCED levels 0-2) divided by qualified youth unemployment rate (ISCED levels 3-4).*

The underlying reasons for the disparity in employment prospects between low-educated and higher-educated people in Germany might partly lie in structural framework conditions. One reason is the highly stratified education system in

Germany which fosters an early selection of students, thereby consolidating socio-economic inequalities (Hofäcker, 2017). A tertiary or vocational degree - either obtained through completing university studies or a vocational apprenticeship - is an important requirement to access the German labour market. As shown in Figure 2, the opportunities for tertiary and vocational education differ substantially depending on the type of secondary educational degree obtained; and the separation into one of the three pathways of secondary education usually takes place at the early age of approximately ten years. Young people with a basic secondary school degree can apply for a restricted range of vocational apprenticeships, typically in the technical and handicraft sectors, while an intermediate secondary degree opens access to those and a wider range of apprenticeships, including the business sector. Vocational apprenticeships take around three years, during which the apprentice attends classes on the chosen trade in a vocational school and receives practical (salaried) training with an employer. Upon successful finalisation, the trainee is awarded with a vocational degree certificate. While A-level graduates can choose between a vocational route through an apprenticeship and an academic route by studying at university, vocational apprenticeships are the only promising pathway to qualified employment for those with basic and intermediate secondary education (Protsch and Dieckhoff, 2011).

In addition to the selective school system at an early age, further reasons for the higher incidence and duration of low-qualified youth unemployment include a highly formalised labour market with decreasing value given to lower school degrees (e.g. the basic secondary degree obtained after nine years schooling) and very limited opportunities for people without any of the mentioned certified vocational qualifications (Protsch and Dieckhoff, 2011; Duffy *et al.*, 2016; Hofäcker, 2017). Finally, the situation reflects the overall tendency of low social mobility and increasing social inequality in Germany, where (dis)advantage in education and income is likely to resurface in following generations (OECD, 2018).

Figure 2: Simplified overview of the German education system

Vocational degree — University of Applied Sciences — University (if A-level) — University of Applied Sciences (if technical diploma)

Vocational degree — Vocational degree — Choice of vocational apprenticeships

Basic secondary degree after 5 years — Intermediate secondary degree after 6 years — A-level after 8-9 years or technical diploma after 7-8 years — Several degree levels can be obtained within the same school

Hauptschule — Realschule — Gymnasium — Gesamtschule

Elementary school (Grundschule): Age 6-10

Options for vocational and tertiary education — Secondary education — Primary education

Source: Own elaboration

The discussed evidence shows that unemployed young people, especially when they are low-qualified and live in Eastern provinces, have a particularly high risk of staying at the periphery of the German labour market – or even of being completely excluded from it in the long-term (Hartig, Jozwiak and Wolff, 2008; Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011; Kohlrausch, 2012). The high relative incidence of youth unemployment compared to the middle-aged unemployment rate, as well as the high unemployment duration of low-educated groups in an otherwise prospering economy were the main aspects why Germany has been selected as a case study for this research. This inequality, and its increasing tendency, is problematic for a multitude of reasons. As recognised by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and numerous studies, work is a central element to the wellbeing and development of individuals, communities and societies (Lee and Holoviak, 2006; Duffy *et al.*, 2016; International Labour Organization, 2019). Unemployment is associated with economic and social exclusion, a decline in mental and physical health, increased long-term poverty risk, as well as higher instability and crime in societies (Gundert

and Hohendanner, 2015; Koen *et al.*, 2016; Hofäcker, 2017; Blustein *et al.*, 2019). Understanding what can be done to effectively tackle the unemployment of disadvantaged young people and help them exit the vicious cycle of marginalisation is therefore of urgent and increasing importance.

1.2 Active Labour Market Policies and what we know about their effectiveness

Government strategies to address unemployment are classified by the ILO in "active" and "passive" labour market policies. While passive labour market policies refer to social protection measures like unemployment benefits, active labour market policies (ALMPs) aim to integrate the unemployed in the labour market (International Labour Office, 2003). In recent decades, several labour market reforms in Europe have set the focus specifically on the encouragement of labour market participation ("activation") rather than the provision of social security to the unemployed (Eichhorst, Grienberger-Zingerle and Konle-Seidl, 2008; European Commission, 2018; Dengler, 2019). Typical ALMP types are public employment services (e.g. job search assistance), subsidised employment (e.g. public work projects), enterprise development interventions (e.g. start-up loans), and skills development programmes including training, mentoring and coaching (International Labour Office, 2003).

In 2016, OECD countries spent on average 0.52 percent of their GDP on ALMP measures (OECD, 2017). Among the different types of ALMPs, training and retraining are the most popular measures implemented worldwide (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2010). This also applies to Germany, where the diversity of those programmes regarding their length, concept and contents is particularly broad (Biewen *et al.*, 2007). Within the OECD, Germany is one of the countries with the highest investment in job training, ranking sixth in terms of the share of its GDP spent on training programmes (0.2 percent) (OECD, 2017). The German Social Code establishes under-25-year olds as a particular priority target group of those policies and around 22 percent of the German Employment Agency's budget for ALMP

measures (330 million Euros) is spent on interventions to integrate young people in the labour market (Eichhorst et al. 2015).

While ALMPs are widely implemented to tackle unemployment, the evidence of their effectiveness is mixed and heterogeneous. An extensive body of impact evaluations of these programmes globally found widely varying results (Fares and Puerto, 2009; Card, Kluve and Weber, 2010, 2017; Hansen, 2012; Vooren *et al.*, 2019). One example of a positively evaluated youth activation policy programme is the "New Deal for Young People", implemented in the UK in the late 1990es, which comprised a combination of job search support, training, work experience and wage subsidies. However, no thorough analysis of the mechanisms through which this programme achieved positive change was conducted (Eichhorst and Rinne, 2015). A broad range of studies have evaluated the impact of ALMPs specifically for Germany (Hujer, Thomsen and Zeiss, 2006a; Schneider and Uhlendorff, 2006; Biewen *et al.*, 2007; Wunsch and Lechner, 2007; Lechner *et al.*, 2011; Kluve *et al.*, 2012; Doerr *et al.*, 2017, among others). Lechner et al. (2011) found that even after seven years, all types of ALMP programmes in Germany increased the duration of unemployment benefit receipt for their participants, compared to a matched control group (similar findings are reported by Schneider & Uhlendorff 2006 and Fitzenberger & Völter 2007). Furthermore, there is evidence that ALMP programmes in Germany are more effective for the better educated and less so for those struggling with multiple barriers (Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011; Kluve, 2013; Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung, 2016; Hofäcker, 2017). This is problematic given the increasingly urgent need to address low-educated unemployment.

Even though skills training is the most frequently implemented type of ALMP intervention across countries and age groups (Betcherman *et al.*, 2007; Card, Kluve and Weber, 2010), it is less frequently evaluated than other ALMPs (Betcherman *et al.*, 2007; Bernhard *et al.*, 2008; Büttner, 2008). The evaluation results are mixed. For Germany, some studies do not find any impacts of any training type (Wunsch and Lechner, 2007), or even negative effects for application training (Heyer *et al.*, 2012);

others show positive effects but only in the short run (Hujer, Thomsen and Zeiss, 2006a; Ehlert, Kluve and Schaffner, 2012), while in a larger group of evaluations the positive effects materialise rather late, probably due to lock-in effects – i.e. the decreased or completely paused job search effort of participants during training (Schneider and Uhlendorff, 2006; Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011; Lechner, Miquel and Wunsch, 2011; Card, Kluve and Weber, 2017; Doerr *et al.*, 2017). A recent meta-analysis found training programmes in Germany to be on average less effective than in the other –mostly OECD member– countries included in the study (Vooren *et al.*, 2019).

There is also lack of a consensus regarding determinants of positive impacts in a range of domains such as geographical location, participant characteristics and training type. Several studies find negative or less positive employment effects for training in East Germany compared to West Germany (Hujer, Thomsen and Zeiss, 2006b; Biewen *et al.*, 2007; Fitzenberger and Speckesser, 2007); however, Hartig et al. (2008) find the opposite for youth. Work experience seems to be beneficial for increased training effects (Hujer, Thomsen and Zeiss, 2006a, 2006b; Hartig, Jozwiak and Wolff, 2008); at the same time, programmes tend to be less effective for the higher qualified (Hujer, Thomsen and Zeiss, 2006a; Wunsch and Lechner, 2007; Rinne, Schneider and Uhlendorff, 2010). Contrary to these findings, Biewen et al. (2007) identified lower effects for low-skilled workers. Several evaluations share the conclusion that company-based training has greater positive effects than classroom training (Biewen *et al.*, 2007; Wolff and Jozwiak, 2007; Hartig, Jozwiak and Wolff, 2008). One exception is the study of Fitzenberger & Völter (2007) with the opposite finding in the long-run for East Germany. Many scholars found shorter programmes to be beneficial due to their reduced lock-in effects (Hujer, Thomsen and Zeiss, 2006b; Schneider and Uhlendorff, 2006; Biewen *et al.*, 2007; Fitzenberger and Völter, 2007; Wunsch and Lechner, 2007; Lechner, Miquel and Wunsch, 2011; Kopf, 2013; Dengler, 2019), but others showed stronger positive effects materialising from longer programmes in the mid-term (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2010; Wapler, Werner and Wolf, 2018). Overall, no improvement of the effectiveness of ALMPs could be detected over recent decades (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2010).

Given the varied and partly contradictory findings of the studied referred to above, it is difficult to draw meaningful overarching conclusions in terms of effectiveness and specific factors fostering positive results. What instead stands out is that most studies do not provide in-depth insights about the effectiveness of training programmes for youth– and in particular about dynamics and trajectories being likely to lead to positive results. This is not surprising; young unemployed people from marginalised backgrounds are a particularly hard-to-access group, and particularly so for longitudinal studies, as they are likely to struggle with multiple personal and socioeconomic barriers, follow an irregular rhythm of life, and regularly change their contact details. Additional reasons for this scarcity of evidence could also lie in the heterogeneity of training measures and their objectives, as well as in the lack of labour market history information for young people – all of which make it more challenging to apply robust evaluation methods (Büttner, 2008). The picture emerging from the scarce existing evidence on the effectiveness of ALMP programmes for youth is inconclusive and not too encouraging: A recent systematic review of 113 impact evaluations[5] of youth employment programmes worldwide showed that two thirds of programmes had no positive impact on labour market outcomes (Kluve *et al.*, 2019). Meta-analyses have found that ALMP programmes worldwide are often less effective for participants under 25 years of age compared to programmes targeting adults (Heckman, LaLonde and Smith, 1999; Card, Kluve and Weber, 2010, 2017). This seems to be the case also for Germany: Even though some training evaluations find positive results for the employment prospects of youth (Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011; Ehlert, Kluve and Schaffner, 2012), these youth-targeting programmes tend to show more modest effects than for the middle-aged unemployed (Wolff and Jozwiak, 2007; Rinne, Schneider and Uhlendorff, 2010; Heyer *et al.*, 2012). Age was found to be more determinant for the (negative) effects of ALMPs than education, work experience and nationality (Heyer *et al.*, 2012). This picture is problematic, considering the high priority assigned to ALMPs for youth

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[5] The review considered only studies based on a counterfactual analysis, i.e. those comparing treated and control groups of an intervention, including experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations.

as a particularly vulnerable group in the labour sphere, and the corresponding high investments in those policies (Hartig, Jozwiak and Wolff, 2008; Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011; Kluve *et al.*, 2019).

1.3   What we don't know yet: Gaps in the current ALMP evaluation literature

The heterogeneity of ALMP evaluation results raises important questions regarding the determining factors behind these results. Why do some training types work in certain contexts or for specific groups more than others? What are the strategies and ingredients that make those interventions effective for their target group? The two large meta-analyses on youth employment interventions worldwide found programme types or design features to have little relevance for their impact and instead recommend focusing on the individuals involved, and on how programmes are delivered to meet their specific needs (Betcherman *et al.*, 2007; Kluve *et al.*, 2019). By contrast, the existing literature on ALMPs is still largely comprised of microeconomic studies assessing the impact of policies for employment prospects and/or earnings of their participants. These evaluations tend to end at the "diagnosis" stage, referring to the reasons and relations between interventions and their outcomes as a 'black box' (Martin & Grubb 2001; Steiner & Hagen 2002; Bernhard et al. 2008; Card et al. 2010; Kluve 2013). In order to understand why and how ALMPs work (and why and how they often do not), this 'black box' needs to be looked into. For this purpose, it is crucial to understand how ALMPs are meant to work in the first place; i.e. their theory of change.

In the evaluation literature, a theory of change relates to the causal model connecting the activities of a programme (e.g. the provision of training) to its ultimate outcomes (e.g. participants becoming employed) through a variety of intermediate effects, the mechanisms causally linking those effects, the assumptions underlying those linkages, contextual influencing factors and other relevant aspects, which often interact in multiple and complex ways. In short, it is the theory setting

out how an intervention intends to reach its goals, thereby guiding programme planning, implementation and evaluation (Rogers, 2008; Astbury and Leeuw, 2010). Unpacking the causal mechanisms underlying a programme's theory of change as part of an evaluation is especially important when it is likely that "unobservable" factors (e.g. unmeasured participant characteristics) affect its observed outcomes (Astbury and Leeuw, 2010; Khagram and Thomas, 2010; White, 2010). In these cases, evaluation results are at risk of being subject to selection bias. For example, if programme participation is voluntary and participants are compared with non-participants in order to assess differences in their outcomes, it is likely that upfront differences in motivation introduce selection bias in the evaluation (White, 2010). The mechanisms through which labour market training and activation programmes are expected to deliver their effects is an issue that so far has received very little attention in the literature. Similarly, intermediate outcomes, such as programme completion, as well as the dynamics of interaction of the unemployed with other labour market actors, are usually neglected. These are important shortcomings of the ALMP evaluation literature, given the existing evidence that unobserved heterogeneity of job training participants can introduce selection bias that confounds the results of an impact evaluation, as shown by Heckman et al. (1997). In order to unpack the underlying mechanisms along the theory of change of a labour market intervention, it is necessary to analyse the linkages between the activities provided, a range of intermediate goals and the intervention's final objectives, as well as the assumptions underlying those linkages and relevant contextual factors (Bernhard, Wolff and Jozwiak, 2006; Hirshleifer *et al.*, 2014; Liu, Huang and Wang, 2014; Card, Kluve and Weber, 2017).

For this purpose, there is an increasing recognition of the need for a broader methodological and disciplinary horizon while studying the effects of ALMPs. For example, in the economic literature on determinants of unemployment what is behind the decision of the unemployed to participate or not in the labour market (i.e. work or study) is rarely explored (Layard, Nickell and Jackman, 2005). However, there is evidence that the attitude towards job searching has a significant effect on the probability of employment (Sella, 2014). Similarly, a meta-analysis

showed that job search interventions were only effective where they included elements of motivation enhancement in addition to skills training (Liu, Huang and Wang, 2014). In order to understand the dynamics of ALMP implementation, it is important to explore the "unobservable" mechanisms of selection and self-selection, such as those related to the needs, motivational drivers, beliefs and decision-making processes of the unemployed, and their interaction with the ALMP system and actors (Layard, Nickell and Jackman, 2005; Bernhard *et al.*, 2008; Lechner, Miquel and Wunsch, 2011; Heyer *et al.*, 2012).

For example, there is evidence that an unemployed person's perceptions of their own employment prospects can be an important determinant of the success and cost-effectiveness of labour market programmes, and that biased self-beliefs are associated with reduced job search effort and a longer unemployment duration (DellaVigna and Paserman, 2005; Paserman, 2008; Arni, 2015; McGee, 2015; Spinnewijn, 2015; Kassenboehmer and Schatz, 2017). Non-cognitive skills or abilities are generally understood to include a range of personality traits, attitudes and other individual characteristics, as opposed to cognitive skills (e.g. academic achievement). In modern, dynamic labour markets, these behavioural traits and skills become increasingly important – possibly over and above the so-called "hard" skills (Valentine, DuBois and Cooper, 2004; Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua, 2006; Illeris, 2006; Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Cunningham, Sanchez-Puerta and Wuermli, 2010). The importance of non-cognitive abilities for understanding labour market mechanisms has therefore received increasing attention in the economic literature (among others: Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Heckman et al., 2006; Cobb-Clark, 2015; Caliendo and Mahlstedt,2017).

That said, beyond the recognition of the importance of these traits and abilities, within the field of ALMP research, more understanding is needed with regards to how they exert their roles, as well as to the individual perceptions and motivational drivers around them (Deeke and Kruppe, 2003; Cobb-Clark, 2015; Spinnewijn, 2015; Altmann *et al.*, 2018). A rich body of theoretical and empirical literature to be drawn on for this purpose can be found in the field of personality and vocational

psychology (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2005; Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Koen *et al.*, 2016). This has so far only been superficially explored in the mostly microeconomic literature on ALMPs. Most studies in the field of ALMP evaluation employing psychological concepts merely rely on the same set of variables that are gathered in available panel studies, such as the Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism) and locus of control (Caliendo, Cobb-Clark and Uhlendorff, 2015; McGee, 2015; Caliendo and Mahlstedt, 2017).

Furthermore, there remains a notable gap in the literature on unemployed young people and the mechanisms determining their (un)successful participation in ALMP programmes. The restricted accessibility of this group limited the production of research on the matter. In-depth inductive work which listens to the young unemployed themselves is needed to gain a better understanding of what drives their decisions to participate and persist in ALMP interventions, what kinds of change processes they experience during their participation in such interventions, and which dynamics or factors relate to an eventual improvement of their labour market outcomes. In addition, whilst it is paramount to focus on individual specificities, at the same time it is necessary to look beyond a merely individualistic picture, and take into account the role of the institutional context in which ALMPs operate and how this might influence their effectiveness.

1.4   German institutional context

Germany's dual system for vocational education combines practical training in companies with vocational schooling through apprenticeships that last two to three years, as described in more detail in Section 1.2. An apprenticeship completion certificate can be seen as the "entry ticket" to the German labour market. Recognising the high importance of obtaining a professional qualification for preventing long-term exclusion from the labour market, a range of ALMPs are being implemented in Germany, which aim at the professional activation and integration of young people in the labour market. The body responsible for the

implementation of ALMPs at a national level, as well as for the provision of public employment services at a local level, is the Federal Employment Agency ("Bundesagentur für Arbeit", BA henceforth). This is done in cooperation with local job centres, which are jointly managed by the BA and the municipalities (Eichhorst, Wozny and Cox, 2015). Since 2016, several social and educational services targeting young people under 25 years of age are being streamlined under the umbrella of a "youth vocational agency" ("Jugendberufsagentur"). The objective of this initiative is to foster closer and more unified cooperation between different agencies in order to provide a holistic service to vulnerable young people from school to their successful labour market integration (*Jugendberufsagentur Berlin*, 2018). Berlin has twelve job centres, one for each administrative district. When a young person eligible for basic social welfare ("Hartz IV") becomes newly unemployed, they usually receive an invitation for an appointment at their local job centre. During this appointment, the job agent assesses their capabilities, interests and needs, and suggests an intervention appropriate for their situation. The individual then signs an integration agreement ("Eingliederungsvereinbarung") with the job centre, stating compulsory obligations of the job seeker (such as regularly attending the chosen intervention, and/or actively searching for jobs); failure to abide by these obligations can lead to benefit cuts (Mahlstedt, 2016).

There are a variety of interventions within the German system of ALMPs, ranging from job creation schemes and wage subsidies to measures for the promotion of further education. These measures can last up to three years, and aim to help individuals obtain a formal qualification (apprenticeship certificate or other technical qualification). The largest category of interventions covers the so-called "measures for the professional activation and integration" (Aktivierungs- und Eingliederungsmaßnahmen), which are regulated in § 45 of the Third Book of the German Social Code (SBG III). These measures aim to place participants into (self-)employment or vocational training, and/or to identify and remove existing personal barriers to reaching this goal. Such barriers can be homelessness, mental health problems, family problems, debt, or simply the difficulty of following a regular weekly rhythm after having been out of school for some time. The

programmes comprise a range of content, such as career guidance, application training, general and sectoral education, specific sectoral skills training, exploration and building of skills practical workshops. The formally foreseen maximum training duration for these measures is eight weeks, with the option of extending this period to a maximum of twelve weeks for clients with severe barriers. However, the BA states that *"interventions aiming at the assessment and activation and development of skills, as well as the practice of vocational skills and knowledge, do not underlie this restriction of duration"* (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2016, p. 8). Further ALMPs are implemented by the federal governments with resources from the European Social Fund of the European Union (ESF) (Eichhorst, Wozny and Cox, 2015). Participants access these interventions either directly, by signing up voluntarily following public marketing, or – less frequently – through assignment by job agents as described above. Job seekers with more promising employment prospects might receive a voucher from their job agent, which entitles them to choose a training scheme and private (accredited) provider free of charge (Schneider and Uhlendorff, 2006).

1.5 Motivation for this study and research questions

Germany is often described as a front-runner in the sphere of vocational education and as a champion for low unemployment rates. However, this rosy picture is far from telling the real story about the situation of many young people. A selective education system and a strongly formalised labour market (see Section 1.2) leave several groups at the periphery of work and society in the long-term, especially low-educated youth. A wide range of ALMPs - mostly training programmes - aim to balance out these inequalities and integrate disadvantaged youth in work. And yet, despite these efforts, as discussed above the gap keeps widening. More than one third of participants drop out of job training programmes for reasons other than having found employment, and yet the causes of their premature exit have been left largely unstudied. For those who do complete their training, the outcomes are mixed, with many studies showing no or negative impacts. Overall, the evidence on

the effectiveness of these policies is sparse and mixed, and is unable to illustrate how, why and for whom certain programmes do or do not work.

This thesis sets out to overcome the above limitations by shedding light on the "black box" of mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of training interventions for young people in Germany (specifically, Berlin). It aims to look behind the scenes of standard evaluation findings and explore what individual characteristics, beliefs and processes make a young person more likely to decide to participate in the labour market, i.e. to complete a training programme, or to apply for jobs or apprenticeships, and to achieve positive job outcomes. Furthermore, this thesis examines how training can induce positive attitudinal and behavioural change for young people, and how the institutional environment influences effective ALMP implementation. The following research questions are raised and addressed through this study:

1.) Why and when do young people drop out from job training programmes?

2.) What determines the job search quality and quantity of unemployed young training participants?

3.) What determines different labour market outcomes of unemployed young people after participating in training?

4.) What change processes do unemployed young people undergo during job training participation, and what role does the training play in triggering a process of activation?

5.) How do institutional mechanisms affect the successful implementation of training for unemployed youth?

1.6   Procedures

In order to answer the research questions comprehensively, a sequential mixed methods design was applied, consisting of two qualitative and two quantitative data collection waves. The procedure is summarised below.

1.6.1 Stage 1: Multi-stakeholder exploratory study

The first stage was a qualitative study, conducted in order to refine the research focus further after the main gaps in the literature were identified and to gather the viewpoints from a variety of stakeholders involved in the German ALMP system. Based on the results of this first stage, potential determinants of training dropout and effectiveness were selected in order to be examined further in the quantitative research. For this purpose, I conducted a total of 45 semi-structured interviews with three groups of key labour market actors: Job agents, trainers and unemployed youth currently participating in training, as well as one additional interview with a key informant from the regional employment agency. A non-random (purposive) sampling procedure guided by the principles of maximum variation was applied (Patton, 2002, see chapter 5 for more details).

Table 1: Overview of interviews

	Job centres	Training institutes	Young training participants	BA key informant
Number of interviews	10	15	19	1
Duration of interview	60-120 min	60-120 min	30-40 min	120 min

1.6.2 Stage 2: Quantitative baseline survey

The ALMP landscape in Germany is highly diversified, and because of a variety of access schemes and funding sources, there is no central body managing a complete list of training interventions for the unemployed in Berlin. The absence of a full sampling frame posed a challenge for the sampling procedure for this study, making a random sampling approach impossible given the limited resources available. Consequently, a systematic sampling procedure was applied, aiming at ensuring heterogeneity of the full population of interest. At first, full lists of all

contractual partners providing training for unemployed youth in Berlin were obtained from the two main funding sources for ALMPs in Germany: The Regional Purchase Centre of the German Labour Agency (Regionales Einkaufszentrum – REZ) and the European Social Fund (ESF). All those institutions (35 in total) were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study. Four additional institutions which targeted the same group and obtained their participants through the same channels (job centre recommendation or private sign-up) were contacted additionally. 18 of the contacted organisations agreed to collaborate. Initial meetings with the programme managers were held in order to screen their portfolios with regard to the eligibility for the study. The selection criteria applied are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Selection criteria for training interventions to be included in this study

Training types	Measures for professional activation and integration, pre-vocational training, job coaching, technical skills training
Training duration	3-12 months
Target group	Young people between 15 and 25 years of age
Objective	- Placement in a job or apprenticeship and/or - Preparation for the labour market through activation and removal of personal barriers[6]
Modalities	- Interventions were not part of a paid employment scheme (i.e. participants neither received a salary for their participation, nor were paid to participate) - Interventions did not culminate with an official school qualification or vocational qualification upon completion

Based on these criteria, a total of 29 training interventions implemented by 18 organisations were selected as subjects of the present study, leading to a sample of 434 participants who were surveyed at the start of their training. The interventions ranged from classroom-based application training, technical skills training, personal job coaching, low-entry-level integration support, to several combined schemes,

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[6] The study did not consider interventions comprising mainly psychotherapy, addiction assistance or debt counselling, even though elements of these advisory services were part of some of the programmes.

comprising elements of general education, application support, mentoring and workshops to practise different professional fields.

The training institutes recruited their participants from 11 out of the 12 districts of Berlin.[7] Since recruitment takes places through the local job centres, participants are usually residents of the same district where the training takes place. The survey therefore covers districts of high, middle and low socioeconomic levels, grouped according to the Social Index I (2013), in a balanced manner (see Figures 3 and 4 below). The Social Index I is composed of indicators of unemployment, reception of public benefits, as well as health-related indicators such as premature and preventable mortality and severe illness due to tobacco consumption in Berlin. Higher positive numbers represent more favourable conditions, and vice versa.

Figure 3: Classification of Berlin districts in the Social Index I (2013) and distribution of survey participants across Berlin districts (absolute numbers)

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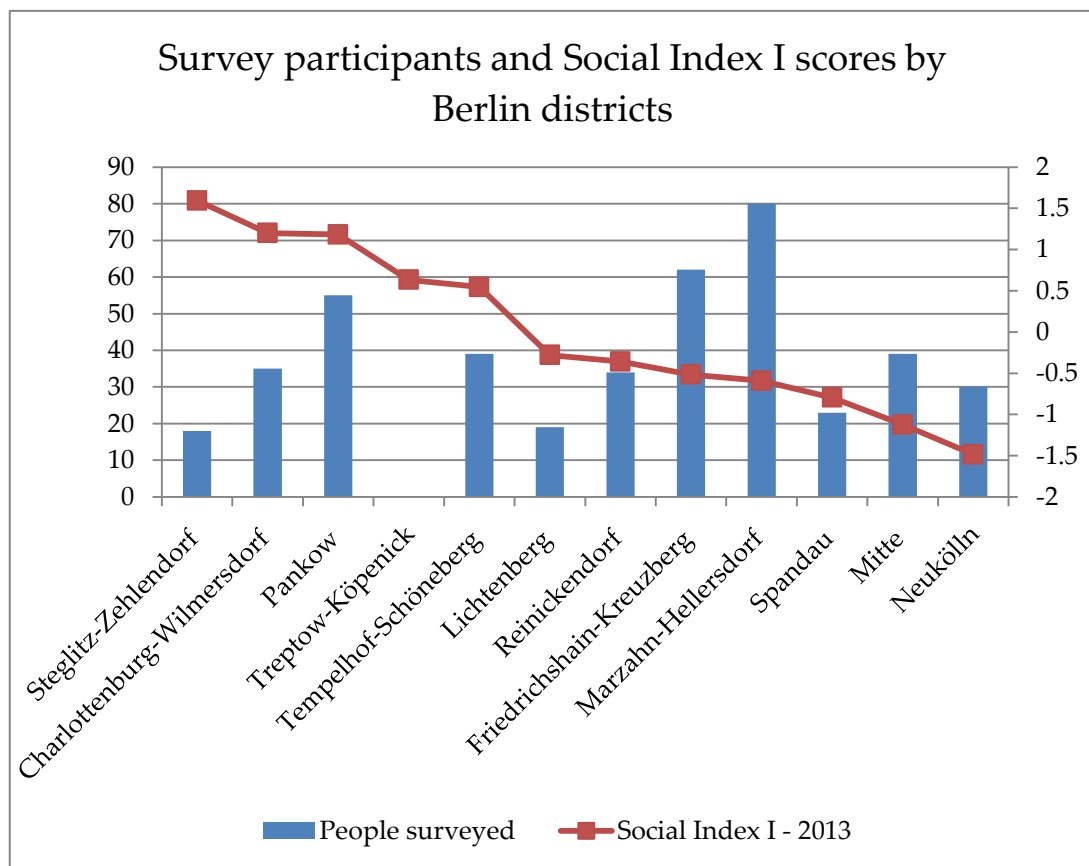
[7] Districts: Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Lichtenberg, Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Mitte, Neukoelln, Pankow, Reinickendorf, Spandau, Steglitz-Zehlendorf, Tempelhof-Schoeneberg.

Figure 4: Distribution of survey participants by districts grouped according to Social Index I 2013 (absolute numbers)

Survey participants by districts grouped according to their classification in the Social Index I (2013)

- Districts with social index ranks 1-4 (high)
- Districts with social index ranks 5-8 (middle)
- Districts with social index ranks 9-12 (low)
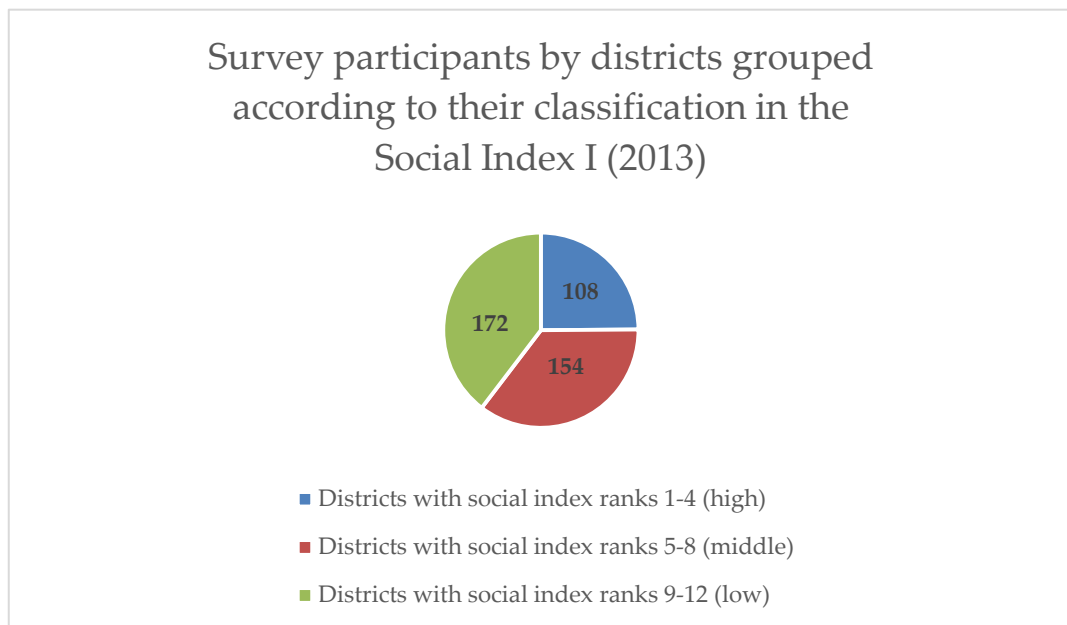
Source: Own elaboration

Survey procedure

The survey was administered by the researcher or one of the three trained research assistants in person in the classroom, in the absence of representatives of the training institution. It took the students approximately 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire (Appendix II). Participants were informed that the study comprised two survey waves and that they would be contacted again at the end of their training (i.e. 3-12 months later) for the second round of the survey and an interview. Upon completion of both questionnaires, a small incentive in the form of a voucher for online music downloads (value, 4 EUR) was announced, as well as a small donation to a charitable youth project in Honduras.

In addition to the survey data, administrative data from the training institutions was gathered on training features (duration and frequency of training, group size, and inclusion of on-the-job-elements).

1.6.3 Stage 3: Quantitative follow-up survey

Following either training completion or premature dropout, all participants were contacted again to complete a second wave of the original survey questionnaire (= time 2 - t2), with additional variables included that allowed for the retrospective assessment of relevant aspects of their participation. Information on dropout of participants was obtained from training providers on a regular basis. When trainers reported training withdrawal of a certain participant, this person was contacted immediately in order to maximise response rates and minimise memory recall bias (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015). In order to keep the time elapsed between departure from training and interview to a minimum, and to maximise response rates, all participants were visited individually, and meetings took place in coffee shops in their respective neighbourhoods. For those who did not quit training prematurely, depending on accessibility, the same procedure was applied, or interviews with the researcher took place in the last week of training at the training premises. Participants' employment status was also obtained from the respondents at the time of the second survey. Figure 5 shows an overview of sample attrition throughout the different points of data collection.

1.6.4 Stage 4: Qualitative follow-up investigation

Following completion of the second survey questionnaire at t2, in the same setting, respondents were invited to an interview. Semi-structured interviews lasting 15-45 minutes were undertaken with a total of 165 participants.

Figure 5: Overview of study sample sizes and attrition

Full sample at t1:
n=434

Outcome data on
dropout status at t2:
n=415

Outcome data on
employment status at t2:
n=306

Completion of second
survey questionnaire at
t2:
n=223

Qualitative sample
at t2:
n=165
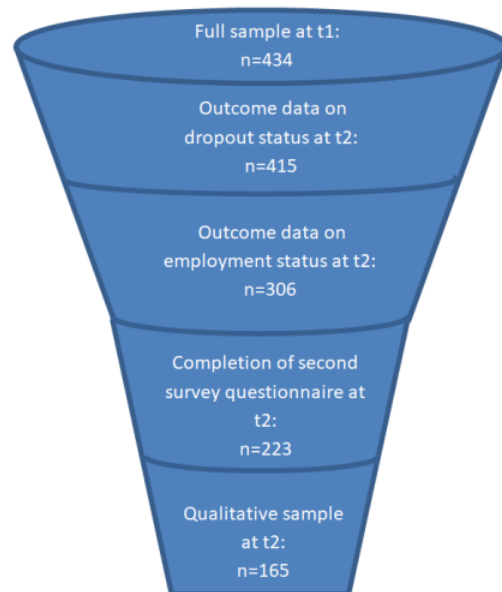
1.7 Summary of empirical thesis chapters

The empirical part of this dissertation consists of four essays (**chapters 2 to 5**) that investigate from different angles the mechanisms determining ALMP effectiveness. While contributing to the investigation of the overall topic of this thesis, each of the four empirical chapters is self-standing and contains a separate literature review, methodology section and conclusion. In **chapter 6**, the individual conclusions from the four essays are combined, presenting a holistic overall conclusion of this thesis.

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, **chapter 2** examines the individual characteristics and motivational processes that lead young training participants to prematurely drop out from training. The results partly support Self-Determination Theory, indicating that young people drop out if their basic needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence are not addressed within the programme context. The findings suggest furthermore that non-cognitive characteristics, namely fear of failure and grit, as well as mental health issues, played an important role in the young people's dropout decisions. Interesting interaction effects between these

characteristics and diverging results for gender subgroups were identified; while females appeared to be more likely to remain in programmes when they had high fear of failure and to drop out in the occurrence of mental health issues, grit and compliance turned out to be important traits for male training retention. A further finding was that higher levels of grit could balance out the increased drop out risk associated with mental health issues.

Chapter 3 explores drivers in job search behaviour and labour market outcomes for the young unemployed. Logistic regression models were estimated to study determinants of job search quality and quantity, as well as labour market participation and integration in a vocational apprenticeship after training. The results were triangulated with qualitative data to enhance their interpretation. The findings indicate an association of fear of failure with lower search intensity and lower chances of finding an apprenticeship for males but not for females. Higher levels of grit are associated with a more intense job search activity, especially for males, but did not have a significant effect on labour market outcomes. Adaptability appeared to be an important trait to instigate general labour market participation, but was not associated with a higher chance of finding an apprenticeship after training.

Chapter 4 draws on in-depth qualitative interview data to explore the attitudinal and behavioural change processes of unemployed youth over the course of their training participation with a special focus on "activation", as one main programme objective. Seven phases of change emerged from the analysis, namely: Vocational availability, self-testing, self-knowledge, self-confidence, goal-orientation, vocational activity and perseverance. A range of drivers of change affecting entrance to these phases from both within and outside the intervention sphere were identified, and discussed in terms of their contribution to building a new theoretical framework for vocational activation.

While the preceding three empirical chapters focused on factors situated at the demand-side of policy implementation, namely the perceptions, attributes, and behavioural drivers of individuals, **chapter 5** complements the insights from this

work from a different viewpoint. Building on administrative documentation, as well as data from a range of key stakeholder interviews (carried out in stage 1), this chapter analyses the legal and institutional arrangements within the process of ALMP design, commissioning and targeting in Germany, which lead to selection mechanisms affecting the effectiveness of these policies for the young unemployed. Findings highlight the importance of inefficiencies rooted in a centralised regulation system, counterproductive incentives driving crucial choices of job agents and training providers, price pressure, and a lack of results-based evaluation. These findings are discussed in the light of New Institutional Theory.

In a nutshell, this thesis extends current ALMP evaluation practice mainly via two strategies; firstly, by listening to the voices of the study subjects in comprehensive qualitative work preceding and following quantitative investigation; and secondly by drawing on relevant additional theoretical concepts and methodological approaches from the field of vocational psychology.

2. Determinants of dropout from job training for unemployed youth in Germany

Abstract

In order to address the problem of youth unemployment, job training is a widely implemented type of active labour market policy. However, more than one third of participants drop out of these training programmes without finding a job. This research examines the determinants that drive unemployed youth to drop out from skills training programmes in Germany. A longitudinal mixed-methods approach is adopted to explore this issue from the perceptions of different labour market actors in two qualitative (n=44 in both cases) and one quantitative stages (n=434). The results partly support Self-Determination Theory, indicating that young people drop out if they do not experience autonomy, relatedness and competence due to a mismatch of training characteristics and trainer behaviour with their basic needs. Furthermore, the findings suggest that certain individual traits and characteristics can play relevant roles in driving dropout behaviour: High grit and compliance were associated with lower dropout rates for males, while female dropout was determined by low motivation, low fear of failure and mental health issues. Moderation analyses show that high levels of grit could balance out the increased dropout risk associated with mental health issues. Further qualitative insights shed light on how disengagement processes evolved as an effect of the training and trainer-relationship on the self-concept of trainees. Based on the results of this research, adjustments to training design and implementation are recommended.

2.1 Introduction

Job training is the most commonly implemented ALMP type worldwide, particularly for the young unemployed (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2017). A growing body of evaluation literature focusses on the outcomes and effectiveness of job

training for unemployed youth (see Kluve *et al.* (2019) for a recent systematic review). However, a large number of those initially assigned to participate in training do not complete the interventions. Studies show dropout rates of 30 percent for a job search training programme in Finland (Vuori *et al.*, 2002), 27 percent for skills training in the Netherlands (both after only 1-2 weeks of training), 35 percent for job training in Australia (Creed, Bloxsome and Johnston, 2001), 32 percent in Korea (Choe, Flores-Lagunes and Lee, 2011) and up to 79 percent in the US (Heckman *et al.*, 2000). In Germany, the dropout rates from short-term training for young people without vocational education were 36.5 percent in 2015 (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2016a). Similar figures of up to 31 percent have been found in a developing country context for Malawi (Cho *et al.*, 2013). These high rates are problematic for a range of different reasons. Not only does it imply economic losses for the social system to register people in training unsuccessfully, as well as logistical and managerial efforts for training providers. Leaving young people in a repeated loop of disappointed attempts to enter the labour market also comes at high personal and social cost for society and the participants themselves: Every dropout goes along with a demotivating effect for the person and other participants, and an experience of failed expectations, which can be particularly damaging for a vulnerable at-risk target group whose previous academic and professional experiences were already rather discouraging (Hodzic *et al.*, 2015). According to career development theories, young people between 15 and 25 years of age are in the stage of exploration within the work life cycle, where their career self-concept is being established (Super, 1953; Savickas, 2005). This emphasises the particular negative impact of a prolonged unemployment experience for young people during this crucial developmental phase.

While high dropout rates have already been recognised as an important factor for the lack of effectiveness of job training (Flores-Lagunes, Gonzalez and Neumann, 2007; Kluve *et al.*, 2012) and as a challenge for its robust evaluation (Heckman, Smith and Taber, 1998; also for Microfinance: Karlan, 2001), very little research has been undertaken on the drivers of dropout from these programmes (Waller, 2008; Cho *et al.*, 2013). In order to design and implement ALMPs for youth effectively, one

of the first key aspects to understand is why so many people quit training prematurely. A look beyond basic sociodemographic characteristics is necessary, exploring the characteristics, attributes and reasons that drive young people's decision to withdraw from training, and how they are interrelated. The evidence on dropout behaviour of young people can mostly be derived from the literature retention from secondary and vocational education (e.g. Schöngen, 2003; Roorda *et al.,* 2011; Beicht and Walden, 2013). However, the group and context for ALMP dropout is different: Participants are young adults who have already left school, often without any degree and further previous experience of failure in their early vocational pathway (e.g. apprenticeship dropout). They enter job training programmes with the objective to find work or an apprenticeship, either voluntarily and/or because of looming benefit cuts. Their dropout decisions might be driven by factors specific to this context and not captured in the school retention literature, such as their personal resilience to previous experiences of failure, a mismatch of programme offers with their vocational needs, individual traits and characteristics, private circumstances, or other aspects. These drivers are so far poorly understood in the literature on ALMPs and career research.

This research aims at filling this gap and helping to understand who most at risk of dropping out is, and what important determinants are. For this purpose, an exploratory mixed-methods approach was applied in this study. Based on a review of the literature and an exploratory pilot study, a range of potential predictors of job training dropout were selected. These include perceived competence, relatedness and autonomy as the three basic psychological needs identified by self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2000), as well as a range of personal characteristics, namely fear of failure, grit and compliance, in addition to individual circumstances such as health problems. A cross-sectional survey was undertaken with a purposive sample of 434 unemployed youths in Germany, followed by a qualitative study (n=44) in order to understand the reasons and drivers of training dropouts in more depth.

This study contributes to several strands of literature. It is related to the large body of research on the evaluation of ALMPs, specifically in its increasing tendency to explore the role of attitudes, beliefs and non-cognitive skills on their effectiveness (DellaVigna and Paserman, 2005; Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua, 2006; Arni, 2015; Spinnewijn, 2015). It also contributes to the educational literature on school-to-work transition (Cornelius-White, 2007; Protsch and Dieckhoff, 2011; Roorda *et al.*, 2011; Elffers, Oort and Karsten, 2012; Frey and Balzer, 2014). Finally, it is connected to the field of vocational psychology, researching on the concept of grit and fear of failure and their meaning in the world of work (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Credé, Tynan and Harms, 2017).

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 1 presents a literature review on determinants of dropout from job training, as well as secondary and vocational education, and introduces the German context. Section 2 presents the methodology, including key themes arising from the pilot study. The third section consists of both qualitative and quantitative study results. Section 4 concludes. In Section 5, the findings and their implications are being discussed.

2.2 Literature review

A range of well-known career theories aim explaining how vocational decision-making and behaviour unfolds in different life stages and contexts (Super, 1953; Holland, 1959; Osipow, 1968; Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994; Savickas, 2005). However, those theories mostly focus on understanding career choices such as the uptake or change of professions and positions, rather than the decision to engage or not with the labour market (Fouad *et al.*, 2016). Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994) is a popular approach which incorporates a range of concepts from other theories. The theory sets self-efficacy and outcome expectations as central determinants for career-related choices. In recent years, the framework has been tested to explain high school dropout (Parr, Bonitz and Bonitz, 2015) and turnover intentions of female engineers (Singh *et al.*, 2013; Fouad *et al.*, 2016), and found, overall, to be of limited applicability in both contexts. The

researchers identified job satisfaction and organisational commitment, as well workplace support and development opportunities as directly relevant determinants for the career withdrawal decisions (Singh *et al.*, 2013; Fouad *et al.*, 2016). Some of those aspects relate to person-environment fit, a concept central to another strand of theories that has been drawn upon to explain professional turnover (Cable and Derue, 2002; Player *et al.*, 2017; Abdalla *et al.*, 2018). Person-environment fit approaches are influenced by Holland's theory of career personalities (Holland, 1959; Nauta, 2010) and focus on the perceived compatibility of the values and demands of an organisation, profession, job or group with the values, abilities, interests and needs of an individual. There is evidence that perceived person-job fit can predict staff turnover intentions (Abdalla *et al.*, 2018) and actual withdrawal from jobs (Cable and Derue, 2002; Player *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, interest-major-fit was found to be a strong predictor of intended study dropout of German university students (Etzel and Nagy, 2016).

For the research interest of the present study, however, those theoretical frameworks have only limited suitability. The participation in labour market training is of a transitionary nature and unemployed training participants are not expected to commit long-term to the organisation, identify with its values and/or see opportunities to develop within it. Training for the unemployed is meant to be tailored to their (potentially changing) needs, hence the logic of matching skills and requirements such as it is the case in a workplace or university context does not represent a satisfactory framework to address the present research question. The fit of trainee needs with offered supplies, as well as an appropriate fit of demanded tasks with participant abilities can still be expected to be relevant for this study and it is important to thoroughly understand those needs and abilities. However, the decision to continue or quit training is likely to be influenced by an interaction of more complex factors, as it is taking place in an interim stage between school and work and accompanied by interdependencies of young clients with different actors (i.e. job agents, job trainers). A meta-analysis on training motivation showed that both individual and situational aspects play a relevant role for participant engagement (Colquitt, LePine and Noe, 2000). It is therefore indicated to delve

deeper into the question how both individual characteristics and contextual training aspects might affect training dropout decisions (Player *et al.*, 2017)

2.2.1 Self-determination theory (SDT)

In order to explore the determinants of why people drop out, it is pivotal to understand the drivers of motivation to engage with training in the first place (Colquitt, LePine and Noe, 2000). One of the leading theories of motivation is self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985). This framework differentiates between intrinsic motivation (carrying out activities based on autonomous decisions and personal interest) and extrinsic motivation (based on external control in order to achieve a certain outcome), while those two forms are being seen rather as a continuum than as two dichotomous groups (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation has been positively associated with engagement and persistence in activities (Vallerand, Fortier and Guay, 1997; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Jõesaar, Hein and Hagger, 2011). The engagement with an activity and the persistence in it can be increased if originally extrinsically motivated behaviour is being internalised (Black and Deci, 2000). Jõesaar, Hein and Hagger (2011), who apply SDT on the dropout of youth from sports programmes, describe withdrawal as a *"maladaptive behavioural consequence (…) due to participants experiencing non-self-determined forms of motivation, whereas persistence (…) is presumed to be an adaptive outcome derived from self-determined forms of motivation."(p. 501).* According to SDT, in order to develop intrinsic motivation, three innate psychological needs have to be fulfilled as people approach their aspired outcomes: Competence, autonomy and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2000). In keeping with its Latin origin ("competentia", referring to "agreement" or "correspondence"), it can be argued that a feeling of competence is created if a person's abilities are in synergy with the difficulty of the tasks imposed on them (Frey and Balzer, 2014). The need for competence in the context of SDT refers to feeling appropriately challenged by an activity and learning to master it (Rocchi *et al.*, 2017). Relatedness means being connected to others, which comprises a sense of belonging and the feeling of being supported and cared for. Autonomy refers to the

power to make own choices, and to feel one's actions being in line with their interests, desires and sense of self (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

As opposed to other frameworks which have been applied in the context of school dropout research (Bowlby, 1979; Feather, 1982), SDT does not focus only on one main aspect, such as the nurturing teacher-relationship in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979; Roorda *et al.*, 2011) or the strength of motivation to strive for a valued goal in expectancy-value-theory (Feather, 1982; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2005). It applies a multidimensional perspective, integrating context, interpersonal relations and self-perceptions in the picture. This makes SDT an appropriate framework to be applied in the present study. The theory has been widely tested and has shown to be suitable in the context of research on school engagement (Vallerand, Fortier and Guay, 1997; Hardre and Reeve, 2003; Roorda *et al.*, 2011), dropout of young people from sport programmes (Jõesaar, Hein and Hagger, 2011) and PhD studies (Litalien and Guay, 2015), as well as job search behaviour of the unemployed (Guay *et al.*, 2003; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2004; Soenens and Vansteenkiste, 2005; Da Motta Veiga and Gabriel, 2016; Koen *et al.*, 2016). One study on job search activity of the unemployed in Belgium showed the value of the considerations of SDT beyond outcome-expectancy (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2005). The three basic psychological needs established by SDT might drive the decision by young people to drop out of training. For instance, participants might decide to leave the programme prematurely when they cannot autonomously decide on the training type or contents, when they do not feel component in the training activities and/or do not personally related to the training staff.

In addition to those motivational aspects, taking into consideration the diversity of young unemployed training clients with regard to their personal backstories, experiences, abilities and career visions, it seems likely that individual heterogeneity also plays a role when it comes to dropout decisions. Individual characteristics such as gender (Störmer and Fahr, 2013), cognitive ability (Parr, Bonitz and Bonitz, 2015), mental health (Liu, Huang and Wang, 2014) and socioeconomic background (Parr, Bonitz and Bonitz, 2015) can affect how young

people approach their training participation. Gender differences in labour force participation are particularly widespread and can only be explained to a limited degree by observable factors (Eriksson and Lagerström, 2012).

However, most of those individual attributes are not situated within the training's control sphere and are therefore of limited relevance for dropout research beyond risk group identification. Further commonly "unobserved" factors beyond those demographic aspects might also matter: Non-cognitive skills have been found to play a role in training retention (Colquitt, LePine and Noe, 2000) and related fields, such as absenteeism at work (Störmer and Fahr, 2013). Two individual traits in particular, which both emerged from the pilot study for this research and might therefore be relevant to understand young people's dropout decisions, are fear of failure and grit

2.2.2   Individual characteristics: Fear of failure and grit

Within achievement motivation theory, fear of failure is defined as "the disposition to avoid failure and/or a capacity for experiencing shame and humiliation as a consequence of failure" (Atkinson, 1957: p.360). According to this approach, the behaviour of an individual with high fear of failure is driven by the motive to prevent failing, and its consequences of embarrassment and shame. This can trigger different behavioural strategies: On the one hand, people might exercise avoidance of situations where they are threatened to fail ("flight"), or they might approach them proactively, with fear becoming a motivational driver ("fight") (Nelson *et al.*, 2013; Cacciotti and Hayton, 2014). Fear of failure in the world of work has mostly been researched with regard to vocational choices in the context of entrepreneurship. A range of studies show that high fear of failure is negatively associated with the decision to become an entrepreneur (see Cacciotti and Hayton (2014) for an overview), and leads entrepreneurs to quit in the face of obstacles (Kollmann, Stöckmann and Kensbock, 2017). This applies particularly for females: Evidence shows that women are more likely to refrain from setting up an own business because of fear of failure than men (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007; Roper

and Scott, 2009; Sánchez Cañizares and Fuentes García, 2010), and that this difference even accounts in a large part for the gender gap in entrepreneurship rates (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007; Koellinger, Minniti and Schade, 2013). Fear of failure has also shown to be a negative predictor of school engagement (Caraway *et al.*, 2003). In the light of these findings, fear of failure might also have a "flight" effect on the young unemployed, instigating them to retreat from skills training in order to avoid confrontation with the job market and potentially adverse experiences.

While high fear might lead to an avoidance of training, another increasingly prominent concept in the retention literature, namely grit, can be expected to foster retention. Defined as "perseverance and passion towards long-term goals" (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007: 1087), grit comprises the ability to sustain effort (perseverance) and interest (passion) for long-term goals, despite experiencing setbacks on the way to their achievement. It is often conceptualised as a resilience factor that helps to push through failure and adversity (Perkins-Gough, 2013; Blalock, Young and Kleiman, 2015). A range of recent studies found grit to be a relevant predictor of success and educational achievements, independent from cognitive abilities and the personality trait of conscientiousness (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). A meta-analysis showed that grit, particularly in its aspect of perseverance, predicted college retention as well as do cognitive skills (Credé, Tynan and Harms, 2017). Similarly, grit was a main predictor for remaining in rigorous military training, above and beyond physical and mental abilities (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). It was also found to reduce the probability of planning to drop out from a surgical training programme (Salles, Lin, *et al.*, 2017), abandoning unexciting but necessary tasks (Galla *et al.*, 2014), quitting jobs, and getting divorced (Eskreis-Winkler *et al.*, 2014). The related concept of self-control has shown to be an important predictor of job search behaviour, even above the motivation to work (Baay *et al.*, 2014). These findings allow for the presumption that grit might play an important role to explain dropout from ALMPs.

Grit helps to establish life goals and to persist especially through frustrating experiences (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Kleiman *et al.*, 2013). The latter was shown in a

controlled laboratory experiment, with the authors concluding that "the power of grit unfolds under difficult conditions" (Lucas et al., 2015: 22). This indicates that developing high grit might be of particular importance for people who are vulnerable due to their difficult personal and/or life circumstances. Kleiman *et al.* (2013) found that grit, in conjunction with gratitude, negatively predicted suicidal thoughts of college students through changes in meaning in life. Similarly, Blalock, Young and Kleiman (2015) showed that high grit could balance out suicide ideation for those experiencing traumatic life events. While Kleiman *et al.* (2013) found no predictive value of grit for depressive symptoms, Credé, Tynan and Harms (2017) reported a moderate negative correlation between grit and depression. The authors found in their meta-analysis a strong relation between grit and emotional stability. Grit was also found to be negatively associated with alcohol and marijuana use, as well as delinquent behaviour of youth in the US (Guerrero *et al.*, 2016) and stress in the work sphere (Meriac, Slifka and Labat, 2015). However, most studies on grit are based on higher educated sample populations (e.g. surgeons or college students). To date, there is no study looking at the effects of grit for low-educated and/or unemployed young people, and on their decisions for remaining in labour market programmes, especially under frequently occurring adverse conditions such as struggling with poor mental health.

2.2.3   Evidence on dropout

Even though ALMPs, particularly job training, and their effectiveness have been widely studied (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2015 (a meta-analysis covering over 200 evaluations); Kluve *et al.*, 2016 (a systematic review of 113 evaluations of youth employment programmes)), only few studies have looked at determinants of dropout from job training programmes, and even less with a focus on young people: An extensive literature search[8] has identified only one study for developed countries (Waller, 2008) who analysed determinants of dropout from further

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[8] The literature research was based on a variety of combinations of the search terms "Dropout/withdrawal/retention" and "Training/active labour market policies" in google scholar, EBSCO and JSTOR databases.

training in Germany based on administrative information. However, the author also highlighted the large gaps in the data available, with reasons for quitting registered for fewer than half of all dropouts, and missing information for 43 percent of those ("absenteeism/other reasons"). Some key predictors of dropout identified in this study were low education, a lack of motivation in the past, living alone and being long-term unemployed. Having had health problems in the past reduced the probability of dropout. In an extended version of this study, Paul (2015) found that employment prospects of dropouts were not significantly worse compared to participants who finalised the programmes. Studies conducted in developing countries found relationships of training quality, accessibility and family support with dropout (Cho *et al.*, 2013; Dammert and Galdo, 2013). In addition, one study also found women being more prone to unfavourable conditions, such as illness, family obligations or distance (Cho *et al.*, 2013). However, the latter findings might be of limited transferability to an urban developed country context with well-established infrastructure and less traditional family ties.

Considering the high rates of premature dropout from job training, it is surprising that more attention has not been dedicated in the evaluation literature to understanding the drivers of dropout from skills training, especially in developed countries with substantial public investment in those programmes.[9] In the context of microfinance interventions, (voluntary) dropout was found to be mostly a result of interventions not appropriately designed to the client's enterprise needs and capacities, and the unwillingness of the institutions to recognise this mismatch. Perceiving required meetings as a waste of time was also a prominent reason for dropout cited by former clients (Hulme, 1999; Wright, 2000), as well as changes in life circumstances and interpersonal dissonances with other group members and staff (Rahman, Rahman and Jalil, 2014). This goes along with the autonomy-dimension of SDT, as described above.

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[9] With a share of 0.2 per cent (6.2 million Euros) of its GDP spent on training programmes, Germany occupied rank 7 among OECD countries in 2015, and rank 2 after France in absolute investment among European countries.

Further literature on withdrawal from secondary and vocational education was considered to inform this study: In line with the relatedness-dimension of SDT, a representative study on apprenticeship dropout in Germany found conflicts with trainers to be the main reason for young people's dropout decisions (Schöngen, 2003). Similarly, a representative longitudinal study on school-to-work-transition in Germany identified the following main reasons for young people to quit apprenticeships: Wrong career choice (53 percent), interpersonal conflicts with trainers and/or peers (46 percent) and personal and/or health reasons (42 percent) (Beicht and Walden, 2013). The first two dimensions are interrelated, as the relationship with the trainer was found to have an important influence on the young apprentices' career identity (Ertelt and Frey, 2011). A supportive interpersonal relationship is also a recurrent theme in the literature on school dropouts: A meta-analysis of 99 studies showed a strong link between affective teacher-student relationships and high school engagement, particularly for at-risk students with a lower socioeconomic status (Roorda *et al.*, 2011).
In a qualitative study on high school dropouts in the US, students reported boredom and a lack of personal relatedness to classroom contents as the main reasons for dropout. Conversely, being challenged was mentioned as a positive factor for retention (Bridgeland, 2010). This reflects the SDT's basic psychological need for experiencing competence (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

Several studies for Germany are in line with this reasoning: Elffers, Oort and Karsten (2012) found a strong and significant correlation between perceiving an academic fit and emotional engagement of students in their vocational education. Difficulty or too high demand did also not show to be a significant predictor in a quantitative study of apprenticeship dropout (Rohrbach-Schmidt and Uhly, 2015). Frey and Balzer (2014) found that a low self-assessment of social and methodological competences is related to a higher dropout risk of vocational training. The evidence on school dropout shows some support for SDT; however, as the review of the literature showed, a range of further individual and contextual aspects might also play important roles in the particular context of this study. As dropout from labour market training has hardly been researched beyond

administrative determinants, both exploratory and explanatory work was needed to address the research question.

2.3 Methodology

This study employs a classical, sequential approach of "participatory econometrics" (Rao and Woolcock, 2003). Recognising the advantage of combining qualitative and quantitative methods in order to gain an understanding of both statistically significant phenomena and their context and related processes, this approach uses in-depth qualitative work as a starting point for the research. From the findings of this stage, hypotheses are derived, which inform the design of a survey instrument to be implemented consequently to test the hypotheses. The econometric analysis is in the focus of this method, while participants' inputs contribute to the study design and contents (Rao and Woolcock, 2003; Jha, Rao and Woolcock, 2007). In the present study, the survey questionnaire emerged from the results of a qualitative pilot study in the field, following an extensive review of the literature. A subsequently implemented qualitative study helped to understand and interpret the quantitative findings more in-depth.

2.3.1 Pilot study

The data collection for this study took place in the context of my larger research project on the determinants of effectiveness of job training programmes for unemployed youth. As a first step, a qualitative preparatory study was undertaken in February 2016. The objective of this study was to explore mechanisms influencing the participation in, and successful completion of training programmes, and inform the subsequent development of the quantitative survey questionnaire.

In order to gather viewpoints from different key actors related to the process of training participation, a sample of the following groups was included in the exploratory study: (1) Job agents, as the decision-makers on training referral, (2) trainers who implement the programmes, and (3) young training participants. Corresponding to the exploratory approach and hard-to-reach target group, a

purposive snowball sampling method was applied. All 12 job centres in Berlin were contacted and invited to take part in the study, resulting in 10 job agents from six job centres participating (six females and four males). Subsequently, training institutions engaged with the job centres were selected, aiming at covering a variety of districts and intervention types. A total of 15 trainers from 12 institutions were interviewed (eight males and seven females). The final part of the sample consisted of young trainees from those institutions, ensuring variation in age, gender, educational degree and unemployment duration (n=19). Subsequent to receiving informed consent from participants, semi-structured interviews of 30-120 min duration were conducted face-to-face with all study participants (n=44). Of the interviewed youths, 12 were males and seven females. Five had an intermediate school degree, eight a basic secondary school degree and six respondents did not have a school degree. Most participants (n=14) were in the range between 18 and 20 years of age, five were between 21 and 25 years old. 11 participants were unemployed for less than one year, while eight were long-term unemployed.

Among the themes arising from this preparatory study, several factors stood out for their potential relevance for the participants' decision to remain in training or not. These themes, together with the insights gained from the review of the above summarised literature, informed the design of the survey questionnaire used for the quantitative part of this study. The findings of the pilot reflect and lend support to the aforementioned considerations of SDT, namely that the need for competence, relatedness and autonomy might be important factors for drop out from job training. The study furthermore provided additional insights, pointing to potentially relevant factors for dropout (see Annex I for more detail). Based on the joint findings from retention literature and the pilot study we can hypothesise that unemployed youth drop out prematurely from their job training if the following factors occur, either alone or in combination:

- **Determinant 1:** Participants do not perceive autonomy when accessing and/or taking part in the programme
- **Determinant 2:** Participants do not feel personally connected with and being cared for by the trainer
- **Determinant 3:** Participants do not feel competent and challenged at the adequate level corresponding to their abilities
- **Determinant 4:** Participants' personal barriers keep them from training engagement
- **Determinant 5:** Participants do not have long-term goals and /or lack perseverance to pursue them
- **Determinant 6:** Participants have high fear to fail in the world of work
- **Determinant 7:** Participants are not able to maintain a regular weekly rhythm

2.3.2   Variables included in the survey

The survey questionnaire was designed to measure perceived competence, trainer relatedness, grit and fear of failure. These variables were measured with self-reports based on already validated Likert scales, which were tested with confirmatory factor analyses and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for their validity and reliability in the present context. See Annex II for a detailed description of the individual scales, items used and the psychometric procedure for their validation. Further predictors included in the questionnaire were questions assessing autonomy, career vision, upfront motivation and expected utility of training, and the ability to follow a regular weekly rhythm. In order to be able to test a range of effects arising from the qualitative work without exceeding an appropriate questionnaire volume for this study's target group, some of those variables were measured with single items (see Annex II). Control variables include the respondents' age, sex, education, unemployment duration, living situation, socioeconomic status, as well as physical and mental health issues.

The reliance on self-report measures for the assessment of the independent variables in this study might introduce common-method-bias and variations in accuracy due to differing personal frames of reference and/or responses striving for

social desirability (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015). However, given the subjective and perceptual nature of the constructs of interest, this is still the most appropriate and most commonly used instrument for their measurement. Several reviews came to the conclusion that that self-reported data provided similar results as non-self-reported variables and the problem is less of a serious one (Fried and Ferris, 1987; Krosnick, 1999; Spector, 2006; Funder, 2012). This study did not focus on interrelations between latent variables such as the commonly used measure of dropout intention (Parr, Bonitz and Bonitz, 2015), but uses an observed outcome variable (dropout), thus the bias can be expected to be of minor extent. This limitation is being dealt with in the best possible way by ensuring confidentiality to participants, presenting variables in separate sections in the survey, using established Likert scales and testing their validity and reliability with factor analyses, and controlling for interviewer effects in the regression.

2.3.3 Sample

Due to the absence of a complete sampling frame, a random sampling approach could not be undertaken for this study. The inability to conduct probability sampling is a limitation of this research. To minimise the bias arising from this limitation, a sampling frame was constructed based on available information from the main funding sources of ALMPs for youth in Berlin, in order to follow a systematic sampling procedure to the best possible degree. All providers offering programmes that matched the eligibility criteria of this study were invited to collaborate, leading to a total of 29 training interventions from 18 providers covering a range of institution sizes, neighbourhoods and training types (see section 1.6.2 for more details on this procedure and eligibility criteria). All new participants joining those interventions over the time span of ten months were invited to partake in the study, leading to a sample of 434 survey respondents.

Altogether, 44.1 percent of all surveyed youths (n=183) dropped out from training prematurely, without having found an apprenticeship or a full-time job before their regular end-date. I applied a purposeful Total Population Sampling approach

(Etikan and Alkassim, 2016), contacting all participants who met the selection criteria (here: dropping out of training without entering the labour market). This sampling approach was chosen considering the variety and complexity of potential stories behind participant's dropout motives, as well as the difficulty of access to them after they abandoned training. Out of the contacted dropouts, 51 agreed to participate in the second survey. In order to explore the reasons for their decision to leave the programmes, all of those participants were also invited to a qualitative interview, to which almost all of them (n=44) agreed.

Overall, the sample includes 434 participants (56 percent males, 44 percent females). The respondent's age ranged from 15 to 25 years with an average age of 19.5 years (SD 2.37). 40 percent of survey respondents lived in districts of Berlin with a lower socioeconomic status (SES), 35 percent in neighbourhoods with middle SES, and 25 percent in neighbourhoods of high SES. The descriptive statistics (Table 3) show that study participants were unemployed for approximately one year on average when they started training, with slightly higher unemployment duration for those who dropped out from the programmes. About one third of respondents had no or only a basic school degree and most of them (96.3 percent) did not have any vocational degree. Half the sample had some kind of physical and/or mental health issues.

Of the young people interviewed for the final qualitative stage of this study, 58 percent were male and 42 percent female. The average age was 19.8. 20.4 percent had no school degree, eight percent had a basic school degree, 24.5 percent an enhanced basic school degree, 43 percent an intermediate school degree and four percent finished their A-levels.

Table 3: Overview of basic descriptive statistics (full sample)

Variable	Variable categories	N	Overall sample	SD	N	Dropouts	SD
Total N		**434**			**183**		
Dichotomous variables (percent)							
Sex	**Total**	**432**	**100%**		**182**	**100%**	
	male	240	55.6%		99	54.4%	
	female	192	44.4%		83	45.6%	
School education	**Total**	**431**	**100%**		**181**	**100%**	
	No school degree	71	16.4%		39	21.5%	
	Basic secondary degree	64	14.9%		29	16%	
	Enhanced basic secondary degree	112	26%		45	24.9%	
	Intermediate secondary degree	153	35.5%		63	34.8%	
	A-Levels	31	7.2%		5	2.8%	
Voc. education	Finalised apprenticeship	16	3.7%		6	3.3%	
Health	**Total**	**430**	**100%**		**180**	**100%**	
	No health issues	246	57.2%		93	51.6%	
	Physical health issues	74	17.2%		34	18.9%	
	Mental health issues	62	14.4%		32	17.8%	
	Both physical and mental health issues	48	11.2%		21	11.7%	
Polytomous variables (mean)							
Age	Years	**420**	19.5	*2.37*	**173**	19.7	*2.25*
Unemployment duration	Months	**369**	11.7	*13.8*	**158**	13.9	*14.98*
Fear of failure (average score)	Values from 1 (low) to 4 (high)	**431**	2.25	*0.65*	**183**	2.21	*0.68*
Grit (average score)	Values from 1 (high) to 7 (low)	**431**	3.08	*1.29*	**183**	3.10	*1.39*
Motivation (av. score)	Values from 1 (low) to 7 (high)	**431**	5.07	*1.52*	**182**	4.98	*1.58*
Influence on training (av. score, t2)	Values from 1 (low) to 7 (high)	**223**	4.44	*1.58*	**51**	3.57	*1.60*
Trainer relatedness (av. score, t2)	Values from 1 (low) to 7 (high)	**222**	5.09	*1.32*	**51**	4.38	*1.45*
Challenge (av. score, t2)	Values from 1 (low) to 7 (high)	**221**	4.17	*1.75*	**49**	2.90	*1.69*

2.3.4   Procedure

Following a small piloting procedure and subsequent revision, the questionnaire was administered to all new participants entering the selected programmes between September 2016 and July 2017 within their first two weeks of starting the training. In order to gather information on variables which could only be assessed retrospectively (trainer-relatedness, degree of challenge, influence on contents), a second wave of data collection was conducted when participants ended their respective training - either regularly, or prematurely because of labour market integration or dropout (see Section 1.6.3 for more details on this procedure).

Following the initial data collection, information on programme attrition of participants was obtained from training providers at a regular basis. When trainers reported about training withdrawal, the individuals in question were contacted, asked to complete the second wave of the questionnaire and invited to participate in an interview. For those participants who did not drop out, the same procedure was applied at the end of their training.

At the second point of data collection (t2), 51 percent of the original sample could be reached again for the follow-up survey (n=223), of which 23 percent were dropouts (n=51). This attrition rate introduces a potential bias for the interpretability of the additional results from the second wave. However, comparing key control variables of those youths who participated in the second wave with those who dropped out from the study, no statistically significant differences in gender (p=0.75), age (p=0.08), unemployment duration (p=0.67) or socioeconomic status (p=0.1) could be observed. Participants of the follow-up wave were slightly better educated than non-participants (p<0.05). Considering the hard-to-reach target group of this research, and the attrition rates of studies with similar target groups, which range up to 60 percent (Cho *et al.*, 2013) or even 70 percent (McArdle *et al.*, 2007), this limitation can be considered acceptable. Finally, in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews were undertaken with dropouts to understand the reasons behind people's decisions to leave training prematurely (n=44). The qualitative interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

2.3.5 Analytical approach

In order to analyse the relationship between the selected variables and the dichotomous dependent variable (whether the student dropped out from training or not), binomial logit models were estimated. Logit regressions are an appropriate approach to estimate binary dependant variables, as those variables are categorical in their nature, which does not cater to the assumptions of alternative linear models such as the normal distribution of residuals. Furthermore, binary outcomes are restricted to an interval of values between 0 and 1, while predictions from linear models are not designed to provide probabilities and can result in coefficients above 1 and below 0, which introduces substantial barriers to their interpretability and a potential source of bias (Horrace and Oaxaca, 2005; Greene, 2014). For those reasons, logit models are the most widely used method for the multivariate analysis of binary outcomes in the evaluation literature of ALMPs (Acharya and Neupane, 2011; McGee, 2015; Caliendo and Mahlstedt, 2017; on career withdrawal: Fouad *et al.*, 2016).

Formally, the probability of dropout is considered here as a random variable following a binomial distribution:

$$Y_i \sim B(n_i, \pi_i),$$

with binomial denominator n_i and probability of success π_i.

The probability of dropout π_i is estimated as a function of an array of the following explanatory variables:

$$logit(\pi_i) =$$
$$\beta_0 + \beta_1 Mot_i + \beta_2 Access_i + \beta_3 ExpUse_i + \beta_4 Ability\_job_i + \beta_5 Ability\_res_i +$$
$$\beta_6 Ability\_social_i + \beta_7 Fear_i + \beta_8 Vision +$$
$$\beta_9 Grit_i + \beta_{10} Rhythm_i + \beta_{11} Influence\ (t2)_i + \beta_{12} TrainerRel(t2)_i +$$
$$\beta_{13} Challenge(t2)_i + \beta_{14} CONTROL_i + \mu_i.$$

In this equation, β_0 is the intercept, the following coefficients refer to the average slope coefficients for upfront motivation (β_1), different channels of access to training (β_2), expected utility of training (β_3), perceived ability to search for and find jobs (β_4

- β_6, *see Annex II*), fear of failure (β_7), career vision (β_8), grit (β_9) and the ability to have a regular weekly rhythm (β_{10}). The following three coefficients represent the variables assessed retrospectively in the second wave of data collection (t2), which were included additionally in the model: influence on training contents (β_{11}), trainer relatedness (β_{12}), and perceived level of challenge in the training (β_{13}). Control (β_{14}) is a set of control variables (gender, age, health, school degree, living situation, unemployment duration, training duration and socioeconomic status, measured by a classification of residential districts[10]). μ_i is the composite error. The errors are assumed to be uncorrelated and robust to heteroscedasticity.

Following the basic model, I examined important sample characteristics such as gender, age and education level as boundary conditions for the prediction of dropout by the aforementioned variables. For this purpose, corresponding interaction terms were included, and average marginal effects were calculated. To account for heterogeneity across the different training programmes, standard errors were clustered at the level of training in all models.[11] The qualitative interviews were recorded and transcribed in German, and the data was thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and subsequently coded in English, using NVivo 11 software. I conducted this procedure myself, as a bilingual person fluent in both English and German.

2.4 Results

Determinant 1: Participants do not perceive autonomy when accessing and/or taking part in the programme

The first hypothesis derived from SDT was that young people are more likely to drop out from training when they feel a lack of autonomy in the training context.

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[10] Parental education was an additional variable assessed in the original survey questionnaire to understand socioeconomic status, however, due to a very high incidence of missing values this information could not be used for analysis.

[11] The analysis of the quantitative data was undertaken with MPLUS and Stata 14 software.

Most participants (58 percent) in the overall sample were not presented with more than one choice of training by their job agent. However, the results from the regression model (Table 4) show that none of the dummy variables generated for the different access channels to training were significant predictors for training dropout. On the other hand, the perceived influence on training contents was significantly associated with dropout until perceived challenge was included as an additional control variable in the model (Table 6). This indicates that participants were more likely to drop out if they could not shape training contents according to their demand, but that they were more inclined to stay in the programmes in spite of this lack of own say, when they felt challenged.

The evidence from the ex-post conducted qualitative study with dropouts supports these findings and provides additional insights in autonomy-related aspects of dropout. When describing their decision processes to leave training prematurely; participants often referred to (an absence of) the reflection of their own identity in the orientation and application process. It was positively mentioned when they maintained an ownership of the process and as an adverse experience if they did not. The following two contrasting statements illustrate this:

> *"At the beginning I was very motivated, but then I lost motivation over the course of the programme, because [the trainer] was very critical with my documents. Nothing moved on and I couldn't recognise myself in my own CV and applications anymore. I wanted my own personality still to be reflected in there."*

> *"He criticised a lot, but afterwards I still felt that what we did was "mine". I liked that a lot. This was not the case for everybody."*

These aspects of autonomy are closely intertwined with trainer relatedness: When dropouts mentioned a perceived violation of their autonomy as a driver for their decision to withdraw from the programme, it was always in the context of the interaction with the trainer.

As one respondent described:

"It was unpleasant in the training. I was supposed to write applications to firms where I didn't want to work. We talked about that, but [the trainer] implemented my ideas differently. I didn't want that. I preferred not to mention it, I just wanted to get away as quick as possible."

In this context, several participants criticised their own career visions not being taken-up by the trainers. One dropout explained:

"I will now get back to school to get a higher degree. In the training, they tried to talk me out of it and into starting an apprenticeship. That was also the case for others, the trainer often tried to talk them out of their original ideas, partly telling them that they were stupid. That's when we participants revolted."

Finally, for one quarter of the interviewees (11 of 44 interviewees) their training was not the right type in the first place. This mirrors the findings on dropout drivers from microfinance interventions (Hulme, 1999; Wright, 2000). Reasons for the mismatch were often a misunderstanding of the training objectives (i.e. if the training specifically prepared for a school degree, if an official work experience certificate for the sector of interest was issued, if language skills were sufficient, or not); or specific contents. These issues seemed to be mostly rooted in miscommunication with the job centre agents about the detailed training targets and contents, as one participant remarked:

"The areas I was interested in were not supported in this training. I don't want to work in carpentry, metalworking or home economics. I'm interested in social issues. My job agent just wanted to get rid of me and put me anywhere. This was decided over my head."

In summary, it stands out that autonomous access to training did not show a significant association with dropout. Unless the training type was of the completely wrong fit in the first place, how people accessed training at the start did not significantly affect their decision to drop out. On the other hand, perceived autonomy during the actual training implementation, such as finding the own identity reflected in application decisions and –materials and perceiving own

influence on programme contents, was a crucial factor for young people to remain in and engage with training. Similar results were found for participants of reemployment courses in the Netherlands, where perceived autonomy was found to be an important determinant of job search motivation (Koen *et al.*, 2016) and perceived choice to access the course turned out to be less important for participants' motivation than the perceived usefulness of the training (Koen, Klehe and van Vianen, 2014). The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative evidence on autonomy are in line with SDT, with a special emphasis on perceived autonomy support by the trainer as an important dropout factor. The results suggest that choice of access to training does not predict dropout; and feeling challenged might partly compensate for a lack of autonomy in shaping training contents when it comes to the decision to leave or remain in the intervention.

Table 4: Results from the logistic regression model (overall and by gender subgroups)

Logistic regression for dropout	Overall model	95% CI	Female	95% CI	Male	95% CI
	Odds ratio		Odds ratio		Odds ratio	
Dropout from training						
schooldegree==no school	2.708***	1.52-4.82	4.842*	0.99-23.7	1.570	0.65-3.78
lowgrit	1.801**	1.09-2.97	1.380	0.55-3.45	2.563***	1.44-4.57
highfear	0.649**	0.43-0.99	0.255***	0.10-0.64	1.316	0.49-3.52
highmotivation	0.463***	0.72-0.79	0.319**	0.10-0.99	0.612*	0.37-1.00
rhythm==difficult for me, but I do it because it is necessary	0.527***	0.35-0.79	0.653	0.20-2.14	0.364**	0.15-0.87
living==shared with other people	4.353**	1.11-17.03	6.198*	0.92-41.9	4.325	0.51-36.4
health = no issues	1.000		1.000		1.000	
health = physical issues	1.945**	1.04-3.64	5.251**	1.32-20.9	0.987	0.41-2.36
health = mental issues	2.760**	1.12-6.78	8.516***	2.46-29.5	1.749	0.47-6.48
health = both physical and mental issues	2.089**	1.06-4.31	5.669***	1.77-18.1	1.149	0.43-3.06
Duration of unemployment (months)	1.023**	1.00-1.04	1.023	1.00-.105	1.022*	1.00-1.05
access==My job agent decided that, I did not participate in this decision	1.497	0.56-4.02	0.549	0.19-1.60	3.407	0.50-23.3
access==My job agent suggested only this intervention to me and I accepted	1.182	0.57-2.46	0.616	0.28-1.38	2.237	0.31-16.1
access==My job agent suggested this intervention and others to me and I decided	1.674	0.73-3.83	0.797	0.31-2.08	3.042	0.34-26.9
access==I suggested my job agent to participate here and he/she approved it	2.077*	0.91-4.76	2.564	0.39-16.8	2.646	0.31-22.6
access==Others	1.000		1.000		1.000	
perceived ability to find jobs	1.114	0.86-1.44	1.128	0.70-1.81	1.146	0.89-1.47
perceived ability to search jobs_non-social	0.842	0.66-1.07	0.547***	0.37-0.80	0.817	0.52-1.27
perceived ability to search jobs_social	1.178	0.90-1.53	0.933	0.56-1.54	1.540**	1.09-2.18
career vision	1.002	0.56-1.79	1.186	0.48-2.94	1.055	0.51-2.19
expected utility	1.598	0.80-3.18	0.762	0.20-2.98	2.213	0.83-5.92
sex	1.161	0.71-1.89				

age	1.001	0.87-1.16	1.035	0.84-1.27	1.035	0.89-1.21
duration of training (months)	0.910*	0.82-1.01	0.891	0.72-1.10	0.936	0.81-1.08
socialindex=1 (low)	1.000		1.000		1.000	
socialindex=2 (middle)	1.380	0.57-3.35	1.524	0.43-5.43	1.171	0.50-2.73
socialindex=3 (high)	1.948	0.73-5.20	0.931	0.43-3.67	2.580*	0.93-7.14
Constant	0.216	0.01-5.16	20.620	0.51-830	0.010**	0.00-0.71
Pseudo R-Squared	0.131		0.280		0.130	
N. of cases	338		143		195	
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01						

Table 5: Regression results by age subgroups

	up to 19 years Odds ratio	95% CI	above 20 years Odds ratio	95% CI
Logistic regression for dropout by age groups				
schooldegree==no school	5.255***	2.13-13.0	2.057	0.08-5.20
lowgrit	1.065	0.42-2.72	2.639**	1.04-6.71
highfear	0.538*	0.28-1.05	0.700	0.35-1.42
highmotivation	0.305***	0.14-0.68	0.495	0.17-1.43
rhythm==difficult for me, but I do it because it is necessary	0.754	0.37-1.52	0.257***	0.10-0.64
living==shared with other people	1.000		2.690	0.61-11.8
health = no issues	1.000		1.000	
health = physical issues	2.077	0.64-6.74	3.331*	1.0-11.14
health = mental issues	4.107**	1.04-16.27	2.180	0.53-9.03
health = both physical and mental issues	5.760***	2.4-13.8	1.898	0.63-5.7
Duration of unemployment (months)	1.037***	1.01-1.06	1.028**	1.01-1.05
access==My job agent decided that, I did not participate in this decision	2.252	0.76-6.71	1.351	0.26-6.98
access==My job agent suggested only this intervention to me and I accepted to pa	2.125	0.73-6.20	1.039	0.23-4.64
access==My job agent suggested this intervention and others to me and I decided	1.375	0.41-4.63	3.952**	1.0-15.6
access==I suggested my job agent to participate here and he/she approved it	2.795	0.39-19.85	3.226	0.65-16.0
access==others	1.000		1.000	
perceived ability to find jobs	0.944	0.64-1.39	1.303	0.90-1.89
perceived ability to search jobs_non-social	0.886	0.69-1.14	0.869	0.61-1.25
perceived ability to search jobs_social	1.193	0.83-1.71	1.029	0.66-1.6
careervision	1.044	0.53-2.07	1.008	0.41-2.46
expected utility	2.202	0.85-5.71	1.579	0.66-3.79
duration of training (months)	0.849**	0.75-0.96	0.938	0.77-1.14
sex	1.028	0.6-1.75	1.358	0.62-2.97
socialindex=1 (low)	1.000		1.000	
socialindex=2 (middle)	0.472	0.13-1.69	3.596***	1.65-7.82
socialindex=3 (high)	2.252	0.52-9.68	2.684**	1.15-6.28

Constant	0.437	0.42-4.6	0.074	0.00-1.84
Pseudo R-Squared	0.168		0.203	
N. of cases	180		163	
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01				

Determinant 2: Participants do not feel personally connected with and being cared for by the trainer

The results from the data collected in t2 show that the odds of dropout for participants who scored high on trainer-relatedness in the retrospective assessment were reduced by 45 percent (p<0.01) (Table 6).

This finding is mirrored by the qualitative evidence, with the trainer relationship being the most frequently mentioned theme emerging from the interviews with dropouts (21 of 44 interviewees). Participants described a range of facets related to this theme, which influenced their decision to leave the programme. Among those that stand out are the feeling of being neglected by the trainer, one's own suggestions being immediately refused and/or not taken seriously by trainers, being pushed to pursue goals or strategies with which one doesn't identify, feeling confused by the frequent turnover of reference persons (all with different opinions), and perceiving a lack of competence from trainers for the own needs.

The perception of negligence was mostly rooted in the share of time and individual attention dedicated to participants, compared to individual work time where participants are supposed to complete work sheets, write applications or search for jobs online. As one participant described:

> *"The coaches did not really cater to us. We sat the whole day at the computer and searched for internships and apprenticeships. Much more didn't happen. They came to answer specific questions, but there was no time to go in-depth."*

A range of statements refer to this feeling of being left alone, best summarised by one participants' remark: *"In this programme you are more or less abandoned."*

Further important facets of the trainer-relationship which led to a violation of participants' perceived autonomy have been described in the previous paragraph. The results show that, coherent with the findings from the pilot study and the literature on dropout from secondary and vocational education (Roorda *et al.*, 2011; Beicht and Walden, 2013), the relationship with the teacher/trainer is one of the most important factors for participants to remain in or leave training. The most frequently mentioned theme in the qualitative evidence was participants feeling neglected by the trainers, which – such as the violation of autonomy – goes along with a lack of perceived personal appreciation. This also mirrors the findings from the literature on high school dropout, with perceived negligence and a weak teacher-student relationship being a central factor for students for disengaging and finally dropping out from school (Hardre and Reeve, 2003; Roorda *et al.*, 2011).

Table 6: Logistic regression results in t1 (original model) and t2 (with additional variables from follow-up survey included)

Logistic regression for dropout including follow-up data

	Original model	95% CI	Original model with follow-up variables	95% CI
	Odds ratio		Odds ratio	
Average score for teacher trust (t2)			0.551**	0.35-0.88
highchallenge			0.166***	0.06-0.43
highinfluence_2			0.520	0.19-1.45
schooldegree==no school	2.708***	1.52-4.82	0.723	0.12-4.29
lowgrit	1.801**	1.09-2.97	1.510	0.36-6.35
highfear	0.649**	0.43-0.99	0.322**	0.12-0.87
highmot	0.463***	0.72-0.79	0.462	0.14-1.57
rhythm==difficult for me, but I do it because it is necessary	0.527***	0.35-0.79	0.880	0.32-2.46
living==shared with other people	4.353**	1.11-17.0	10.720***	3.69-31.15
health - no issues	1.000		1.000	
health - physical issues	1.945**	1.04-3.64	1.637	0.33-8.13
health - mental issues	2.760**	1.12-6.78	8.084**	1.46-44.65

health - both physical and mental issues	2.089**	1.06-4.31	14.430***	3.27-63.7
Duration of unemployment (months)	1.023**	1.00-1.04	1.041*	1.0-1.09
access==My job agent decided that, I did not participate in this decision	1.497	0.56-4.02	2.736	0.15-50.0
access==My job agent suggested only this intervention to me and I accepted	1.182	0.57-2.46	1.718	0.1-30.19
access==My job agent suggested this intervention and others to me and I decided	1.674	0.73-3.83	4.327	0.25-74
access==I suggested my job agent to participate here and he/she approved it	2.077*	0.91-4.76	1.000	
access==Others	1.000		1.000	
perceived ability to find jobs	1.114	0.86-1.44	1.274	0.76-2.12
perceived ability to search jobs_non-social	0.842	0.66-1.07	0.693	0.27-1.78
perceived ability to search jobs_social	1.178	0.90-1.53	1.074	0.67-1.71
career vision	1.002	0.56-1.79	2.829	0.70-11.43
expected utility	1.598	0.80-3.18	0.535	0.11-2.58
sex	1.161	0.71-1.89	1.734	0.52-5.74
age	1.001	0.87-1.16	0.761*	0.57-1.01
duration of training (months) t1	0.910*	0.82-1.01	1.081	0.77-1.52
socialindex=1 (low)	1.000		1.000	
socialindex=2 (middle)	1.380	0.57-3.35	4.229	0.74-24.1
socialindex=3 (high)	1.948	0.73-5.20	1.231	0.19-7.82
duration of training (months) t2			0.542***	0.37-0.79
Constant	0.216	0.01-5.16	4239.3***	26.2-683763
Pseudo R-Squared	0.131		0.463	
N. of cases	338		163	
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01				

Determinant 3: Participants do not feel competent and challenged at the adequate level corresponding to their abilities

Contrary to the findings of Hardre and Reeve (2003) on high school dropout, perceived competence (here: to search for and/or find a job) was not a significant predictor for dropout in any of the three assessed dimensions (see Table 4 and Annex II). However, adding the retrospectively gathered variable on perceived challenge to the model, the results show that feeling highly challenged in the training reduced the dropout risk by as much as 83 percent (p<0.001). This indicates that feeling challenged is a crucial aspect for the young unemployed to engage and remain in job training. This finding is also well-reflected in the qualitative evidence. A high share of interviewed dropouts (19 of 44 interviewees) described the training as a waste of their time, highlighting a lack of content, learning or challenge, boring routines and/or an abundance of time spent in the training without being occupied with tasks. Training was repeatedly referred to as "occupational therapy" by former participants.

With regard to content, several interviewees claimed a lack of clear inputs on topics related to the achievement of their professional goals and expressed the desire to be more focussed during the time they spend in training. They often mentioned comparisons with other activities which could be undertaken in the same time, such as doing the same work at home, or earning money at the side, and assessed those as more useful.

As one respondent pointed out: *"On Fridays we played games. I didn't like that. We are not in nursery school. We could have sat together and had a focussed discussion about professional goals instead."*

The daily duration of the training was consistently assessed as too long, resulting in boredom, playing games, or being allowed to leave much earlier than foreseen in the rules. Both the lack of tasks and the lack of attention due to training staff being busy with administrative work were recurrently mentioned aspects. Several interviewees described a desire to receive more and/or clearer learning inputs and responsibilities during the training, such as one participant pointed out:

"We didn't do much. Most of the time, we played online videogames. I would have preferred to have more teaching."

These findings are coherent with previous qualitative research by Bridgeland (2010) on dropout in US high schools. Boredom was the main dropout reason mentioned by students, who also reported a desire for more rigour, while parents and teachers had lower expectations towards the students.

The results confirm the assertion established by SDT that the three dimensions of autonomy, relatedness and competence, while individually defined, are yet interrelated (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Participants were often not occupied with tasks that they could connect to their skills and that presented a challenge to them, thereby applying and re-affirming their abilities. The main reasons arising from this data were a highly diverse peer-environment (see below) and a shortage of training contents for the scheduled attendance time. Coming from a place where they most probably already experienced a lack of affirmation at competence level, this feeling of "hanging around" was described by interviewees with surprisingly strong aversion (in the words of one participant: *"After this training here it was a disaster, I literally lost the will to live because it was so boring.").* Dropouts mentioned explicitly the desire of doing more focused activities in the training and having less spare time. This gap in the sphere of competence goes along with a lack of trainer-relatedness, both leading to a feeling of abandonment as a central theme that instigated the decision to leave the programme. On the other hand, being pushed too much or in a direction where participants could not identify with, lead to a violation of their autonomy and, consequently, also to disengagement from training. Aspects of non- or negative relatedness to the trainers were not only the most frequently mentioned drivers for dropout, but also both the competence and autonomy aspects were contextualised with reference to the trainers. However, it is worth noting that a positive trainer relationship alone did not compensate for the absence of competence or autonomy-support, as several participants pointed out that the trainers were nice, but they preferred to leave the training because they felt not picked-up in their own ideas and/or were bored.

Determinant 4: Participants' personal barriers keep them from training engagement

Having mental health issues (alone or in combination with physical health issues) increased the dropout risk by a factor of 2 ($p < 0.05$) (Table 4) in the present sample. The subgroup analyses show that mental health issues go a long with up to seven time's higher odds to leave training for females, while for males the effect was smaller and not significant anymore (Table 4). Younger people up to 19 years of age had an even three to five times higher dropout risk if they had mental health issues (Table 5). Altogether, women were also more frequently affected by mental health issues than men (30 percent of women compared to 22.3 percent of men), which corresponds to general statistics about gender and (registered) mental health in a young age (World Health Organization, 2002).

While different kinds of personal issues might constitute serious barriers to a successful labour market integration of young people, in the qualitative evidence of this study they were a rather subordinate theme. Only four out of 44 interviewees mentioned family problems, pregnancy or severe psychological problems in the context of their decision to drop out from training. An explanation for this might be the amplifying effect of personal issues on other direct drivers of dropout, e.g. participants with psychological problems might me more prone to quitting when they do not experience autonomy, relatedness or competence than their healthy peers. Subgroup analyses of dropout factors specifically for participants with mental health issues showed that of the here analysed independent variables grit was the only significant predictor, indicating that the dropout risk is 3 times higher if this group has low levels of grit (OR=4.05, $p < 0.05$, see Table 17 in Annex III). This finding will be explored further in the following subsection.

Determinant 5: Participants do not have long-term goals and/or lack perseverance to pursue them

While having a career vision at training start did not show a significant effect on dropout, having low levels of grit increased the odds of dropout for training participants by 80 percent (OR=1.8, $p < 0.05$) (Table 4). The effect is stronger and

highly significant for males and participants aged 20 years or older, while it is not significant anymore for females and younger people. Similar results were found by Coneus, Gernandt and Saam (2009) for the effect of locus of control, another non-cognitive trait, which predicted dropout from vocational education only for older people. One possible explanation could be that grit increases with age, as people develop a long-term attitude and perseverant capacity over time (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Credé, Tynan and Harms, 2017). However, in the present study grit was not correlated with age (r= 0.001, p=0.99). Also, grit showed no significant correlation with education, and the coefficient remained significant when including these variables to the regression model. This suggests that perseverance is an important dropout factor above and beyond cognitive abilities and "increased life wisdom" with age.

Assessing the interaction between grit and mental health, the results show a strong and significant difference in the likelihood of dropout for people with mental health issues for different levels of grit: Predictive margins show that the higher the grit, the lower the dropout risk for participants with mental health problems (see Figure 6). At very high levels of grit, the increased dropout risk for people with mental health issues was completely balanced out. The marginal effects were significant for people with mental health issues (see Figure 6) and the interaction effect of grit and mental health in the logistic regression was significant at 5 percent level (OR=1.63, p<0.05). This finding goes along with the rather recently emerging strand of studies highlighting the role of grit as a factor of resilience in settings of vulnerable mental health (Kleiman *et al.*, 2013; Blalock, Young and Kleiman, 2015), and is particularly relevant for women as the group most affected by mental health problems.

Figure 6: Absence or presence of mental health issues at different levels of grit: predictive margins and marginal effects
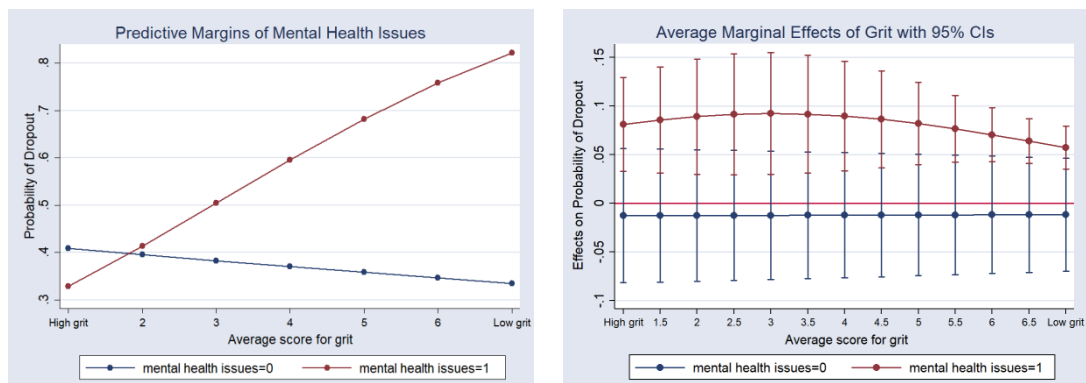
**Determinant 6: Participants have high fear to fail in the world of work**

An unexpected finding is that fear of failure predicted dropout negatively in this study: Having high fear at training start decreased the odds of dropout by 35 percent (p<0.05). The effect increased to 74 percent (p<0.01) for women, while it was not significant anymore for men in the subgroup analysis (Table 4).

In general, women showed significantly higher levels of fear of failure in this study than men.[12] The gender difference is in line with the above described literature on fear of failure in the context of entrepreneurship, where women were frequently found to expose higher levels of fear of failure (Nelson *et al.*, 2013; Tsai, Chang and Peng, 2016) and be more driven in their behaviour by fear than men (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007; Roper and Scott, 2009). However, other than hypothesised, participants with high fear do not drop out more frequently as a strategy to avoid the labour market. On the contrary, they tend to remain in the programmes. Hence, in the present context, fear of failure might instigate trainees to approach the intervention and persist in it, rather than avoiding it by quitting. To understand this effect better, the model was re-run including job search activity at training start as an additional variable.[13] The results show that the interaction effect between the

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[12] Mean = 2.41 (women) vs. 2.12 (men) on a 4-point Likert scale, a Mann-Whitney test showed a highly significant difference between the two groups (p<0.01).

[13] Measured as the amount of hours spent with job search in the last month before the survey, and classified as binary variable with "high search activity" representing more than 13 hours and "low search activity" up to 13 hours.

two variables was highly significant (OR=.32, p<0.01). The dropout-reducing effect of fear was only strong and significant for people with an active job search behaviour at training start (even though fear and job search activity showed a slight but significant negative correlation (r=-0.16, p<0.01), suggesting that fear overall might rather paralyse than instigate action). For inactive job searchers, fear hardly made a difference, and the average marginal effects were not significant. This shows that high fear might prevent those people from dropping out who translate their fear into increased job search action, but not those for who fear results in paralysis. Nelson *et al.* (2013) remark that active, fear-driven individuals often suffer from anxiety, which is debilitating for their further professional pathway. A moderate highly significant correlation between high fear and mental health issues (r=0.24, p<0.001), with a notably higher correlation coefficient for active searchers (r=0.37, p<0.01) supports this presumption.

Figure 7: Predictive margins and average marginal effects of the interaction between fear of failure and job search activity
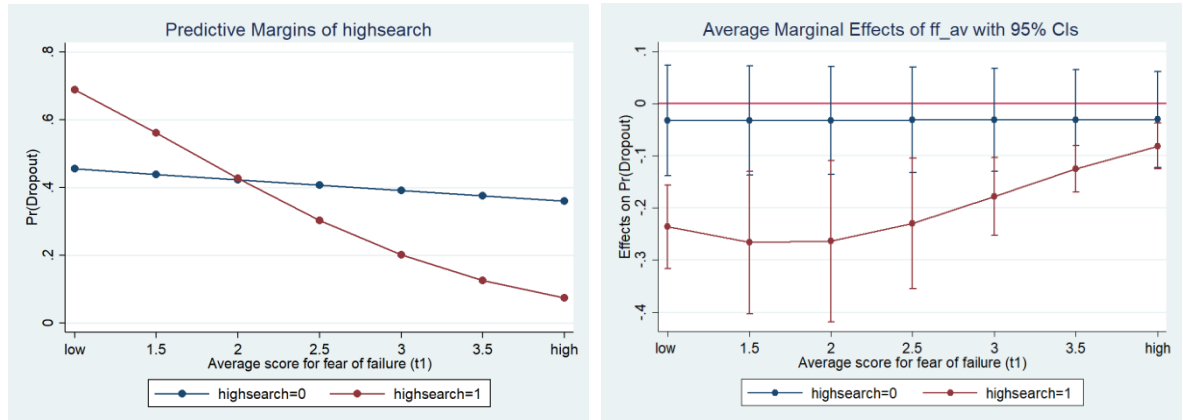
Determinant 7: Participants are not able to maintain a regular weekly rhythm

Finally, another theme arising from the pilot study was that participants quit the programmes because they could not stick to a regular rhythm, such as getting up early and attending training daily. In the quantitative study, the self-reported ability to follow a regular weekly routine predicted dropout only in one aspect: Participants who answered this question with the statement "It is difficult for me,

but I can do it if it's necessary" had a significantly lower likelihood to drop out (OR = 0.53, p<0.01). This effect was not observable for any of the other answer options.[14] This observation can be interpreted as a compliant attitude, suggesting that those trainees, who are willing to persist through unpleasant conditions when required, are less likely to quit training. This is in line with findings from Baay *et al.* (2014), showing that self-control can be a stronger predictor of job search activity than motivation. This attitude is conceptually closely related to the perseverance-dimension of grit, which could be confirmed through the subgroup analysis: Similar to the findings for grit, having a compliant attitude reduced the odds of dropout by 76 percent for older people (p<0.01) and by 64 percent for males (p<0.05), while the effect was not significant anymore for younger participants and females. The two variables were only moderately correlated (r=0.19, p<0.001), indicating that they are still measuring two separate concepts.

Further predictors and control variables

The expected utility of the training for pursuing own life goals was not significantly associated with a higher dropout risk. Consistent with Waller (2008), if participants were highly motivated at the beginning of training it reduced their odds of dropout by 54 percent (p<0.01). The results from the gender subgroup analysis (Table 4) indicate that this effect remained only significant at 5 percent level for females. These results suggest that even though the expected utility of training and high upfront motivation were significantly correlated (r=.58, p<0.01), motivation played a role in dropout decisions beyond expected outcome-efficacy. Similar results of un-related upfront expectations with training outcomes were found for Germany by Mahlstedt (2016) and for career withdrawal decisions of women engineers (Fouad *et al.*, 2016). This is in line with SDT, allowing for the presumption that those participants motivated beyond outcome-expectations, i.e. intrinsically motivated, have a lower probability to drop out. In the qualitative data, many interviewees highlighted their longing to get out of the house and have some structure again.

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[14] *no problem/no problem if the activity is enjoyable/very difficult*

Part of participants' upfront motivation to participate in job training might therefore be rooted in this desire for following a regular daily structure.

While the overall risk to dropout from training did not differ significantly by gender, age, socioeconomic status and foreseen training duration, it was strongly determined by education: The odds of leaving training prematurely were 1.7 times higher if participants did not have a school degree ($p<0.001$), consistent with the findings of Waller (2008) for Germany. This effect applied particularly to males, and was over four times higher for the younger age group (OR=5.3, $p<0.01$), while it was not significant anymore for those above 20 years of age and female trainees.

Finally, living with other people increased the odds of dropout by a factor of 4.3 ($p<0.05$). This might be explained by a lack of control compared to those living with their families, considering that benefit cuts due to irregular training assistance often affect the whole household.[15]

Given that having no school degree is one of the most important predictors of dropout, further subgroup analyses were undertaken to get a more differentiated picture of how participants' dropout decision might be driven differently, depending on their education level. While low motivation and health issues were dropout drivers particularly for those with a lower education (=either having no school degree, or a degree lower than intermediary secondary education), for those with higher school degrees grit and a compliant attitude were highly significant predictors (see Table 7). The higher educated who accessed the training by own suggestion were furthermore three times more likely to drop out. This might be due to a mismatch of training contents and own needs, and a comparatively favourable

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[15] The benefit system in Germany groups several household members entitled to financial support to a "community of need". Consequently, benefit cuts affect the overall household budget, rather than the individual responsible for the cuts. This procedure has both advantages and drawbacks for training assistance: On the one hand, family members might push participants to attend training regularly in order to avoid common sanctions. On the other hand, as stated by several interviewees, irregularly attending or withdrawing training participants do not feel the immediate financial consequences of their behaviour financially, which reduces the foreseen effect of the sanctions.

position in the job market which enables this group to move on to other activities better tailored to their demand.

The results were subject to an additional robustness check with linear regression analysis (see Annex IV). Most predictors remained significant at 5 percent level, with the exception of health and trainer-relatedness; these predictors were now only significant at 10 percent level. All interaction effects stayed significant at 5 percent level.

As an additional robustness check, I re-ran the original regression model excluding, one at a time, the control variables of education, training duration and unemployment duration. This because they may be themselves related to other explanatory variables. Results in general hold. For example, excluding training duration from the model made no qualitative difference to the observed effects. By contrast, without education as a control variable in the model, the negative effect of health issues on dropout turned insignificant. Eliminating unemployment duration from the regression resulted in the effect of grit and challenge turning insignificant in some of the regressions. All other effects were qualitatively unchanged by the variation in control variables. The findings from this additional exercise suggest that the effect of health on dropout is contingent on controlling for education, and that the effects of grit and challenge as predictors of dropout are dependent on taking into account different spells of unemployment. With my limited survey data it is difficult to investigate further the relationship between these variables, and the relevant repercussions on their roles as predictors of dropout. My qualitative data indicate that education and unemployment duration may play an important role in determining dropout, therefore indirectly supporting the inclusion of these variables. Further research could focus on the relationship between these variables to highlight how they may be affecting one another and in turn be related to dropout.

Table 7: Subgroup analysis by education level

Logistic regression for dropout by education				
	Low education Odds ratio	**95% CI**	**High education** Odds ratio	**95% CI**
lowgrit	0.738	0.32-1.71	4.596***	2.17-9.72
highfear	0.577*	0.31-1.09	0.533	0.19-1.47
highmot	0.254***	0.12-0.52	0.910	0.3-2.76
rhythm==difficult for me, but I do it because it is necessary	0.693	0.40-1.21	0.256***	0.1-0.69
living==shared with other people	6.045*	0.97-37.6	2.058	0.36-11.67
health = no issues	1.000		1.000	
health = physical issues	2.073**	1.08-3.96	1.992	0.56-7.03
health = mental issues	3.294**	1.09-9.95	3.234*	0.94-11.17
health = both physical and mental issues	1.277	0.51-3.20	3.412*	0.97-11.99
duration of unemployment (months)	1.027*	1.0-1.06	1.009	0.97-1.05
access==My job agent decided that, I did not participate in this decision	1.164	0.24-5.6	3.679	0.48-28.17
access==My job agent suggested only this intervention to me and I accepted	1.614	0.36-7.32	2.134	0.52-8.79
access==My job agent suggested this intervention and others to me and I decided	4.458*	0.84-23.7	1.078	0.22-5.41
access==I suggested my job agent to participate here and he/she approved it	3.056	0.39-24.3	4.163**	1.12-15.31
access==others	1.000		1.000	
perceived ability to find jobs	1.156	0.86-1.55	0.922	0.60-1.42
perceived ability to search jobs_non-social	0.842	0.63-1.12	0.609**	0.40-0.93
perceived ability to search jobs_social	1.124	0.85-1.48	1.414	0.86-2.32
careerdum	0.650	0.33-1.28	1.397	0.53-3.68
expected utility	1.340	0.62-2.91	3.432*	0.86-13.77
duration of training (months)	0.923	0.78-1.09	0.880*	0.76-1.02
sex	1.727	0.77-3.87	0.688	0.24-1.99
age	1.062	0.89-1.27	0.976	0.78-1.23
socialindex=1 (low)	1.000		1.000	
socialindex=2 (middle)	1.119	0.41-3.03	2.005	0.62-6.49
socialindex=3 (high)	1.621	0.45-5.87	2.589	0.71-9.40

Constant	0.180	0.01-6.73	0.352	0-104.4
R-squared	0.165		0.223	
N. of cases	184		154	
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01				

Additional theme 1: Negative peer-effects

An additional strong theme emerging from the qualitative evidence were peer-effects in the training context. 18 out of 44 interviewees referred to their training peers as a factor for dropout, in most cases in the context of feeling negatively influenced, distracted or insufficiently challenged due to a high diversity of age, knowledge levels and barriers in the same group. Having too many participants per trainer and consequently not receiving adequate attention was recurrently criticised, which goes along with the aforementioned feeling of negligence. In only one case, mobbing by classmates was an issue. Due to a shortage of staff, sufficient numbers of participants and/or resources, in sectoral skills training, groups of participants were occasionally mixed together, i.e. individuals having to attend classes unrelated to their professional interest. Intellectual differences in the classroom were another recurrently mentioned issue by participants who lamented a lack of progress, such as the two following quotes illustrate:

> *"The diversity of age groups was not ideal, in class you have to wait for the slowest. This was like a mix between grade seven and ten. Sometimes they put people from cosmetics together with those from administration. A better distribution of classes would have been reasonable."*

> *"There was a high diversity of people here. Some have mental health issues, others have very different problems. It is difficult to move on. A differentiation of groups would have been needed."*

Apart from the diversity issue, another prominent subtheme related to peer-effects was feeling disturbed, distracted and thwarted by classmates in the training. Several interviewees mentioned that they engage in leisure activities (e.g. listening to music, watching videos, chatting) during training and start to work on their

applications afterwards from home, where they are able to concentrate better. As one interviewee described:

> *"It doesn't help me to sit there for eight hours a day. There are many annoying youngsters who distract me and don't let me work. Therefore, I mostly watched movies while I was in the training and wrote my applications from home. Lots of people do that."*

The share of people with a higher education (i.e. at least an intermediate school degree) is higher among the group who mentioned peer effects as a dropout reason than the share of the overall dropout sample (56 percent vs. 37 percent). Even though this difference is not statistically significant, it indicates that these aspects might be more important drivers for better educated participants.

Those findings indicate a poor person-group fit (Abdalla *et al.*, 2018) and are closely related to several of the previously described themes, especially with low perceived trainer-relatedness, the experience of negligence and a lack of opportunities to affirm self-perceived competency.

Additional theme 2: Reconsideration of professional plans

Even though this study only considers those participants as dropouts who did not leave the programmes successfully (i.e. due to finding an occupation), it is still worth mentioning that premature withdrawal from training might also occur due to positive reasons. As already stated by Paul (2015), participants might only stay as long as a programme provides added value to them. The qualitative evidence shows that some interviewees (five out of 44) left early because their professional plans had changed over the course of training. In this case, they either went back to school (or in a training preparing for school exams), or they moved on to a more specific training type tailored to their needs. Given the high importance of the level of secondary school education in order to succeed in the German labour market, the drivers for the decision to go back to school are an important insight to learn from. The following three reasons were mentioned by interviewees:

(1) Failure in entering the labour market during the training, or an increased awareness of requirements for own job interest: School dropouts who moved on to training fairly soon afterwards reported about an adjustment of their optimistic expectations on their chances in the world of work. Frustration and disappointment after first experiences in the process of job search go along with an increased feeling of time pressure and, consequently, the decision to recuperate the school degree in order to have better chances to find an apprenticeship (or the desired apprenticeship). This is coherent with the findings of previous research on job searcher's attitudes, that optimism based on biased beliefs about own job chances can be a barrier to successful labour market integration (Arni, 2015; Spinnewijn, 2015). Closely related to the former were cases where the decision to go back to school was rooted in the failure to find any attractive profession for their current level of education, whereupon participants decided to continue studying to enhance their array of options. One respondent described this process in the following way:

> *"I started applying during my time in the training, and I was always rejected, even for internships. People always said, you need a school degree. I wasn't aware of that beforehand. My brother has a school degree and he had to make only one call to get an internship"*

(2) Insights into higher-level jobs: Related to the previous point, interviewees also decided to go back to school because they adjusted their preconceptions about the labour market through positive inspiration. Insights into attractive conditions of jobs (such as contents, development options and salary) which require a finalised school education worked as a driver for the decision to obtain a school degree after all. One participant pointed out:

> *"I saw how much people earned that worked in public administration. Then I decided to go back to school and recuperate my intermediate secondary education degree."*

(3) Another driver for the decision to go back to school was encouragement through the trainers and, consequently, a higher self-confidence to dare the endeavour. This is often a process with several stages involved, as illustrated by the following quote:

"I was undecided to go for a school degree; I always thought I can't do it. But the trainers here always encouraged me. After some time, they convinced me. We also did a test and I good a good result."

When participants moved on to a different training type, it was usually because their specific needs were discovered during the first training. The issue was then discussed with the job agent, and the trainees were consequently referred to a more suited programme, such as a specific sectoral skills programme, a language class, or training with special psychotherapeutic focus.

Summary of results

This research aimed at understanding what drives unemployed youth to abandon job training prematurely. The results of the mixed-methods study draw a multifaceted picture, with several themes being central to the process of disengagement. Among those stand out the experience of disregard, perceived by young training participants in the process of career orientation, acquisition of skills and application. Young people quit training when they did not feel understood in their visions and needs, when they did not experience own influence, competence, and progress (through structure and appropriate challenge) in the training activities, and/or when they did not feel personally appreciated by the trainer. Insights from the qualitative interviews suggest that the strong occurrence of this theme might partly be rooted in young people's previous experiences of "having been abandoned/given up on" by key reference persons at home or at school. Thereby, the results of this study provide some support for SDT, showing that the framework is helpful to understanding why the young unemployed drop out from job training. The three basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness were closely intertwined in the present context, being the trainer the crucial figure to provide a need-supportive or need-thwarting environment (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

The results also show that contextual factors in the training had an important influence on the fulfilment of those needs, such as a selection of tasks that challenged participants at an appropriate level (demand-abilities fit), a suitable group composition (person-group fit) and the provision of appropriate guidance and support (needs-supplies fit).

Furthermore, beyond the logic of person-environment fit and needs fulfilment, a range of individual characteristics emerged as important determinants of dropout. Among those stand out non-cognitive traits such as fear of failure, grit and compliance, as well as low school education and mental health issues. The findings of this study suggest that grit and compliance are important traits to foster training engagement, and fear of failure can prevent those participants from dropping out who translate their fear into a "fight", rather than a "flight" or "freeze" response. Statistically significant differences between participant subgroups could be observed with regard to the factors associated with dropout: In contrast to Waller (2008), who did not detect significant gender differences in determinants of dropout based on administrative data, the results of this study suggest that women might be more driven by "intrinsic drivers" such as motivation, fear and mental health issues, while men retained in training if they have high grit and compliance. A similar picture emerged for education clusters and age groups: Dropout of the higher educated was determined by grit and compliance, and for the lower educated by motivation and fear. For younger people low motivation and mental health issues were important factors, while for older ones a lack of grit, compliance and fear of failure was associated with dropout from training. These results show a hint towards different dropout "types", namely those mostly influenced by factors relating to self-regulation (being compliant and perseverant), and those who are more emotionally driven (by fear, motivation and mental health). The findings mirror existing research on differences in motives by gender and age in other spheres (Vallerand, Fortier and Guay, 1997; Weinberg *et al.*, 2000; Brunet and Sabiston, 2011; Struyven, Jacobs and Dochy, 2013).

2.5 Discussion and implications for theory, practice and further research

Recognising the importance of addressing SDT's three basic psychological needs to foster participant engagement, training design and implementation should be oriented more strategically towards supporting those needs. The young people who formed the population of this study are at a critical transition point from their educational to a vocational pathway, where the former has usually been determined by a range of negative experiences, such as bad grades, mobbing and/or school dropout. Their vocational self-image is highly fragile and easily influenced by close reference persons. In the present context, the trainer showed to be a crucial figure to provide a need-supportive or need-thwarting training environment, which can be decisive for their further vocational pathway (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Setting high expectations in combination with the expression of genuine personal interest and appreciation from the trainer mirror the young person a self-image of having high potential and being believed in, which fosters motivation. Feeling highly challenged notably reduced the dropout risk, which implies that - in contrast to the perceptions of several trainers and job agents- low-barrier training content might rather lead to disengagement from training. In order to instigate a feeling of competence in students, they need to be challenged at the right level, within a system of clear and consequent rules which they understand (Roorda et al., 2011). Based on the findings from this study, a strict but fair handling of participants, in combination with personal appreciation and acknowledgement of their visions and desires is more likely to result in higher training engagement than allowing for too much freedom and leisure time. A clear definition of intermediate targets, as well as the visualisation and celebration of their achievement is furthermore recommended. It stands out that an autonomous choice of training did not show a significant association with dropout. How people accessed training and what they thought of it beforehand (i.e. their outcome expectancies) did not affect their decision to drop out. However, being able to shape training content during the programme was a crucial factor for young people to remain in and engage with training. This finding

suggests that young people's full ownership of the training choice, while still important, might be less relevant than a flexible training design which can be adapted to the diverse and changing needs of participants. In order to foster intrinsic motivation and thereby increase student's performance and engagement, trainers should further create an autonomy-supportive environment. This includes supplying students with appropriate information which they can process further by themselves, acknowledging their feelings, providing options for autonomous choices and avoiding threats (Black and Deci, 2000). On the other hand, perceiving unconcern, a lack of structure and focus and/or not feeling heard and seen in the personal strengths and visions can trigger unpleasant previous experiences within or outside the educational system and drive youth to repeat patterns of withdrawal in order to avoid re-experiencing the same.

The assignation to poorly suited training types, staff shortage and high staff turnover of the training providers, a mismatch between training contents and time allocated, high admin workload for staff and an inappropriate composition of groups are some drawbacks of the current system of skills training for youth in Germany which are counterproductive for effective training engagement and outcomes. A focus on "one size fits all" packages with large chunks of time being dedicated to self-study is not appropriate for the present target group. Instead, it would be recommended to reconsider the current structure towards more flexible models. This could comprise a reorganisation of training times, group compositions and contents, ensuring that attendance times are filled with a reasonable amount of clear tasks that have been agreed with participants and will be tightly monitored in their progress and outcomes. Ensuring a certain level of cohesion both in the composition of groups and the training schedule (e.g. through joint activities to start and end the day) is also recommended to foster the experience of perceived person-group-fit and thereby training commitment. Shorter obligatory attendance modules could be complemented with optional self-study afternoons where staff is available to give advice on demand.

The findings of individual characteristics associated with a higher prevalence of dropout carry important implications to identify those who are more likely to quit training and mitigate their dropout risk. In line with the findings on apprenticeship dropout (Beicht and Walden, 2013), participants without a school degree are particularly at risk for leaving training prematurely, which should be taken into consideration in the assignment of training contents and trainer attention. In combination with an appropriate provision of therapy, special modules focusing on enhancing grit could be a potentially promising strategy to engage participants with mental health issues longer in training. This is backed up by evidence showing that resilience interventions and the school and work context benefit most those at highest risk of dropout (Credé, Tynan and Harms, 2017). Both the constructs of grit and fear of failure have shown to have a potentially important influence on how young people navigate their labour market transition and deserve increased attention in retention research, with a special focus on gender-specific effects. Given the varying results for males and females in this study, the application of gender-specific strategies to prevent training dropout might be worth considering. However, the gender-differential findings deserve further research and exploration, as it cannot be excluded that internalised gender identities have an influence on response behaviour (e.g. male participants might be less likely to report feelings of fear because it is not perceived as masculine).

Finally, it is worth noting that dropout is not necessarily a disadvantageous action. In cases where participants identified more specific needs or developed professional visions and insights during the time in the programme which lead to a different demand, dropout can be seen as an efficient step towards labour market insertion. However, the high share of interviewees reporting on training contents or types not matching their needs, as well as the high diversity within training groups indicates an urgent need for improved targeting strategies by the job centres and a more tailored support from training providers. To tackle these issues, one might need to start at the roots of the current system of training assignment in Germany, where job centre staff is encouraged to first fill training places of a "pre-purchased"

contingent, instead of being able to choose an individual solution for each client (see chapter 5 for a deeper exploration of those issues).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings from this study support the relevance of SDT, but also show that there is a need for a broader framework to comprehensively understand training dropout of the unemployed. A mismatch of trainee needs with training features and provided support emerged as a strong theme contributing to the lack of basic needs fulfilment. Finally, individual characteristics, such as grit, compliance, fear of failure, as well as education and mental health issues form a third category of dropout determinants, which partly interact with each other and are influenced by the young people's background and past experiences. Figure 8 shows a suggested theoretical model for dropout based on those insights. This model does not constitute a conclusive theory and needs to be further developed (e.g. further non-cognitive traits might be relevant, and mediation relationships between them), but it represents a first step in the direction of a more comprehensive lens to understanding training dropout decisions of the unemployed.

Figure 8: Outline of a theoretical model for labour market training dropout
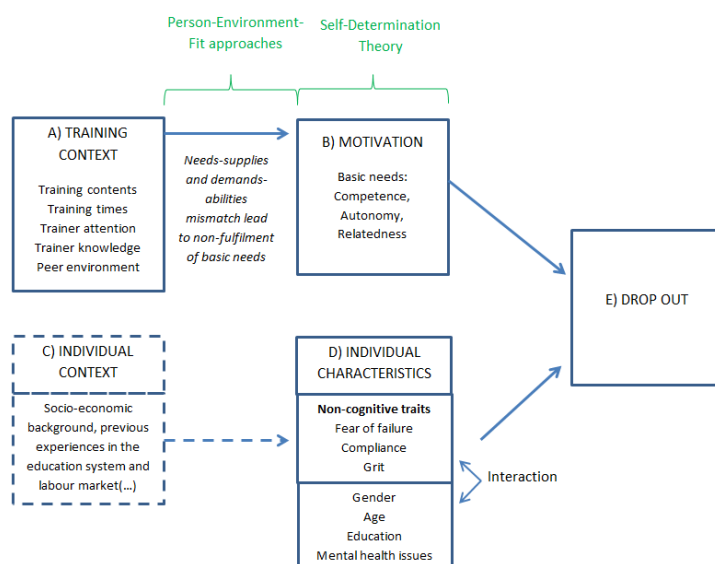
The purpose of this research was to explore and assess determinants of dropout from job training for unemployed youth. This was done using a three-stage mixed-methods design, including two phases of qualitative interviews with different labour market actors and a cross-sectional survey with training participants. This study found a range of aspects where training features mismatched participants' basic needs. Participants often drop out because of a feeling of negligence in the training, determined by a lack of both a clear structure with challenging contents and an affirming interpersonal relationship with the trainers. A lack of perceived autonomy-support through training staff was a further relevant dropout factor. In addition to those motivational processes, a set of individual characteristics was identified as important determinants of dropout: The results suggest that high grit, compliance and education are associated with lower dropout for men, while women are determined by motivation, fear and mental health in their decisions to leave training or not. Grit showed to be a particularly important trait to prevent people with mental health issues from dropping out of training. The findings have several important theoretical and practical implications, including the necessity to address SDT's basic needs in training design and implementation, and the need for a comprehensive theoretical framework which considers contextual factors, motivational aspects and individual traits to understand training dropout.

3. "They don't kick the ball because they might miss the goal": The importance of fear of failure for the labour market prospects of unemployed youth

Abstract

Reasons and mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of active labour market policies for youth are still rarely understood in the evaluation literature. Using mixed methods, this longitudinal study explored the roles of fear of failure, grit and adaptability as drivers for job search behaviour and job outcomes for unemployed youth participating in job training programmes in Germany. Results show that fear of failure was associated with lower search intensity and lower chances to find an apprenticeship for males. Grit buffered the inhibiting effect of fear on job search behaviour. Adaptability predicted general labour market participation, but not the chance to find an apprenticeship after training. Relevant processes underlying these results are interpreted based on qualitative findings, and implications for policy, practice and research are discussed.

3.1 Introduction

Tackling the global challenge of youth unemployment remains one of the main priorities on the political agenda in many countries: In 2016, OECD countries spent on average 0.54 percent of their GDP on active labour market policies (ALMP), such as job training, employment services and subsidised work. Traditionally, the evaluation of these policies mostly focused on their labour market outcomes, e.g. employment status and earnings (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2010, 2017; Kluve *et al.*, 2019). More recently, the interest of evaluation literature is increasingly giving priority to understanding the causal mechanisms behind observed outcomes

(Heckman and Vytlacil, 2007; Khagram and Thomas, 2010; White, 2010). This is also reflected in the literature on ALMP evaluations (e.g. Arni, 2015), recognising the need to understand the large variation in research findings regarding the effectiveness of those interventions (Liu, Huang and Wang, 2014). A growing body of literature at the intersection between economics and psychology is analysing specifically the effects of non-cognitive skills, attitudes and beliefs on job search behaviour and outcomes in the context of ALMP interventions (Heckman and Rubinstein, 2001; Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua, 2006; Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011; Arni, 2015; Caliendo, Cobb-Clark and Uhlendorff, 2015; Spinnewijn, 2015). Popular constructs receiving attention in this context are locus of control (McGee and McGee, 2011; McGee, 2015; Caliendo and Mahlstedt, 2017), optimism (Arni, 2015; Spinnewijn, 2015) and (biased) self-beliefs (Valentine, DuBois and Cooper, 2004; Spinnewijn, 2015; Kassenboehmer and Schatz, 2017) with results providing a mixed picture ranging from no effects (Caliendo and Mahlstedt, 2017) to significant effects above and beyond cognitive aspects (Valentine, DuBois and Cooper, 2004; Kassenboehmer and Schatz, 2017).

Main career theories conceptualise job search as a self-regulatory behaviour, aimed at an employment goal and driven by the confidence in the own ability to reach this goal (i.e. perceived control, or self-efficacy) (Bandura, 1977; Ajzen, 2002; Hoye and Saks, 2008; Liu, Huang and Wang, 2014; Saks, Zikic and Koen, 2015). A meta-analysis on the effectiveness of job search interventions highlighted furthermore the importance of individual characteristics, job search skills and motivation (Liu, Huang and Wang, 2014). All those factors can also be expected to play a role for the job search behaviour and subsequent outcomes of unemployed young people from marginalised backgrounds. However, further specific aspects might come into play for this group which, as outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, is at particularly high risk of perpetuating its negative starting situation in society and being permanently excluded from the labour market. A major challenge for professionals delivering interventions for this target group is often to access them in the first place, and prevent their complete withdrawal from the intervention and labour

market (see chapters 2 and 4). Self-sabotaging behaviour was a strong theme emerging from the pilot study informing this research (see Annex I). A variety of studies have shown that fear of failure is an important barrier for school engagement and entrepreneurship (Covington, 1992; Jackson, 2002; Caraway *et al.*, 2003; Steinmayr and Spinath, 2008; Cacciotti and Hayton, 2014; Kollmann, Stöckmann and Kensbock, 2017). Nevertheless, beyond the domain of entrepreneurship, this phenomenon has not yet been researched in the context of labour market access, and to date there is no study on the effects of fear of failure in the context of ALMPs. Fear can be expected to have an especially strong influence on the behavioural choices of young people who have already experienced drawbacks in their educational journey (e.g. through school or apprenticeship dropout). These youth have not had much opportunity to build a positive self-image with regard to their own capabilities in the world of work that may provide them with resilience to failure. This allows for the suggestion that for some young unemployed people, the reasons for abstaining from job search and proactive application go beyond the prevalence of a career goal and self-efficacy, and represent maladaptive self-handicapping strategies deeply rooted in fear of failure (Leon and Matthews, 2010).

Grit is an increasingly studied non-cognitive skill which has shown to predict behaviour and success in different life spheres, and to be a valuable resource to persist through adverse experiences (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Blalock, Young and Kleiman, 2015). However, the role of grit in the labour market prospects of unemployed young people has not yet been examined. The aim of this study is to address this gap in knowledge and to assess the roles of fear of failure and grit as part of mechanisms often referred to as "unobservable" that might determine job search behaviour and outcomes of unemployed young participants of job training, alone and in interaction with each other.

A further construct of interest examined in this study is adaptability during job search. Career adaptability, defined by Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) as pre-disposition for personal change to meet the demands of a situation, has been shown

to be one of the key dimensions of employability and positively predict labour market outcomes (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004; Koen *et al.*, 2010; Klehe *et al.*, 2015). This research will explore if being adaptable during job search goes along with both higher and more stable employment prospects for unemployed young people.

Given the prevalence of gender differences in the occurrence of unemployment (in 2017, male youth unemployment rates in Germany were 30 percent higher than female ones, OECD, 2019) and previous research on both fear of failure (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007; Roper and Scott, 2009; Sánchez Cañizares and Fuentes García, 2010; Koellinger, Minniti and Schade, 2013), and job search behaviour (Eriksson and Lagerström, 2012), this chapter also explores results heterogeneity across gender groups through the introduction of interaction effects and subgroup analyses for males and females. The research focusses on Germany as an example of a developed country with substantial investment in ALMPs, where low-qualified unemployment remains high in spite of a prospering economy and overall declining unemployment rates (see chapter 1).[16] To investigate the study hypotheses, a mixed methods approach was used, consisting of a qualitative pilot study, a longitudinal quantitative survey, and a qualitative follow-up study based on semi-structured interviews.

The following five hypotheses were tested in this research:

Hypothesis 1: High fear of failure of unemployed youth is associated with lower job search activity and a lower probability to find a job.

Hypothesis 2: The negative association of fear of failure with job search behaviour and the probability to find work is stronger for males than for females.

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[16] With a GDP per capita of EUR 45,000 and an overall unemployment rate of 3.7 percent, Germany was on 10th place of the wealthiest OECD countries in 2017 and had the 6th lowest unemployment rate (OECD Data). With a share of 0.2 per cent (6.2 million Euro) of its GDP spent on training programmes, Germany occupied rank 6 among OECD countries in 2016, and rank 1 in absolute investment among European countries (OECD Data).

Hypothesis 3: Grit is associated with higher job search behaviour and a higher probability to find a job.

Hypothesis 4: The negative association of fear of failure with job search behaviour and the probability to find work is influenced by grit.

Hypothesis 5: Adaptability significantly predicts the probability of unemployed youth to find a job after training.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. The following section presents the literature review. Section 3 contains the methodology and empirical approach. Results are presented in section 4 and section 5 concludes. Limitations are being acknowledged in section 6 and implications of the findings for ALMP and further research are discussed in section 7.

3.2   Literature review

The construct of fear of failure has its origin in achievement motivation theory, which distinguishes two motivational drivers: The disposition to seek success and the disposition to avoid failure (Atkinson, 1957). According to this framework, those individuals who are strongly driven by fear of failure will take behavioural choices oriented at avoiding the experience of failing and its consequences of shame and humiliation (Atkinson, 1957). This can involve an increased effort ("fight") or the avoidance of challenging situations in anticipation of possible failure ("flight") (Conroy, Willow and Metzler, 2002; Nelson *et al.*, 2013; Cacciotti and Hayton, 2014). In classic achievement motivation theory, both the motive to strive for success and the motive to avoid failure were seen as equal determinants of achievement motivation (Atkinson, 1957). According to the later developed self-worth theory which roots in these considerations, the motivation to establish and protect a positive self-image can surpass the desire to be successful (Covington and Beery, 1976; Covington, 1992; Leon and Matthews, 2010). In order to avoid the negative consequences of failure, such as shame, embarrassment and a decline in self-worth, Covington (1992) identifies two main strategies: Preventing failure, or escaping the

consequences of failure. Preventing failure, for example through overstriving ("fight") or setting very low-level goals, is not always possible. However, a range of options to avoid the consequences of failure ("flight") are usually accessible: Setting unachievable goals, procrastination (delaying effort until the last minute), minimising or completely abstaining from effort, and/or exercising disruptive behaviour are examples for strategies which provide the excuse that success could have been possible if one had really tried, and failure is not due to a lack of intelligence or capabilities (Atkinson, 1957; Covington, 1992; Jackson, 2002; Cacciotti and Hayton, 2014). These strategies are self-handicapping in their outcomes, but help to keep the self-image intact in the short-term (Thompson, 1999; Jackson, 2002; De Castella, Byrne and Covington, 2013). Covington (1992) distinguishes in this context between those who actually withdraw from effort, and the so-called "closet achievers" who only pretend to do so, thereby avoiding humiliation and keeping their social worth intact in case of failure.

Self-worth protection theory has mostly been applied in the context of education, showing that fear of failure is associated with lower school engagement and achievements above and beyond intelligence (Covington, 1992; Jackson, 2002; Caraway et al., 2003; Steinmayr and Spinath, 2008). Research on the implications of fear of failure in the world of work has so far predominantly focussed on entrepreneurship, with several studies showing that high fear of failure keeps people from setting up and maintaining businesses (Cacciotti and Hayton, 2014; Kollmann, Stöckmann and Kensbock, 2017). In the context of unemployment, there is evidence that fear of failure is significantly associated with difficulty to find work for unemployed people with mental health and/or substance abuse issues (Laudet et al., 2002), as well as for the unemployed with disabilities (Leon and Matthews, 2010). Beyond those studies, the literature review conducted for this study found no further research on the role of fear of failure for the unemployed in their efforts to find work, and/or for the effectiveness of ALMP interventions. Particularly in wealthy countries where professional success and achievement are an important part of the adult identity as a full member of society, the implications of trying and failing in this endeavour can be severely self-worth threatening. Based on the

considerations from self-worth protection theory, it can therefore be assumed that unemployed young people might jeopardise their own success in the labour market through self-handicapping withdrawal behaviour in the context of their participation in job training. Consequently, the first hypothesis of this study is that those with higher fear of failure search less for jobs and have a lower chance to find work.

The negative association of fear of failure with job search activity might however not materialise equally for all young people. Several studies show systematic gender differences in the strategies to tackle fear of failure. A range of studies analysing the effects of fear of failure in the domain of entrepreneurship found women to be more inhibited by fear of failure than men when it comes to setting up new businesses (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007; Roper and Scott, 2009; Sánchez Cañizares and Fuentes García, 2010; Koellinger, Minniti and Schade, 2013). In general, women often show a higher prevalence of fear of failure than men (Sherman, 1988; McGregor and Elliot, 2005; Nelson *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, studies have shown higher levels in behavioural inhibition, a motive to withdraw from unpleasant situations, for females (Jorm *et al.*, 1999; Leone *et al.*, 2001; Muris *et al.*, 2001). This would allow for the presumption that women might also be more affected by fear of failure in the context of unemployment, and therefore more likely to exert maladaptive coping strategies such as withdrawing from job search.

By contrast, Covington (1992) asserts that females have a tendency to be accepting of failure and to divert to alternative strategies to gain self-worth, such as punctuality and diligence, while males have been found to be more prone to avoidance and withdrawal in an effort to protect their self-image. Similarly, Thompson (1999) lists a set of studies from the 1980s and 1990s observing defensive behaviour and efforts to withdraw following failure only or predominantly in males, across different life spheres. Multiple studies found males to be more prone to self-handicapping strategies than females (see Leon and Matthews (2010) for an overview). Similarly, studies on English adolescents (Jackson, 2002, 2003) and Australian students (De Castella, Byrne and Covington, 2013) found that males

were more likely than females to employ avoidance strategies rooted in the desire for self-worth protection as a response to fear of failure. To understand the reasons behind those contrasting observations, the "tend and befriend" theory (Taylor *et al.*, 2000; Taylor, 2012) provides a helpful framework. According to this theory, women apply a different approach than the typical fight/flight reaction to fear; they reach out to their social networks for support (Taylor *et al.*, 2000; Olff, 2017). This effect is expected to be especially strong in an intervention context, where social support is accessible on demand (Taylor *et al.*, 2000). A meta-analysis on gender differences in coping strategies covering 50 studies found support for this approach, showing that women are more likely to reach out for help than men as a reaction to different sources of stress (Tamres, Janicki and Helgeson, 2002). Similar findings were discovered by Kessels and Steinmayr (2013) in a school context. The tend-and-befriend theory is based on bio-behavioural evidence, observing that when confronted with stress, women release higher levels of hormones which instigate affiliative behaviour (Taylor *et al.*, 2000). However, the roots of these observed gender differences in the reaction to stress and fear can also be explained referring to gender role theory (Bem, 1981; McLean and Anderson, 2009). The framework builds on the idea that differences in male and female traits and behaviour are based on gender stereotypical socialisation. The traditional hegemonic model of masculinity goes along with the expectation to be brave, strong and successful. As a consequence, both failure and reaching out for help are less tolerated for males, as they both signal weakness (Tamres, Janicki and Helgeson, 2002; Kessels and Steinmayr, 2013). This, on the other hand, results in male self-worth heavily relying on the experience of skills and success, and therewith higher competitiveness and lower frustration tolerance (Bem, 1981; Thompson, 1999; Jackson, 2003; McLean and Anderson, 2009).

From this perspective, even though women often record higher levels of fear of failure, men might be more likely to exercise self-handicapping avoidance behaviour as a self-worth protection strategy when they assess the likelihood to fail as high. In the present context, males in the identity-forming age of young adulthood and with a trajectory of previous failure in school and/or vocational

education might search less for jobs in order to avoid the confrontation with failure in their endeavour to find an apprenticeship. Building on those considerations, the second hypothesis of this study is that the inhibiting effect of fear of failure is more pronounced for males than for females.

While the hypothesised effect of fear of failure on job search behaviour and outcomes can be expected to differ for males and females for the mentioned reasons, there might be other important factors influencing this relationship. Several studies have found certain non-cognitive skills to predict labour market related behaviour and outcomes (Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua, 2006; Arni *et al.*, 2014). Grit, defined as "perseverance and passion towards long-term goals" (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007: 1087) is one of those skills, and has been shown to be an important personal resource to persist through setbacks, frustration and repeated failure in different contexts, including the search for employment (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Kleiman *et al.*, 2013; Lucas *et al.*, 2015). The related concept of self-control was shown to determine the job search activity of young people above and beyond their motivation to work (Baay *et al.*, 2014). Grit has furthermore been observed to be an important personal resource associated with lower suicide intention in challenging life situations (Kleiman *et al.*, 2013; Blalock, Young and Kleiman, 2015). So far, most of the evidence on grit has focussed on higher educated individuals (Credé, Tynan and Harms, 2017; Salles, Liebert, *et al.*, 2017). The role of grit in the context of ALMP interventions for unemployed youth has not yet been examined. This is surprising, given the previous findings showing the positive association of "grittiness" with success in different life spheres, above and beyond ability (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). Based on those considerations, unemployed young people can be expected to search more for jobs and be more likely to find an apprenticeship if they are grittier (hypothesis 3). Furthermore, given the characteristic of grit to be a resource to persist through the experience of failure (Lucas *et al.*, 2015), it could also be expected that high grit might help those participants with high fear of failure to mitigate the adverse experience and thereby reduce the maladaptive behaviour stemming from it (hypothesis 4). To date, no studies have yet researched the relationship between grit and fear of failure for people in adverse life situations such as unemployment.

In times of flexible labour markets and increasing job instability, another important non-cognitive skill to survive and strive in the labour market is adaptability (Hall, 2004). Career adaptability can be defined as the ability and willingness to change to fit into new career-related circumstances (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004; Koen *et al.*, 2010; Klehe *et al.*, 2015). In the literature of vocational psychology, the construct has been related to planfulness, a readiness to cope, tolerance for environmental and a predisposition for personal change; as well as a proactive personality and a boundaryless mindset (Savickas, 1997; Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004; McArdle *et al.*, 2007). Adaptability is one of the four pillars of employability in the model developed by Fugate et al. (2004), which has been found to predict a range of labour market outcomes, such as long term unemployed people's reemployment chances (Koen, Klehe and Van Vianen, 2013). Career adaptability has also been related to higher job quality (Koen, Klehe and Van Vianen, 2012), and a recent meta-analysis found positive associations with employability, work performance and engagement, income and entrepreneurial outcomes (Rudolph, Lavigne and Zacher, 2017). Other studies found a higher incidence of underemployment and lower job quality for more flexible young job searchers (Vansteenkiste, Verbruggen and Sels, 2016). However, given that most young people in the present sample are low-educated and do not have any vocational degree, based on the aforementioned evidence it is more likely that their chance to find a job or apprenticeship increases if they are highly adaptable with regard to both their location and vocational orientation. This is the fifth and final hypothesis of this study.

3.3   Methodology

This study applies a multistage mixed methods design, combining an exploratory and explanatory sequential approach in three stages: A qualitative pilot study in order to understand the research context and establish the hypotheses, a longitudinal quantitative study with the objective of testing the hypotheses derived from the literature review and the pilot, and a qualitative follow-up study aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the reasons and mechanisms underlying the

quantitative findings. This type of design is often used for longitudinal studies interested in understanding the effects of an intervention (Fetters, Curry and Creswell, 2013). It has the advantage of shedding light on the phenomena of interest from different perspectives over time, which is why this approach has been chosen for the present research.

3.3.1   Sample and procedure

First, a preparatory study was carried out in February 2016, with the objective of informing the quantitative study by exploring the main factors relevant in the specific context of this research.[17] Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 44 key informants, consisting of 10 job agents, 15 trainers and 19 young training participants in Berlin. The interviews were transcribed and a content analysis was conducted. The final decision on the hypotheses to be tested in the quantitative study was taken based on the results of this pilot. See Annex I for a more detailed description of the pilot study results.

For the quantitative study, a longitudinal data collection was carried out, consisting of two data collection points: A cross-sectional survey gathered all study variables from participants of job training programmes at the beginning of their training (time 1), and outcome data for participants was collected after training participation (3-12 months later, time 2). In order to gather the study sample, a total of 29 training interventions were selected, covering a range of different types of job training aimed at preparing young people for, and integrating them in the labour market. Training duration varied from 3 to 12 months. From those institutions, all new participants over the data collection period of 10 months were invited to participate in the study, leading to a sample of 434 young people between 15 and 25 years of age (45.6 percent females) who were surveyed at the start of their training. See section 1.6 for more details on the sampling process. When the foreseen training

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[17] The pilot was undertaken in preparation of a larger research project on the determinants of effectiveness of job training programmes for unemployed youths. Together, the different elements of this study compose my PhD research.

time had elapsed, participants' employment status was obtained from trainers. This constitutes the longitudinal element of this research. If the status was unknown to trainers, e.g. due to premature dropout, participants were contacted directly via different contact details gathered from them at time 1. In some cases, however, the youth changed their contact details over the course of the study and they could not be traced anymore. Information on the employment status at t2 could be obtained from 306 respondents, which is equivalent to a response rate of 70.5 percent.

As in all cohort studies, the attrition rate introduces a potential bias for the interpretability of the results. Even though a comparison of participants with and without outcome information showed that those who did not participate in the follow-up data collection are slightly lower educated, no statistically significant differences in further key attributes, such as gender, age, unemployment duration or socioeconomic status could be observed. Considering the hard-to-reach target group of this study, i.e. unemployed youth who regularly change their contact information, and the attrition rates of other longitudinal cohort studies based on unemployed people, which can range up to 60-70 percent (McArdle *et al.*, 2007; Cho *et al.*, 2013), this attrition rate can be regarded as acceptable.

For the final, qualitative stage of this research a purposeful Total Population Sampling approach (Etikan and Alkassim, 2016) was applied, which implied contacting all participants of the baseline survey and invite them to an interview. This approach was chosen above and beyond the point of data saturation for two reasons: Firstly, in order to gain meaningful insights into repeating patterns on participants' decision processes in spite of the broad variety of personal histories, professional visions and training programmes covered. Secondly, in order to explore the option to link the qualitative and quantitative dataset for the purpose of data triangulation, which requires a larger amount of qualitative observations. The young people were contacted following completion of their training and invited to a one-to-one interview either in the training premises, or in a coffee-shop in their own neighbourhood, depending on their availability and preference. A total of 165 people participated in semi-structured interviews with a duration of 15-45 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with consent. Subsequently, a content analysis was undertaken with NVivo Software.

Figure 9: Overview of sample attrition

Full sample at t1:
n=434

Outcome data on employment
status at t2:
n=306

Qualitative sample at t2:
n=165
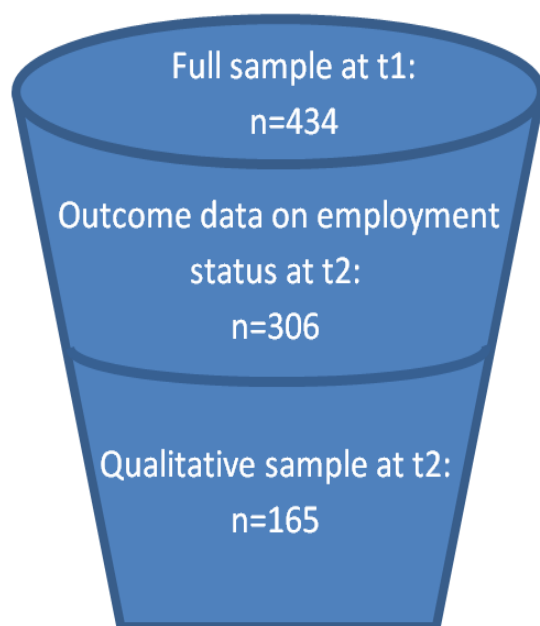
3.3.2 Empirical approach

The empirical approach applied for this study is two-fold: Cross-sectional and longitudinal regressions models were estimated to analyse the relationship between the dependent variables of interest, job search behaviour and job outcomes (see Table 8), and key independent variables derived from the reviewed literature, namely fear of failure, grit and adaptability (see Annex II for more detail on the measurement of those variables, including the scales used and their psychometric validation). The variables on job search have been measured in a pre-training context; whilst job outcomes were measured post-training. Ordinary least squares (OLS) models have been used to estimate the cross-sectional regressions on job search behaviour at training start, and logit regressions for the binary longitudinal job outcomes, respectively controlling for a range of influence factors such as age, sex, school degree, health, socioeconomic status and unemployment duration.

Table 8: Dependent study variables and their measurement

Job search behaviour (cross-sectional data)		Job outcomes (longitudinal data)	
Job search quantity	Measured as the number of hours searching for jobs in the last month (time 1)	Apprenticeship	Having an apprenticeship or having accepted a corresponding offer at time 2
Job search quality	Measured as the number of different job search strategies used in the last month (time 1). This includes using online job search platforms, company websites, making cold calls, visiting fairs and events and using personal networks.[18]	Labour market participation	Carrying out any vocational activity (i.e. apprenticeship, internship, part-time or full-time unqualified work, volunteering and going back to school) at time 2

Table 9: Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Job search hours (log)	289	2.10	1.24
Job search strategies	425	2.46	1.35
Grit (av. factor score)	431	0	0.96
Fear of failure (av. factor score)	431	0	0.33
Sex (women)	432	0.44	.50
Age	420	19.54	2.37
Unemployment duration (log)	379	1.82	1.22
School education (%)			
No school degree	431	16.4%	
Basic secondary degree	431	14.9%	
Enhanced basic	431	26%	

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[18] While it is important to acknowledge that the time and effort invested in each of these strategies, as well as the individual access to them might differ, this variable aims to reflect the variety and creativity of job search, which is an important element of its quality.

secondary degree		
Intermediate secondary degree	431	35.5%
A-Levels	431	7.2%

Health

No health issues	430	57.2%
Physical health issues	430	17.2%
Mental health issues	430	14.4%
Both physical and mental health issues	430	11.2%

Social index

Low	434	39.6%
Middle	434	35.5%
High	434	24.9%

OLS regressions

Job search quantity was measured as a continuous variable at one point in time. Hence, a cross-sectional analysis with OLS regression was performed, following the procedure applied in previous research on job search behaviour (Baay *et al.*, 2014; McGee, 2015; Altmann *et al.*, 2018; Mahlstedt, 2018). The model was specified according to the following equation:

$$Y(loghrs_i) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FF_i + \beta_2 Grit_i + \beta_3 CONTROL_i + \varepsilon_i$$

In this equation, $loghrs_i$ represents the log of job search hours of individual *i* in the past month. The original variable expressed in hours has been log-transformed in order to account for its non-normal distribution (e.g. Vallerand, Fortier and Guay, 1997). β_0 is the intercept, β_1 is the slope coefficient for fear of failure, β_2 the slope coefficient for grit and β_3 is the set of control variables. ε_i is the composite error. In order to observe the effects of fear on job search behaviour independently from and in combination with grit, hierarchical models were used, starting with the effects of fear of failure, and subsequently adding grit to the model. Building on recent evidence that job search quality can matter more than quantity for predicting employment outcomes while most studies only look at the time invested in job

search (Koen *et al.*, 2010, 2016; Arni, 2015), a differentiation in job search quality and quantity was chosen for this research. The same model as described for job search quantity was built accordingly to assess job search quality.

Logit regressions

To estimate the effect of the independent variables on the propensity to have an apprenticeship at the end of the training, a binomial logit specification was employed. This multivariate analysis of binary outcomes is widely used in the evaluation of ALMPs (Acharya and Neupane, 2011; McGee, 2015; Caliendo and Mahlstedt, 2017), see chapter 2 for a more detailed justification of this analytical approach.

The probability of having an apprenticeship after training π_i is estimated as a function of an array of the following explanatory variables:

$$logit(\pi_i) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Fear_i + \beta_2 Grit_i + \beta_3 Adapt_i + \beta_4 Control_i + \varepsilon_i$$

In this equation, β_0 is the intercept, the following coefficients refer to the average slope coefficients for fear of failure (β_1), grit (β_2), the three variables composing adaptability (β_3), and a set of control variables (β_4), namely sex, age, health, education, unemployment duration, training type, training duration, socioeconomic status and month of survey. ε_i is the composite error. The errors are assumed to be uncorrelated and robust to heteroscedasticity. To account for heterogeneity across the different training programmes, standard errors were clustered at the level of training in all models.[19]

Following this model, the analysis aimed at identifying if there are statistically significant differences of the individual predictors' effects by gender. In order to test differential effects between males and females (hypothesis 2), at first subgroup analyses were conducted. Consequently, interaction terms between fear and gender

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[19] The analysis of the quantitative data was undertaken with MPLUS and Stata 14 software. The qualitative interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the data was consequently coded using NVivo 11 software.

were added to the model, and average marginal effects were graphically illustrated. The same analysis was undertaken for the outcome of labour force participation, an additional outcome variable that was included in order to reflect the difference between the most stable and promising work modality for unemployed youth, i.e. a vocational apprenticeship, and employment of a more temporary nature, such as internships or temporary work (Rothe and Wälde, 2017).

Preliminary descriptive analyses disaggregated by gender show that women have higher fear of failure than men: Of low-educated males (up to enhanced secondary school degree), 30 percent have high fear of failure, compared to 49 percent of females. Of higher educated men, it is only 22 percent, compared to 40 percent of females. This is consistent with the literature on fear of failure (McGregor and Elliot, 2005; Nelson *et al.*, 2013). Eliminating five extreme outliers, among participants with low fear, male mean job search activity is four hours higher than those of females, while among those with high fear females have a slightly higher search activity (0.25 hours).

3.4   Results

3.4.1   Job search quantity

In the cross-sectional linear regression model (Table 9), both grit and fear of failure were significant predictors of the level of job search activity, controlling for sex, age, education, health, social status and unemployment duration. High fear of failure was negatively associated with job search activity, which indicates a prevalence of the hypothesised "flight" behaviour in response to fear. The inhibiting effect of fear of failure on job search also emerged in the qualitative data. The description of avoidance attitudes and/or behaviour was one of the main themes identified in the content analysis. One of the attitudes described frequently was the reluctance to search for jobs during the training time, while applications were written in the

evenings from home. This was partly explained by an inability to focus, for example due to the distraction caused by disruptive behaviour of others, or partly just because of a lack of desire, such as the following two quotes demonstrate:

> *"I did not apply at all there [in the training], only in the evenings from home. When you are there, you are busy with your friends" (male participant, 18 years old).*

> *"I learnt how to manipulate the trainers so they would leave me in peace. At home I then started writing applications and used the materials they provided me. That is much more practical, nobody is on my back annoying me." (male participant, 19 years old)*

This goes along with Covington's (1992) concept of "closet learners", suggesting that some participants prefer to preserve their social self-worth during the training hours by not showing application effort to trainers and peers, and thereby exposing failure in cases of negative or no response. Other participants, however, truly applied a range of maladaptive behaviour, often mentioning a lack of time as an excuse for their poor effort, as also identified by Jackson (2003). The following statement illustrates one exemplary case:

> *"Previously, I wrote applications from home and showed them to the job centre, so that I didn't have to participate in training. But I never actually sent them out. Later, when I was in the training, I got job offers, but I always rejected them. (…) I also studied to do my school degree, but I did not show up on the exam date. I didn't have time on that day." (male participant, 20 years old)*

The internal struggle taking place during self-handicapping was also insightfully described by the following two participants:

"It [the problem] is not the training, it is me. When I get good advice, I just don't necessarily use it. It's not that I don't want to. I just don't do it. And at home I sit down at my computer [and do things]." (male participant, 20 years old)

"I'm a hopeless case, I just don't know what I want to do. I refuse any options I am presented with, without even looking at them. There is no profession I find even interesting enough in theory. (…) in photography the work schedule might be tough (…) salesmen will soon be replaced by robots (…)."(male participant, 18 years old)

Hypothesis 1 is therewith supported by both the quantitative and qualitative evidence with regard to job search quantity.

Grit (reverse coded) also showed a positive association with job search activity, indicating that "grittier" participants had higher job search activity. This is in line with the literature, which expects grit to help people persist through frustration and rejection (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Almlund *et al.*, 2011). As opposed to the insights from the interviews with trainers in the pilot study (see Annex I), the construct of grit did not emerge as a strong theme from the qualitative interviews with youth in relation to their job search behaviour. However, several participants described a process of being more goal-focussed and perseverant presently than in the past. Three brief statements of participants with grit levels in the upper quartile of the quantitative sample illustrate these processes:

"I think this time it will work. I will put more effort in. In the past, I didn't take things seriously. I didn't know there was so much responsibility. I want to have my own family and provide for them" (18-year-old male participant)

"I can't get around studying hard now. I just had to take the decision to do so." (20-year-old male participant)

> *"I am old enough now to stick to something even though I get some criticism in it" (20-year-old male participant)*

Looking at interviews with participants who had high fear of failure and high grit in the quantitative sample, some illustrate the development of their "gritty" attitude through the description of previous setbacks. As one participant (female, 20 years old) pointed out:

> *"I have applied a lot, and have often received no response or rejections. Then I was frustrated and sulky. But then I got back on my feet and moved on. (...) This is just how I am, I was always like that."*

Another one described:

> *"I did not want to quit [the intervention]. This is not who I am. I am somebody who finishes things, no matter what happens." (18-year-old female)*

These insights show that, while some participants understood grit as part of their core personality, others experienced changes in grit, which were often contextualised in relation to a process of ageing and/or maturing. The analysis of change processes along training participation is beyond the scope of this chapter and will be explored further in chapter 4. Hypothesis 3 is supported by the quantitative evidence with regard to job search quantity. Looking at subgroups; the effect of grit was higher for males, while it was small and non-significant for females (see Table 9). Fear of failure was a significant negative predictor of job search behaviour only for males (-.73, $p<.05$) until grit was included in the model, then becoming insignificant. [20] Female job search activity was positively associated with mental health issues, which might be an indicator for anxiety-driven search behaviour. Both findings are consistent with results from my previous study on training dropout based on the same sample (see chapter 2). The theory of grit establishes the phenomenon as a resource that helps people to persist through fear

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[20] Detailed regression results are available on request.

of failure (Lucas *et al.*, 2015). The results for men speak in favour of this mechanism, while neither grit nor fear were significant predictors for female job search activity in this study. This is contrary to other findings in the entrepreneurship literature which suggest that women are more driven by fear of failure than men (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007; Koellinger, Minniti and Schade, 2013). One reason for this difference in the observed results could lie in the measurement method for fear of failure: The mentioned studies are all based on data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), a large global dataset which assesses fear of failure with one single question. The present study used a 15-item scale whose psychometric properties have been tested and validated (see Annex II), thereby exploring the phenomenon more in-depth. Furthermore, the gender-differential translation of fear in a behavioural response might be different in the sphere of entrepreneurship, where failure is related to a more mid-term risk with often major economic implications, compared to the risk of being rejected by employers, which has an immediate effect on self-worth. The particular population of this study – vulnerable youth strongly influenced by previous experiences of failure - might also play a role. Finally, the comparatively smaller sample size of this study constitutes a general limitation to the comparability of the results. However, the qualitative findings provide further support for the picture emerging from the regression results: Out of 12 participants making statements that were coded under the theme of avoidance behaviour (see above), 11 were males. Young men in the present sample had a higher tendency to exert self-handicapping strategies rooted in fear of failure than their female peers. Hypothesis 2 is thereby supported in the dimension of job search quantity.

The low r-squared values of 12-18 percent are dissatisfying but not surprising, considering the variety of complex observable and unobservable, subject- and context-related factors that can influence job search behaviour and job outcomes. The qualitative part of this study aims at unpacking some of those mechanisms. Similar values of 8-15 percent can be observed in other studies aiming to predict job search behaviour (Shatnawi, 2015) and employment outcomes (Kluve *et al.*, 2012; Mendolia and Walker, 2015; Hall *et al.*, 2017). The statistical significance of the

observed effects in spite of the relatively small sample size, in combination with the insights from the qualitative part of this research, show the importance of the findings as part of the picture to explain job search activity and outcomes of the young unemployed.

Table 10: OLS model for job search quantity			
	Overall model	women	men
Grit	-0.203***	-0.119	-0.282***
Fear of failure	-0.487**	-0.362	-0.491
Highest school degree			
no school	0.000	0.000	0.000
basic secondary education	-0.490**	-0.550	-0.132
enhanced basic secondary education	-0.104	-0.397	0.346
intermediate secondary education	-0.237	-0.593	0.295
A-Level	0.315	0.110	0.655
Unemployment duration (log)	0.150***	0.180**	0.077
Sex	-0.140	0.000	0.000
Age	0.013	-0.030	0.082
Health issues			
no issues	0.000	0.000	0.000
physical issues	-0.140	0.097	-0.383
mental issues	0.514*	0.819**	0.138
both physical and mental issues	0.020	0.483	-0.554*
Social index			
low	0.000	0.000	0.000
middle	-0.069	-0.216	-0.027
high	0.143	0.181	0.076
Constant	1.722**	2.498**	0.232
R-squared	0.115	0.175	0.162
N. of cases	256	108	148
* $p<0.10$, ** $p<0.05$, *** $p<0.01$			

3.4.2 Job search quality

The linear regression model in Table 10 shows that fear of failure was also a significant negative predictor of job search quality, above and beyond grit. In the subgroup analyses, the effect was again stronger and significant for males, while it was weaker and not significant anymore for females. Furthermore, unsurprisingly, better educated participants used a broader variety of job search strategies than the lower educated.[21] Hypothesis 1 and 2 are thereby also supported with regard to job search quality.

Table 11: OLS model for job search quality			
	Overall model	**women**	**men**
Grit	-0.089	-0.283**	0.013
Fear of failure	-0.690***	-0.517	-0.755**
School degree			
no school	0.000	0.000	0.000
basic secondary education	0.414	0.683*	0.243
enhanced basic secondary education	0.556**	0.695**	0.444
intermediate secondary education	0.868***	0.946***	0.832***
A-Level	0.918***	1.263**	0.637
Unemployment duration	0.012	0.129	-0.034
Sex	0.101	0.000	0.000
Age	0.040	-0.028	0.071
Health issues			
no issues	0.000	0.000	0.000
physical issues	0.170	0.155	0.196
mental issues	-0.168	-0.136	-0.222
both physical and mental issues	0.060	-0.404	0.351
Social index			
low	0.000	0.000	0.000
middle	0.092	0.049	0.038
high	0.103	0.322	-0.104
Constant	1.003	2.084**	0.602
R-squared	0.091	0.141	0.107
N. of cases	361	152	209
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01			

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[21] The results are qualitatively unchanged using Poisson regression or negative binomial regression under the interpretation of job search quality as a count variable.

3.4.3 Job outcomes: Finding an apprenticeship

In the longitudinal logistic regression model only (higher) education and the training type of projects comprising business mentoring were significant predictors for the probability of having an apprenticeship immediately after finalising training. However, the subgroup analyses show that fear of failure was a significant predictor for the likelihood to find an apprenticeship for males: A unit increase in the factor score of fear of failure reduced the odds of finding an apprenticeship by 70.4 percent for males, above and beyond a range of person-related control variables and key training characteristics. No statistically significant effects could be observed for grit and the adaptability variables.

	Table 12: Logistic regression for the likelihood of having an apprenticeship (Odds Ratio)						
	Basic model	95% CI	women	95% CI	men	95% CI	Basic model with inter-action effects
Fear of failure	0.892	0.48,1.66	5.226	0.41,65.9	0.296***	0.09-0.95	0.321**
Interaction fear of failure#sex (1=female)	-		-		-		13.758**
Grit	0.848	0.56,1.28	0.662	0.36,1.2	0.891	0.56-1.42	0.891
Plan B	1.209	0.62,2.35	1.888	0.64,5.6	0.743	0.33,1.66	1.051
Willingness to move	1.140	0.70,1.86	1.029	0.42,2.5	1.386	0.65,2.93	1.131
Maximum commuting time (log)	1.259	0.70,2.26	0.808	0.26,2.52	2.435*	0.97-6.1	1.403
Highest school degree							
no school	1.000		1.000		1.000		1.000
basic sec.	2.817*	0.85,9.37	5.742*	0.89,37.1	2.729	0.46,16.4	3.701**
enhanced basic sec.	3.091***	1.63,5.87	5.088**	1.14,22.6	2.041	0.6,7	3.183***
Intermediate	3.430**	1.34,8.81	6.266**	1.21,32.5	2.882	0.65,12.8	4.185***
A-Level	4.742***	1.53,14.7	3.203	0.71,14.6	9.896**	1.15,85.5	5.329***
Health issues							

	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR
no issues	1.000		1.000		1.000		1.000
physical issues	0.924	0.37,2.32	1.770	0.39,8.07	0.810	0.23,2.8	0.872
mental issues	1.057	0.52,2.14	0.745	0.11,4.99	1.523	0.43,5.35	1.004
both phys. and mental issues	0.724	0.27,1.92	0.552	0.09,3.3	0.807	0.21,3.04	0.655
Sex	0.927	0.58,1.5					(omitted)
Age	0.892*	0.8,1	0.854	0.67-1.09	0.865*	0.75,1.01	0.886**
Unemployment duration	0.808*	0.64,1.02	0.796	0.49,1.29	0.749	0.52,1.07	0.793*
Social index							
low	1.000		1.000		1.000		
middle	0.783	0.45,1.38	0.353**	0.16,0.8	0.797	0.31,2	0.751
high	0.542*	0.28,1.07	0.541**	0.31,0.95	0.451	0.17,1.17	0.584
Training duration (months)	1.070	0.98,1.17	1.172*	1,1.37	1.027	0.87,1.22	1.059
Training type							
classroom	1.000		1.000		1.000		1.000
workshops	1.396	0.44,4.5	1.223	0.25,5.95	1.620	0.37,7	1.236
business mentoring	5.140**	1.14,23.2	16.952***	2.55,112	3.549	0.4,31.7	4.786**
coaching	1.325	0.39,4.5	1.180	0.21, 6.7	1.282	0.27,6.16	1.186
Month of survey	1.006	0.94,1.08	1.061	0.98,1.15	0.969	0.87,1.08	1.005
Constant	0.524	0.01,32.4	1.757	0,1643	0.135	0,20.4	0.419
Pseudo R-Squared	0.113		0.211		0.142		0.133
N. of cases	251		106		145		251

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

In order to explore these results further, an interaction effect between fear (centred on the mean for this purpose) and gender was added to the model. The interaction term was strong and significant (see Table 11). Figure 10 shows that higher fear was associated with a higher likelihood to find work for females and a lower likelihood for males (left side). The average marginal effects were significant for males, and at very high and low levels also for females (right side), suggesting that fear had a detrimental effect on the job chances for males, while it had no or partly even a positive effect for females.

Figure 10: Predictive margins and average marginal effects for the interaction effect between fear and gender
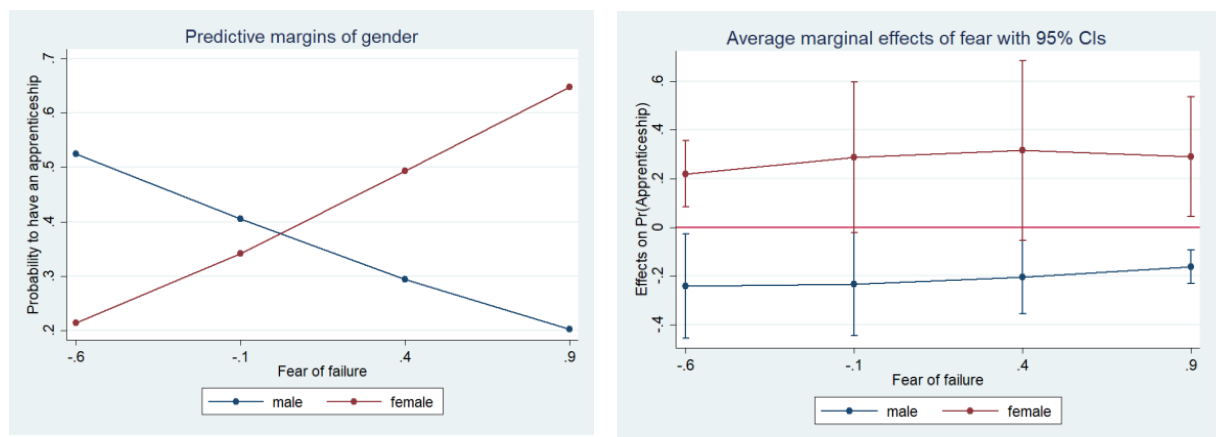
Both findings from the job search behaviour and job search outcome variables contradict the strand of literature which found women to be more negatively affected by fear of failure (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007; Roper and Scott, 2009; Sánchez Cañizares and Fuentes García, 2010; Koellinger, Minniti and Schade, 2013) and provide support for Taylor's tend and befriend theory (2012). The results suggest that in the present sample young men might react to fear of failure with self-handicapping avoidance ("flight") behaviour, such as searching less for jobs, and in lower chances of finding an apprenticeship. On the other hand, women might translate their fears into more constructive channels, such as reaching out for support, which would explain the partly positive effect of fear of failure on female labour market prospects. However, the latter mechanism could not be tested within the scope of this study. In conclusion, hypotheses 1, 3, 4 and 5 were not supported by this model, while hypothesis 2 is further substantiated.

3.4.4   Job outcomes: Labour market participation

For the broader outcome variable on labour market participation, the results of the logistic regression model (Table 12) show that, contrary to the previous outcome of finding an apprenticeship, two out of the three variables on adaptability, namely having a Plan B and being willing to commute, were significantly associated with a higher probability of being vocationally active at time 2. Having a Plan B at training

start increased the odds of labour market participation by 120 percent, and the disposition for a longer commute was significantly related to similarly higher odds of participation (see Table 12). This supports the findings from Vansteenkiste, Verbruggen and Sels (2016) that flexible job search can go along with underemployment and lower job quality.

Among those participants who indicated having a professional Plan B and a high willingness to commute (above one hour/one way) in the quantitative survey, their high adaptability also came across in the qualitative interviews. Partly, the implementation of originally vague alternative ideas was attributed to the participation in the intervention. As one participant remarked:

> *"I always had a Plan B in my head, but in the training they helped me learn more about it and put it into practice." (17-year-old male)*

On the other hand, several participants with lower adaptability shared insights into why they are exclusively holding on to their main professional goals. Some were passionately sticking to their dreams, as described by one respondent:

> *"I hate it to waste my time. I put my whole energy in my music; I want to learn and understand as much as possible. This is my passion. I want to at least try it, not to be like those people who lost themselves along life and didn't do their thing"* (20-year-old male).

For others, it was a more complex arrangement of priorities based on location, partner/children; own age and previously experienced failure that results in the conclusion that there is only one option of interest left. One example is the following participant:

"I have my mini-job and my boyfriend here; I don't want to move away. But the only apprenticeship I am interested in is hardly offered here. I will just wait and continue trying." (24-year-old female).

In view of the quantitative results, which show that adaptability is not necessarily a pre-condition to find an apprenticeship but does predict labour market participation, these are interesting findings to consider for training implementation. It is worth understanding young people's reasons for low adaptability in order to support them appropriately to access the labour market.

In the subgroup analyses, fear of failure showed an even stronger positive effect for females, alongside with higher school education. The positive effect of willingness to commute as one dimension of adaptability stayed strong and significant for both genders. Mental and physical health issues kept women from being active, while they surprisingly seemed to have an activating effect on men. Grit had no significant effect on labour market participation. Furthermore, being long-term unemployed reduced the odds of participation, especially for males. In conclusion, this model provides support (only) for hypothesis 5.

Table 13: Logistic regression model for the probability of labour market participation

	Overall model	women	men
	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio
Fear of failure	1.431	38.284***	0.880
Grit	0.879	0.829	0.849
Plan B	2.210***	2.365	1.653
Willingness to move	1.144	1.377	1.733
Maximum commuting time (log)	2.170**	4.439***	6.506**
Highest school degree			
no school	1.000	1.000	1.000
basic secondary education	1.336	6.503*	0.880
enhanced basic sec. education	1.366	8.382***	0.541
intermediate sec. education	1.281	10.468***	0.426
A-Level	2.138	3.247	2.524
Health issues			
no issues	1.000	1.000	1.000
physical issues	0.592	0.023**	1.272
mental issues	0.750	0.182*	1.445
both physical and mental issues	0.794	0.040***	2.884**
Sex	0.586*	1.000	1.000
Age	1.012	0.883	0.980
Unemployment duration	0.656***	0.864	0.541**
Social index			
low	1.000	1.000	1.000
middle	1.287	0.600	2.054**
high	1.213	1.546	1.172
Training duration (months)	0.927	0.802	0.867*
Training type			
classroom	1.000	1.000	1.000
workshops	1.197	0.147*	4.360***
business mentoring	1.843	1.282	2.231
coaching	0.818	0.251	1.144
Month of survey	1.017	1.121*	0.924*
Constant	0.036	0.018	0.001
R-squared	0.102	0.310	0.214
N. of cases	251	106	145
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01			

3.5   Conclusion

The reviewed literature and the insights from the pilot study suggested that fear of failure; grit and adaptability were significant predictors of job search quantity and quality, as well as job outcomes of young training participants in the present sample (hypotheses 1, 3, 5). It was further hypothesised that the negative effect of fear on the outcome variables would be moderated by gender (hypothesis 2) and grit (hypothesis 4).

The results of this study showed that high fear of failure goes along with less active job search and a lower probability to find an apprenticeship after training for young unemployed male training participants. This association can most likely be explained through the mechanism of self-handicapping strategies rooted in the desire for self-worth protection. As this finding was only statistically significant for males, the first hypothesis of this study, which suggested that high fear of failure of unemployed youth is associated with lower job search activity and a lower probability to find a job, is partly supported. Hypothesis 2 (stating that this relationship is more pronounced for males) is fully supported.

Grit showed to be a significant predictor of job search behaviour but not job outcomes, thereby only partly supporting hypothesis 3, which stated that grit would significantly affect both variables. Further findings show that grit could partly compensate for the inhibiting effect of fear of failure on job search activity (substantiating hypothesis 4 for this sample). Finally, adaptability, especially with regard to the willingness to commute, was an important predictor for labour market participation following training but not for finding an apprenticeship. This partly supports the fifth and final hypothesis of this study, which anticipated a significant association with both of those job outcomes.

3.6   Limitations

There are several limitations to this study which should be acknowledged. Firstly, due to restrictions in resources and accessibility the study is based on a purposive sample of a limited sample size. This implies that the presented findings should be interpreted with caution and cannot be generalised beyond the specific study context. Secondly, data on job search quantity at Time 1 was only available from 60 percent of respondents, and information on the employment status at Time 2 from 70.5 percent of all participants, which introduces the risk of attrition-related bias. In section 3.3.1 I have elaborated on how this bias has been minimised in the best possible way for this study.

Another limitation is that the longitudinal outcome variables relating to participants' job status were gathered immediately after finalising training. The results might therefore be affected by so-called "lock-in effects", referring to a delay in programme effects because participants were busy with their attendance in the training and often reduce their job search intensity during the intervention (Fitzenberger and Völter, 2007; Card, Kluve and Weber, 2017). However, within the available time and resources of this research, a more long-term approach was not feasible. In spite of those limitations, this research provides a valuable contribution to the literature at the intersection of vocational psychology, labour economics and ALMP evaluation, being the first to explore the constructs of fear of failure and grit in the context of job training for a vulnerable group, and shedding light on the phenomena of interest from different perspectives through the application of a mixed-methods approach.

3.7 Implications for research and practice

The findings from this study have a range of implications for further research, policy and practice. Firstly, the results indicate that fear of failure and its potential effects on the effectiveness of ALMPs through its influence on young people's job search behaviour is an important, yet so far, overlooked construct which deserves more attention in future unemployment research. While the debate around what works in labour market interventions still mostly revolves around intervention features such as duration and contents (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2017), in this study, person-related characteristics showed to be relevant determinants of labour market outcomes above and beyond those features. When Caliendo and Mahlstedt (2017) conclude in their study on Germany that "unobservable" (non-cognitive) skills are "unimportant", they refer only to locus of control and the Big 5 personality traits. The findings from this study suggest that a range of further characteristics, namely fear of failure, grit and adaptability, deserve more attention in the ALMP evaluation literature. This study did not aim to test or compare the relevance of the included characteristics for job search and career outcomes against established constructs in career theory, such as perceived behavioural control or job search self-efficacy. Nevertheless, the results indicate that a comprehensive career theoretical perspective on job search behaviour would benefit from the consideration of self-handicapping drivers such as fear of failure, and resilience resources such as grit. Further research is needed to understand the role of those characteristics for different groups of the unemployed, and their interaction with the above mentioned, more commonly researched constructs.

In order to design and implement effective interventions to bring young people into work and vocational education, it is crucial to understand perceptual barriers that might lead to self-handicapping behaviour, and how to tackle these barriers. For this purpose, it would be recommendable to link the debates on effectiveness of job training more to the lessons learned from educational psychology. Thompson (1999) already pointed out that skills training alone is most likely to be ineffective when

addressing individuals driven by fear of failure and promoted the need for a multifaceted approach. He presented a range of recommendations for teachers in order to prevent or tackle maladaptive behaviour rooted in fear of failure. Many of those can be transferred to the context of job training: For example, encouraging risk-taking and constructive interpretation of failure; minimising uncertainty at the personal level by helping to define a positive strength-based self-image and providing clear and appropriate evaluative feedback; mitigating the power of professional success as the main source for self-worth by fostering multiple bases of self-valuation; and encouraging the setting of specific, proximal and achievable goals. Similarly, Leon and Matthews (2010) recommended a focus on the practical application of existing skills in order to internalise those capabilities and thereby foster self-worth. Another important strategy is creating an environment of tolerance for failure and promoting strategies to deal with it productively. This is linked to the promotion of malleable self-beliefs, or a "growth mindset" (Dweck, 1999), which has also been suggested in the context of fostering grit (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015). It comprises helping participants to attribute success to effort, or other personal actions or skills which are subject to development and change, rather than to innate ability or intelligence. Given that some results of this research indicate that grit might balance out the inhibiting effects of fear of failure on job search activity, this mechanism also deserves further attention in future research. The clear gender pattern emerging from the studies presented in this paper reaffirms the importance of disaggregated analyses in order to gain meaningful results on what works in labour market policies. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights on "invisible" barriers for unemployed young men. Since this demographic group is a risk factor for violence and unstable societies (Kingston and Webster, 2015), understanding their issues is crucial for designing and implementing and targeting interventions effectively. Jackson (2002) suggests a combination of strategies to mitigate defensive behaviour (such as the ones mentioned above) and tackle hegemonic masculinities. How this might look in practice deserves careful exploration under the consultation of interdisciplinary evidence and insights from practitioners. Following the findings from this study, it might be worth doing so.

4.   What gets them going? Change mechanisms of activation policies for unemployed youth.

Abstract

Activation policies are widely implemented to encourage labour market participation of unemployed young people, and yet they are hardly understood or monitored in their causal mechanisms. While activation schemes often use the 'carrot-and-stick' logic of microeconomic job search theory, in practice the process of how activation unfolds is far more complex, comprising elements of career identity and capability development, among others. This paper explores both the attitudinal and behavioural changes of unemployed youth during the course of their participation in different activation programmes. Seven phases of change emerged from the analysis, namely vocational availability, self-testing, self-knowledge, self-confidence, goal-orientation, vocational activity and perseverance. Young people enter these seven phases as a result of a range of drivers - from both within and outside the intervention sphere; this research identified these drivers and their implications for research and practice.

4.1   Introduction

Addressing youth unemployment is not only an important goal for economic development but also for the social welfare of societies. Aside from being inactive economic contributors, unemployed people are also less satisfied and healthy, as well as being more prone to social isolation and delinquent behaviour than those following a vocational activity (Wanberg, 2012; Kingston and Webster, 2015; Andresen and Linning, 2016). The impact of being unemployed at a young age entails a higher risk of long-term negative effects, such as long-term unemployment

and mental health problems in later life (Konle-Seidl and Eichhorst, 2008; Bell and Blanchflower, 2011; Strandh *et al.*, 2014). Welfare dependency often carries on over generations: Problems at home and at school can lead to a lack of cognitive and/or non-cognitive abilities, which in turn reduces the access options to vocational education and/or the successful retention in it. Repeated failure and rejection can then lead young people in a vicious cycle of decreasing motivation, passivity, and increasingly blocked opportunities to enter the labour market (Pohl and Walther, 2007). Hence, young people with a background of multiple personal barriers are an especially vulnerable group at risk to become trapped in a situation outside the formal work force. An often observed consequence of this and similar experiences is the complete retraction from the world of work, with individuals disengaging from any activity relating to work, education, training or job search (Maguire, 2015).

ALMPs are designed to intervene in this cycle by improving the relation between supply and demand on the labour market (International Labour Office, 2003). One particular subgroup of those policies which is prevalent in most modern welfare states are activation policies, which specifically aim at increasing the active participation of benefit-dependent individuals in the work force (as opposed to other ALMP objectives, such as an increase in technical skills). These programmes usually have enabling and demanding elements, i.e. they provide support conditional on certain cooperative behaviour of their clients, and are focused on triggering a behavioural change of the unemployed towards an active and successful job search (Pohl and Walther, 2007; Van Berkel and Borghi, 2008).

A vast amount of literature has concentrated on activation policies, their objectives, their philosophy of mutual obligation and different systems for their implementation (for an overview see: Eichhorst, Grienberger-Zingerle and Konle-Seidl, 2008; Fromm and Sproß, 2008). Evidence on the effectiveness of those policies shows mixed results, with especially limited impact for the already long-term unemployed (Konle-Seidl and Eichhorst, 2008). However, noticeably little attention is dedicated to the question how these policies are supposed to unfold their effects. What makes some people choose not to participate in the labour market in the first

place? What are the mechanisms of change that successfully "activate" this target group, i.e., makes them step-up their job search and ultimately participate in a vocational activity? Why are some programmes successful while others are not? What kind of personal change processes do participants experience which finally lead to the desired outcomes – actively taking part in vocational education, training or work – or not? Unemployed youth frequently undergo various loops of participation in activation interventions without tangible successful outcomes, thereby perpetuating their unfavourable starting situation further (Kohlrausch, 2012). In order to understand the reasons for the success or failure of those labour market initiatives aiming at activating especially the young unemployed, the different mechanisms of change underlying those programmes need to be understood in detail. More specifically, it is necessary to understand first what can trigger the desired change in attitudes and behaviour for the specific target group, in order to then analyse how these triggers can be effectively translated in an intervention context. Nonetheless, neither the personal change processes expected from the young unemployed, nor detailed theories of change of activation policies and programmes have received much attention so far in both the academic and practical literature on these instruments. This research aims at addressing this gap by tracing change processes of unemployed young participants of a variety of activation-oriented job training programmes in Germany over the course of their programme participation. The study contemplates a wider perspective, capturing general personal change not necessarily limited to the training context, in order to understand the full scope of processes and drivers of change for young participants. It then sheds further light on those aspects specifically relating to the intervention.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 gives an overview over relevant theoretical approaches to theories of change of activation policies. Section 3 describes the empirical concept of activation with a special focus on its legal and institutional set-up in Germany, followed by a summary of evidence on activation policies in section 4. Section 5 outlines the methodology of this research. Results are being presented in section 6 and discussed, including their limitations, in section 7. The eighth and final section concludes.

4.2 Theoretical perspectives on change mechanisms of activation policies

The concept of "activation" in social policy does not have a formal definition and can, depending on the respective context, vary in purposes and target groups (Eichhorst *et al.*, 2008). The EU defines activation policies as *"policies designed to encourage the unemployed to step up their job search after an initial spell of unemployment, by making receipt of benefit conditional on participation in programmes"* (Eurostat, 2019a). The objective of making people actively participate in job searching, training and/or work and thereby rapidly reduce their dependency on public welfare is a common feature of activation programmes (Pohl and Walther, 2007; Van Berkel and Borghi, 2008). The underlying principle is based on a dynamic of "demanding and enabling": The achievement of objectives is a shared responsibility between individual and state, which materialises in support and public benefits being conditional upon the verifiable fulfilment of certain obligations by the unemployed, such as demonstrable job search, participation in training and the acceptance of job offers (Pohl and Walther, 2007; Eichhorst *et al.*, 2008; European Commission, 2018).

Initiated by the USA and UK in the 1980s, today, most modern industrialised countries do comprise some kind of activation as part of their labour market policy schemes and the different tools and schemes of their implementation are being discussed (Eichhorst *et al.*, 2008). However, contrastingly little information can be found on how activation programmes are expected to reach their objectives, i.e. the theory(ies) of change of their implementation 'on the ground'. The concept of activation as a means to achieve labour market integration is not covered explicitly as such by any theory in the vocational sciences. However, a range of theories offer perspectives on how labour market policies unfold their effects. In the following, different theoretical frameworks will be explored for their potential to explain change mechanisms of activation policies, and compared in their respective approaches.

4.2.1 Classic microeconomic search models

Classic microeconomic search models are based on the assumption of rationally acting individuals who behave according to the expected maximised benefit of their action. According to standard job search theory (Mortensen, 1986), a person will invest as much time and effort in searching for jobs as it seems reasonable with regard to the expected future outcome, compared to their value of leisure. In other words, one will search if and as long as the marginal return to the search effort is higher than the marginal cost of this effort. Consequently, individuals are expected to stop searching once an offer reaches or exceeds an acceptable quality - their reservation wage - and/or will not start searching if the benefits of the unemployed status quo outweigh its costs (Mortensen, 1986). Based on those considerations, activation programmes can influence the probability of an unemployed individual to become employed through two effects: By increasing their chance of receiving job offers (e.g. through an increase in their human capital or improvement of their search strategy), and/or by increasing their willingness to accept those offers (i.e. a reduction in their expectations) (Hujer, Thomsen and Zeiss, 2006a). The first effect reflects the promoting elements of activation policies: Support and skills transfer will lead to an increase in human capital and/or job search effectiveness, which in turn leads to a better matching with existing labour demand. The second effect reflects the compulsory aspects: It is assumed that through sanctions such as benefit cuts, and/or obligations attached to benefit reception, the utility of unemployment will decrease for the unemployed. This in turn is expected to increase their effort to evade unemployment, i.e. have an activating effect on job search and make concessions when it comes to accepting job opportunities (Holmlund, 2015; Dengler, 2019). Consequently, activation programmes should be designed with a focus on incentivising the unemployed to quickly (re-) integrate in the work force by enhancing their skillset and/or moralising their behaviour (Bonvin, 2008; Konle-Seidl and Eichhorst, 2008). Figure 11 illustrates the logic of change from this theoretical viewpoint.

Figure 11: Theory of change of activation policies from a microeconomic perspective
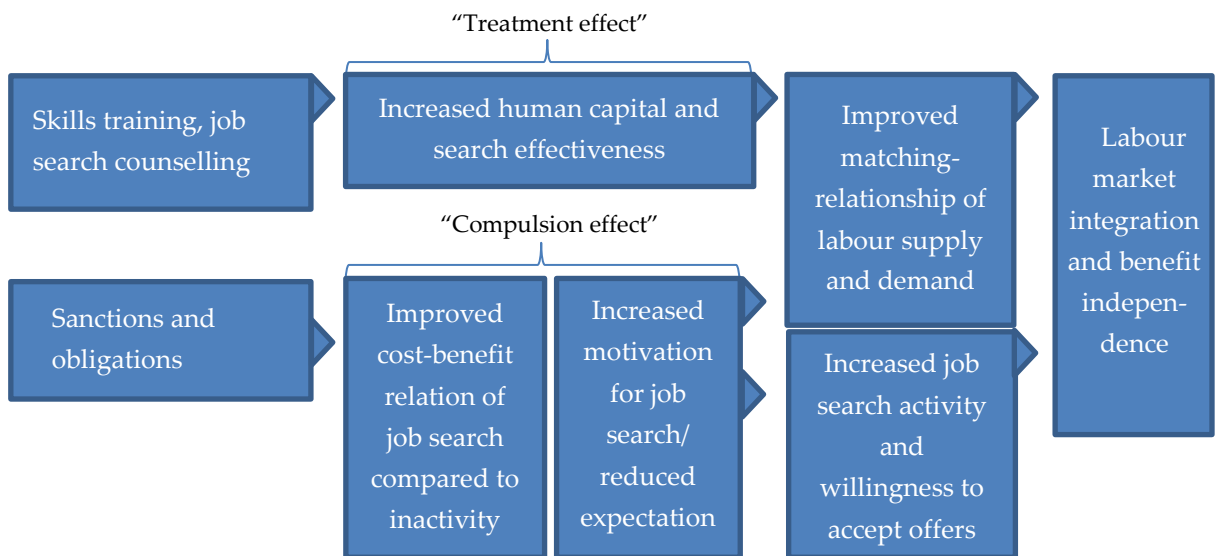
Source: Own elaboration

This theoretical perspective has a range of limitations. First of all, the only outcome of interest is quick labour market integration, which might happen at the cost of job quality and sustainability, thereby becoming more costly for the state in the long term (Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung, 2016). Secondly, its explanatory logic mainly revolves around two variables: Search effort and (reservation) wage. A maximisation of lifetime income (i.e. the expected income in future years) is seen as the only envisaged payoff to search. In modern labour markets, however, a more differentiated picture is needed to understand people's decision-making processes in the world of work. Wage is not the only driver anymore, and expected job satisfaction, consisting of a variety of person-specific criteria, such as job contents, location, flexibility of work times and stability needs to be considered. The effect of sanctions might be distorted in policy systems like Germany, where benefits are often granted at household level, thereby enabling the community to balance out for individual benefit cuts (Eichhorst *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, recent experimental evidence showed that the quality and efficacy of the chosen job search strategy might be of higher relevance than the mere search intensity (Arni, 2015). Finally, the theory is based on the assumption of rationally acting individuals and does not consider that people make behavioural

choices based on their subjective judgements regarding future events, which might not correspond to the real situation in the labour market. Biased beliefs can have a crucial influence on labour participation decisions (Arni, 2015; Spinnewijn, 2015). Unemployed young people come from a range of different personal backgrounds with a variety of individual circumstances that might affect the perception of their own position in the vocational sphere. Assuming that everybody can work and only needs to be equipped with enough cognitive tools and be rightly incentivised to do so is too simplistic, especially for a target group with multiple barriers. In order to understand the heterogeneity of effects of activation programmes for youth and shape their design appropriately according to the needs of their diverse target group, it is important to understand the abilities and needs of unemployed young people more in-depth.

4.2.2 Capability- and empowerment-based approaches

A different perspective is taken by Amartya Sen's approach (Sen, 1985) where strengthened capabilities are the main and ultimate outcome of interest. According to this theoretical viewpoint, people need freedom and resources to put their capacities into action. A capability is therefore *"a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being"* (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993 p. 30). This approach innately comprises the concept of empowerment: Individual skills and competencies, as well as an economic and socio-cultural context both act as conversion factors which are needed to transform this freedom and resources into actual capacity to act (Sen, 1985; Bonvin and Orton, 2009). From this viewpoint, the final objective of ALMPs in general should be enhanced capabilities of their participants, i.e. their disposition of the freedom and resources they need to perform a vocational activity that they value, rather than bringing them quickly into any kind of employment. Intermediate outcomes would comprise the appropriate equipment with skills and financial resources, as well as the creation of an enabling environment (Bonvin and Orton, 2009).This implies the evaluation of activation policies against corresponding outcomes, for example the degree to which beneficiaries have influence over programme assignment and implementation (Bonvin and Orton, 2009).

This theoretical perspective deviates from the carrot-and-stick-logic of microeconomic job search models: In the capability approach, the imposition of duties is counterproductive to the development of capabilities, as the freedom of choice of one's own path is one of its essential requisites. In parallel, it also highlights the need to empower people by equipping them with the means to make use of this freedom, both elements aiming at making the unemployed subjects rather than objects of their process (Bonvin and Orton, 2009; Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2009). While classic microeconomic search theory builds on the compulsion effect to increase the responsibility (and consequent activation) of the unemployed, the capability approach takes the view that freedom of choice and empowerment are essential pre-requisites for taking responsibility (Bonvin, 2008).

Figure 12: Theory of change of activation policies according to Sen's capability approach
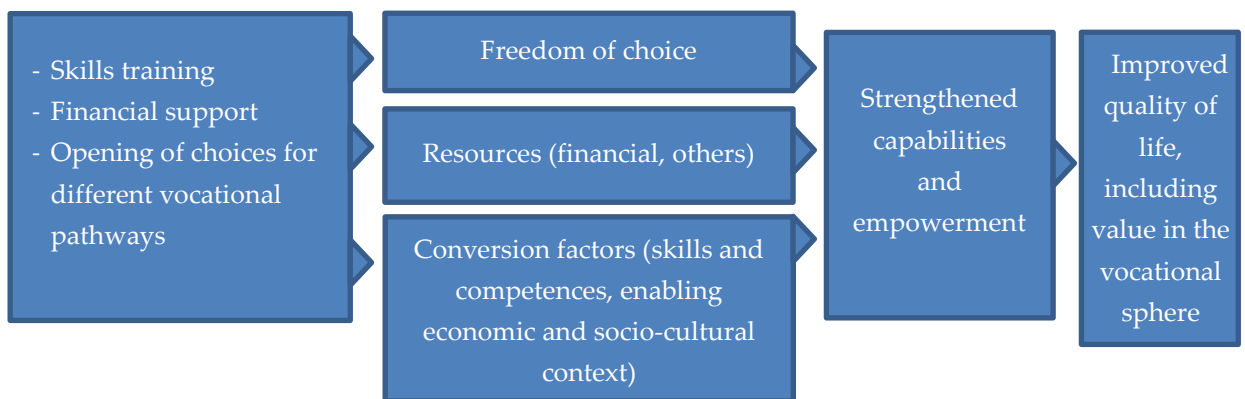
Source: Own elaboration

The construct of empowerment deserves a closer look in this context. It is much used in political and feminist literature, but often there is no clarity or consensus on what exactly is empowerment and how it can be promoted (Wilkinson, 1997; Tengland, 2008). A review of a variety of concepts showed that empowerment can be understood both as a goal (i.e. gaining control over specific relevant determinants of one's quality of life) and/or as a process or means (empowering participants in order to achieve "external" goals, such as finding work) (Chamberlin, 1997; Kabeer, 1999; Tengland, 2008). For the former, intermediate objectives are an improvement in health (which here includes mental aspects such

as self-confidence, self-efficacy and autonomy), knowledge (including self-knowledge, consciousness, skills and competence) or freedom (i.e. opportunities for action) (Tengland, 2008). For this purpose, it is essential that skills and information can be "unlocked" and (following Sen's logic) converted into power, as mere knowledge alone does not contribute to an increased control (Tengland, 2008). Similarly, in vocational rehabilitation, empowerment as a strategy for activation aims at the unemployed taking control of their process to re-integrate in the work force, and take autonomous choices with regard to their goals and the means of their achievement (Van Hal *et al.*, 2012). The logic of change for activation is therefore similar to Sen's capability approach: The provision of knowledge, health and freedom, adequately converted in an increased control over a subjects own life quality, satisfies basic human needs of self-actualisation and fulfilment, which in turn lead to increased motivation and, ultimately, action (Wilkinson, 1997). Figures 12 and 13 illustrate a simplified version of theories of change for activation policies from the capability and empowerment perspectives.

Figure 13: Theory of change for activation policies from a process-perspective of empowerment
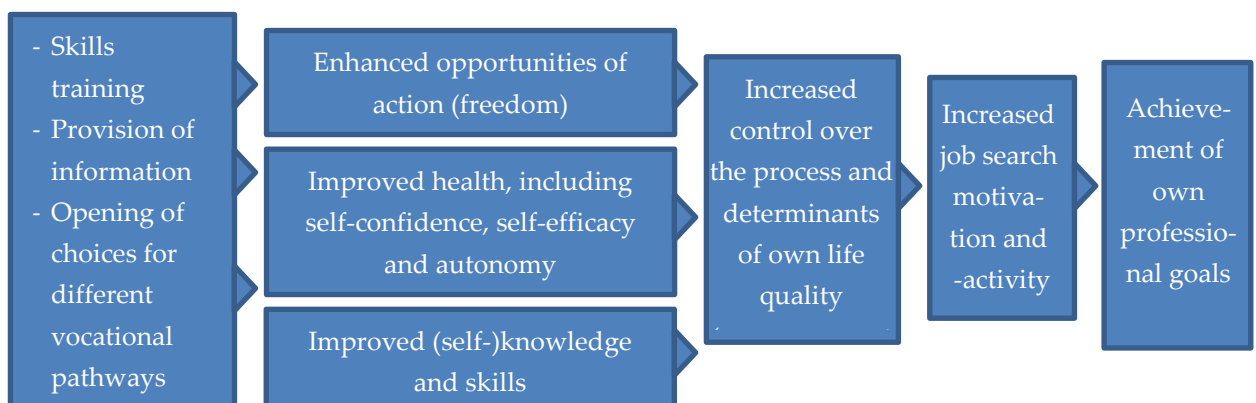
Source: Own elaboration

As opposed to the microeconomic theories, the capability and empowerment approaches put the individual at the helm of their own journey of change. According to this viewpoint, those who have an adequate freedom of choice, necessary resources and the capacity to use these resources are capable to enter the

labour market in a way that enhances their own quality of life. This should represent the ultimate goal of activation policies – independent from the participants' actual employment status. Activation thereby unfolds its effect through bringing people into the conditions to act freely and in an empowered way. However, empowerment and activation in practice might not be a straightforward process. Sometimes reflecting on one's objectives and assuming control over the personal process is not realistic and/or not yet desirable for the individual, for example when they are not ready to do so due to physical or mental health problems (Van Hal *et al.*, 2012). The discussed approaches leave the way open to question how empowering activation schemes are supposed to account for such heterogeneity of clients and their personal change processes.

4.2.3   Career theories

The third and final theoretical strand to be examined here is situated in the field of vocational psychology, where the focus of interest lies on an individual's career-related decisions and actions. A range of career theories analyse the subject of vocational choice, i.e. how and why people select which kind of professional pathway (Super, 1953; Holland, 1959; Osipow, 1968). Developmental theorists understand a person's career decisions in the context of their general human development (Super, 1953; Ginzberg, 1972; Savickas, 2005). According to this perspective, career development happens over a lifetime in five main stages, with the development of a vocational self-concept taking place from childhood until the early teenage years (growth), followed by a phase of exploration, skills acquisition and vocational choice until the mid-twenties, which later becomes fostered through work experience (Super, 1953). Consequently, if individuals do not psychologically mature in their sense of self and in certain abilities which can be expected as part of their respective life phase (e.g. the ability to delay gratification), their career development will become inhibited and/or inappropriate (Osipow, 1968).

Another group of theorists follow Holland's approach of vocational typologies. According to this theory, people can be classified in six different types of career

personalities and in order to be successful and satisfied; their choice of profession needs to match their personality type (Holland, 1959; Nauta, 2010). The questions why career avoidance occurs and how it can be tackled through vocational activation is not explicitly addressed by either of these vocational theoretical frameworks (Zytowski, 1965; Osipow, 1968). However, some insights can be derived from the discussed approaches: From Holland's viewpoint, vocational inactivity might occur due to indecision as a result of poor self-assessment of one's career personality type, and/or unsuccessful access to a matching profession (Osipow, 1968). Based on this logic, the effects of activation policies would unfold for young people mostly through effective profiling and corresponding career orientation. From the developmental perspective, these policies should focus on supporting the individual's personal maturation process, e.g. through the provision of information, to bring them up to speed with their corresponding developmental phase, which in turn is expected to enable appropriate decision-making (Super, 1953; Osipow, 1968; Savickas, 2005). Figure 14 provides a summary for both described pathways of change for activation policies targeting youth.

Figure 14: Theories of change for activation policies from the perspective of psychological career theories
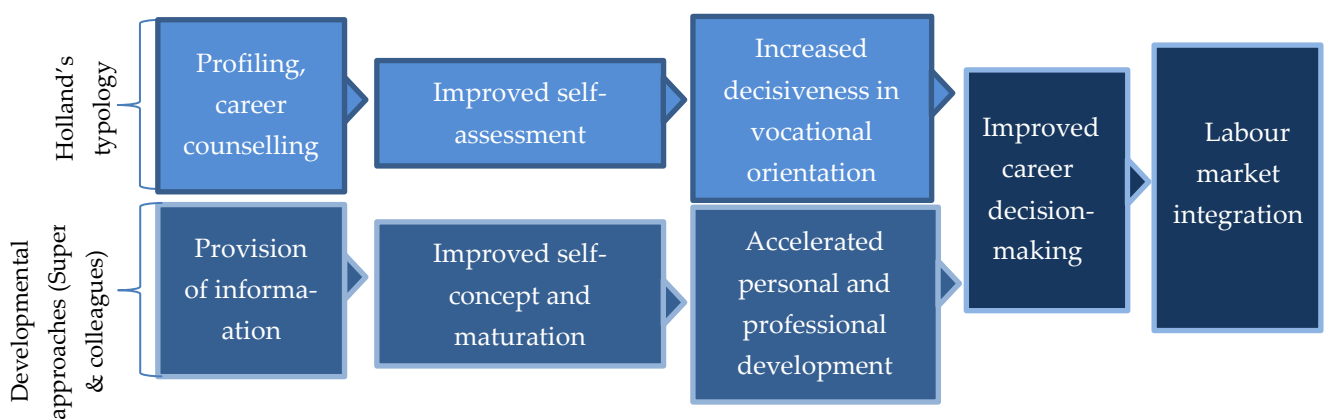
Source: Own elaboration

The reviewed theoretical frameworks show several aspects in common and other substantial differences. While most theories focus on successful labour market integration as the ultimate outcome of activation programmes, Sen's capability approach deviates from this scheme and puts the individual's quality of life at the

forefront. Improving matching efficiency, either of labour supply with demand (microeconomic search theory) or of the individual's personality with their career choices (Holland) is a common intermediate target across the disciplines. Both the capability and empowerment approaches aim at providing the unemployed with the "equipment" to take control over their process, while in the microeconomic view the focus lies on improving the person's cost-benefit ratio in favour of an active participation in the labour market. While the microeconomic and career theoretical approaches mostly focus on the provision of information and skills when it comes to the enabling elements of activation, the empowerment and capability approaches highlight the importance of freedom/opportunities and resources as essential elements to progress.

From the review of the theoretical literature it stands out that career avoidance or vocational non-participation, even though being a notable problem for modern welfare states and being widely addressed through activation schemes, have not received much explicit attention in the literature of the vocational sciences. Peck and Theodore (2000) see the roots of unemployment predominantly in behavioural aspects and emphasise the need for ALMP to look beyond the classic employability-focused logic and concentrate on motivations and expectations of their beneficiaries. The above discussed theoretical frameworks allow for some inferences to be drawn on reasons for non-participation. However, they are of limited value for gaining an understanding of the diverse and complex cognitive-behavioural mechanisms that might keep the unemployed from actively participating in the labour market, and consequent implications for an effective functioning of activation policies. In this study, those mechanisms will be explored in-depth for unemployed young people in the context of German activation policy programmes. Based on the results, a more comprehensive framework to understand and monitor individual processes of vocational activation will be suggested which takes up selected elements of the above discussed theories.

4.3 Activation policies in Germany

In Germany, especially since the major labour market reforms ("Hartz") reforms in 2003, the principle of workfare, based on activation and mutual obligation of the state and the unemployed ("Fördern und Fordern"), is prevalent for the entire ALMP system (Engelberty, 2012a; Ehrich, Munasib and Roy, 2018). When an unemployed person enters the benefit system, job agents usually conduct an initial screening to assess their availability for work. Consequently, individual integration agreements are developed and signed by both the unemployed and the job agent. These agreements comprise the specific ALMP support services to be provided by the job centres and their suppliers, as well as required cooperation by the client (e.g. active job search, regular participation in training). The fulfilment of the obligations stated in the agreement will be monitored regularly and non-compliance usually leads to benefit sanctions (Tergeist and Grubb, 2006; Eichhorst, Grienberger-Zingerle and Konle-Seidl, 2008).

German activation policies as the means of activation are regulated in the Second Book of the Social Code, which focusses on individuals who are part of the benefit system ("basic social security"). It states the objectives to strengthen the self-responsibility of those entitled to benefits who are fit for work, contribute to their ability to support themselves independently from the social security system, shorten and/or minimise their need for assistance, maintain, improve or restore their ability to work, and create incentives for the uptake of gainful employment (§1 SGB II, Section two).

Concrete measures for activation and professional integration are regulated under the Third Book of the Social Code (§ 45 SGB III), which states the aims of accession to the labour market (including vocational apprenticeships), identification, reduction or removal of personal barriers, placement in or stabilisation of formal employment, and entrepreneurship promotion. In order to achieve these targets, the following intervention types are listed: Programmes aiming at assessing existing capabilities and circumstances, skills training, application training and job search

counselling (Kopp, 2019). All those objectives focus on achieving an independence from benefits by making the unemployed able and willing to work. Formal documents fail, however, to outline how these programmes are supposed to deliver their promise, and upon which assumptions and theoretical grounding they are based. Interim targets are rarely officially formulated and tracked (Deeke and Kruppe, 2003; Spermann, 2015). Some intermediate outcomes which are commonly discussed (albeit not explicitly monitored) are getting young people used to a regular work rhythm, punctuality and reliability, and thereby preparing them for the labour market (Eichhorst, Grienberger-Zingerle and Konle-Seidl, 2008). Keeping the unemployed generally engaged with their vocational situation and prevent them fully withdrawing from the labour market, turning into so-called "discouraged workers" is another interim achievement which is so-far invisible in administrative data (Hartig, Jozwiak and Wolff, 2008). Improving capacity, employability and competitiveness through skills transfer, as well as increasing motivation and compliance through the threatening effect of sanctions (mostly benefit cuts) are further mechanisms of change that can be derived from the literature on German ALMPs (Deeke and Kruppe, 2003; Oschmiansky, 2010). According to Eichhorst et al. (2008, p.5) *"Through the conceptual and practical combination of demanding and enabling elements, activating labour market policies aim at overcoming individual barriers to employment such as lack of employability due to long-term unemployment, poor skills and personal problems."*

Based on the activation objectives and interventions outlined in the German Social Code, as well as the limited literature elaborating on the functioning of activation policies, the following rough outline of a theory of change for activation policies in Germany can be drawn (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Illustration of a theory of change of German activation policies

Enabling elements	- Profiling/testing - Skills training - Application training - Job search counselling	→	Improved skills and capacities	→	Improved employability	→	Labour market integration and benefit indepen-dence
			Regular work rhythm and improved punctuality		Improved labour market readiness		
			Individual barriers addressed or mitigated		Active participation in job search and training		
Demanding elements	- Integration agreements - Sanctions threat	→	Increased motivation for job search/reduced moral hazard				

Source: Own elaboration

Referring back to the theoretical approaches to activation, it appears that the theory of change underlying the German activation policy is mostly based on microeconomic search theories, assuming a combination of a positive treatment effect through an increase in skills and search effectiveness, and a negative threat effect through sanctions which is expected to moralise behaviour and increase search effort.

This leaves much room for interpretation regarding what exactly is meant by activation, and how the mentioned tools of programme implementation are meant to achieve the set objectives (Eichhorst, Grienberger-Zingerle and Konle-Seidl, 2008). It stands out that also the literature on activation in practice mostly focuses on the structural design features of the systems (Tergeist and Grubb, 2006; Pohl and Walther, 2007) and lacks a more profound occupation with the mechanisms of change of activation programmes, the assumptions underlying each causal link in the chain from intervention to ultimate goal, as well as recommendations for a thorough assessment of their occurrence in practice. The monitoring and evaluation of activation programmes commonly takes place through activity indicators (such as attendance, number of applications written) and final outcome indicators (commonly: Integration in vocational training or employment, and retention in it for at least 6 months) (European Commission, 2018). Processes taking place in-between remain hidden in a "black box" – above all: What is behind the "treatment effect"?

Which attitude changes precede behavioural changes when it comes to increased search behaviour and labour market readiness, and how can they be promoted through interventions? How can activation programmes create change for young people and help them maximise their potential to shape their own vocational path (Pohl and Walther, 2007)? In order to understand these questions, it is necessary to analyse through qualitative research how activation materialises in the practice of policy implementation for its ultimate beneficiaries (Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2009).

4.4 Evidence

The empirical evidence on mechanisms of change of activation policies is limited, as evaluations mostly focus on the questions "What works, for whom and at what costs?", rather than looking at the "how and why" (Konle-Seidl and Eichhorst, 2008). There is some indication that activation policies can contribute to an increase in self-confidence and to creating enhanced opportunities through helping their clients to tackle personal barriers (Fromm and Sproß, 2008), but most studies focus on final labour market outcomes and/or an increase in human capital, while there is hardly any research on not directly market-related benefits (CEDEFOP, 2013).

When looking at existing evidence on the microeconomic search models, it is challenging to disentangle the carrot-and-stick effects (Graversen and van Ours, 2008). Some evidence suggests that the "threat effect", i.e. individuals being invited to join an intervention, can increase job search activity and outcomes independently from their actual participation (Hofmann, 2008; Müller and Steiner, 2008; Busk, 2016). This indicates that the compulsion effect, i.e. the mere motivation to avoid training commitment and/or other unpleasant experiences such as benefit sanctions, might play a relevant part for the effectiveness of activation policies. However, other studies show that disciplinary means can also have counterproductive effects, which can lead to a disengagement from cooperation with employment services (Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2009).

In general, the impact of activation programmes on the employment prospects of their beneficiaries has shown to be very mixed and heterogeneous, without

allowing for clear conclusions overall or for particular demographic subgroups (Eichhorst, Grienberger-Zingerle and Konle-Seidl, 2008; Konle-Seidl and Eichhorst, 2008). For those individuals who are long-term unemployed or have multiple personal barriers, the evidence even indicates towards rather negative effects of activation programmes (Fromm and Sproß, 2008). This is startling, considering that those programmes particularly aim at "activating" those furthest from the labour market.

More than two decades ago, the OECD acknowledged that "the ways in which benefit recipients are treated – left on their own, assisted, controlled, encouraged, challenged – during the various stages of their unemployment spells is a factor which affects the effectiveness of ALMPs." (OECD, 1997 p. 7)

Nevertheless, the evidence about the implementation process of activation programmes, related interactions, and how interventions are tailored to the needs of their beneficiaries is still scarce today (Eichhorst, Grienberger-Zingerle and Konle-Seidl, 2008). In order to understand programme effectiveness, it is necessary to understand first how the activation effects can unfold, and which are the important, possibly at first sight "unobservable", heterogeneities that need to be considered. As the inconclusive evidence on ALMP effectiveness confirms, a "one size fits all" approach cannot suit a highly diverse target group with multiple barriers (Pohl and Walther, 2007)

4.5 Methodology

4.5.1   Analytical approach

In the field of policy evaluation, there is increasing recognition that theory-based evaluation approaches are useful and necessary to understand the causal linkages between an intervention and its outcomes (Weiss, 1997; White, 2010). Especially in complex settings with a diverse target group and a high likelihood of several "unobservable" factors influencing programme effectiveness, it is necessary to unpack the causal mechanisms underlying the observed effects of a policy or programme in order to understand how and why this programme works (Rogers,

2008; Astbury and Leeuw, 2010; Khagram and Thomas, 2010; White, 2010). Considering the limited theoretical and empirical literature on the question how activation policies bring about change for their beneficiaries, this study follows a mechanism-based approach of theory-driven evaluation. It aims at identifying the change processes young people experience over the course of their participation in activation programmes and carving out which of those change experiences can be causally related to the intervention sphere. Based on those insights, it aims at constructing a more comprehensive programme theory of change, taking-up different elements from the above outlined theoretical approaches within the vocational sciences.

4.5.2 Sample and data collection procedure

This study was part of my wider longitudinal research project on mechanisms of ALMP effectiveness. The full sample of the study presented in this chapter (n=165) had participated in a baseline survey when starting different types of job training in Berlin which included activation as part of their main targets. Selection criteria for the participation in this study were being between 15 and 25 years of age, unemployed and about to start job training with a foreseen duration of 3-12 months. Informed consent was secured from all participants at this baseline stage, and for underage participants, signed consent forms were obtained from parents or legal guardians. When completing the baseline survey, all participants (n=434) agreed to be contacted at the end of their participation period on for a qualitative follow-up interview. The timing for the interview – in the aftermath of training participation- was chosen in accordance with the objective of this research, i.e. to trace back change processes that occurred over the course of programme participation. Purposive sampling was then applied until data saturation was reached (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2005; Saunders *et al.*, 2018), in order to ensure the diversity of the sample with regard to relevant criteria, such as training types and -duration, gender, age, education, social status and unemployment duration and understand repeating patterns in young people's change processes in spite of their diversity (see Table 13). The trainees were invited to a face-to-face

interview and were offered small vouchers for online music purchases and a charitable donation as incentives upon completion of the interview. Semi-structured interviews with a duration of 15-45 minutes were undertaken with a total of 165 participants. The main share of the interviews were conducted by the principal researcher (n=128), the remaining interviews were administered by three female Master students in Sociology who were recruited and trained as research assistants for this study. All interviews were conducted in German language. Depending on the young people's preference and convenience, the interviews took place either in private rooms within the training premises, or in a coffee shop in the respondents' neighbourhood. This approach was chosen in order to minimise access barriers and maximise participation incentive for this difficult-to-access target group (many of them having dropped out of training over time).

Table 14: Key characteristics of the sample

Variable	N[22]	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Sex (% female)	164	42.68			
Unemployment duration (months)	145	11.59	13.50	.25	60
Age	159	19.55	2.44	15	25
Social index (%)	165				
Low		40.00			
Middle		37.58			
High		22.42			
Education (%)	165				
No school degree		16.36			
Basic degree		11.52			
Enhanced basic degree		22.42			
Intermediate degree		42.42			
A-level		7.27			
Training duration (months)	161	4.70	2.22	1	11
Training type (%)	161				
Classroom		16.15			
Workshops		52.80			
Business mentoring		12.42			
Coaching		18.63			

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[22] Differing sample size numbers are due to missing values for individual variables.

4.5.3 Instruments and analysis

The interviews started with an invitation to the young person to openly narrate how they came to take part in the intervention, and how the overall participation went for them, with follow-up questions to clarify and go more in-depth on the participation experience where relevant. This was followed by another open question if the individual experienced any personal change over their course of participation (explaining that this might comprise any kind of factual, cognitive, attitudinal and/or behavioural change, related or not to the training and its objectives). Consequently, several follow-up questions explored the respective types of change experienced, their perceived relevance for the individual's vocational journey, different triggers of change and the role of the intervention in this process. The interviews included more questions on specific attitudes and decisions, such as reasons for dropout where it applied. However, the analysis presented in this paper focused only on the interview questions relating to personal change processes.

Following the written expression of informed consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and their content transcribed in German. Translated excerpts are available on request. After a detailed familiarisation with all answers (first stage of the analysis), a thematic content analysis was undertaken, where respondents' answers were coded in different themes for two categories: (A) Phases of their personal change process and (B) triggers to transitions in-between those phases (second stage of the analysis). In a third stage, the identified codes were revised and re-structured into main themes and sub-themes for each of the two categories (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

> Corresponding to the objectives of this study, the coding was conducted in an inductive manner, letting the themes arise from the data instead of following a pre-set theoretical framework. This is a common technique to identify meaningful patterns in qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; De Maeyer *et al.*, 2011) The analysis was carried out with NVivo Software.

4.6 Results

The change processes derived from the thematic analysis can be classified in seven main phases of change, with each one of them comprising several elements (sub-themes). A summary of all themes, sub-themes and triggers of change arising from the data analysis is presented in Table 14.

1. **Vocational availability:** The process from complete inactivity to general vocational availability, i.e. the willingness to participate in training, approach job search and setting career-goals

2. **Self-testing:** The process from general vocational availability to the readiness to explore the labour market and one's own skills through workshops, internships and placements.

3. **Self-knowledge:** The process of gaining an increased understanding of one's personal strengths, weaknesses, barriers, interests, preferences, possibilities and, ultimately, career goals.

4. **Self-confidence:** The attitudinal change arising from the improved self-knowledge, leading to a more positive outlook into the (vocational) future, including increased self-efficacy and hope with regard to the achievement of one's goals

5. **Goal-orientation:** The process of focusing one's decisions and actions towards the achievement of self-set career goals, including the active addressing of previously identified personal barriers.

6. **Vocational activity:** The process of entering in concrete vocational action, such as active and effective job search, starting work, re-entering education or participating in specific programmes aimed at the removal of personal barriers, which prevent one entering education or work.

7. **Perseverance:** The ability to continue activities mentioned in phase 6 despite experiences of frustration, developing resilience to rejection

These phases do not necessarily follow a consecutive course. Some are determined by behavioural changes, while others are attitudinal changes or related to a change

in (self-) knowledge, and their order can be recursive. Figure 16 gives an overview of the individual change processes identified and their interactions, which will be described in more detail in this section. It is important to highlight that each individual phase of change can directly lead to the final goal of vocational activity, without necessarily passing through any of the other phases (for simplicity of graphical illustration, these connectors have been omitted in Figure 16). For example, for some participants the mere change from complete passivity to vocational availability (phase 1) might be sufficient to find a job. Depending on each individual's personal circumstances, addressing only one bottleneck and/or tackling a more complex interaction of barriers and needs might be required.

(1) Vocational availability: Basic activation and/or a change in awareness

Basic activation

As shown in Figure 16, a first phase of change described by young people relates to the transition from a state of paralysis or complete vocational inactivity to being available for approaching the labour market. This availability can again be distinguished in two different elements: The first one is the mere willingness and ability to engage in any regular work-related activity, such as attending the intervention itself. Since they left school (often prematurely without accomplishing the envisaged degree), many unemployed young people have experienced periods of staying at home without engaging in any kind of work or training. These "hanging out" phases can last from a few months to a few years, resulting in a decline of the ability to follow a regular daily structure and comply with attendance times and rules, which in turn increases the barrier and hampers the young people's chances to enter the labour market. Several youths (n=20) mentioned the exit from this "hangout" phase in favour of having a regular place to go to as a positive change resulting from the intervention, which consequently triggered them to occupy themselves again with their professional orientation.

Figure 16: Overview of change processes from vocational inactivity to activation identified in this study
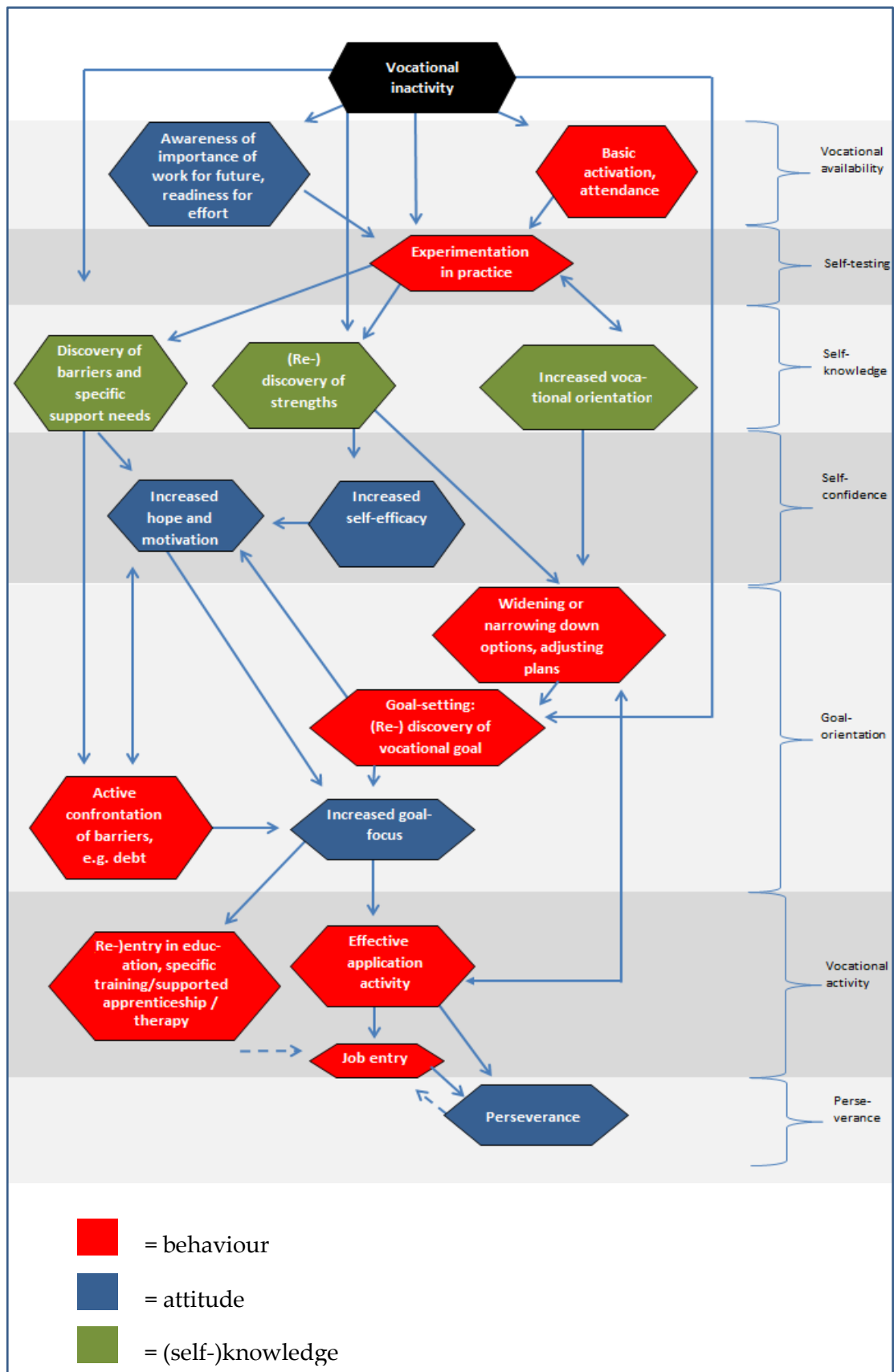
Table 15: Overview of main phases of change, the individual elements forming part of those phases, and triggers of change for each element

	Main phases of change	Individual elements of each phase	Triggers of change
1	**Vocational availability**	Basic activation Awareness	Clear structure, rules and rule enforcement Demanding schedule Group dynamic and rituals Repeated failure Peer-comparison and time pressure Trustful conversations Surge in responsibility and/or stroke of fate
2	**Self-testing**	Experimentation in workshops or internships	Basic activation Awareness "Push"/challenge Persistence Positivity/personal encouragement
3	**Self-knowledge**	Identification of barriers and special support needs (Re-) discovery of own strengths Increased vocational orientation	Experimentation in workshops or internships Mirroring/feedback by trainers Ability tests Experimentation in workshops or internships
4	**Self-confidence**	Self-efficacy Hope and motivation	(Re-) discovery of own strengths Self-reliance/independence Self-efficacy Identification of barriers and special support needs (Re-) discovery of vocational goal
5	**Goal-orientation**	Widening or narrowing down vocational options Goal setting	Increased vocational orientation (Re-) discovery of own strengths Insights into labour market conditions and/or requirements Gentle nudge for developing a Plan B Widening or narrowing vocational options Reflective retreat In-depth interest by trainers

		Increased goal-focus	(Re-)discovery of vocational goal
			Active confrontation of barriers
			Increased hope and motivation
		Active confrontation of barriers	Identification of barriers and special support needs
			Increased hope and motivation
			"Push"/challenge
			Persistence
			Positivity/personal encouragement
6	**Vocational activity**	Effective application activity	Increased goal-focus
			Transfer of skills and knowledge
			Widening or narrowing vocational options
		Re-entry in education or specific training/support	Increased goal-focus
		Entry in work or apprenticeship	Active and effective job search
			Transfer of skills, knowledge and contacts
7	**Perseverance**	Resilience to rejection during search process	Insights into labour market conditions and/or requirements
		Persistence through challenging phases at school/work	Repeated failure
			Surge in responsibility

This phase can be described as "basic activation", as it simply refers to getting young people to leave the house and follow a regular structure in preparation of the requirements of future employers. One participant described:

"It was a better feeling than just staying at home. (…) I used to go because I had to, but then I actually started enjoying it a bit." (19-year-old male).

Another one remarked: *"Staying at home ruins you, because you get used to it. Every day looks the same."* (18-year-old female).

When asked for the triggers of this change, respondents mentioned obligations attached to the intervention, such as clear rules, set arrival times, a demanding schedule that required attendance, as well as group cohesion for the compliance with those rules. More specifically, joint group rituals for starting and ending the

day, as well as adherence to set attendance rules by trainers with sanctions for non-compliance were highlighted positively. In contrast, equally as many study respondents (n=20) criticised the absence of clear rules or adherence to rules by training staff and a *laissez-faire* attitude as demotivating. A more profound analysis of this issue can be found in chapter 2 of this thesis ("Determinants of Dropout").

Change in awareness

The second aspect of vocational availability is related to a more general attitudinal change and represents one of the most important themes identified in this study. It is here summarised as a change in awareness. The respondents describing their experience under this theme (n=16), refer to a change from a state of indifference/phlegm and "can't be bothered"-attitude to an insight about the importance of work in general for their future, as well as the need to increase their own effort in order to progress professionally. This goes along with a shift in perception from a "quick win" perspective and expectation to longer-term thinking. This realisation is often described as having a strong impact on the person's subsequent point of view and behaviour. When directly asked, participants frequently portrayed this process as one of general maturation setting in over time, without any specific cause. However, upon deeper investigation, four sub-themes could be identified contributing as triggers of change for this theme.

Repeated failure and regret

The first trigger one refers to a repeated experience of failure, recognised as self-inflicted, in the vocational sphere. This often comprises multiple dropouts of school and previous attempts to start apprenticeships, for example due to absence or other incompliance with the rules as a type of active self-sabotage. As one respondent pointed out: *"I still struggle, but I have learned my lesson. I know now the consequences if I don't work on myself. The shock shook me up, even though it was predictable – I did not want to see it. The surprise was even bigger then."* (22-year-old male)

Another group of participants simply applied low effort due to no or an over-optimistic assessment of market requirements. The most recent experience of failure

preceding or during the intervention was then perceived the "last straw to break the camel's back" to avoid future self-imposed experiences of failure, or simply as the revelation that more effort is needed to achieve the desired outcomes, such as described by the following participant:

> *"Last year's experiences showed me that I have to do something in order to achieve*
> *something. I used to take things easy and thought it's somehow going to work out."*
> *(17-year-old male)*

Peer-comparison and time pressure

A second trigger for the change in awareness is related to the young person's perception of time and their personal development in comparison with their peers. Respondents described a feeling of being left behind, when they noticed similar-aged friends getting degrees and progressing in their careers. This perception can be amplified when a certain milestone age is reached (e.g. 18, 21 or 25 years of age), which goes along with a change of legal or formal category. Related to this effect is the aspiration of certain tangible goals or goods which are associated with being a successful adult member of society, such as having a driving license, having a car, living independently and/or being able to provide for a future family. A 20-year-old female respondent illustrates this feeling in the following quote:

> *"You become older and start thinking about the future. This is the aspect where I*
> *have understood a lot. You want a family one day, and be able to give them*
> *opportunities. I will turn 21 and do not yet have a degree. Age makes me ambitious*
> *to get things done now."*

Peer-effects can also influence from the opposite side, as a threat. Over time, young respondents observed some of their peers delving deeper into deviant behaviour, becoming criminal and/or not progressing personally and professionally, and they develop a desire to not follow the same pathway. A change of peer-group then often goes along with a shift in perspective, with either one or the other coming first. As one 17-year-old female reflected: *"I used to be stupid, was just hanging out...my group of friends then completely changed. I urgently wanted to get my degree and not become like the*

others". This effect can also be triggered through peer-contact within the intervention, with several respondents observing others trapped in loops of repeated failure and demotivation and emphasising that they did not want to be like "all the slackers here".

Trustful conversations

Occasionally, serious conversations with close well-trusted people were mentioned as another trigger for the change in awareness. This comprised family members (rather siblings or uncles than parents), as well as training staff, where there was a positive personal relationship. The following two quotes show examples where the attitudinal change was supported through conversations with intervention staff.

> *"I concentrate more on my work-life now, the teacher opened my eyes. This used to be a secondary matter in my life. Through the conversations with her I see now how important that all is. My vocational choice itself has not changed, but my interest in the whole issue, and my will for it." (16-year-old male)*

> *"In school I just didn't care about apprenticeships. (…) It was not yet that serious for me. Here you are being made aware of the importance of those things." (18-year-old female)*

Surge in responsibility and/or stroke of fate

A final mechanism leading to an increased awareness is rooted in life events that brought upon a major change to the young person's private sphere, which either required a surge in responsibilities and/or triggered general consciousness. Among these occurrences is the death or illness of a close family member, the divorce of parents, or the birth of a child. Young respondents described such events as triggering a leap in maturity, often related to care responsibilities and a shift in focus on what is important. One female respondent remarked *"The thoughts with regard to my life have changed. I want to be able to earn money and support my mother during her chemo therapy (…). This came through a role play we did in the training. They*

asked if we would prefer to be a different person right now. I couldn't stop thinking about this question at home. I noticed that I do want to be somebody who has already achieved their goals (having an own flat, a driver's license and a car), before setting new ones. I would like to start a new chapter now."

This finding is consistent with evidence that ALMP programmes are more effective for young parents, even though the overall rate of participation of this group is comparatively low (Achatz *et al.*, 2012).

Reflecting back on the above discussed theoretical frameworks in the light of the insights from this first theme of vocational availability, the effect of basic activation can be related to the logic of microeconomic search theory: The value of staying at home had - consciously or subconsciously- already decreased for many young people, as they often started suffering from the lack of structure and purposeful action in their daily life. Clear attendance rules, an expectation of purpose, and sanctions for non-compliance provided the additional "nudge" that made activation more attractive than passivity. If these programme aspects do not set in (e.g. due to a lack of regular schedule of non-enforcement of rules by trainers), respondents expressed frustration. The change in awareness and its several triggers, on the other hand, are more related to the career developmental approach: Respondents described their acknowledgement of crucial career-related insights in the context of a more general personal maturation process, which could in parts be supported through the intervention.

(2) Self-testing: Three P's - push, positivity and persistence

A second type of change described by respondents was the transition from a rather "internal-theoretical" occupation with their professional orientation (or none at all) towards "getting out there" and testing their abilities and interests in practice, for example through engaging in internships and work placements, or actively trying out different manual workshops in the training environment. This step was sometimes taken proactively as a direct consequence of the previously described

surges in awareness or basic activation, while in other occasions it was the result of further triggers, which are mostly situated in the intervention sphere. Participants described being challenged and pushed by trainers, in combination with feeling appreciated and recognised in their personal potential as an enticement to activation and self-experimentation. The following quote by a 17-year old male respondent illustrates an example of this experience:

> *"My way of thinking has changed completely. I am only positive now; as soon as I arrive I switch on the PC and start looking for internships. (...) At the beginning, I was very lazy. Mrs Q. caters to her trainees very well; she shows interest and also tries to establish a private connection. I am in good contact with her and also tell her private stuff. At the beginning she had to kick my ass a lot. That was good."*

A close, personal and trustful relationship with the trainer was usually an essential basis for this mechanism to set in, with some examples showing counterproductive effects of challenging young people without this relationship basis. In this context, positivity/optimism and constant persistence by trainers were also frequently mentioned. These insights show that the combination of personal sympathy and care with pressure made young people feel cared for and believed in, which positively affected their self-concept and motivation and, consequently, their decisions to approach the labour market. The following quote shows the importance of the perceived personal interest of the trainer:

> *"She was very committed, she forced me to inform myself and approach people. She was behind it, saying that the company will kick me out if I don't write applications. She really wanted me to find an apprenticeship."* (20-year old male)

While some respondents highlighted the "push" elements of this mechanism, others emphasised the persistence and positivity as the crucial factor, as the following quotes illustrate:

> *"I was not very decided to do this. I always repeated I can't do it. But they always repeated again, yes, you can. At some point they just convinced me."* (19-year old female)

"He just kept on going. He saw potential in me and did not give up; he pulled it off and stayed persistent. I found this admirable." (20-year old male)

"Mr. X was very different. I only knew him for a couple of days, but he insisted so much that I finally searched for a job and found one. Due to him, I made an effort. (…) He annoyed me, every morning he came and made suggestions, gave me websites and brochures. (…) He wouldn't let anything slip. I did not feel left alone. When there was Mrs. Y, we just said 'good morning' and that was it." (20-year old male)

This phase reflects the empowerment approach, with young people gaining an increased control over their vocational process by making first steps to try out their skills. Respect, appreciation and an appropriate level of challenge showed to be essential ingredients to foster young people's "readiness to be empowered" and subsequent uptake of responsibility.

(3) Self-knowledge: Identifying barriers and strengths, adjusting options and forming goals

In this phase, young people experienced an increased understanding of their personal strengths, weaknesses, barriers, needs, interests, preferences, possibilities and, ultimately, career orientations. Three sub-themes emerged from the interview data and will be described in the following.

Identifying barriers and special support needs

Considering the diversity of the population of unemployed young trainees, it is not surprising that many of them have special needs that require a different type of support than the one provided in the programmes forming part of this study. This might comprise the requirement of psycho-social support, such as therapeutic or debt advice or supported apprenticeships, as well as more specialised sectoral training, among other options. The identification of those needs is crucial, not only in order to provide appropriate tailored support to each person, but also for the young people themselves as an important element of self-awareness for shaping their further vocational pathway. In this study, young people narrated about the

discovery of personal limitations and specific support needs as an important step in their individual change processes, which was occasionally at first an adverse experience, but eventually lead to an increase in hope, motivation, the recognition of new opportunities and more suitable support modalities (see further phases of change below). The identification sometimes took place as a direct result of the previously described self-testing phase, followed by an appropriate de-briefing on the insights gained from this phase. In other cases, it was a result of trainers mirroring their perceptions of participants' abilities and needs. Occasionally, ability tests also helped to support this process.

(Re-) discovering own strengths

Similarly to the previous sub-theme, the identification of strengths is another important part of the journey of change for the young people in this study. It is often a direct result of the self-testing on the labour market, with internships and work experience providing important affirmation to the young participants. Another channel is the previously mentioned feedback of own strengths by trusted trainers. An interesting insight is that several respondents described the insights gained in this phase as a re-discovery, remembering what they are good at from other spheres of (non-professional) life and/or previous times before they experienced repeated failure. Where a trainer showed both the in-depth personal interest in the participant to understand their underlying strength, as well as the ability to mirror their impression back to the young person, it often had a strong effect on the participant. As a 24-year-old female participant pointed out: *"You just need to be woken-up and have a neutral counterpart who reminds you of who you really are."*

Improved vocational orientation

An improved vocational orientation is another direct effect of the experimentation in practice. It reflects the iterative process of testing and refining ideas and opportunities and gaining an increasingly clear picture of one's own position and interests in the labour market, or, in Super's terms, career self-concept. Without necessarily having a clear idea of their professional vision yet, this is still an

important phase of change for the young unemployed, which eventually leads to the setting of a vocational goal.

(4) Self-confidence

Increased self-confidence is an aspect of positive change described by a range of respondents. It materialises in reduced fear to take part in job interviews, speak to others in general, increased self-efficacy for the accomplishment of job search-related tasks, as well as hope and optimism with regard to the possibility of achieving one's goals and higher resilience towards rejection. The improvement in self-efficacy was frequently described a result of the preceding phases of self-testing and (re)discovering the own strengths. Furthermore, it could develop as a result of a certain degree of self-reliance and independence in the intervention, which forced participants to find own solutions (with a particular strong effect for those taking part in an internship abroad). This is another reflection of an empowerment experience where participants gained control over their professional process through an increase in self-knowledge and certain –even though initially often unwelcomed– freedom, and constitutes an important interstation to subsequent phases of change, such as goal-orientation, which will be described in the following paragraph.

In conjunction with an increase in self-efficacy, young participants often also reported a surge of hope. New scenarios opened up, or old ones appeared more achievable, which in turn boosted motivation. The subtheme of hope also emerged as a result of the previously mentioned identification of barriers and special needs – some young people appeared to be stuck in loops of repeated failure without understanding the reasons. Unveiling personal barriers and identifying feasible strategies to tackle them often gave the individual an entirely new horizon of options. In these cases, flexibility and comprehension by trainers were highlighted by respondents as positively contributing to their personal change. One trainee reflected:

> *"They showed empathy for fears, and we dealt with it together. For example, at the beginning, they would take me a bit by the hand; even join me to a job interview. I used to be very shy. When I had a really bad day, they would also understand and leave me in peace. Our problems were taken seriously."* (22-year-old male)

(5) Goal-orientation: Finding a vocational goal and focusing on its achievement

The phase of goal-orientation comprises the adjustment of vocational visions, the specific identification of a vocational goal, as well as the increased focus on the achievement of such goal, including the active confrontation of previously interfering personal barriers.

Widening or narrowing down vocational options

A direct result of the identification of strengths and an improved vocational orientation is often an adjustment of options for the individual's professional pathway. Some young people found in their internships the vocation they would like to follow further, or a new field to explore, others found out what was not suitable for them and adapted their scope accordingly. This may include the decision to go back to school as a result of not enjoying any practical activity at the present moment, or the acknowledgement that a profession (or salary) of interest requires a higher educational degree. In this context, the immediate practical insight into the requirements and conditions on the labour market (e.g. through job fairs, work experience or unsuccessful job search) is an important trigger for the adjustment of vocational options. This process can be supported by trainers providing professional guidance and nudging participants to open up for a Plan B to their original idea, while allowing them to maintain the autonomy over this process. The following quote from a 19-year-old male illustrates an example of successful professional re-orientation: *"Originally I wanted to become real-estate agent, but you need A-levels for this and I got rejected a lot. Mr. X made me see that industrial clerks do a very similar job. I then got fairly quickly a job interview, internship and apprenticeship offer."*

The autonomy aspect is crucially important, as pushing young people too far away from their personal career visions – even though these might not be feasible – without counting on their ownership of this transition, repeatedly lead to counterproductive effects such as complete rejection of the trainer and intervention (see chapter 2 on training dropout for similar findings). Allowing for gentle, accompanied experiences of failure in situations of unachievable visions appears to

be a more promising strategy than "dream-crushing". In this phase, an improvement of self-knowledge in different aspects is the overarching theme, which resonates with both of the earlier presented career theories: The results reflect especially Super's career developmental approach (Super, 1953; see section 4.2.3) that highlights the importance of the development of a career identity for taking appropriate vocational choices. Through identifying own strengths and barriers, young people gained more clarity on their 'vocational self', which allowed them to take action towards an improved career orientation.

Goal-setting

A substantial share of interviewees (n=34) identified a specific vocational goal for themselves over the course of programme participation. Two main pathways were described that led to this important milestone: Firstly, the above outlined process of self-testing and identification of strengths, resulting in improved vocational orientation and finally, the identification of a clear goal. The second pathway is not related to experimentation in practice and has a rather cognitive characteristic, with young people coming to an insight of what they really want to do through reflection. Two subthemes arose from the interview data as triggers for this reflective insight: The first trigger emerged when trainers showed a profound interest in the participant's passions and dreams, and listened to their narrations. This was often explicitly positively emphasised in contrast to previous experiences in other interventions and/or family members. Respondents under this subtheme repeatedly described being asked for their real visions – and having them taken seriously - as a unique experience, whereas they are commonly used to others wanting them to find any kind of work as quick as possible. A 20-year-old female trainee reflected on this in the following way:

"Mr. X worked with me in the way that we move towards my wishes. It then made 'click' for me, and I thought, why did you actually waste your life so far? That showed me again what I actually want to do. As if someone had just nudged me from the back and said "just go and do it". (…) before, nobody has ever asked what is my dream job."

The second trigger to finding a vocation was related to being in some state of retreat or isolation, which gave the individual space to think, enter an inner dialogue of their personal visions and gain clarity amongst a confusing range of options and opinions. In this context, respondents referred to a combination of intervention- and non-intervention-related situations, such as the forced independence in foreign internships, the (otherwise negatively assessed) perceived abandonment in some training programmes, the conscious own decision to detach from a debilitating peer-environment or partner, a reflective theatre play (as part of the intervention), and time in prison. One participant summarised it pointedly as: *"I was being told all those different things and never knew what I wanted. When I reflected properly for the first time, I clearly knew that I wanted to go back to school and get my degree."* (18-year-old-male).

These experiences can be interpreted in relation to the element of freedom, which is central to the capability and empowerment approaches. When respondents perceived the freedom to choose their professional path, either due to the mere absence of 'background noise' to their own inner voice, or due to an empowering interaction with trainers who offer the prospect of helping to convert this freedom in actual achievability of the goal, they progress in their goal-setting.

Confronting barriers

Actively tackling the previously identified barriers constitutes another important change for several unemployed interviewees. It is part of the young people taking ownership of their future, acknowledging where they need help and not being too proud and/or afraid to seek for it. While some participants immediately proceeded to looking for support after they acknowledged their personal barriers (e.g. by starting therapy, changing their housing situation, seeking legal or financial advice, or looking for socially supported apprenticeships), more commonly the step from acknowledgement to action was a substantial hurdle, accompanied by fear and resistance. Youth who successfully overcame this hurdle mentioned similar triggers to their behavioural activation than those already described in phase 2 above (the process leading to self-testing): Push, positivity and persistence by trainers, on the

basis of a close relationship determined by personal interest and care, trust, and feeling believed-in. Two quotes by participants illustrate these mechanisms. A 20-year old female with mental health issues described her experience as the following: *"They look behind the façade here; these people helped me understand when I was not well before I knew it myself. (…)Before, I just thought I am ill and I will have to live with it. I now know what I have to do to get better, and I'm going to do it"*. A 20-year-old male with a history of repeated intervention dropout and debt problems remarked: *"I did not want a debt advisor at all. Mr. X [the trainer] insisted for months on it, we discussed all pro's and con's upside down. At some point I just gave up to stop him bothering me. (…) At the beginning I was very reluctant, but now I tell the advisor things I would have never expected. (…) He really wanted me as a client, I noticed this."* Again in this phase, the empowering effects of a combination of being pushed and positively re-affirmed emerge from the data.

Increased goal-focus

An increased focus on the active persuasion of their vocational goal was reported by a substantial share of interviewees (n=31). This usually happened as a consequence of the previous phases, such as the change in awareness, the re-discovery of a vocational goal, the active confrontation of barriers, and/or an increase in self-efficacy and hope through self-testing and the identification of own strengths.

A 20-year-old female who was about to re-enter formal education after having dropped out several times emphasised: *"This time it will work out, because today this is more important for me and I take it much more seriously. Now I also know why I want to do it. Formerly, I did not know this, and I had so much other trouble…money problems and no stable home."* A young mother highlighted her change in perspective following an internship abroad: *"I became more self-confident and optimistic. As I was all on my own, I got to know a different personality. Previously, I thought I would anyway not achieve my goals. Now I don't care what others think, I will pull it through!"*

(6) Vocational activity

A key phase of change – and the ultimate goal of most activation policies – is the process of the young unemployed entering in concrete interaction with the labour market, such as through active and effective job search and applications, starting work, re-entering education or participating in specific programmes aiming at the removal of personal barriers to enter education or work. An increased application activity was reported by a range of respondents as a result of the previously described processes. The decision to continue secondary education or enter a specific support programme was often taken as a result of the phase of self-knowledge. Respondents who reported on having found a job through the intervention did also refer to more "tangible" tools as positive promotors of this success, such as the transfer of application skills and contacts, support when developing their CV and cover letters, as well as the rehearsal job interviews. This related back to both the classic microeconomic models, where an increase in human capital and search effectiveness constitute the enabling effects of activation policies, as well as the empowerment and capability approaches, where skills and competences act as conversion factors to achieve the ultimate personal goals.

(7) Perseverance

A final phase of change described by participants relates to being more perseverant through experiences of setbacks. This comprises both rejections during the application process, and sticking to a chosen pathway (e.g. going back to school or starting an apprenticeship) without dropping out prematurely. When asked for the causal mechanisms for this attitudinal change, respondents often described having gained a wider horizon and more long-term perspective, with insights in the advantages of delaying gratification and exercising effort in favour of future benefits. Triggers for this change in perspective are similar to those above described as affecting a change in awareness and relate to a surge in maturation. They can be found both in the private sphere (e.g. due to a new relationship, the prospect of a family to look after), as well as in the vocational sphere (e.g. through the threatening effect of gaining insights into labour market conditions for the non-qualified, a shock

due to repeated failure). Another trigger were positive experiences with regard to the own skills and ability to persevere, leading to self-affirmation and increased confidence and motivation.

4.7 Discussion

The insights from this study show that vocational activation of the young unemployed can be a complex process, with a range of different interdependent phases and triggers of change, depending on the individual, their personal history, barriers and experiences. Some of the identified factors contributing to different phases of attitudinal or behavioural change of respondents were located directly in the intervention sphere, while others were embedded in larger processes of maturation within their personal lives. It is necessary to disentangle these elements: On the one hand, all of the identified phases of change comprised some triggers whereby the activation programmes had an immediate influence, such as the empowering effect of pushing and positively encouraging young participants, or the careful guidance on the inwards-bound journey of discovering their personal career self-concept. On the other hand, it is recommended to be creative when it comes to the design and implementation of interventions, making use of the more general triggers of personal change identified in order to stimulate important processes of awareness and maturation through the simulation of real-life events, e.g. via theatre or roleplay. This links also to the findings from the preceding empirical chapter 3, providing valuable insights into potentially promising strategies to foster adaptability and reduce fear of failure.

The analysis brought to light that none of the initially presented theoretical frameworks alone provide a satisfactory framework for a comprehensive theory of change of activation policies; especially the classic 'carrot and stick' based microeconomic search models, which form the basis for the system of activation policies in Germany and many other countries. These turned out too simplistic and helped to explain only a small part of the complex picture (namely, the basic activation at the very beginning, and the human capital increase at the very end of

the here described chain of change mechanisms). None of the complex cognitive-behavioural processes that might materialise in-between or in parallel of those observed effects are considered. Approaching the activation of unemployed young people from this viewpoint is most likely not going to lead to substantial and sustainable positive outcomes for its diverse target group. As expressed by Bonvin (2008, p. 4): *"the problem is not activation in itself, but the ambition to impose one and the same conception of activation on all beneficiaries"*. Bonvin and Orton (2009) also highlight that the aspects determining the success of activation programmes reach far beyond technical efficiency. A broader perspective is therefore necessary, analysing the individual's career developmental phase and capabilities before and during the intervention in-depth, and applying appropriate empowerment strategies to foster this change.

Hence, a new approach to a theory of change of activation policies is suggested, building on the seven phases of change identified in this study and taking up important elements from the literature on career development and empowerment. It is recommended to consider the seven phases for both the design and monitoring and evaluation of activation policies, thereby applying a more appropriate holistic framework for the implementation of those programmes in practice. In this context, the capability, empowerment and career development approaches provide helpful elements for explaining some of the identified change processes: A major theme emerging from the data was the development of a career identity, based on the careful facilitation of self-knowledge and the consequent successful conversion of this knowledge into action. Another crucial phase of change comprised the surge in awareness for the importance of career-related decisions and own responsibilities. Both phases were related to more general processes of maturation and personal development, as proposed by Super (1953).

Translating this into an intervention strategy might comprise, for example, a tight combination of pushing and encouraging for some participants in order to help them develop the resources (e.g. skills) and conversion factors (e.g. self-efficacy) to gain control over their professional pathway, while a targeted provision of

autonomy (freedom) will be needed for others – or for the same individuals in a different phase of change. A thorough analysis and continuous monitoring of young people's phase of change are therefore crucial to ensure the effective implementation of activation programmes. For this purpose, the goals of activation policies need to be set in a more granular way, capturing and monitoring intermediate outcomes, such as the identification and active addressing of barriers, an increase in self-efficacy, changes in the attitude to exercising on effort, vocational orientation and goal-focus, based on a thorough and holistic theory of change for those programmes (Fromm and Sproß, 2008). In this process, apparent setbacks or experiences of failure should not be judged negatively per se, as they might represent important adjustments in vocational orientation leading more sustainable long-term labour market success. The current practice of gathering basic activity indicators, such as programme attendance, and employment status as a final outcome indicator omits the entirety of mechanisms of change that take place in-between those levels and keeps them hidden in a "black box". This encourages programme implementers to simply pursue maximised short-term gains for minimised intervention costs (Bonvin, 2008; Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2009).

Another important aspect that deserves increased attention in both programme planning and evaluation relates to perseverance. Commonly, the vocational status of ALMP beneficiaries in Germany is being assessed at the end of their participation in an intervention, and six months later. As part of the results of this study, increased perseverance arose among the themes of change. Evidence from different spheres shows that this is an important attitudinal change with potentially transformative effects for professional and personal success (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Credé, Tynan and Harms, 2017). Changes in this trait, among others, and their longer-term effects on retention in subsequently started education or work should be considered when evaluating activation initiatives.

The focus on supply-side factors, i.e. the unemployed individuals and their behaviour, has to be acknowledged as a limitation of this study, which is occasionally criticised in the literature as 'victim blaming' (Van Hal *et al.*, 2012).

While choosing to concentrate on individual processes in this research, the author recognises the importance of structural labour market features, such as labour demand, equal accessibility and the signalling effects of previous vocational histories, in order to holistically tackle youth unemployment. Furthermore, the exploratory nature of this study does not allow for a quantitative testing of the suggested framework. Further research is needed to assess the applicability of the here presented findings to other contexts.

This paper provides an important contribution to the literature of ALMP evaluation, especially addressing the call for more theory- and mechanism-based evaluation approaches (Astbury and Leeuw, 2010; Strat, Trofin and Lonean, 2018); as well as to the strand of career development in vocational psychology, widening the focus of interest towards the increasingly important topic of career avoidance.

4.8   Conclusion

Tackling the challenge of youth unemployment is a high priority of many governments around the globe. Especially in wealthy economies with rather well-developed labour markets, a focus of interest often lies on how to instigate active participation of unemployed young people in work, education or training, preventing or mitigating the rates of vocationally inactive individuals. Activation policies are a widely implemented instrument for this purpose, aiming at driving a behavioural change of their beneficiaries through applying a combination of enabling and demanding elements. However, the detailed mechanisms of change of those programmes have hardly received any attention in the literature of the vocational sciences, and/or the evaluation literature on ALMPs. This research analysed different theoretical frameworks within the social sciences for their potential to construct a theory of change for activation policies. This literature review was complemented with a qualitative field study in Germany, analysing the attitudinal and behavioural change processes of unemployed youth over the course of their participation in different activation programmes. The results showed that

young respondents underwent up to seven phases of change, namely vocational availability, self-testing, self-knowledge, self-confidence, goal-orientation, vocational activity and perseverance. Each of those phases comprised different elements and triggers of change, which were partly situated within and partly outside the intervention domain. The findings suggest that the classic microeconomic search models which build the basis for most activation schemes are not capturing the complexity of the multi-stage change process, including interconnected and occasionally recursive causal factors triggering the different phases of activation for young programme participants. Based on the findings from this study, a seven-stage framework is proposed as a more appropriate basis for a theory of change of activation policies, including aspects of the individual's career and capability development. This application of a wider perspective is necessary in order to understand the variety of change processes which can be experienced by young people over the course of their participation in an activation programme, and how these can be influenced as part of the intervention.

5. 'Front runner' or running in circles? An exploration of institutional mechanisms affecting the successful implementation of activation measures for unemployed youth in Germany

Abstract

The institutional system for the development and implementation of activation policies for unemployed youth in Germany is complex and regulates a variety of public and private organisations. In the light of New Institutional Theory, this study uses semi-structured key informant interviews with multiple stakeholders (n=45) to identify crucial factors affecting the implementation of activation measures at different stages of the process from programme design to evaluation. The decoupling of practices on the ground from the overall institutional purpose and individual values emerged as a key finding from this study. This is the outcome of centralised regulation, counterproductive incentive systems for job agents and training providers, price pressure and a lack of results-based evaluation, among other factors. Recommendations comprise a significant shift towards increased local responsibilities for intervention design, a module-based programme development and an overall revision of the current system for monitoring and evaluation towards an outcome-focused approach.

5.1   Introduction

ALMP for youth are widely implemented in Germany. The evidence with regard to their effectiveness in bringing young people into work or vocational apprenticeships is mixed and draws a rather inconclusive picture (Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011; Lechner, Miquel and Wunsch, 2011; Ehlert, Kluve and Schaffner, 2012). There is an increasing acknowledgement of the need to understand causal

mechanisms which might determine and/or reduce the effectiveness of ALMP programmes (Pohl and Walther, 2007; Khagram and Thomas, 2010; Cobb-Clark, 2015).

The first three empirical chapters of this thesis focused on drivers of self-selection situated at the demand-side of policy implementation, namely the perceptions, attributes, attitudes and behaviour of young programme participants. Complementing this viewpoint, this chapter focuses on the supply-side for the specific type of activation measures, i.e. ALMP interventions aiming at the professional activation, orientation and labour market integration of young people. The development and implementation of those measures encompasses a complex framework of rules, mutually interacting private and public organisations, and individual actors. Taken together, the totality of these rules, norms, entities and agents comprises here the ALMP institution.

The objective of this chapter is to explore potential frictional losses at the various interaction points between the actors and organisations of this institution, and analyse their potential impact on the final programme outcomes. While it is important to acknowledge that the ALMP system naturally has a variety of touch points and overlaps with other spheres, such as the school system and the labour- and apprenticeship market, this study limits its focus on examining the process of programme design, commissioning, targeting, implementation and evaluation of activation measures.

Based on a review of relevant official documentation and interviews with key informants representing different organisations involved in ALMPs in Germany, this study identifies key factors within the institutional system that are likely to affect the effectiveness of activation measures for young people: Among those which stand out are a rapid price- and quality erosion in the competitive market for interventions, centralised regulation schemes, targeting processes affected by detrimental incentive systems in the job centres, high training staff turnover, and a process-based monitoring and evaluation system with little consideration of outcomes.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 presents a review of the relevant literature on the German ALMP system in the light of New Institutional Theory, section 3 summarises the research methodology. The study results are presented in section 4 and discussed in section 5. Section 6 presents a series of recommendations and section 7 concludes.

5.2   Literature Review

5.2.1   German ALMP institution

Measures for the professional activation and integration of the unemployed (in the following: activation measures), are the largest category of ALMP interventions in Germany. These programmes are partly centrally and partly locally organised, and their outsourcing to providers follows free market logic. For centrally organised interventions, a standardised service description is developed in the BA's headquarter and offered to job centres nationwide. At the BA's regional purchasing centres (REZ), the job centres can pre-order the amount of interventions that they consider necessary to support their clients. Consequently, the REZ will advertise the pre-ordered interventions in a public tender, and private training providers can submit their proposals. The proposals are being assessed conceptually (by the job centres) and financially (by the REZ), and the most competitive provider will be commissioned with the intervention's implementation. In annual expert group meetings including regional and national representatives of the BA and selected job centres, the service descriptions are being revised and adjusted, and new product ideas are developed (Bernhard *et al.*, 2008; Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2016b). The locally organised interventions follow a similar track, with the exception that they are not designed centrally, but directly by the local job centres under advice from their responsible REZ. Traditionally, the centrally organised intervention modality was predominant for commissioning activation measures. In more recent years, the share of locally designed measures has increased and in 2018 both modalities

covered an equal amount of the overall intervention contingent for Berlin and its neighbouring counties.[23] As described more in detail in section 1.4, the young unemployed sign so-called integration agreements with the job centres, in which they commit to obligations such as regularly attending the proposed intervention and accepting reasonable job offers (Mahlstedt, 2016; Dengler, 2019). Once the client is being assigned to the intervention, this changes their status from "unemployed" to "job searching" in the formal employment statistic. At this point, it is noteworthy that 13 per cent of the outflow from unemployment between 2005 and 2009 was related to ALMP participation, as opposed to actual work force entry (Rothe and Wälde, 2017). Further programmes are implemented independently by federal governments and/or private firms (see introductory thesis chapter for more details).

Contracting private actors with the implementation of activation measures is also common in other countries, such as the USA and Switzerland. While in Sweden activation is mostly regulated at municipal level, in Denmark, Switzerland and the Netherlands the dynamics of (de-)centralisation are comparable to the German case. More generally, the German activation approach is similar to other continental European policy models (e.g. in the Netherlands and Switzerland), in contrast to more liberal "work first" approaches (traditionally more prevalent in Anglo-Saxon countries) and more universalist Scandinavian activation policy models (Konle-Seidl and Eichhorst, 2008). A clear comparison of policy approaches is difficult due to the high heterogeneity in contexts and increasing overlaps in the specific design of policies and the dynamics of their implementation. Hence, no general conclusions can be drawn with regard to the effectiveness of one approach above others. However, given the commonalities in the structural features of the German activation system with other European countries, the findings from this study can be expected to have relevance beyond the German context.

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[23] Source: Overview of Labour Market Services under § 45 SGB III b for Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia as of 16/05/2019, supplied on request by the BA.

5.2.2 New Institutional Theory

The described system of ALMPs including its process from intervention design to implementation comprises multiple levels, regulations, bodies and actors. New Institutional Theory provides a helpful framework for understanding the complex dynamics of this structure. New Institutionalism is a school of thought situated within sociology and political science focusing on how institutions shape the behaviour of humans and organisations (Lecours, 2005). While traditional institutional theory set its focus of interest on the functioning of the state and formal government entities, it was later followed by a shift of perspective towards the analysis of individual behaviour and its drivers (Peters, 2019). Renewing the attention on institutions in a 'structuralist turn' (Lecours, 2005 p. 8), New Institutionalism emerged in the late 1970es (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; March and Olsen, 1984). As opposed to traditional institutionalism, in New Institutional Theory institutions are understood in a wider sense than material government structures, as collections of shared rules and routines (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Lecours, 2005). An institution usually comprises a variety of organisations and individuals (Peters, 2019). Another key feature of the revised theoretical approach is the addition of a cognitive dimension as part of the ways in which institutions shape behaviour (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Peters, 2019). According to New Institutionalism, institutions have three pillars through which they influence human and organisational action: A regulative pillar (referring to rules, laws and sanctions), a normative pillar (comprising norms and values, maintained through systems of certification) and a cognitive pillar (meaning the internalisation and "taking for granted" of certain ways of doing things) (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Jackson, 2010). Institutions thereby have an enabling and constraining effect on individual choices and thus restrict human agency. Within an institution, the phenomenon of institutional isomorphism can be observed when organisations become increasingly similar in their structures and practices. Mirroring the above described pillars, isomorphic change can materialise through three mechanisms: Coercive isomorphism (through top-down political authority, norms and regulations), normative isomorphism (through homogeneous selection

and professionalization of individuals) and mimetic isomorphism (through peer-influence and imitation) (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) propose a range of potential drivers for isomorphic change, such as dependence, centralised resource supply, ambiguous organisational goals, uncertainty regarding their achievement with the applied means, as well as a high level of interaction with the state. When organisations become isomorphic within their institutional environment, this will foster their legitimacy and survival, but might come at the cost of organisational efficiency and effectiveness (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

At times, the institutional rule systems can be contradicting, bringing actors in the dilemma to choose among competing loyalties (Peters, 2019). This decoupling between institutional norms and values and actual practice might take place at both individual and organisational level (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Meyer, 2010). Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 357) mention as examples: *"Hospitals treat, not cure patients. (…) Schools produce students, not learning (…) and deemphasize measures of achievement."* In these cases, organizations continue to function based on the good faith and confidence of their participants. Evaluation and inspection can undermine this functional structure, and is, as a consequence, often avoided or ceremonialised (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, 1991).

In order to understand the functioning of an institution, it is essential to analyse the interaction of its composing elements, i.e. the organisations and individuals taking part in it, and the rules, norms and cognitive beliefs that connect them. Similarly, it is useful to apply an institutionalist lens to understand why certain choices are preferred over others by individual actors in an organisational setting (Lang, 2018). From the perspective of New Institutional Theory, the German ALMP system as a whole can be understood as an institution (European Commission, 2015) with its rules set by the Social Code and the guidelines for its execution, among others. The involved bodies, such as the BA, job centres and training providers are organisations, which in turn each consist of their own human agents (civil servants, job agents, trainers). The interactions between the institution's norms and rules and the practice of each organisation, as well as the choices of the individual actors

within this system are expected to be manifold and intertwined. The literature on German ALMP implementation describes some of those interactions, which might represent potential selection mechanisms affecting the effectiveness of activation measures for the young unemployed. One of them is the so-called cream-skimming by job agents: In order to boost own placement rates, youth with higher chances to transition into work or an apprenticeship might be more likely to be assigned to more effective interventions (e.g. those comprising on-the-job elements) (Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011; Heyer et al., 2012; Fertig, 2015). Another selection mechanism might be represented by the inadequate addressing of personal issues such as debt and mental health problems: Due to a lack of appropriate counselling services, certain groups of young people are being abandoned in a trap of struggles while others progress on their vocational pathway (Spermann, 2015).

Finally, there are indications that job agents' placement choices might be driven by other factors rather than their clients' needs and best interests (Bernhard, Wolff and Jozwiak, 2006; Wolff and Jozwiak, 2007; Eichhorst and Rinne, 2015). To comply with the job centres' performance indicators, which require the full occupation of pre-purchased interventions, assignment practice might be biased in favour of those clients whose needs happen to match the offer of the programmes prioritised for occupation (Bernhard, Wolff and Jozwiak, 2006). In general, the centrally organised market-based ALMP commissioning system running in parallel with independent interventions funded by the regional governments leads to price competition and parallel structures with an array of possibilities that create additional expense and confusion at the participants' side (Engelberty, 2012b; Eichhorst, Wozny and Cox, 2015).

The above reviewed literature showed some signs of contradicting rules and practices within the German ALMP institution. Based on the example of activation measures for youth, this study explores key selection mechanisms situated in the interactions of the ALMP institution with its organisations and agents, which can be expected to interfere with the effectiveness of those interventions.

5.3 Methodology

5.3.1 Sample and procedure

As a first step, relevant official documentation obtained from training and BA staff (programme concept notes, reports and tender documents) was reviewed. Consequently, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 45 informants involved in the process of ALMP programme development and implementation through different roles and perspectives. This included one civil servant from the Federal Employment Agency (BA), 10 representatives from different job centres, 15 employees from a range of training institutions and 19 young training participants (18-25 years of age).

For the selection of participants in this study, a snowball sampling strategy guided by the principles of maximum variation was applied (Patton, 2002; Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). This approach was chosen in line with the objectives of this study, in order to trace interactions between those organisations and individuals who are actively collaborating within the ALMP institution and gain a comprehensive understanding of relevant phenomena from different viewpoints, while also ensuring diversity with regard to key personal and programme characteristics (see below). Initially, the BA's regional purchasing centre and all jobcentres in Berlin - 12 in total - were approached via email, informed about the study and requested for an interview with one or more job agents responsible for under 25-year-old clients. The responsible regional BA, as well as one local branch and five job centres agreed to collaborate, covering six out of the 12 districts of the capital, including those of high, middle and low socioeconomic levels.[24] The job agents were asked to name training providers they assign their participants to, independent from their personal assessment of the training quality. All institutions mentioned by the job centres were contacted and interviews with those representatives working with under-25-year old clients were requested. In order to gather perspectives from different

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[24] Participating institutions: Job Centres Charlottenburg, Lichtenberg, Mitte, Reinickendorf, Tempelhof-Schoenefeld, Labour Agency Steglitz-Zehlendorf.

viewpoints on the questions of interest, the interviewees were selected from a range of different job positions (e.g. managers, social workers, coaches), gender and age groups, as well as programme types (e.g. application training, skills training, coaching). Finally, young participants taking part in the interventions at the time were approached through the trainers and asked for their willingness to participate in an interview. In order to ensure maximum sample variation also for this sample group, the interviewees were selected considering diversity of age, gender, educational background and type of programme they participated in. For all interviews, consent forms were explained to the interviewees and signed beforehand.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the job centres and training premises, respectively[25], and had a duration of 30-60 minutes (youth) and 60-120 minutes (stakeholders). Within a year, 50 percent of the originally interviewed trainers had changed their job (n=8). Following their resignation, four of those individuals were willing to participate in a second interview in order to identify the reasons for leaving their previous employers. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants prior to the interviews.

5.3.2   Data processing and analysis

Notes were taken directly during interviews with institutional stakeholders, while the interviews with youth were audio recorded and transcribed afterwards. The reasoning behind this difference in procedure is rooted in the impressions from a previous scoping visit, where representatives of organisations often shared sensitive insights and repeatedly asked not to be quoted. An audio recording of these interviews could have been expected to affect the openness of the interviewees and, respectively, the data quality. Conversely, in the interviews with youth, the full attention of the interviewer needed to be dedicated to the interviewee, otherwise risking distraction. The audio recording did not seem to affect the openness of young interviewees, hence, this method was chosen for this particular group. All

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[25] (One interview took place via phone for logistical reasons).

interviews were transcribed in their content. Consequently, an inductive thematic content analysis was undertaken (Braun and Clarke, 2006), supported by NVivo software. In this procedure, the answers were firstly coded in main themes, representing the sphere of each organisation involved (i.e. matters situated within the BA, within the training providers, or at the intersection of both). Secondly, sub-themes were identified, reflecting the cross-institutional issues building the findings of this study. As a third and final step, the assigned codes were revised and improved (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The inductive procedure was chosen in order to ensure that all relevant aspects in the complex multi-stakeholder process of ALMP design and implementation will be captured and contextualised appropriately in this study.

5.4   Results

The factors influencing an effective activation policy implementation which emerged from the thematic analysis can be categorised into three main groups, reflecting different stages of the process. The first category (A) refers to factors situated in the phase of activation programme design, purchase and commissioning. The second category (B) relates to the phase of programme targeting/placement and implementation. The third group (C) comprises aspects concerning monitoring and evaluation. Figure 17 shows a synopsis of the above outlined process for the implementation of activation programmes for youth in Germany, including the influencing factors identified in this study. The detailed findings for each category will be presented in the following.

5.4.1   Design, purchase and commissioning of interventions

"Race to the bottom"
As described above, the German ALMP implementation system is based on the principles of the free market, promoting competition among different training providers in order for the BA to be able to purchase high-quality intervention packages at a competitive cost (Bernhard et al., 2008). However, one of the most

prominent themes arising from the interviews with various stakeholders is the decline in programme quality due to heavy and increasing price pressure on providers. The core features of the interventions are pre-determined in tendering documents and selection takes place based on a simple rating of the fulfilment of those criteria by the job centres[26], compared to the lowest programme cost (assessed by the BA's regional purchasing centres). As a consequence of this commissioning system, several interviewees described a "race to the bottom" by training providers, where mutual underbidding drags down both programme costs and quality and ultimately only the biggest providers can maintain the appropriate infrastructure (e.g. permanent staff, practical workshop facilities) to compete in the process.

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[26] Job agents in charge of the conceptual assessment of proposals have the opportunity to rate different aspects of programme quality on a four-point-scale, ranging from "offer not meeting requirements" to "offer exceeding requirements". Hence, if a proposal generally "ticks the box", the job agent has only two options to nuance their rating, which does not allow much room for differentiation. This leads to a selection process heavily determined by programme cost.

Figure 17: German Activation Policy Process
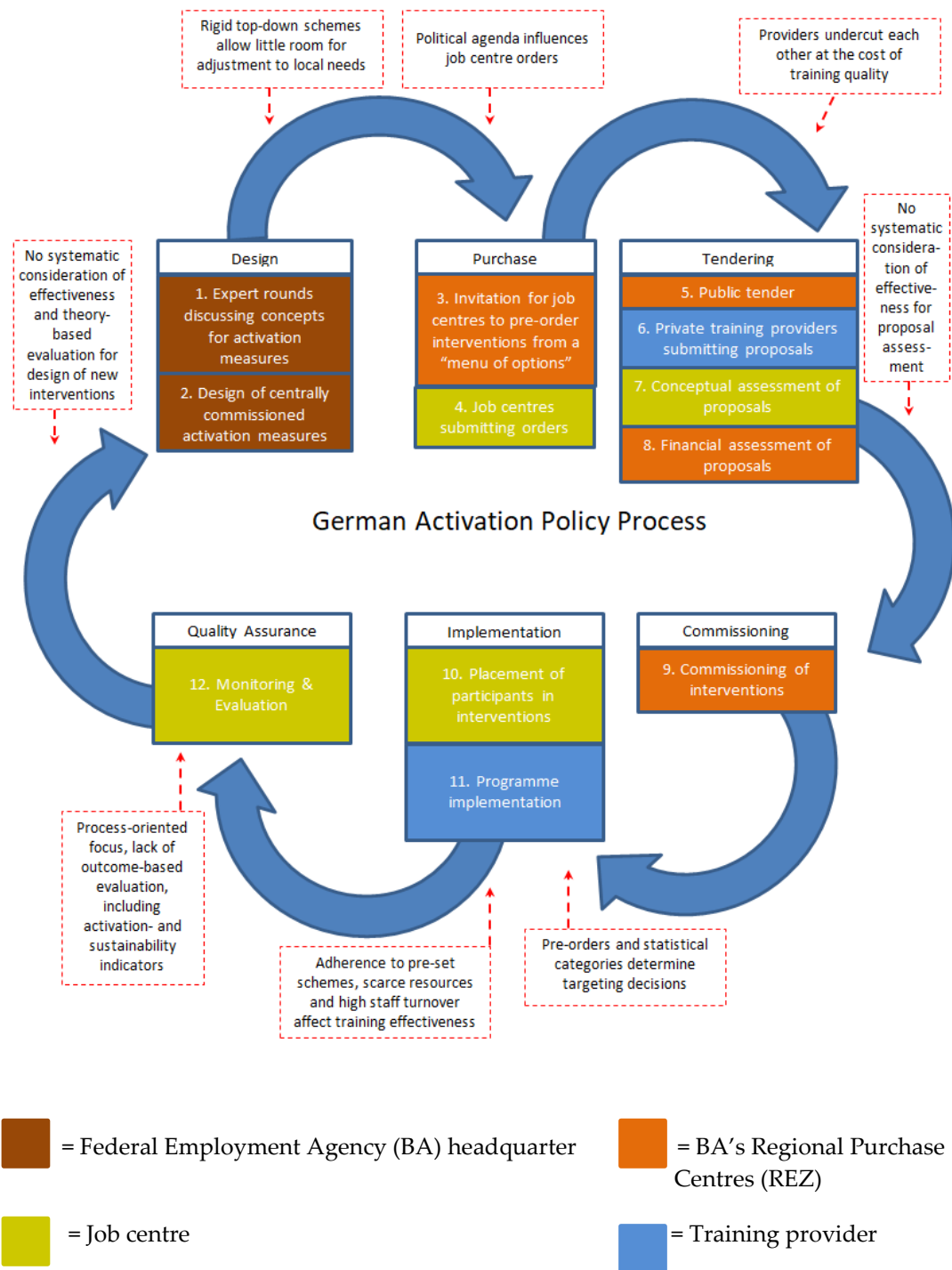
Source: Own elaboration

As one male manager of a workshop-based skills training programme remarked: *"Institutions undercut each other. (…) The trend goes towards programmes that in reality are not doable."* This results, among other consequences, in a low staff-to-participants ratio in practice, which affects the time and attention that can be dedicated to this

particularly challenged target group, therewith severely threatening the intervention's success (see chapter 2 on the importance of the trainer-trainee relationship for programme completion).

Rigid schemes

Those interventions commissioned centrally by the BA are driven by the national political agenda and determine programme features country-wide in a standardised way for all interventions of the respective type. The tender specifies the programme objectives, target group and duration, staff qualifications, ratio of staff-to-participant and detailed programme curriculum, as well as more specific aspects such as the amount of hours to be spent in the intervention (usually: 39 hours/week), facilities (including square metre space per participant), technical equipment (including computer screen sizes and internal memory volume), and workshop equipment (including numbers and types of knives for home economics workshops), among others. Changes to those specifications can be made in some cases, following individual consultation and agreement with the job centres. This highly detailed determination of programme characteristics from a centralised top-down perspective is counterproductive to effective implementation on the ground. The target group of training programmes for unemployed youth is highly diverse, already within one intervention, and all the more in different regional contexts across the country. Hence, the "one size fits all" approach applied in standardised intervention tenders presents local implementers with a range of challenges affecting programme effectiveness. One female trainer of an integration programme focused on removing personal barriers expressed with regret: *"Decisions are being taken based on numbers, the financial pressure determines everything and you don't get paid for anything that is not exactly as stated in the concept note. We used to do excursions to courts and social institutions, which was very useful but is not possible anymore."* Especially the pre-set amount of daily hours in the intervention was criticised by a range of interviewees. The programmes often do not have enough content to fill these times, and this leads to the common occurrence of empty time with young people "hanging out" and watching movies. The original idea of mirroring a full

work day is flawed due to the absence of those factors that make a work day rewarding for young people (among those were mentioned: Being part of the work force, clearly assigned tasks and appreciation for their accomplishment, payment and joint work in a team). One trainer pointed out: *"The torture through interventions has its temporal boundaries"*.

Even though a reform of public procurement law in 2016 theoretically opened room for retrospective changes to programme features, those need to be formally requested at the BA through the job centres - a procedure that is hardly used in practice - and implementers are bound to compliance with the conditions outlined in the original tender documents. This is an example where the institutional rule system is contradicting its own mission when it comes to its execution on the ground, restricting implementing actors in their choices and resources to fulfil this mission through their obligation to comply with the institutional norms (Peters, 2019). For individual, locally designed interventions, the situation is more flexible and this modality has gained increased popularity over the last few years. However, in 2018, 40-50 percent of all activation programmes in Berlin and the surrounding counties were still centrally commissioned.[27]

5.4.2   Participant placement and programme implementation

Supply-driven targeting

Once the job centres purchase an intervention package for a determined number of clients, the allocation of participants to these programmes takes priority. In order to meet the job centre's planning targets, job agents are expected to fill the pre-purchased (and pre-paid) interventions with participants. This leads to a pressure to refer participants first to the pre-purchased programmes, often independently from the suitability of the particular programme, even though more appropriate support options might be available. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that job centres are often expected to fulfil quotas of nationally rolled out interventions for their

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[27] Source: Overview of Labour Market Services under § 45 SGB III b for Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia as of 16/05/2019, supplied on request by the BA.

own region, which in turn affects the centre's purchasing decisions in order to comply with their organisational performance targets.

In practice, this leads to programme targeting being strongly supply-driven with often limited consideration of the unemployed client's individual demand and needs, and little flexibility to deviate from a programme assignment strategy pre-set at the beginning of the year. This issue, which has already been pointed out over a decade ago by Bernhard et al. (2006) (and the general need for improved targeting by Heyer et al. (2012)), emerged as one of the most prominent themes from this study, being highlighted by a range of interviewees across institutions. It also affects the (actual and registered) performance of training providers, as they receive types of participants their programmes are not designed for, hence having a lower likelihood to achieve the desired outcomes. As one trainer remarked: *"Finding a balance between the job centre's objectives and the participant's objectives is a real challenge."*

A related selection mechanism in the targeting process is the decision to assign participants to external third party interventions, such as those organised privately and/or funded through the federal states. Driven by the interest to register appropriate success rates of pre-purchased interventions, job agents will be more likely to refer those participants to third party programmes who are less likely to find a job or apprenticeship. One job agent summarised the situation in the following way: *"There is no potential to adjust the offer to the client. Currently, we adjust our clients to the offer."*

Statistics-driven targeting

Following the priority established by the German Social Code to bring young unemployed people as soon as possible into work, a policy guideline states that benefit recipients under 25 years of age should not be registered as unemployed for longer than three months (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2006; Engelberty, 2012a). When a young person is assigned to a training programme and remains in it for at least three days, their statistical status changes to "searching work", thereby exiting

the formal unemployment count. Wolff and Jozwiak (2007) already stated the thesis that a relevant share of young people might have been assigned to programmes by job agents in order to achieve this change in status, thereby complying with own performance goals. This issue emerged also as one of the key themes from the interview data, including the motivation to assign participants to longer interventions in order to keep them out of the unemployment register. As one male job agent critically remarked: *"The ambition of labour market integration through interventions is rubbish. It is a common and preferred practice to assign people in longer interventions to keep the statistics clean. (…) This change in status is a big problem for the whole assignment-nonsense. One day we will be transferring more clients than we have."* This is particularly concerning, as longer interventions can be less effective for young people, among other reasons due to the so called lock-in effects (Wunsch and Lechner, 2007; Card, Kluve and Weber, 2010).

Another example where statistical categories affect targeting decisions is the classification of school degree interventions[28] in the same category as job training. While for a low-qualified young person, often traumatised from a past schooling experience determined by failure and mobbing, the decision to improve their education post hoc is a big step towards a long-term successful vocational pathway, the administrative categories depict no difference compared to those participating in long repeated loops of job training. This not only fails to display an important progress in professional orientation (see more details on this stage of the activation process in chapter 4), but also carries the risk that transfers in school degree interventions are less encouraged by job agents than the immediate uptake of work, in spite of the more desirable perspective in the long run (Caliendo, Künn and Schmidl, 2011). Similarly, a young person repeatedly entering and dropping out of programmes will be counted each time as a new transfer (and thereby as a success for the job agent) if they persevere for at least six weeks in the intervention. One

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[28] Typically programmes with a length of 9-12 months with a heavy focus on teaching, oriented towards preparing young people for an exam where they attain a higher school degree.

male trainer of a practical skills training programme summarised the situation simply as: *"The unemployment statistics tell absolutely nothing about the real situation."*

All the mentioned factors have a strong effect on the job agents' targeting decisions, and can be expected to restrain the autonomy of the unemployed clients when it comes to their participation in the referral decision. This goes along with the observation of previous studies that only 13 percent of referrals happened on request of the unemployed client (Bernhard, Wolff and Jozwiak, 2006) and is particularly counterproductive, considering that the uptake of responsibility for the own vocational pathway is a crucial step for young people to progress professionally (see chapter 4).

Both influencing factors on targeting choices – the supply of pre-purchased intervention packages and the statistical categorisation- represent a decoupling of institutional values and practical actions (Meyer, 2010). In the latter case, most interviewees appeared to have internalised this incentive system, describing the possibility of influencing the unemployment statistics through programme placement tactics rather positively. To a certain degree, this goes along with the New Institutional Theory's proposition of an unreflective human nature, where individuals adopt institutional routine in their behaviour and take it for granted without questioning its reasoning or implications (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). On the other hand, with regard to the targeting based on quotas for pre-purchased interventions, the competing loyalty between the institutional rule- (and organisational incentive-) system and individual values (Peters, 2019) were expressed clearly by several interviewees. This allows for the supposition that the more immediate the actors come in contact with the consequences of their choices, the stronger these conflicts materialise. "Parking" young unemployed clients in a longer programme instead of re-assessing their progress after a few weeks might have a less immediate impact on a job agent's moral code than purposefully placing them in a non-suitable intervention which needs to be filled, in spite of having more appropriate support options at hand.

Weak staff continuity

A key theme relating to the phase of training implementation was the high rates of staff turnover and lack of enough qualified social educators for training implementation. Trainers frequently change jobs and institutions, which affects the provider's relationship with both job centres and participants; as well as the overall training quality. One interviewee referred to a "hire and fire" culture, with both institutions and employees not committing in the long-term. The regular change of reference persons for the young participants was described as particularly detrimental to training success, which is in line with the crucial role of the trainer for both training retention and –outcomes identified in chapters 2 and 4.

Those members of training staff who changed their jobs over the duration of this study mentioned the following reasons for their decision to leave:

- Lack and decline of structural resources (including both equipment and qualified staff) and appropriate support instruments (e.g. supervision) during a time when participants had become an increasingly challenging clientele.
- Predominance of administrative work compared to the time available for participants, including perceived priority for "administrative correctness" above real quality.
- Insecure short-term contracts, no planning security
- Being ad hoc "shifted" between projects
- Low pay

Even though low pay was mentioned among the reasons for quitting, all respondents reported no or only a marginal salary increase in their new position, which allows for the assumption that the other aspects were more relevant for the decision to leave. However, salary budget was mentioned by both training providers and job agents as a challenge factor to recruit and retain well-qualified staff.

One training coordinator summarised the situation in the following: *"There is an increasing documentation mania. (…) The trainers' motivation is to help people, and not to*

please the job centres. There is an increasing frustration in this profession. This is the root for the high staff turnover, not the bad pay – people are used to that."

Similarly, one male trainer who left his job after 12 years in ALMP interventions to work in the private sector remarked: *"Public resources are decreasing continuously, the equipment is bad, so are the salaries, and there is an increasing amount of not well-qualified staff. Activities that don't belong together are being merged. The price pressure is huge. I earn only slightly more in my new job, but I'm very happy with the decision."*

This theme represents another case of decoupling, here of institutional norms and individual values (Meyer, 2010). It also supports those studies in the psychological literature which found a lack of person-environment-fit due to a clash of values associated with staff withdrawal decisions from their job or entire profession (see chapter 2) (Cable and Derue, 2002; Abdalla *et al.*, 2018). It stands out that the public sector agents (i.e. job agents, BA employees) showed a higher tendency to accept and/or stretch the rules when they experienced this disconnection (Jackson, 2010) (see above), while the trainers operating in the less stability-providing private sector more frequently took the choice to abandon the organisation or entire institution.

Shifting of training resources

Another theme situated in the training intervention sphere relates to the distribution of resources within training, such as staff time and technical content. As part of the provider's "survival strategy" in an environment of increased price pressure (see above), several interviewees report merging classes with different content when they do not have enough participants to fill one class.
This leads to frustration for participants, as the training contents do not match their needs and interests, and is detrimental to positive training outcomes. A 17-year-old female trainee of a vocational preparation programme criticised: *"They did not have teachers for every course, so they mixed the course of beauty/cosmetics with warehouse/trade. I did not like that, they taught all kinds of stuff that did not interest me."*
Similarly, both training staff and participants describe a high share of staff time being spent with administrative tasks in their offices (estimates are in the range of

40-50 percent). Hence, even though the tender requires an appropriate staff-participant ratio, this does not necessarily reflect the time spent with young trainees in practice.

5.4.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

Focus on process instead of outcomes

A wide range of issues mentioned by interviewees relates to indicators and targets alongside the entire process focusing on activities instead of capturing outcomes. For example, the relevant performance indicator for job agents is the number of programme placements, as opposed to progress, finalisation or participants' situation upon exiting the intervention. This reflects Meyer and Rowan's (1977, p. 357) example of decoupling as *"schools that produce students, not learning"*. Similarly, as mentioned above, administrative indicators such as the occupation of pre-purchased interventions with participants and timely cash outflow are determining a job centre's successful performance.

Another aspect is the consideration of a provider's outcome-related performance in the competitive bidding on intervention tenders. Previous participant dropout and labour market integration rates of training providers are not formally part of the selection criteria within the assessment process. While historically the consideration of previous experience with training providers had to be removed altogether from the assessment in order to avoid a violation of competition law, a legal reform in 2016 allowed for the re-introduction of an open category referring to the provider's "previous success and quality" as a criterion in the assessment matrix. However, firstly, this criterion applies to the provider's nation-wide performance for comparable socio-economic areas, which dilutes the actual experience with the local branch. Secondly, this procedure has not yet been introduced for activation measures so far. In practice, training institutions who did not deliver successful outcomes but meet the tender's formal targets regarding programme content,

attendee numbers, staff ratio and costs, will get new contracts independently from the quality of their delivery.

This situation is also reflected in the approach to evaluation of activation programmes. Several interviewees described the quality management procedures as detailed and laborious, while merely focusing on tracking the implementation process (e.g. each phone call with a participant requires written minutes). A high administrative workload for trainers is one of the themes arising from this study and was mentioned above with regard to its impact on time spent with participants. As one trainer remarked: *"There are more and more revisions and they are desk- and paper-based; completely distant from the real life. No one looks at results. What is not on paper is non-existent. There is no trust."*

A systematic outcome-focused programme evaluation following implementation is also not required. Intermediate outcomes, such as progress in activation or professional orientation, are not systematically captured at all, which makes it very difficult to assess the performance of those interventions working with multiple-barrier target groups, where labour market integration is more of a long-term goal. One BA stakeholder criticised: *"We spend much money for ineffective strategies (…), while not assessing if it's actually worth it. To be honest, I would prefer to spend that money on renovating schools instead."*

Another aspect not considered as part of the monitoring and evaluation of activation measures is the sustainability of programmes success after a certain time (e.g. a year) has passed. This incentivises both job agents and trainers to persuade young people to take up any job in order to exit the system quickly, if temporarily, instead of following a perspective of sustainable long-term integration in the labour market. This has already been observed by Eichhorst and Rinne (2015) as a negative side effect of integration agreements. As one female 17-year old training participant stated: *"They want us all to become social assistants or work in the hotel industry, because everybody is accepted there. That way they get rid of us quickly."*

The focus on activities rather than outcomes continues throughout the system down to the provider level. Training institutions often receive their payment based on the number of participants attending (including a funding top-up for taking in additional trainees). This implies a disincentive for trainers to sanction participants with irregular or rare attendance, since declaring their lack of compliance to the job centres or expelling them from the programme would damage the own employer. As a result, rule enforcement is in practice often rather casual (which has a strong effect on the young people's motivation, see chapter 2 on training dropout) and participants are occasionally asked to sign attendance lists retrospectively in spite of having been absent at the date. This situation mirrors the perspective of New Institutional Theory on inspection and evaluation taking a rather ceremonial role, with real achievement assessment being avoided (Meyer and Rowan, 1991).

5.5   Discussion

The various findings from this study illustrate a decoupling of the ALMP institution's core objectives– an effective and sustainable exit of young people from the benefit system and integration into the labour market – with its actual functioning in practice. While one strand of institutionalism discusses discrepancies between individual and organisational maximisation of utilities (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), it can be observed here that personal values commonly mirror the wider institutional purpose (i.e. trainers and job agents having the genuine desire to act in the best interest of their clients), while the norm- and incentive systems partly counteract this mission, thereby generating conflicting loyalties. This causes friction, which in some contexts - namely where it is most tangible to the individual - materialises more than in others. In public structure, rules are followed but taken ad absurdum in their consequences. Even though job agents voice moral conflicts when their choices are restrained by individual quotas, they appear to take for granted the functioning of the unemployment statistics system with its counterproductive incentives (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). In the private organisations, decoupling of actual practice from the rules is predominant (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), e.g. by letting people leave training before the agreed time, or

allowing them to sign in participants lists in spite of non-attendance. As opposed to the job agents, private sector trainers regularly abandon their organisations, or even the entire ALMP institution. This shows that how individual behaviour unfolds in this study was strongly influenced by the stability and affiliation provided to them within the institution. As a consequence of the decoupling, a range of dysfunctionalities and selection mechanisms emerged in this study, which are detrimental to the effective implementation of activation measures for the young unemployed. The centralised process and decision-making in programme design in combination with the current incentive systems for programme purchase and placement within the job centres hamper the provision of appropriate support tailored to the needs of this specific target group. The cost-competition among providers on centrally determined schemes leads to organisational choices that affect programme quality and are most likely related to poor outcomes through factors like high staff turnover and merging of programme contents.

Those training providers which have mastered to tick the formal boxes within the ALMP commissioning process, and which comply with the formalities during implementation have become isomorphic with the institution. In the present context, this happened mostly through coercive mechanisms, as the German ALMP institution is tightly regulated. The isomorphic training organisations are then more likely to win new tenders and become reinforced in their legitimacy, even though others might provide a more effective service.

Some tendencies for institutional change could be observed, e.g. through the aforementioned legal reform and the increasing trend to move away from centralised interventions, but the development is slow and patchy, and individual agents showed rather adaptive practices in combination with a low perceived ability to influence the wider system. Finally, the focus of monitoring and evaluation practices on highly detailed administrative procedures with little attention to an honest, systematic assessment of outcomes and effectiveness represents the ceremonialisation of evaluation and inspection proposed by New Institutional Theory (Meyer and Rowan, 1991). In this context, it is worth noting

that the vast majority of academic studies evaluating the impact of ALMP in Germany rely on large administrative datasets, e.g. from the German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP) (Offerhaus, 2013), the German Labour Agency (BA) (Kopf and Wolff, 2009; Lechner, Miquel and Wunsch, 2011; Dengler, 2019), or the Intituteof Labour Economics (IZA) (Caliendo, Cobb-Clark and Uhlendorff, 2015). However, the findings from this study show that administrative categories do not always appropriately display actual intervention features. In practice, there are large overlaps and soft boundaries between both programme categories and their participants. Due to the previously described incentive systems, inappropriate targeting can be expected to affect programme outcomes, as it is the case also for changes in programme implementation features post-assignment. This might partly explain the mixed and inconclusive evidence on the effectiveness of ALMPs for youth in Germany.

5.6   Recommendations

Based on the insights gained from this study, several recommendations can be formulated. Firstly, as described above, the centrally organised modality for activation measures has a range of disadvantages with potentially severe negative effects on the intervention outcomes. It is recommended to either abolish this modality completely and further expand locally designed interventions, or substantially enhance the scope of flexibility of the centralised tenders. This might comprise eliminating the prescription of petty intervention details and allowing providers to develop their offers more creatively under consideration of their experience what works to meet their target group's needs. A more decentralised distribution of responsibilities for the design and commissioning of those programmes would also benefit a faster and more streamlined processing within the BA. A revision of statistical categorisation is also recommended, in order to ensure a more appropriate display of intermediate professional steps, such as returning to education.

A further set of recommendations relates more directly to features of programme design and implementation. As shown in chapter 2, the concept that interventions need to cover a time frame equivalent to a full day of work is often not reasonable for the target group of unemployed young people with multiple personal barriers. Furthermore, the results of this study showed that current targeting practice leads to a highly diverse mix of programme participants with regard to their cognitive and non-cognitive skills, as well as personal interests and needs. This does not only dilute the results of those evaluations based on clear-cut intervention categories (see above), but also indicates that the current approach to offering fixed programme packages might not be the most effective solution to bring young people (back) on a vocational pathway. Instead, a more flexible tiered pick-and-mix approach based on modules is suggested, where both the balance of contents and obligatory attendance times can be tailored to the individual participants' needs and abilities. For purposes of manageability and group cohesion, a minimum of joint routine could be established. Shorter obligatory attendance times would reduce the barrier of participation for more difficult cases and incentivise effective progress for the more straightforward ones. Optional afternoons with accompanied learning would allow for a more individualised support for those in need. Time required for conducting administrative tasks needs to be planned for, and transparently tracked and reported in order to avoid an interference with the attention time foreseen for participants. A modular approach would also provide room for flexibility during programme implementation and make small improvements tangible, which can be expected to promote participant motivation and engagement.

Finally, this step-wise programme implementation should be accompanied by a systematic outcome measurement based on appropriate indicators to measure intermediate progress such as the range of personal, methodical, practical and intercultural competences that are currently listed in tenders but not objectively assessed, as well as activation, proactive problem-tackling and professional orientation. The recommended modular approach would also allow for a more granular and accurate evaluation of "what works" by comparing programme features, instead of the current practice of comparing comprehensive training

programmes with a variety of contents and participants mixed together in one package.

In general, a fundamental revision of the current monitoring and evaluation practice in favour of a results-based approach is strongly recommended. Assessing progress based on outcome indicators such as the above mentioned ones, as well as "final" outcomes (integration in education, internships, apprenticeships or work) would save resources currently spent on the meticulous tracking of implementation details. The feasibility of introducing results-based finance elements in this model could be assessed through further research, as well as the cost-effectiveness of having higher staff-to-participant ratios.

5.7   Conclusion

Activation measures are a widely implemented policy intervention type to address the unemployment of young people in Germany. The findings from this chapter showed a range of malfunctions and selection mechanisms situated within the current institutional system for developing and implementing activation measures for youth, which might partly explain the inconclusive evidence regarding the effectiveness of those programmes. At several stages of the process, norm and incentive systems trigger a decoupling of individual and organisational practices from the actual institutional purpose to bring young people effectively and sustainably into work. This leads to issues such as inappropriate targeting, high staff turnover, interventions missing the needs of their target group, and programme ineffectiveness not being among captured and acted upon. Based on the insights from this study, a stronger shift towards the decentralisation of the German ALMP system is recommended, including an increased room for flexibility for both job centres and training providers to adapt support strategies to their clients' needs. Furthermore, a revision of the system for monitoring and evaluation away from the current process focus towards a results-based approach is recommended.

6. Overall Conclusions

The findings from this thesis offer new insights into a range of behavioural and institutional mechanisms influencing the effectiveness of ALMPs for unemployed youth, and have a variety of important theoretical and practical implications.

The results of the first empirical chapter showed that training dropout of unemployed youth was determined by mutually interacting individual characteristics such as grit and mental health issues on the one hand, and motivational aspects on the other hand. The motivational aspects leading to disengagement related to a mismatch of participants' basic psychological needs and the conditions encountered in training, with special importance of the trainer-relationship. The second empirical chapter discovered self-sabotaging behaviour rooted in fear of failure as an important mechanism negatively affecting the job search activity and job outcomes of unemployed young males, with grit showing some potential to counterbalance this effect. It also found adaptability to be an important trait to foster labour market participation of the unemployed. In the third empirical chapter, a seven-stage theory of change was set out for activation programmes, based on the attitudinal and behavioural changes experienced by unemployed youth participating in those programmes and the different drivers triggering those changes. The seven stages identified were the following: Vocational availability, self-testing, self-knowledge, self-confidence, goal-orientation, vocational activity and perseverance. The fourth and final empirical chapter looked beyond the focus on individuals and analysed barriers to the effective programme implementation situated within the institutional ALMP system in Germany. It identified a range of aspects where normative regulations (such as the centralised commissioning of interventions), incentive systems (such as those promoting quantity over quality in programme placement) and organisational practice (such as the disregard of results-based monitoring and evaluation) counteract the purpose of the ALMP system to foster sustainable employment.

The target group of this study were young people at a critical transition stage of their lives, starting the journey to find their vocational identity and place after having exited school regularly or prematurely. They entered the training as a highly diverse group with regard to their backgrounds, skills, characteristics and career visions. In most cases, their previous educational and professional pathway was characterised by adverse experiences, such as low achievement, mobbing, dismissal and/or dropout of schools and apprenticeships, resulting in a rather negative and fragile vocational self-image. This study (in particular its first empirical chapter) showed that motivational disengagement and subsequent dropout from training frequently occurred when the young trainee's basic psychological needs for competence (especially feeling appropriately challenged), autonomy and personal relatedness were not met within the intervention context. A mismatch of training content, structure, level of demand, group composition and trainer attention with the trainee's needs and abilities often contributed to this deprivation of needs. The perceived experience of disregard and negligence was a key underlying theme connecting the other elements, which gives emphasis to the importance of the trainer as a key reference person to influence the attitudes and self-concept of young participants in this defining phase of their vocational life. This theme emerged beyond the issue of dropout across different essays presented in this thesis: Most of the seven phases of change identified for the process of activation in chapter five comprise at least one trigger relating a trustful relationship with a trainer or coach (e.g. the combination of pushing, persistency and positivity which instigated young people to dare testing their own skills and/or actively confront personal barriers). This thesis furthermore showed that important non-cognitive individual characteristics can drive young people's behaviour during their unemployment spell. The first two empirical chapters illustrated the relevance of grit as a resilience factor to reduce self-sabotaging behaviour like training dropout and low job search activity in spite of the prevalence of risk factors such as mental health issues and high fear of failure. This insight is particularly relevant for effectively supporting the large share of participants who frequently struggle with adverse conditions. While the construct of grit has been debated in its uniqueness compared to other

traits (Perkins-Gough, 2013; Credé, Tynan and Harms, 2017), studies have shown a distinction of the element of effortful perseverance compared to the well-researched psychological trait of conscientiousness (Abuhassàn and Bates, 2015). The results of my study support previous research which challenges the two-factor structure of grit, emphasising the importance of perseverance through setbacks as a driving characteristic to predict career behaviour and outcomes, above the element of passion for long-term goals (Abuhassàn and Bates, 2015; Datu, Yuen and Chen, 2017; Steinmayr, Weidinger and Wigfield, 2018).

There is an urgent need to understand better the malleability of grit, and how and under what circumstances changes in grit can be induced through interventions. Fostering grit, for example through the promotion of a "growth-mind-set" (Dweck, 1999) could lead young people to remain long enough in training to identify and tackle their personal barriers and enter a step-wise process of activation such as outlined in chapter four. It could also instigate in participants the necessary perseverance to work through fears and develop the required skills and work experience to gain and retain employment.

Fear of failure with its differential effects on young people's vocational behaviour and outcomes is an important construct which so far has received unfairly little attention in unemployment and ALMP research. The findings from this research showed strongly varying results by gender, suggesting that fear of failure is detrimental for males in the job search context. Self-handicapping strategies rooted in the desire of self-worth protection inhibited their search activity, triggered self-sabotaging behaviour such as not attending job interviews, and ultimately reduced their chance of finding work. On the other hand, the effect of fear of failure on females was less pronounced and rather hinted towards a positive motivational trigger to remain in training and conduct active job search. It is recommended to undertake further research into the role of fear of failure for the unemployed, with a particular focus on the moderating role of gender. Developing specific strategies to address and reduce male fear of failure in the training context could have important untapped potential for improving job search and training effectiveness. For

example, by creating a failure-friendly environment where experimentation is encouraged independently from its outcomes and apparent setbacks are shared and celebrated in their contribution to personal growth and improved professional orientation.

In general, the differing results for subgroups by characteristics such as gender, age and education, as well as the low person-group fit emerging from the qualitative findings demonstrate the high heterogeneity of training participants in characteristics relevant for their vocational pathway. This is important for several reasons: Firstly, if trainers were aware of the characteristics associated with a higher dropout risk, they could implement appropriate prevention strategies. Secondly and more importantly, an improved targeting and placement according to participant 'types' (i.e. their specific skills, needs and goals, is paramount to improve both training retention and effectiveness).

This research has a number of limitations that should be noted and were partly discussed in more detail in section 3.6. The sample for the quantitative study is of a relatively moderate size and was not drawn randomly. This affects the potential to draw inference and generalise the findings beyond the present context. This limitation applies especially since several findings are based on subgroup analysis, thereby further reducing the sample size. The fact that the main findings of this study were substantiated by qualitative data is, however, reassuring to some extent; it would be interesting to see if the main findings would be confirmed with a large sample and/or in a different context. For example, the present sample was taken in an urban context in a region of Germany where the economy is strongly determined by the service sector. In rural areas more characterised by agribusiness, the barrier to self-experimentation of skills might be lower and fear of failure might play a less pronounced role as a behavioural driver. With more time and resources, ideally a nationally representative sample could have been taken for the quantitative part of this research, thereby increasing both the robustness and generalisability of the results.

Also, the findings are specific to Germany, a country with a well-developed economy, formalised education and labour systems and comparatively low unemployment rates. The suggestions for further theoretical development formulated in chapters 2 and 4 therefore need to be interpreted with reservation. It is likely that the experience of failure has a more destructive effect on young people's self-image in a system where few fail, and those who do are likely to "get stuck at the bottom". Hence, in countries with higher unemployment rates and/or less formal access requirements to standard work, the importance of satisfying motivational basic needs and strengthening self-worth through training might be lower. Replicating this study in a different context, e.g. in a country with a weaker economy, would provide valuable insights on the transferability of the findings – but could not be undertaken within the scope of this thesis.

The sample attrition in the second wave of survey data introduces further risk of potential bias to the findings of this research. Although this has been argued to be unlikely to represent a major concern, it is still possible that trainees who could not be reached for a second survey show relevant unobserved characteristics distinguishing them from respondents. This risk might affect the interpretability of those findings based on data from the second wave of the survey, such as trainer relatedness. Furthermore, not all psychological constructs were measured with multi-item scales, which imposes limitations to the analysis and interpretability of some of the findings. Those limitations are rooted in the limited time, capacity and resources available for this study, as well as the particular target group of vulnerable unemployed youth who are locally dispersed, hard to reach for repeated data collection rounds and whose attention spans and willingness to collaborate impose restrictions on the length of research instruments.

In spite of the discussed limitations, this work provides a substantial contribution to the literature. To my knowledge, it is the first large mixed-methods study to examine mechanisms for the effectiveness of ALMPs overall, and for youth in particular; the first study to assess the role of fear of failure in the context of ALMP interventions and the first study to conduct an in-depth exploration of relevant

change processes and triggers of change for young unemployed training participants.

This research demonstrated and partly addressed several gaps in theory development to understand the attitudinal and behavioural processes of unemployed youth in a training context. In order to address the current absence of a comprehensive theory of change specifically for the target of professional activation, a seven-stage-model (informed by capability, empowerment and career development approaches) is proposed based on the findings from this research. The model defines a set of measureable intermediate goals that connect the intervention with its ultimate goals and should be monitored individually. Furthermore, the model identifies triggers within and outside the training sphere that support the pathway to reach each of those goals. In general, the findings suggest that a comprehensive career theoretical perspective on training interventions for the unemployed would benefit from the consideration of motivational aspects, person-environment-fit elements and individual characteristics. More specifically, such a holistic perspective should include the three basic needs stipulated by SDT, the contextual elements that affect the fulfilment of those needs, as well as non-cognitive characteristics such as fear of failure and grit that influence training engagement, job search behaviour and career outcomes through self-handicapping mechanisms and resilience to adversity. Based on the insights from this study, it appears that linking the debates on ALMPs both theoretically and methodologically closer to existing research in educational and vocational psychology would enrich the understanding of programme effectiveness considerably.

On the practical side, there are good news. This study showed that the 'black box' of hidden mechanisms contains a wealth of colourful content. If unpacked and appropriately addressed, this content holds high potential to trigger real behavioural change of a target group recognised as high priority and difficult to effectively support. The findings can be translated in a range of recommendations for improving labour market policy and practice for young people. First and foremost, although the main focus of this research was not the robust assessment of

the causal attribution of a specific intervention to its observed outcomes, from the findings it can be concluded that training is able to make a relevant change for the young unemployed. Shifts in attitude and behaviour can be induced through having quality interactions with a caring trainer, an appropriate level of challenge in the intervention, the experience of increased self-perceived competence through autonomous experimentation, and carefully guided experiences that foster the acquisition of self-awareness and maturation, among other aspects.

On the other hand, there are also several shortcomings in the current policy and programme practice that can hinder an effective harvesting of the insights gained from this study. A range of dysfunctional attributes within the ALMP institution in Germany are detrimental for effective training design and implementation. Centralised decision-making in programme design, counterproductive incentive systems for programme targeting, as well as dynamics of high competitiveness and price pressure among providers contribute to the mismatch of training content and participant needs. This mismatch can negatively affect training quality and prompt high staff turnover, among other effects. Against this backdrop, a review of the current commissioning and incentive systems within the Federal Employment Agency is needed. A more radical shift towards decentralised intervention design would enable a development of training offers tailored to the needs of the specific target group and take placement pressure of job agents. Shifting the ownership for intervention design to the local providers also allows for the development of more creative multi-faceted interventions which engage participants, help them direct their focus away from the past and towards the future, and enable a tangible connection with real labour market conditions in an accompanied way. Promising elements include theatre/role play, sports, mentoring, systemic work involving families, internships locally and abroad, volunteering and short salaried work placements.

In addition, a more accurate statistical categorisation (rather than treating ALMP participation and return to formal schooling as the same category, for example) would improve the display of professional progress and most likely help to liberate

vocational guidance from the bias of job agents' and trainers' own performance targets. Instead of the current system of fixed training packages, more flexible, modular approaches to training design are recommended, where basic cohesive group activities are complemented by individual support elements tailored to each client's needs and abilities that can be combined and adjusted over time. Such a module-based approach to skills training would also be beneficial from an evaluation perspective, enabling the comparison of individual programme features to gain a better understanding on which strategies work for which types of participants. A more strategic connection and collaboration among the vast number of independent training providers could help tackle the limited availability of qualified staff, infrastructure and equipment.

Acknowledging the importance of the identified motivational processes to prevent dropout, foster vocational activation and instigate effective job search of young training clients, the provision of an in-depth training of trainers focusing on the motivational aspects of the job would be expedient. Potential contents include tackling popular misconceptions, such as the need to set the challenge low, as well as providing guidance on creating a safe environment for failure (especially for males), on how to help participants to develop a positive vocational identity, and on how to address different types of participants. The insights from chapters two, three and four of this thesis offer a number directions to this end. This training should be regularly revised in a participatory manner, involving practitioners from different programmes in order to systematically harvest their knowledge and experience.

Finally, from a monitoring and evaluation perspective, it is important to define and assess intermediate outcomes such as the proactive addressing and removing of barriers, progress in professional orientation, attitudinal changes and active engagement based on a comprehensive theory of change, such as the activation model suggested in chapter four, in order to capture the impact and change mechanisms of ALMP interventions appropriately. For this purpose, ALMP monitoring and evaluation practice needs to move away from its current focus on activities and statistical outcome categories, with little consideration of what

happens in-between and why. A shift towards a results-based approach is recommended and would save administrative resources in addition to providing more meaningful insights. Interim targets would also benefit training implementation by enabling the creation and celebration of tangible milestones for participants, thereby fostering a sense of competence and achievement for young people on the way, while they navigate their labour market transition.

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Annex

Annex I: Results from the pilot study

The following themes arose from the exploratory pre-study which preceded the elaboration of the survey questionnaire:

Theme 1: Relationship with trainer/coach

In line with the "relatedness" dimension of self-determination theory and the findings from the dropout literature, interpersonal relationships between participants and the job coaches were also an important theme in the exploratory study. A high fluctuation rate of training staff was repeatedly mentioned by job agents as a factor promoting dropout, as participants needed a constant reference person to relate to. The importance of the trainer as a person overall was frequently emphasised as a key factor for both training engagement and success. As one job agent pointed out: *"If people drop out depends heavily on the trainer. If they have good insights into human nature and communicate well, the dropout rates are much lower and success rates higher."* Similarly, another job agent emphasised the importance of the trainer above programme characteristics: *"With a small change of staff, success rates of a programme can change drastically"*.

Theme 2: Upfront motivation and own choice of training

Both trainers and participants report critically on the assignment process to training. Even though participants need to sign an agreement for their attendance with the job centres, in many cases they have not been actively involved in the selection of their intervention. In line with the autonomy-dimension of self-determination theory, trainers perceive this lack of free choice as disadvantageous in its consequences for participant engagement with the programmes. As described by one trainer: *"The people themselves are the last ones to be asked when it comes to entering the training. They get no choice, or they get talked into it. With most of them, we have a problem to establish a trustful relationship and develop a vision together."* Others

highlighted the increased dropout risk if participants had no autonomous choice to attend the training: *"The dropouts are usually those who were just sent here. It's difficult."*

Theme 3: Challenge/competence

The competency-dimension of self-determination theory was also reflected in the findings from the pilot. However, differences in the perceptions of trainers and participants emerged from these preliminary findings. Trainers often expressed the need to have low-barrier contents to make programmes accessible for the youth, as the following reflection of one coach portrays:

"I used to overestimate participants' capacity to be burdened. Today I am more in favour of leisure activities, such as excursions, in the training".

Participants, on the other hand, expressed a desire to be focused: *"I would prefer to skip the excursions; I want to find an apprenticeship and not hang out in the city. I would prefer to work in that time."* (training participant). With a view to the previous findings from the literature, it seems worth exploring the relation between participants' perceived challenge and dropout decisions further.

Theme 4: Fear of commitment and/or failure

A recurrent theme mentioned by trainers was the fear felt by young people in approaching the job market and engaging in commitments, such as initiating an apprenticeship or even starting an internship. As one trainer pointed out: *"There is fear to go out there. People have a self-image of "you're not good at anything". They have not experienced to confront challenges, to influence their environment and be part of the solution."*

Some trainers described their impression that participants do not actively look for jobs and gain practical experience in order to avoid adverse experiences. The transition from "carefree" times at school to having responsibilities in an apprenticeship or job was described as a major challenge, with participants trying to delay this step as long as possible. One trainer described this in the following way:

"People are scared, as soon as things get real. They have strong barriers and fear not to succeed, so they prefer to escape when an apprenticeship comes in sight. They don't kick the ball out of fear of not hitting the goal."

The interviews with young people portrayed a similar picture, showing that the prospects of failure following active search and/or commitment cause emotional distress that participants prefer to avoid. As one participant remarks: *"I prefer not to apply [for an interesting job]. I don't want to create any false hopes for myself which will only end in bigger chaos".*

More specifically, the self-handicapping behaviour and self-worth protection motive was described by respondents from all three groups (participants, trainers and job agents). The following quotes provide illustrative examples into these reflections:

"The youngsters are disappointed themselves when they notice that they don't perform as it is expected from them. They have their strategies to cover this up." (trainer)

"Some seem to set unachievable goals on purpose, such as becoming a doctor when you only have a basic school degree. This is like some kind of avoidance strategy, no reasonable job placement can be done like that." (job agent)

"I don't know if this training is going to be successful. In fact, I don't quite have the will for it to be successful yet. Without the will, it is not possible. Once you do an apprenticeship, you can't just drop out again; this is different from just working." (participant)

Theme 5: Lack of vision, sustainable thinking and long-term perseverance (Grit)

Another theme arising mostly from the interviews with trainers was a lack of a mid- or long-term professional vision, as well as a lack of ability to persist while withstanding stress and frustration. Especially trainers expressed the lack of perseverance through difficult times as a key barrier for young people to find apprenticeships and remain in them. The following quotes illustrate trainer's

corresponding reflections. Some trainers highlighted the absence of a long-term vision as a barrier to their effective work, such as one person stating that *"People need to have a vision and be motivated to do an apprenticeship; this is often not the case. Then they prefer to do random, quick and well-paid illegal jobs."* Others referred to the weak ability to endure in unfavourable conditions, with statements such as the following: *"There is very little tolerance for frustration"* (one trainer), *"Perseverance is the most important skill for them"* (another trainer). These considerations go along with the previously described concept of grit, defined as passion and perseverance for long-term goals.

Theme 6: Lack of discipline in combination with extensive training hours

As many participants of job training have been inactive for a while before they entered the programme, one of the first targets is to maintain a regular weekly rhythm including an 6-8-hour daily schedule, in order to prepare them for the requirements of the labour market. It is thus not surprising that the attendees struggle with this structure. As one trainer states: *"To keep people 8 hours a day in training is far too long. They don't persist. In an internship this is different, there they are surrounded by working adults, and this generates a different pressure".*

Theme 7: Personal barriers/subsidiarity of problem: Mental health, homelessness

Personal issues, such as addiction, homelessness or physical or mental health problems were mentioned frequently as common and crucial barriers for participants to successfully complete their training. For example, in the context of mental health issues, a phobia of classroom situations was a recurrent theme, mostly attributed to negative previous experiences of failure and mobbing in school. As one trainer claims: *"If the placement obstacles are too dominant, you can do what you want and nothing will be effective."*

A substantial share of young people were affected by personal barriers, and tackling them is one of the key objectives of training. However, these barriers were often too predominant for people to remain long enough in training to address them.

Theme 8: Adaptability

Adaptability was another theme arising from the pilot study. Especially trainers repeatedly mentioned both the geographical immobility of participants, as well as the absence of a Plan B as l barriers for successful training outcomes. As one job agent pointed out: *"They are not willing to look outside their neighbourhood. The barrier is too high, new pathways are difficult to explore. This is a major restriction to help them find a job."*

Interestingly, while most interviewed youth were not willing to move away for a job or apprenticeship, 10 out of the 12 young participants indicated a disposition to commute 45 minutes or longer to work in the morning.

Annex II: Measurement of latent variables

Based on the results of the qualitative pilot study, **autonomy** has been operationalised measuring two aspects: a) Autonomy in the decision to access the programme (measured at time 1), and b) influence on the contents of the programme (measured at time 2). For the first question, respondents were asked to indicate their modality of access among five ordinal options, ranging from "My job agent decided about my participation, I did not have a say", to "I suggested the participation in this programme myself". The levels of influence on training contents were assessed with the question "Could you influence the contents of this training for yourself (e.g. what you did every day, which priorities you set, what you discussed with your trainers)?" Answers were given on a 7-point Likert scale (7= high influence / 1= no influence at all).

Relatedness was assessed at time 2 with 16 items adapted from the Learning Climate Questionnaire (Williams and Deci, 1996). Statements such as "This person accepts me" and "I feel understood by this person" were asked retrospectively for the participant's main reference person in the programme. Answer options ranged from "I do not agree at all" to "I fully agree" on a 7-point Likert scale. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .95 indicates very good scale reliability.

Competence was measured at time 1 with the assessment of three types of perceived ability, adapted from the job search self-efficacy scales developed by Saks, Zikic and Koen (2015). Respondents were asked to rate 16 statements, such as "I am able to use a variety of channels to search for jobs" and "I am able to prepare resumes that will get me job interviews" on a 7-point Likert scale. The answers ranged from "I don't agree at all" to "I fully agree".

Although the original scale comprised a two-dimensional structure (self-efficacy with regard to 1) job search outcomes and 2) job search behaviour) a confirmatory factor analysis - with the robust maximum likelihood estimator - did not fit the data well. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with principal axis factoring supported a three-factor model, based on the presumption that for the target group of this study perceived job search ability might vary depending on its actual interaction with the world of work. The first factor of this model measures, in line with the original scale, the perceived ability to achieve job search outcomes. The second one measures the perceived ability to conduct job research individually, and the third factor comprises those items relating to the perceived ability to conduct job research with social interaction. This confirmatory factor analysis model showed acceptable fit indices (RMSEA=0.069, CI=0.061-0.079, p<0.001; CFI=0.923; TLI=0.908; SRMR=0.057; chi-square 302.15, df = 100; p<0.001). In this model, two error variances were allowed to correlate given their commonality in their wording ("I am able to find a job with a very good salary" and "I am able to obtain a very good job"). The scale reliability was satisfactory (Cronbach's Alpha = .78 for both factors relating to job search behaviour and .92 for job search outcomes).

Table 16: Factor loadings from the confirmatory factor analysis for the three-factor solution for perceived ability

STDYX Standardization				
			Two-Tailed	
	Estimate	S.E.	Est./S.E.	P-Value
FPA1 BY				
PA1	0.558	0.046	11.994	0.000
PA3	0.649	0.042	15.372	0.000
PA4	0.774	0.030	25.453	0.000
PA5	0.795	0.032	24.686	0.000
FPA2 BY				
PA6	0.650	0.038	17.030	0.000
PA7	0.464	0.050	9.277	0.000
PA8	0.829	0.028	30.038	0.000
PA9	0.586	0.043	13.778	0.000
PA10	0.795	0.037	21.564	0.000
FPA3 BY				
PA11	0.774	0.028	27.388	0.000
PA12	0.808	0.026	31.158	0.000
PA13	0.778	0.029	27.043	0.000
PA14	0.829	0.021	39.842	0.000
PA15	0.798	0.024	33.035	0.000
PA16	0.762	0.029	25.914	0.000
PA17	0.783	0.027	28.742	0.000
FPA2 WITH				
FPA1	0.517	0.063	8.247	0.000
FPA3 WITH				
FPA1	0.754	0.035	21.451	0.000
FPA2	0.589	0.050	11.710	0.000
PA16 WITH				
PA17	0.424	0.062	6.890	0.000

Table 17: Three-factor-structure of perceived ability to search for and find jobs and EFA results

Factor 1: Perceived ability to conduct job search with social interaction		Factor 2: Perceived ability to conduct job research		Factor 3: Perceived ability to achieve positive job search outcomes	
Item	**Explained variance**	**Item**	**Explained variance**	**Item**	**Explained variance**
I am able to impress interviewers during employment interviews	0.77	I am able to find out where job openings exist	0.83	I am able to obtain a very good job	0.89
I am able to make "cold calls" that will get me a job interview	0.73	I am able to search for and find good job opportunities	0.67	I am able to find a job with a very good salary	0.86
I am able to prepare resumes that will get me job interviews	0.58	I am able to inform myself on careers and jobs	0.64	I am able to find a job as soon as possible	0.77
I am able to use social networks to obtain job leads	0.48	I am able to use a variety of channels to search for jobs	0.58	I am able to get an offer for a job I really want	0.73
		I am able to plan and organize a weekly job search schedule	0.47	I am able to be successful in job search	0.58
				I am able to obtain more than one good job offer	0.57
				I am able to obtain invitations to job interviews	0.50

Grit was measured with the 8 items of the shortened Grit Scale (Grit-S), developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009). The authors divided the scale in a hierarchical two-factor model with grit consisting of (a) consistency of interest and (b) perseverance for long-term goals, respectively measured by four items. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale with possible answers ranging from "I do not agree at all" to "I fully agree". A confirmatory factor analysis did not show a satisfying model fit, even though results of an exploratory factor analysis with principal axis factoring also suggested the original two-factor model. The factor on consistency of interest only showed a scale reliability coefficient of α=.54. The factor relating to perseverance showed a satisfying internal scale reliability (α=.75) when dropping item 2 from the scale (consistent with Guerrero *et al.*, 2016; Datu, Yuen and Chen, 2017). This is consistent with previous research which has found perseverance of effort to be the component of grit that is predominantly linked to the mentioned positive outcomes, leading some authors to question the role of interest consistency within grit given the repeated occurrence of low reliability coefficients (Abuhassàn and Bates, 2015; Datu, Yuen and Chen, 2017; Steinmayr, Weidinger and Wigfield, 2018). The stronger validity and higher predictive power of the perseverance component of grit for academic performance has recently been confirmed in a meta-analysis, with the authors suggesting that "the focus of grit researchers should shift to perseverance as the most promising avenue of future research" (Credé, Tynan and Harms, 2017: 503). Given the unsatisfying psychometric properties of the scale for consistency of interest, in the present study grit was measured only in its aspects of perseverance, with the following three items from the original Grit-S scale: *"I am a hard worker"*, *"I finish whatever I begin"* and *"I am diligent"*. For the regression analyses in chapter 2, grit was classified as binary variable in "high grit" and "low grit", respectively representing values above and below the mean.

Fear of failure was measured using 15 items from the Achievement Motives Scale (Gjesme & Nygard 1970), such as "I feel uneasy to do something if I am not sure of succeeding" or "I am afraid of failing in somewhat difficult situations, when a lot depends on me". Participants were asked to rate those statements on a 4-point

Likert scale, ranging from "I do not agree at all" to "I fully agree".

A confirmatory factor analysis for this one-factor-model showed factor loadings ranging from 0.4 to 0.76 for all scale items, with an average loading of 0.64 and a mean standard error of 0.03. The model showed adequate fit indices (RMSEA=0.07, CI=0.060-0.079, p=0.001; CFI=0.916; TLI=0.902; SRMR=0.046, Chi-square=269.53, df = 90; p=0.000). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was .91, indicating very good scale reliability. For the regression analyses in chapter 2, fear of failure was classified as binary variable in "high fear" and "low fear", respectively representing values above and below the mean.

Building on the insights from the pilot study, **adaptability** was measured with three variables, each represented by one question: (1) Having a "Plan B" for the own professional goal, (2) disposition to move away for a job or apprenticeship, and (3) the amount of time participants were willing to commute every day to their workplace.

Challenge was assessed in time 2 with the question "How challenged did you feel by the training?", with answers on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "not challenged at all" to 7 "not challenged at all".

Upfront motivation to participate in the training was assessed with one item ("How motivated are you to participate in this training?"), with answers on a 7-point Likert scale (7= highly motivated / 1= not motivated at all).

Expected utility of training was assessed with the question "Do you think this training will bring you closer to achieving your career goals?", with answers on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Very unlikely") to 7 ("Very likely").

Career vision was assessed by the question "Do you know what you would like to work in?" with three answer options: "Yes, I have a pretty clear idea", "I have a few ideas and still have to decide", "No, I have no idea".

Ability to maintain a regular rhythm was assessed by the question "Getting up early and going somewhere for five days a week is..." with four answer options: "No

problem for me", "difficult for me but I can do it if it's necessary", "difficult for me but I can do it if I enjoy the activity" and "very difficult for me, I tend not to succeed at it".

Annex III: Regression results for the subgroup of participants with mental health issues

Table 18: Logistic regression model for dropout (subgroup of mental health participants)

	Odds ratio
schooldegree==no school	2.688
lowgrit	4.053**
highfear	0.309
Highmot	0.224*
rhythm==difficult for me, but I do it because it is necessary	0.906
living==shared with other people	2.752
Duration of unemployment (months)	0.999
access==My job agent decided that, I did not participate in this decision	0.666
access==My job agent suggested only this intervention to me and I accepted to pa	1.868
access==My job agent suggested this intervention and others to me and I decided	2.073
access==I suggested my job agent to participate here and he/she approved it	4.591*
access==Others	1.000
perceived ability to find jobs	0.921
perceived ability to search jobs_non-social	0.767
perceived ability to search jobs_social	0.875
career vision	0.566
expected utility	5.112
sex	3.885
age	0.989
duration of training (months) t1	0.813
socialindex=1 (low)	1.000
socialindex=2 (middle)	3.003
socialindex=3 (high)	9.322*
Constant	6.239
R-squared	0.236
N. of cases	88
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01	

Annex IV: Results of robustness check with OLS regression

Table 19: Logistic regression for dropout including follow-up data

	Logistic regression model with follow-up variables included	OLS model
	Odds ratio	OLS coefficients
Dropout from training		
Average score for teacher trust (t2)	0.551**	-0.532*
highchallenge	0.166***	-0.152**
highinfluence_2	0.520	-0.080
schooldegree==no school	0.723	-0.032
lowgrit	1.510	0.029
highfear	0.322**	-0.125***
highmot	0.462	-0.088
rhythm==difficult for me, but I do it because it is necessary	0.880	-0.004
living==shared with other people	10.720***	0.285***
health - no issues	1.000	
health - physical issues	1.637	0.052
health - mental issues	8.084**	0.129*
health - both physical and mental issues	14.430***	0.206*
Duration of unemployment (months)	1.041*	0.005
access==My job agent decided that, I did not participate in this decision	2.736	0.242***
access==My job agent suggested only this intervention to me and I accepted to pa	1.718	0.180**
access==My job agent suggested this intervention and others to me and I decided	4.327	0.291***
access==I suggested my job agent to participate here and he/she approved it	1.000	0.210**
access==Others	1.000	
perceived ability to find jobs	1.274	0.019
perceived ability to search jobs_non-social	0.693	-0.027
perceived ability to search jobs_social	1.074	0.014
career vision	2.829	0.080
expected utility	0.535	-0.046

sex	1.734	0.062
age	0.761*	-0.013
duration of training (months) t1	1.081	0.019
socialindex=1 (low)	1.000	
socialindex=2 (middle)	4.229	0.110
socialindex=3 (high)	1.231	-0.159
duration of training (months) t2	0.542***	-0.053***
Constant	4239.301***	0.720**
R-squared	0.463	0.383
N. of cases	163	174
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01		

OLS coefficient for the interaction effect of grit and mental health: 0.103**
OLS coefficient for the interaction effect of fear of failure and job search activity: -0.210**

Annex V: Survey questionnaire

Questionnaire

1. **How did you join this programme? Please choose one of the following statements that is most applicable to you.**

   ☐ My job agent has selected this for me; I did not participate in the decision.

   ☐ My job agent suggested only this intervention and I have accepted to participate.

   ☐ My job agent suggested this and other interventions and I chose this one.

   ☐ I suggested this intervention to my job agent and he/she approved.

   ☐ Other (please indicate):

2. **How do you get along with your job agent? Please choose one of the following statements that is most applicable.**

   ☐ He/she understands what I need and helps me.

   ☐ He/she is nice, but not helpful.

   ☐ I don't get along very well with him/her

   ☐ Not applicable/other (please indicate):

3. **How motivated are you to do this training? Please make a circle around a number from 1 to 7, where 1 means "not at all motivated" and 7 means "highly motivated".**

   Not at all motivated   **Highly motivated**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. **Do you think you will complete this training? Please guess a probability from 0 (very unlikely) to 100 (highly likely) percent.**

┌─────────────┐
│   │
│   │
└─────────────┘

5. **Can you influence the contents of this training for yourself (e.g. what you do every day, which priorities you set, what you discuss with your trainers)? Please select a number from 1 to 7, where 1 means "I have no influence on the contents of the training" and 7 means "I can influence the contents very much myself".**

No influence   **High**
at all   **influence**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. **Do you think this training will bring you closer to achieving your career goals? Please select a number from 1 to 7, where 1 means „very unlikely" and 7 means "very likely".**

| **Very** |
| **Very unlikely**   **likely** |

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

☐ **I do not have any professional goal**

Part 2: Your plans

7. **Do you know what you would like to work in? Please select (only) one of the following statements that matches best with your views:**

☐ Ye s, I have a pretty clear idea

☐ I have a few ideas and still have to decide

☐ No, I have no idea yet

☐ Not applicable/other (please indicate):

8. **Do you think you will achieve your professional goals? Please select (only) one of the following statements that matches best with your views:**

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ Yes, but I will have to work very hard for it

    ☐ No idea, maybe

    ☐ This is not very probable

    ☐ Not applicable: I don't have professional goals

    ☐ Other (please indicate):

9. **Do you know the next steps to reach your career goals?**

    ☐ Yes, I know the steps that are necessary to reach my goals

    ☐ I know the next 1-2 steps, then I will see further

    ☐ No, I don't know yet how to reach my goals

    ☐ Not applicable/others (please indicate):

10. **Do you have a Plan B if your main career goal does not work out?**

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

11. **What are you good at? Please think carefully about your answer and name as many things that come to your mind:**
    (open text field)

    ☐ I don't know anything what I am good at

12. **Getting up early five days a week and go somewhere regularly is…**

    ☐ …no problem for me

    ☐ ….difficult for me, but I do it because it is necessary

    ☐ ….difficult for me, but I can do it if I enjoy the activity

    ☐ ….very difficult for me, I tend to not bear it for a long time

13. Would you move for a job/an apprenticeship?

☐ ☐ ☐

Yes No Only, if it is a really interesting one

14. How long would you commute to a workplace in the morning (maximum time)? Please indicate in minutes.

☐

15. What do you think, how long will it take until you find a job or apprenticeship? Please estimate a number of months.

☐

16. How do you search for jobs/apprenticeships? Please tick every box that applies to you (several answers possible).

☐ Online on job portals

☐ Online on websites of companies I am interest in

☐ Initiative calls to companies to present myself

☐ Initiative visits to companies to present myself

☐ I visit job fairs and other events

☐ I ask people I know

☐ Others (please indicate) …………………………

☐ I don't search for jobs/apprenticeships at the moment because I have already a confirmed job/apprenticeship position

☐ I don't have a confirmed position yet, but I don't search for jobs/apprenticeships at the moment

17. How many applications did you send out in the last month?

☐

18. Do you think this is...

☐   ☐   ☐

...a lot   ...little   ...just the right amount

19. How many hours approximately did you spend with active job search in the last month?

☐

20. Do you think this is...

☐   ☐   ☐

...a lot   ...little   ...just the right amount

Part 4: Your perceptions

21. How satisfied are you with your life on a scale from **from 1 to 7, where 1 means „very unsatisfied" and 7 means "very satisfied"?** You can use the values in-between to grade your answer

Very unsatisfied						**Very satisfied**
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

22. In the following table you find different statements. Please indicate with a circle how much you agree with each statement. Please answer on a **scale from 1 to 7:** The number 1 means that you do not agree at all with the statement, number 7 means that you fully agree. You can grade your opinion with the numbers in-between. **Please take your time and think carefully before you answer.**

	Do not agree at all						**Fully agree**
(1) How my work life develops depends on me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(2) Compared to other people, professionally I have not achieved what I deserved.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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(3) Success in the world of work is mainly a question of destiny or luck	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(4) If a person is socially or politically active, he/she can have an effect on social conditions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(5) I frequently have the experience that other people have a controlling influence over my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(6) One has to work hard in order to succeed in the labour market.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(7) If I encounter difficulties in a work-related context, I often doubt my abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(8) My work opportunities are determined by the social conditions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(9) Talent is more important than all efforts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(10) I have little control over the things that happen in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

23. In the following table you find again different statements. Please indicate with a circle how much you agree with each statement. Please answer on a **scale from 1 to 7:** The number 1 means that you do not agree at all with the statement, number 7 means that you fully agree. You can grade your opinion with the numbers in-between. **Please take your time and think carefully before you answer.**

I am able to…

	Don't agree at all						Fully agree
(1) … use social networks to obtain job leads	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(2) …acquire additional skills that I need for a job/an apprenticeship I like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(3) … prepare resumes that will get me job interviews.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(4) … impress interviewers during employment interviews.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(5) …make "cold calls" that will get me a job interview.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(6) …inform myself about careers and jobs that I am interested in pursuing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(7) … plan and organize a weekly job search schedule.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(8) …find out where job openings exist.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(9) …use a variety of sources to find job opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(10) …search for and find good job opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(11) …obtain more than one good job offer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(12) …be successful in your job search.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(13) …be invited to job interviews.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(14) …get a job offer for a job I really want.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(15) …get a job as soon as possible.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(16) …get a job with a very good salary.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(17) …obtain a good job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Well done, you're over half way through! On to the final bit...

24. Please decide also for the following statements how much they apply to you personally. Take your time for each answer and be honest – there are no right or wrong answers!

	Does not apply to me at all						Fully applies to me
(1) New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(2) Setbacks don't discourage me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(3) I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(4) I am a hard worker	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(5) I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(6) I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(7) I finish whatever I begin	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(8) I am diligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(9) I am happy to learn additional skills that I need for a job/an apprenticeship I like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

25. Please indicate once more how much you agree with the following statements thoughts and beliefs. The value "1" means that you do not agree at all, value "4" means that you fully agree.

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	Strongly agree 4
(1) I do not like to work on something when I am not sure if it will be successful	1	2	3	4
(2) I am afraid of failing in somewhat difficult situations, when a lot depends on me.	1	2	3	4
(3) If I do not succeed in something, I am ashamed even though no one else notices it	1	2	3	4
(4) Even thinking of confronting new and unknown problems makes me a bit anxious	1	2	3	4
(5) Situations in which my abilities are tested make me feel worried.	1	2	3	4
(6) I feel uneasy to do something if I am not sure of succeeding	1	2	3	4
(7) Even if nobody would notice my failure, I'm afraid of tasks, which I'm not able to solve.	1	2	3	4
(8) I prefer to avoid situations where I can apply my skills	1	2	3	4
(9) I am worried to fail even in tasks that I believe I can master	1	2	3	4
(10) I feel worried about doing things which seem somewhat difficult.	1	2	3	4
(11) Even if nobody is watching, I feel quite anxious in new situations.	1	2	3	4
(12) If something is a bit difficult, I hope I do not have to do it, because I am afraid of not succeeding	1	2	3	4
(13) I become anxious when I meet a problem I don't understand at once	1	2	3	4
(14) I find it worrying to do something where I have to prove my skills	1	2	3	4

(15) I don't like to work on something when I am not sure I will master it.	1	2	3	4

26. The following statements refer to your perception of time. Please read the statements carefully and select a value that is most appropriate for you.
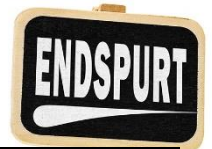
	Strongly disagree						Strongly agree
(1) I am running out of time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(2) I feel time pressing on my behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(3) Time means a constant race for me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(4) I wish I could hold time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(5) I am irritated by the lack of time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(6) Time passes slowly and regularly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(7) I do not manage to keep up with the quick pace of time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(8) Let the others hurry – I have plenty of time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(9) My time remains beyond my control	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(10) Due to a lack of time I cannot implement my goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(11) Life means a constant escape from time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(12) The past is over and will never come back again	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(13) I can resist all the temptations whenver I have some work to do	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(14) I know what I want to achieve in my life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(15) Future achievements are more important than present profits	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(16) I seize the day without wondering what tomorrow will bring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(17) I treat my goals very seriously	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(18) When I want to achieve something I set a goal and consider thoroughly the ways of accomplishing it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(19) One should be prepared for a rainy day, in my opinion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(20) I finish an activity only after I achieve a goal I have set for myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(21) I will do everything to "take a step forward" to achieve my goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(22) I am not discouraged doing something that does not bring immediate effects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(23) My future looks quite real	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(24) It is worth putting in both time and effort if that brings profits in the	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

future.							
(25) I waste a lot of time on doing nothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

27. [ONLY FOR FOLLOW-UP SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE]
Now please think about the trainer or coach who you had most contact with during your programme participation. Please answer the following questions for this person.

	Strongly disagree						Strongly agree
(1) This person shows me different opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(2) I feel understood by this person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(3) I can be open with this person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(4) This person believes that I can perform well	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(5) This person accepts me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(6) This person made me understand the objectives of this training and what I need to do to achieve them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(7) This person encouraged me to ask questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(8) I trust this person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(9) This person answers my questions comprehensively	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

and thoroughly							
(10) This person listens how I would like to do things	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(11) This person is good in dealing with the emotions of others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(12) I matter to him/her as a person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(13) I do not feel very comfortable with the way this person speaks to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(14) This person tries to understand how I see things before he/she makes own suggestions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(15) I feel comfortable talking about my feelings with this person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(16) This person helped me to further develop my career vision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Finally a few questions on yourself:

28. How old are you?

29. Are you...

☐ Male   ☐ Female   ☐ Other/prefer not to say

30. Are you...

☐ Married   ☐ In a relationship   ☐ Single   ☐ Other/prefer not to say

31. How long are you already out of school and neither in an apprenticeship or in work? Please indicate a time in months.

32. Please indicate your parents'/guardians' highest educational degree

	Father	**Mother**
No school degree		
Primary school degree		
Basic secondary education		
Enhanced basic secondary education		
Intermediate secondary education		
A-level		
Completed apprenticeship		
Completed university		
I don't know		

33. Please indicate the highest grade in school you arrived at (no matter if you finalised it or not). Make a circle around the number that is applicable to you.

Unter 4	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13

34. Do you have a school degree? If so, which one?

☐ No school degree

☐ Primary school degree

☐ Basic secondary education

☐ Enhanced basic secondary education

☐ Intermediate secondary education

☐ A-level

☐ Completed university

35. Do you have a finalised apprenticeship ?

☐ Yes ☐ No

36. Have you ever worked in a field that you are professionally interested in?

☐ Yes ☐ No

37. If you answered „yes" to the previous question, please indicate an approximate time in months how long you worked.

38. Did you have any health conditions in the last 12 months that would have kept you from working? Please tick as many boxes as apply for yourself.

☐ Yes, physical health conditions

☐ Yes, mental health conditions

☐ No

39. What is your current living situation?

☐ I live with my family

☐ I live alone

☐ Ich live together with my partner

☐ I live in a shared flat

☐ I currently don't have a stable home

☐ Other (please indicate): ……………………………………………………

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!!

You just successfully completed the first part of this study – well done!! In a few months I would like to contact you again for some follow-up questions.

Please indicate your email address and phone number below for this purpose. This information will only be used by me personally and only for the purpose of this study. It will not be transferred to other people and will be deleted immediately after finalisation of the study. By doing this, you are supporting a charity project helping young people in Honduras. As a "thank you" for participating, you will also receive a little gift next time.

Email Address: **Phone number**