



## **The Challenges of Learning and Teaching German (as a Foreign/Second) Language in Times of Migration**

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**Abstract:** In this paper a closer look will be taken at the challenges that arise in the field of learning and teaching German (as a foreign) language in times of migration with regards to Germany being one of the desired countries, even the top country in Europe for migrants. As Germany has a long tradition of migration, which has always existed to one degree or another, the paper begins with a short overview of Germany's history of migration, followed by an exposition on the present migration status in Germany. The subsequent section inter alia points out the importance as well as the challenges for immigrants to learn the German language and therefore acclimatize to customs of their new home country, as this is essential for integration into society as well as school and work environments. Hence, a sufficient number of integration courses for adults must exist as well as intensive courses for children of migrants in schools in order to provide an opportunity to learn the target language as soon as possible. In turn, this results in a higher demand for German (as foreign/second) language teachers. Therefore, the final chapter of this paper focusses on presenting and evaluating the demand for German (as foreign/second) language teachers from 2014 up to the present date and how the Federal Government of Germany responded to the increasing demand in this field. For this purpose, available information on relevant web pages of Federal Agencies (e.g., Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees), as well as relevant reports and studies are examined and evaluated. Finally, the conclusion offers a brief summary and critique of the findings and a forecast on future development in this field.

**Keywords:** *Migration, German as foreign/second language, language acquisition, integration, foreign language teaching*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The main reason for choosing this topic is a personal interest of both authors as the two are German as foreign/second language teachers, i.e., now associate professors at the faculty of humanities and social sciences at the German department in Rijeka and have a migration background due their parents migrating to Germany in the 1970's as Gastarbeiter (guest workers) in search of a "better life". Accordingly, both are familiar with this topic, can relate to it from personal experience and desired to gain a deeper insight into the current situation in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The present paper is an overview and presentation of the challenges apparent in the field of providing integration and intensive (language) courses that have been implemented due to one of the major events over the past few years in the Federal Republic of Germany, i.e., the massive influx of immigrants, mostly due to the civil war in Syria. Syrians account for the highest number of immigrants albeit migration from other countries also exists.

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As Germany has considered itself an emigration rather than an immigration nation such as the USA, it suddenly found itself coping with a very high number of individuals seeking asylum and wanting to remain in the country. This in turn affected many public sectors such as the economic, societal, healthcare, security and, of course, the educational system. Germany was not prepared for such a challenge and was therefore prompted to settle this unexpected occurrence quite swiftly. New regulations and laws had to be passed and new jobs created, especially in the field of social work, security and schools. When arriving to Germany, in addition to all the paperwork connected to obtaining visas, migrants initially have to deal with learning the unfamiliar language as this is inevitable if they plan on remaining in the country, going to school, getting a job and integrating into their new environment. Until the immigration crisis, which peaked in 2015, local authorities were responsible for integration and inclusion however, the Government of Germany was forced to react due to the high demand for integration courses for all individuals coming to Germany, ranging from children to younger and older adults.

The challenges which immigrants were and still are facing and what exactly the Government undertook to deal with the high demand for German as foreign/second language teachers are also the main issues addressed in this paper. Although it is not possible to examine all facts and issues comprehensively in the space allotted, the authors, nevertheless, hope to set a stage for further investigation of the field of immigration impact on society as well as additional development of German as foreign/second language teachers in the Federal Republic of Germany.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is a qualitative research. The purpose of this research was to study the present situation of migration in Germany and the resulting demand for German as foreign/second language teachers as well as its development in peak times of migration (2014-2019) in Germany. Data was collected and analysis performed based on available material, i.e., research articles and newspaper articles regarding numbers and facts related to this topic available on government and institutional web pages.

### ***The History of Migration in the Federal Republic of Germany***

Germany has a long tradition of migration, although it has itself not seen as an immigration but rather emigration country. This is due to the fact that immigration into Germany for a long time did not seem as relevant as emigration to the USA, Russia or elsewhere. Even into the second half of the 20th century, German politicians such as Chancellor Helmut Kohl stressed that migration in Germany was outgoing rather than incoming (Coy, Poley, & Schunka, 2018). However, this has changed significantly since 2014:

As a result, the sense that German society is defined by its historical development as an “immigration society” (Einwanderungsgesellschaft) is emerging. In recent years, political experts, influenced by eminent scholars, have explicitly mentioned both sides of the (German) immigration society (Coy et al., 2018).

(Hochstadt, 1983) found that migration took place even in preindustrial Germany on account of society in Europe already being mobile by 1800 (Hochstadt, 1983). Migration then, however, took place within the country as peasants and workers were moving from country sides to towns. Servants in particular were moving around quite frequently in order to earn money for a living. The distance of migration was closely connected to social status as the lower classes were unable to travel long distances and therefore their journey often ended in the next city. The reason for migration (still within the country) is due to an ever-growing population. As long as there was enough land for everyone to work in and to live off, migration was unnecessary. When the population expanded, hence making it impossible to feed all the hungry mouths, mobility of population increased (Coy et al., 2018).

A significant change in the type of migration into Germany happened during the Wirtschaftswunder (economic wonder) in the 1950's. From 1955 to 1968 Germany signed bilateral agreements with Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Portugal and the former Yugoslavia with regard to labour recruitment, the so-called Anwerbeabkommen. This was done because Germany needed a vast number of workers which exceeded the number of workers that were available in Germany. However, workers from abroad were not meant to stay in Germany forever. They were employed as guest workers, the famous Gastarbeiter. Predominantly only the men travelled to Germany to work (this was also the case with the authors' fathers) and sent money to their families back home in Turkey or to other countries included in the labour recruitment agreements. Due to high demand at the time, guest workers were warmly welcomed. In 1964, the millionth guest worker was welcomed with flowers and a motorbike upon arriving at the Cologne central train station (Coy et al., 2018). Nevertheless, German hospitality was not all that it seemed as this gesture may have suggested. The

situation for guest workers was surely not easy, as they were separated from their families and had to manoeuvre their way in a new country, without knowing the language or what exactly to expect from a guest worker status. Some of the guest workers returned to their home countries as their temporary employment ended, but many of them brought their families to Germany and continued their life there.

Back then there was no special treatment for foreigners in Germany and guest workers had to cope with learning the language and becoming members of German society all on their own. No language or integration courses were offered and not all Germans were guest-friendly or helpful in regards to guest workers adaptation to the new environment. Well remembered and indicative are the words of one of the author's fathers who stated: "If I had the money for a train ticket back home to Zagreb, I would not have hesitated a second and returned home immediately. But I received my salary every week and it was barely enough to buy me food and to pay for the room I was living in."

In 1973 the "heyday" of guest worker arrivals was over, as Germany had signed a recruitment ban on foreign workers because "approximately 3 million foreigners (mostly Turks) lived in West Germany, a country with an overall population of slightly less than 60 million" (Coy et al., 2018).

The next big immigration growth in Germany took place in the early 1990's due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the war in former Yugoslavia and the human rights crisis in the Kurdish region of Turkey. This immigration wave at times even exceeded the number of guest workers flocking to Germany in the preceding decades. In order to limit immigration to Germany, in 1993 the "Asylum compromise" was implemented stating that asylum seekers who travelled through "safe-third states" to Germany no longer qualified for asylum. This made it impossible for refugees to legally migrate to Germany overland and thus the number of migrants decreased once again by the mid 1990's (DoMid, 2016).

In view of what has been mentioned so far, one can conclude that Germany has had a long tradition of migration but it was clearly not made politically cognizant:

Up until the early twentieth century, immigration into Germany as well as movements within Germany were legally not a national issue, because they were addressed by the respective territorial authorities (Coy et al., 2018).

Germany is clearly a country that has changed to a great extent from the 1950's. Once ethnically highly homogenous it is today a country where millions of foreigners reside and is thus considered a multicultural society.

### ***The Present Situation of Migration in the Federal Republic of Germany***

According to Bartsch et al. (2018) and Hess and Green (2016) Germany is one of the primary destinations for immigration in Europe. In 2015 and 2016 alone almost 1.2 million asylum seekers arrived in Germany with Syrian nationals being the main group, followed by Afghan and Iraqi nationals (Degler & Liebig, 2017). Today over 20 percent of the population in Germany has a migration background and most of the larger cities are highly culturally diverse urban centres. It can definitely no longer be denied that Germany is an immigration country. This itself is posing great challenges to the country as well as leading to doubts among the German population regarding reasons for immigrants' arrival. Many prejudices and stereotypes exist, the exploitation of the welfare system for one, which bear a negative impact on societal cohabitation of foreigners and natives (DoMid, 2016).

Refugees, on the other hand, have varying reasons for leaving their homelands. Some move involuntarily due to war and expulsion and embrace the hope of returning to their homeland, others migrate in order to remain permanently and build a life in the new society. Respectively, cultural development following their arrival may take different forms. Considering that migrants are also seeking respect in regards to their cultural background, it is likely that they recede to ghetto cultures if experiencing rejection and prejudice by their new society. As a result, adaptation to the new culture is limited and integration does not occur (Hoerder, Gabaccia, & Horton, 1993). This is what (Süssmuth, 2009), former president of the Bundestag, also draws attention to:

The reality is that immigrant communities are among those most of the risk of being marginalized or disadvantaged. Yet the success of social integration depends on fostering a common understanding that the economic crisis can only be overcome if we engage society as a whole, and not by excluding any sections of it, particularly immigrants or ethnic minorities (Süssmuth, 2009).

Apparently, the German federal governments have acknowledged Germany's status as country of immigration due to the fact that there are persuasive arguments for Germany to open itself up for migration. Firstly, a demographic crisis exists as the population is growing older and the birth rate is stagnant and secondly, a shortage of employment exists in key economic sectors. Hence, labour migration has been facilitated since 2000 by several liberalisation measures and

law reforms (Hess & Green, 2016).

As (Süssmuth, 2009) states, prior to 2000 employers, local governments and civil-society organisations were responsible for implementing measures in order to advance immigration. A major breakthrough in the migration and integration policy occurred with the immigration reform bill in 2001, followed by immigration and integration reforms in 2005. Obviously, the long-time laissez-faire approach of politicians and politics concerning immigration has changed:

Immigration and diversity do not automatically have a positive or negative effect on society; they do, however, significantly affect society. This impact can be steered to some extent by government policies. It is up to a society, aided by policy, to turn these impacts into an advantage for all parties involved (Süssmuth, 2009).

The above mentioned has paved the way for new forms of integration and inclusion measures such as integration courses and social work with refugees and asylum seekers in order to accelerate the inclusion process and prevent the development of ghetto cultures. As a result, the Federal Republic of Germany began facing the challenge of employee shortages in the domain of social work and security as well as the education system.

### ***Challenges for Immigrants in Regards to the Integration Process***

There are certainly many challenges asylum seekers must cope with when arriving in a foreign country amidst dealing with the difficulties of leaving their homeland and migrating to the unknown in order to start a new life. Flight is a very sensitive topic for the people concerned and the reasons for fleeing are various, ranging from physical intimidation due to wars, discrimination based on sexual orientation or ethnic affiliation to fear of being called upon for military services. However, all of them have in common the hope for a secure life in another country where their lives are not in daily, imminent danger. To reiterate, it is not easy for any asylum seeker to leave their country. Individuals from Syria especially point out that most had a higher standard of living in their homeland, with a professional career, a car and their own home (Bartsch et al., 2018; Sumingwa, 2018).

Nevertheless, immigrants of all ages leave their homes and over the past few years have entered the Federal Republic of Germany facing the challenge of integrating into a new society, adapting to a new culture and learning a new language. As a result of changes in political thinking, Germany attempts to be of aid to these individuals with e.g., the aforementioned integration courses. These courses are organised by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and consist of a language course (usually 600 hours) and a civic orientation course (usually 100 hours). The Ministry of the Interior bears the cost for the courses. Following the completion of the integration course, the participants' language proficiency is expected to be on level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Students receive their certificate by way of passing the final exam which not only tests language skills but also knowledge concerning German culture and society (Hübschmann, 2015; Wu, 2017).

Nevertheless, not all asylum seekers are granted the possibility of attending free integration courses but rather must fulfil certain prerequisites. A request for participation in the integration course must be submitted, which is then either approved or denied by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, depending on the recognition rate of the country. If the recognition rate of the country is high (for countries such as Syria, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and Somalia) the integration course is usually approved and, accordingly, free of charge. At the beginning of 2016 it took approximately two months for the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees to process all requests (Hübschmann, 2015).

While adults must enrol in integration courses, children attend preschool, primary or secondary school where they also attend intensive German language courses. For children it is normally easier to acquire a new language, whereas adults face more difficulties seeing as the age of acquisition is predictive of foreign/second language acquisition outcome, especially nativelylike attainment of the mentioned language. Language courses, i.e., formal training, are not the only things to consider regarding the acquisition of a new language but also exposure to the language being learned, relative use of the language in daily activities and motivation, psycho-social integration with society and culture as well as aptitude, learning styles and strategies (Birdsong, 2006). Generally speaking,

[...] we learn that the associative memory and incremental learning elements of language learning are steadily compromised by age, as are the working memory and processing speed components of language processing and production. It appears that these declines are linear and that they begin in early adulthood and continue throughout the life span (Birdsong, 2006).

Children who attend preschool or primary/secondary school have a greater exposure to the foreign/second language. They learn the language by playing with other children, making friends etc. In addition, children learn faster, have



a higher ability to imitate what they hear and likely are less reserved. For adults who enrol in integration courses exposure to the language and use of the like is usually limited to the duration of the course. When they return home, they revert to speaking their native language with family and friends.

Derived from their own experience as guest workers' children, the authors have concluded that they as well as other guest workers' children learned the foreign/second language on a native language level, whereas their parents remained on a lower level estimated as being B2 or C1 at most and with a noticeable accent. Their parents used the German language at their place of employment, while shopping or dealing with local authorities, yet as soon as they returned home, they reverted to speaking their native tongue. Oftentimes an interlanguage was used which consisted of the native language combined with certain German expressions or single words. For housewives in particular it may be quite difficult to acquire the foreign/second language as they remain at home and care for the family. By nature of their occupation, language exposure is limited to language courses and presumably to purchasing groceries at the store. If no genuine need to learn the foreign/second language exists motivation may also be questioned.

The above described measure of providing integration courses poses challenges for the immigrants on the one hand and on the authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany on the other. In all likelihood, is not easy to learn a new language in a short period of time as well as to acquire enough knowledge regarding the social and civic structure of the new homeland. It is also a challenge to ensure enough German as foreign/second language teachers for such a large number of asylum seekers.

### ***Challenges of the Integration Process for the Federal Republic of Germany - Shortage of German as Foreign/Second Language Teachers***

Although measures were taken in order to make it easier for asylum seekers to integrate into society, realisation of the aforementioned was not as easy a task as originally perceived. There were simply too many refugees to deal with all at once. According to the Adecco job market index, 2017, the integration of refugees created new jobs in various fields. In the first half of 2017 there were 8.722 job offers concerning refugees and asylum seekers, including positions such as social (education) workers, security personnel, administrative assistants and of course German as foreign/second language teachers.

The shortage of German as foreign/second language teachers and long processing times for integration course applications led to waiting times for refugees which lasted up to six months before they could begin taking the mentioned courses.

Whereas graduate teachers for German as foreign/second language in former times usually held part-time jobs and worked in language schools where they were underpaid or, in fact, left Germany in order to work abroad, suddenly there was a high demand for German as foreign/second language teachers in and outside of schools. Many of them, therefore, finally obtained permanent positions. Even salaries for freelance teachers "were increased from 23 euro to 35 euro per hour as of July 2016." (Degler & Liebig, 2017). Yet this was still insufficient as there was a much higher demand than there were teachers on the market. As a result, it was possible for persons who did not possess a degree in language or teaching to attend a preparatory course lasting 70-140 hours and obtain a certificate to teach German as a foreign/second language. This preparatory training was temporarily suspended and teachers who had previously retired were rehired and individuals who lacked education training could, in actuality, teach German courses considering they were native speakers as this was regarded sufficient for teaching refugees.

According to the Degler and Liebig (2017) in 2016 the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees accredited 11,000 new teachers for integration courses. When including previously active teachers, although only a small number were actually German as foreign/second language educators, approximately 19,000 teachers were teaching in integration courses in 2016. Considering it was impossible to cover the extremely high demand of courses within contact hours, online language teaching was also implemented:

With the increase of asylum seekers arriving in Germany, the amount of online language courses has grown substantially. A plethora of offers from broadcasting stations, Ministries, adult education centres, social partners and private developers has been made available. At this point it remains unclear how widely they are used and with what results (Degler & Liebig, 2017).

It is clear, however, that online courses also required the services of teachers, thus, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees offered a refund for attendance to preparatory training for German as foreign/second language teachers.

When taking into account that up until 2016 there were approximately 200.000 school-age children and 50.000

preschool-age children among refugees that came to Germany, not only did a shortage of teachers for adult integration courses exist but there was also deficiency for the so-called intensive courses for children in schools. Therefore, not only did federal authorities have to react to the sudden shortage of teachers but also universities from all over Germany. Suddenly, there was an increase in students who wanted to become German as foreign/second language teachers yet only a few universities in Germany were offering study programmes for German as a foreign/second language. To rectify this situation, they were compelled to write new curricula seeing as the number of new students enrolled in German as foreign/second language teacher study programmes increased by 32 percent from 2014 to 2017 (Wilms, 2017). According to Jung, Middeke, and Panferov (2018) up to 2017 there were 37 universities offering study programmes for German as foreign/second language teachers and even more were planning on implementing them.

The highest increase in teacher demand was evident in 2015 as this was also the year when the highest number of refugees arrived in the Federal Republic of Germany. As the number of refugees now has begun to decrease, the demand for educators is therefore not as high as it was in the previous years, yet there are still a substantial number of job offers for German as foreign/second language teachers when browsing relevant web pages (www.arbeitsagentur.de, www.academics.de, www.stepstone.de, www.monster.de). These job offers mostly refer to private language schools and companies and have changed the job title from German as foreign/second language teacher to German trainers or German lecturers. It is apparent that the number of job offers in regular schools has decreased somewhat by now, yet relevant sources still mention teacher shortages.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The data reported in this article appears to support the assumption that the Federal Republic of Germany found itself in unexpected circumstances when it was affected by such a significant migration wave. This was probably also due to the fact that they had previously not considered themselves an immigration country. Appropriate measures were taken but resources were scarce. In order to meet the demands as adequately and swiftly as possible, unconventional measures had to be taken to fill the gaps, e.g., hiring people lacking the proper education to teach integration and intensive courses for refugees as well as increasing the number of study programmes in order to secure more German as foreign/second language teachers on the market. However, teacher training is an extensive process and teachers were needed immediately.

All things considered, the results suggest that it is almost certain the number of refugees will decrease even more in the future, considering that the decrease has already begun, and according to figures showing the increase in the number of students and study programmes for German as foreign/second languages teachers, it is almost likely that there will be a teacher surplus in the future. A reasonable approach to tackle this issue could be to investigate how many students will graduate from universities as German as foreign/second language teachers in the upcoming years and how many of them will actually obtain permanent employment.

Indeed, studies on the efficiency of integration courses for immigrants already exist as well as on how many of the attendants actually pass the final exam, exhibiting that the number is not as high as expected and that many of the attendants do not complete the courses. A possible future area of research would certainly be to investigate the language proficiency of refugees who were taught by trained teachers as opposed to those taught by people without the proper training. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to question the motivation of migrants for learning the German language and the effects it has on the final outcome.

In conclusion it can be said that: “The authorities didn’t wake up to the predictions [about growing enrolment] soon enough,” says Heinz-Peter Meidinger, head of the German Teachers’ Federation (Local, 2018).

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