

The German Integration Panel – how to measure the influence of integration courses on mi- grants' integration?

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Abstract

In 2005, Germany's Federal Government introduced integration courses in order to enable migrants to improve their German language skills and thereby also their general integration into German society. From 2005 to 2007, about 500,000 migrants were granted the right to take part in an integration course. Several methodological challenges had to be overcome when establishing the German Integration Panel, a longitudinal survey aimed at analysing the efficiency and sustainability of integration courses and the impact they have on general integration processes. Among the key issues of this large-scale survey was its global design, especially the composition and accessibility of a control group of non-course participants as well as the assessment of German language proficiency. The decisions taken are leading to authoritative results concerning obstacles and facilitations in the integration processes of migrant groups from different cultures into German society.

Keywords: immigration; acculturation; evaluation; longitudinal survey; Germany.

Introduction

In 2007, Germany was home to some 15 million persons with a migration background who account for almost 19 percent of the population as a whole.¹ Despite this large number, the Federal Government for long denied that Germany is a country of immigration. This fact was not acknowledged until the Immigration Act (Zuwanderungsgesetz) was adopted in 2005, which also involved the implementation of a target-oriented integration policy. The German wide system of integration courses is an integral part of this policy (cf. Federal Government 2007, Federal Ministry of the Interior 2008).

Language and integration courses are also available to adult migrants in other European countries, for instance in the Netherlands, Sweden and France and are being implemented in each country with different concepts and goals (Carrera 2006, Jacobs and Rea 2007, Joppke 2007). The effec-

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¹ Persons with a migration background include migrants who have entered the present territory of the Federal Republic of Germany since 1949 as well as all foreigners born in Germany and all persons born in Germany of whom at least one parent migrated to Germany or is a foreigner who was born in Germany (Federal Statistical Office 2009).

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tiveness and sustainability of these integration courses need to be analysed as there is little point in implementing very cost-intensive integration measures unless they prove to be effective. However, Germany is the only country that is currently conducting a scientific study to evaluate the courses (cf. Schönwälder et al. 2005, Esser 2006).² This may be attributed in part to the complexity and large number of methodological challenges that need to be overcome before any such evaluation study can be carried out.

Before presenting the German Integration Panel – a research project that is being implemented by the research group at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) to evaluate the efficiency and sustainability of the German system of integration courses – and the methodological challenges that had to be faced, a brief overview of the system of integration courses will be given.

The German system of integration courses

The German system of integration courses is regulated by Sections 43, 44 and 44a of the Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*) and by the Ordinance on Integration Courses (*Integrationskursverordnung*; IntV). A course concept defines the concrete implementation and objectives in detail (Federal Ministry of the Interior 2007, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2009). The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees was commissioned with implementing the integration courses. The objective of the integration courses is to offer persons with a migration background lessons in the German language and to teach them about the German legal system, history and culture in a way that will enable them to handle all aspects of their everyday life independently without the help or mediation of third parties. The courses are therefore aimed at reaching proficiency level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).³

The Residence Act specifies which persons have the right to take part in the course and for which persons participation is actually mandatory. All new immigrants (entry after January 1, 2005) residing lawfully in Germany are eligible to take part in integration courses unless they have a sufficiently good command of the German language, are going to school in Germany or are acknowledged as having little or no need for integration. Immigrants who came before 2005 are also permitted to take part in integration courses if there are places available. Participation in integration courses is manda-

² In Germany, Social Consult GmbH conducted two evaluations in 1998 and 1999 of the language courses available at the time to ethnic German migrants and foreign workers by interviewing the participants and by organising a language test, however, without interviewing a control group (Social Consult GmbH 1998, 1999). The evaluation of integration courses carried out by Rambøll Management in 2006 focused on evaluating the formal success of the system which was relatively new at the time (Rambøll Management 2006).

³ Course participants who have reached proficiency level B1 can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered (at work, school, etc.). They can also describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans (Council of Europe 2001a).

tory for new immigrants who have little or no knowledge of the German language. Immigrants who came before 2005 can also be obliged to take part in integration courses if they are drawing benefits in accordance with Book II of the German Social Code or if there is evidence to suggest they have a special need for integration. Ethnic German migrants are eligible but not obliged to take part in integration courses.

At the time the project plan was drawn up, integration courses encompassed a maximum of 630 lessons of 45 minutes per participant, with the language course accounting for 600 lessons and an orientation course for the remaining 30 lessons.⁴ In the orientation course, participants also study the German legal system, culture and history. A final examination proves the successful course participation. If there is a sufficient number of interested participants special courses can be organised for women and parents, for young people and for participants with literacy requirements.

Since the Immigration Act came into force in January 2005 up until the end of December 2007, 500,000 persons have been eligible to take part in an integration course and over 360,000 persons had done so. The federal budget allocated € 140.8 million in 2007 and € 154.8 million in 2008 to finance integration courses (cf. Federal Ministry of the Interior 2008).

The German Integration Panel

Empirical studies on adult migrants' language proficiency examine their determinants, that is the factors that have a positive or negative impact on migrants' language proficiency (cf. Carnevale et al. 2001, Chiswick et al. 2005, Dustmann 1994, Dustmann and van Soest 2002, Lopez 1999, van Tubergen and Kalmijn 2005, Braun 2009). As noted by Esser (2006), no empirical studies have been carried out so far, however, to examine the impact that learning a language in a controlled setting (e.g. by taking part in an integration course) has on a person's command of the language. The few studies that have been carried out on this do not include any control group or only use a rough self-assessment to measure foreigners' command of the foreign language. Alternatively, they disregard other aspects of societal integration (Beenstock 1996, Gonzalez 2000, Hayfron 2001).

Research desiderata

The Integration Panel analyses the efficiency and sustainability of integration courses on the basis of the following five comprehensive questions, thereby greatly enhancing the findings in relation to the effects of language acquisition in a controlled setting (cf. Rother 2008):

⁴ Further development of the integration courses led to a revised Ordinance on Integration Courses which came into force on 8 December 2007. The most important amendments involve reducing the maximum number of participants per course, increasing the number of lessons, a more comprehensive reimbursement of travel expenses and expansion of the repetition possibilities (cf. Federal Ministry of the Interior 2008: 101).

1. How does the German language proficiency of participants in integration change during and after the course compared to that of non-course participants?

The aim for participants is to have a better command of the German language after the course and also to have a better command of the German language than persons who have not participated in any integration course. This means the integration courses should be effective. Furthermore, participation should also have a sustainable effect. Sustainability is deemed to have been achieved if the course participants' command of the German language remains stable after the course has been completed or continues to improve, with the course participants actually reaching a higher level of proficiency than non-course participants.

2. What effect does participation in integration courses have on general societal integration?

Participation in integration courses is intended not just to improve participants' command of German but also to have a positive effect on their general integration into society in comparison to non-course participants. Integration indicators refer to the four domains of cultural, structural, social and identificative integration (Esser 2006). Apart from German language proficiency, the use of the German language needs to be attributed to cultural integration. Social integration, for instance, means the frequency of contacts with Germans. Indicators of structural integration include participation in the labour market whereas the level of identificative integration needs to be examined in terms of foreigners' attachment to Germany and whether or not they intend to return to their country of origin.

3. How does the integration process develop in the various groups of participants? Who benefits most from the integration courses?

It is analysed what factors lead to a swifter integration or rather a higher level of integration, both in the group of course participants and non-course participants. For instance, it is anticipated that persons who have a higher level of education will learn German faster and better than persons with a lower level of education because they are better trained in learning languages. Furthermore, there is reason to assume that persons living in a more German environment will learn German faster and more sustainably as the environment gives them the opportunity to use what they have learnt. It is also examined to what extent a more homogeneous composition of courses in terms of participants' first language and educational level influences the success of the course.

4. What conclusions can be drawn regarding the enhancement of integration courses?

Success and failure factors should be derived from the findings that can be incorporated into the further enhancement of the integration courses and into the development of further support measures.

Methodological challenges

Several methodological challenges had to be overcome when designing and implementing the research project. They involved the global research design, the construction and interviewing of a control group and the assessment of German language proficiency.

Research design

In order to analyse the effectiveness and sustainability of the integration courses, a design was developed to conduct a longitudinal survey in which the group of course participants was questioned at three different periods of time. This design is based on the recommendations on evaluation research (cf. Clark 1999, Rossi et al. 2004): a first interview of the investigative group takes place at the beginning of the course in order to measure the initial position of the participants (ex-ante measurement). The second interview is held at the end of the course in order to map any changes that have taken place during the course (ex-post measurement). In order to evaluate the sustainability of the integration courses above and beyond that, a third survey is carried out around twelve months after the course has been completed.

In order to ensure that a sufficient number of respondents are reached in the third survey at least 4,000 persons have to be interviewed in the first survey. The population of courses from which the sample of courses subject to evaluation was drawn consists of all general integration courses for parents/women and young people which began in April and May 2007 and that comprised at least 20 hours per week.⁵ The population for each course consists of all the persons participating in the course.

A relevant sample of just under 300 courses was taken from the data processing system "Integrationsgeschäftsdatei" (InGe) in May/June 2007. Valid information on the first survey is available on 286 courses and 3,960 persons. This corresponds to an average number of 14 participants per course. 3,283 course participants took part in the second survey (2,096 of whom had participated in the first survey and 1,187 persons of whom were new to the course). These surveys were conducted between October 2007 and May 2008 owing to the fact that the courses ended at different times.⁶ 2,504 course participants who had already been interviewed before took part in the third survey (which was conducted between February and July

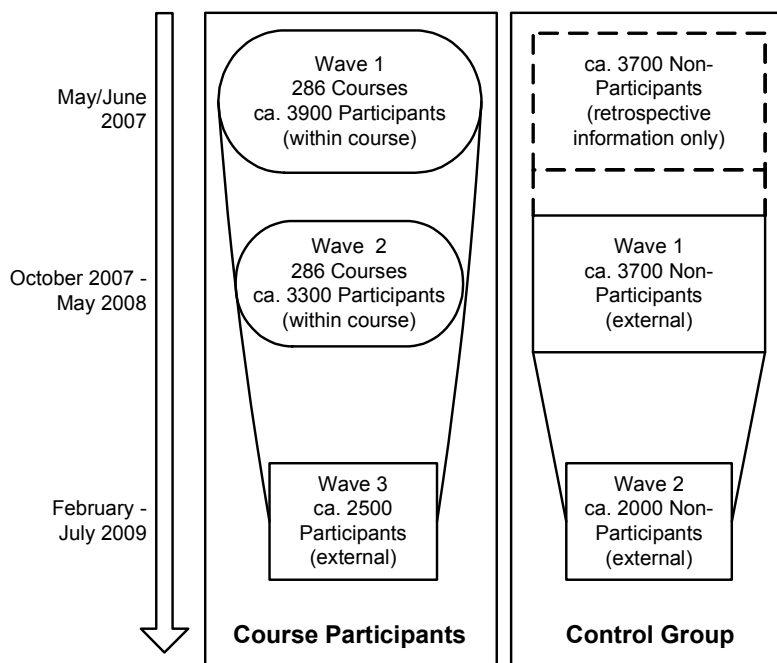
⁵ Participants in integration courses including literacy skills are interviewed in a separate survey.

⁶ Initial results on the first two surveys conducted with course participants are outlined in Rother (2008, 2009).

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2009). The left-hand side of Figure 1 provides an overview of the three surveys conducted on the group of course participants.

Figure 1: Global Design of the German Integration Panel



Whereas the first two surveys of course participants were conducted jointly by the regional coordinator of the Federal Office⁷ and the course instructors during the courses themselves, the third survey of course participants was conducted by an external survey research institute in the respondents' homes. The questionnaires were translated into the 13 languages most commonly spoken by the course participants.

Composition of the control group

Interviewing a control group of migrants who did not participate in an integration course serves to examine whether course participants manage to achieve a swifter integration or rather a higher level of integration so that integration courses can be seen as being effective. It is hence indispensable for the evaluation to compare participants with non-participants (cf. Cook and Campbell 1979). However, this presupposes that both groups are com-

⁷ Regional coordinators are staff of the Federal Office who are employed in decentral field offices and who are responsible for local tasks of the Federal Office in the area of integration, including supervising and examining integration courses.

parable in the first place. It would be ideal within the meaning of an experimental design to allocate persons to either of the two groups at random. However, a random assignment is not possible in this case for legal reasons. Therefore a control group had to be constructed which has as similar a structure as possible to that of the course participants in terms of the relevant variables (age, gender, nationality, year of migration and command of the language) by using parallelisation.

Exact quotas are therefore defined for the stratification of the sample taken from the population register. It is possible to do so regarding age, length of residence and nationality as the population register contains this information. If it becomes apparent despite all expectations that it is not possible to draw parallels to the desired extent, statistical matching methods (e.g. propensity score matching) could be used retroactively (cf. Dehejia and Wahba 1999).

The immigrants' German language proficiency is another relevant variable. It needs to be ensured that the respondents of the control group have a similarly poor knowledge of German as the course participants. However, the population register does not contain any information about foreigners' knowledge of German. A screening phase therefore needs to be organised before the actual interview is held, in order to identify which foreigners and ethnic German migrants have little or no command of German. The interviewers themselves have to judge whether the respective person has a command of the German language not greater than level A2 which is more or less the level of German spoken by course participants. In the actual interview, the person's knowledge of German is analysed in greater detail so that information on the comparability of the two groups is available and can be taken into account accordingly. It must also be ensured in the screening interview that the interviewee has not participated in an integration course before. The results show that with 24 percent of all addresses used in the field, the interview was terminated after the screening phase as the person was found to have had too good a command of German or to have already taken part in an integration course.

Ideally, the control group should also be interviewed at three different times. For financial and time constraints, but above all for cost-benefit considerations, it was only possible, however, to carry out two surveys of the control group. The first interview of the control group took place in spring/summer 2008 at the same time as the second interview was being held at the integration course. In addition, retrospective questions were asked in this interview so that information on the level of integration and sociodemographic background of these persons was also available for the time the first interview was held with course participants. The second interview of the control group was held at the same time as the third interview of course participants, between February and July 2009 (right-hand side of Figure 1). In the first survey of the control group an external research institute interviewed 3,717 persons; in the second survey 1,974 persons were still available.

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When the effectiveness of the courses is analysed, the progress made in the control group is used as a benchmark both to compare the progress made between the first and second interview and between the second and third interview of course participants. This ensures the analysis of the effectiveness and sustainability although some more in-depth analyses and trend analyses have to be dispensed with.

Assessment of German language proficiency

A valid and comprehensive assessment of German language proficiency needs to be carried out both in the group of course participants and in the control group in order to draw any conclusions regarding the changes in course participants' and non-course participants' German language proficiency. As such, objective language tests produce the best quality criteria. For legal reasons, it is not possible to use the results achieved by course participants in the basic, intermediate and final test. Furthermore, these results are not available for the control group either so that they cannot be compared with the results achieved by course participants.

It was impossible to implement an objective language test within the German Integration Panel for two reasons. On the one hand, there is no valid test available yet that allows grading according to certain levels of proficiency and that provides sub-results for various language skills such as listening, reading and writing at the same time. Available tests (e.g. "German certificate") only check whether a certain level of proficiency (e.g. B1) has been reached. On the other hand, it is not possible to use an objective test within the framework of a socio-scientific survey as these tests would take approximately three hours and could only be conducted by certified examiners⁸.

In order to measure the participants' development of their German language proficiency, a detailed self-assessment tool is used that was developed by the project "Milestone" as part of the "European Language Portfolio" (ELP) specifically for persons with a migration background. This tool has been certified by the Council of Europe (Milestone 2002, Council of Europe 2001b). Apart from other modules, the ELP also contains checklists for self-assessment using descriptors. Learners have to assess themselves in the following five language skills: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing.

There are checklists available containing four to six descriptors for each language level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and for each language skill. Figure 2 contains the list for language level A1. Hence this is a subjective, but very detailed

⁸ The test „Zertifikat Deutsch“ of the Goethe Institute, for example, is composed of two parts. The written part takes about 150 minutes, the oral part another 15 to 30 minutes (see <http://www.goethe.de/lrn/prj/pba/bes/gzd/enindex.htm>).

Figure 2: Checklist for language level A1

Now we would like to learn more about your knowledge of German.

Please rate your knowledge of German using the following lists. There are three lists with different levels of difficulty. Each list contains questions regarding five different language skills.

Please mark whether or not you are able to manage each situation described with an x.

If you have marked the entire right column of a list with an x, e.g. you are not yet able to manage these situations then you do not have to fill out the next list with the higher level of difficulty.

| List 1 | I can... | I can do that | I cannot do that yet. |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Listening | | | |
| • ...understand the day of the week and statements regarding the time | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...understand numbers and prices | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...understand a simple message on the telephone | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...understand simple directions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reading | | | |
| • ...read and understand bus or train schedules | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...read and understand street signs and simple public notices | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...read and understand opening times (e.g. in stores) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...read and understand a written appointment | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...read and understand simple written messages | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...read and understand simple written directions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Spoken interaction | | | |
| • ...greet others and introduce myself | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...ask how you say something in the new language | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...hold a simple conversation if it involves a topic that interests me | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...ask questions I consider important (e.g. in stores) and use gestures in doing so | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...ask for and give simple directions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...hold a simple telephone conversation if it involves a familiar situation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Spoken production | | | |
| • ...clearly say and spell my name and address | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...specify the country or city I come from | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...describe where I live | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...give a simple message | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Writing | | | |
| • ...fill out a form with important information about myself | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...write down a short message (e.g. memo) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...write a simple postcard | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...write a greeting card | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • ...write about myself using simple sentences | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

assessment related to everyday life issues which respondents can fill in themselves and which offers sufficient validity. As respondents may have difficulty filling in the checklists in German especially in the first survey, together with the translated questionnaire, a translation of the checklists is also provided.

Out of the items an additive index is constructed for the analyses. It indicates in how many cases the learner claims to be able to manage the re-

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spective situation, covering all five language skills and five levels of difficulty. The values of the aggregate index range between 0 and 125. The higher the score, the higher the language skill is. The differential indicates the progress made in language proficiency. It shows how many more descriptors the learner marked as "I can do that" in the second and third survey as compared to the first and second survey respectively.

Conclusions

The German Integration Panel was established in order to assess the efficiency and sustainability of integration courses – the most important and expensive instrument of German integration policy. Methodological challenges had to be overcome when planning and implementing the research project owing to the complexity of the course system. Decisions had to be taken in order to conduct a survey that generates representative and authoritative results concerning obstacles and facilitations in the integration processes of migrant groups from different cultures into German society. These decisions related primarily to the global design which was specified as a longitudinal study conducted on course participants and on a control group of non-course participants. Within this design it was not possible to carry out a third survey on the control group. The second difficulty involved constructing a comparable control group via the population register which was overcome by specifying quotas and implementing screening interviews. Assessing participants' German language proficiency proved to be a third problem as there was no objective test available to do so. The detailed checklists from the European Language Portfolio were used as a sufficiently valid tool to provide information on the progress course participants and the control group made regarding their German language proficiency.

There was no perfect solution available to all the methodological problems that arose but the results achieved are sufficient to draw representative conclusions on both effectiveness and sustainability. The German Integration Panel hence provides an innovative tool that can be used to examine the net influence of language acquisition in a controlled setting on the development of adult migrants' German language proficiency for the first time.

In addition, the data collected can be used to carry out more extensive analyses at a number of levels. From the linguistic and didactical perspective, this is the first time data is available that can be used to examine the impact individual course factors such as the number of participants in the course, a possible migration background of the instructor or the composition of a homogeneous group have on the learning outcome of participants at representative level. From a more global, sociological perspective, the German Integration Panel is for the first time providing data that can be used to analyse the influence of language acquisition in a controlled setting on the general societal integration of migrants in addition to other determinants of integration. As it is possible to extract individual determinants of the course

success, the project is contributing decisively to policy counselling and to further enhancing not just the German system of integration courses at the political level. Last but by no means least, the data can be used for more than just evaluation purposes. Owing to the high proportion of new immigrants among the course participants and in the control group, the relevant partial dataset can also be deemed an initial, comprehensive new immigrant survey in Germany, the longitudinal structure of which will also allow monitoring integration processes from the very outset.

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