

Research & Interview report: Language Training for Newcomers in Germany

1. Overview

There has always been a co-existence of courses accredited and paid by the government and courses which are held by volunteers.

Since 2015, when a lot of refugees came to Germany, the whole system of language courses is under pressure because of the sheer number of people, who need training. Courses done by volunteers are not regulated, although a lot of volunteers have organized themselves in networks, which are mainly reachable through internet. In order to reach out to newcomers in an effective way many courses are now organized directly at reception centres, where newcomers find temporary accommodation.

Due to the big numbers of newcomers the standards for their accommodation were also minimized. This results in a lack of privacy in big emergency shelters, where no separate rooms are available where women can close a door on intruders. Standards for child protection also were not installed quickly, so that there are concerns about their safety. All this changes only slowly.

2. Courses

2.1. “Integration Courses” for Newcomers in Germany

These courses are financed by the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge BAMF (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) and are realized by lots of NGOs and organisations all over Germany. Not every newcomer is entitled to access them, normally a German residence permit is needed.

Since 10/15 the BAMF rushed to finance new courses, which are open to refugees too. Also some of the German federal states established and financed new courses. So some language centers offer special courses for refugees.

Participation of refugees is restricted to those, who have a (limited) residence permit or a document which identifies them as asylum seekers and who do not come from a “safe” country. These conditions are met by most people for Syria, Eritrea, Iraq and Iran. They have to be registered and live at the region/city where the course takes place. The refugee courses seem not to be planned very well – they often only last 2 months and often do not lead to a certificate.

Structure of the “normal” BAMF-accredited courses:

Each course is a combination of a **language course** and an **orientation course**:

- 600 hours with different language levels (A0-B1), each ending with an intermediate test. After each module one can change to another course provider. After the language course additionally
- 60 hours of **orientation course** take place.

At the end of the orientation course a final examination „Deutschtest für Zuwanderer“ (German test for immigrants) takes place.

If students fail to reach B1 level, they can apply for another 300 hours of language course. Some specialized courses take up to 900 hours from the start.

Schools do tests in the beginning to place someone to the right language level. There is a variety of settings, a typical example:
Course for beginners, 6 months, 4 hours Monday-Friday each day.

Some courses do alphabetization at the same time, some courses are especially for young people <27 years.

The language courses are available full time and part time – generally full time courses are normal.

If people are entitled to money from social services, they often are sent to language courses by the job center to improve their qualification and capability to get a job. If they do not attend they risk losing this financial support.

The topics of the language courses cover every day life:

- Work and career
- Basic and further training
- Bringing up and raising children
- Shopping, trade, consumption
- Leisure time and social interaction
- Health and hygiene/human body
- Media and the use of media
- Housing

They also teach how to write letters or E-Mails in German, how to make telephone calls, complete forms and apply for jobs.

The orientation courses are the ones where human rights could be a topic. Topics discussed in these courses are f.e.:

- the German legal system, history and culture,
- rights and obligations in Germany,
- ways of co-existing in society, important values in German society, e.g. freedom of worship, tolerance and equal rights.

The Curriculum of the Orientation Course (60 hours)

The BAMF has a detailed curriculum for the orientation courses it pays for. This curriculum is “under construction” at the moment, it is reviewed and changed. The new one is not yet available.

Up to now there were 3 modules:

- **Politics in Democracy (22 hours)**

This is the biggest part and should inform about the structures and functions of the German democratic system, with a special focus on possibilities for participation. The German constitution and the rights of every individual provided by it are explained. The curriculum states that a connection with the experiences of the students should be made and that current debates should be included. The curriculum expressly refers to **forced marriage, violence in the family and honour killings**. The duties of a citizen are discussed – besides paying taxes also the duty to send young people to school, to educate them and to take care of them without violence.

- **History and Responsibility (11 hours)**

German history should be told not as dates and facts alone: Bridges to today's experiences of the students should be built, so that an awareness of the relevance of history for present life is created.

- **Man/Individual and Society (15 hours)**

This module should be based on the every day life of the students and reflect their life in the past and in Germany with the aim to stimulate an intercultural perspective. By this the risk of intercultural misunderstandings should be reduced. To represent diversity has priority over the presentation of supposed German cultural standards. Participants should be able to understand their position in the German society better.

Topics listed for example:

- roles in the family and different forms of families in front of a background of equal rights and the ban of discrimination
- results of different parenting styles
- targets of education: motivation, responsibility and self-determination
- emancipation of women

2.2. Welcome classes

Welcome classes focus on the target group of underage refugees. They take place at public schools and combine different background and age groups.

2.3. Courses given by volunteers

Asylum seekers often have to wait for a very long time until their asylum procedures are decided. In this period they are not entitled to attend the official integration courses. That's where volunteer language teachers step in. There is an endless number of different projects, settings and initiatives by NGOs, newly founded initiatives fe. at refugee camps or houses, the church and so on. Some initiatives work in this field for years and have produced their own material on how to teach at a basic language level, mostly from A0-A2. Courses from volunteers are an optional offer and do not have to be attended. They don't follow a certain curriculum and depend on the choices of the teacher. Because they are not accredited they do not lead to a positive consequence for the residence permit as the official integration courses do. Positive aspects of the courses are that they are often combined with other social activities, bring civil society and refugees together and are more open for the upbringing of human rights issues.

3. Qualification of Teachers

There are two different qualifications for language teachers: Deutsch als Fremdsprache/DaF (German as a Foreign Language) and Deutsch als Zweitsprache/DaZ (German as Second Language). German as Second Language covers the needs of newcomers, while German as Foreign Language also could be of interest for tourists.

Normally both qualifications are university degrees. Most graduates work in adult education, they are not entitled to teach children and young people at public schools.

Since 2005 the BAMF wants teachers for their paid courses to have a special degree in German as Second Language/DaZ – either an university degree or an additional qualification.

Due to the lack of teachers at the moment there are a lot of trainings for people who already have a university degree and speak and write German fluently (C1 level). For example: In four weeks of fulltime training they can reach a qualification which is similar to the English CELTA (*Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults*) and which is accepted by the BAMF. The focus is on teaching- techniques, not on certain subjects.

4. Forms of Cooperation between Language Centers and NGOs

Often ethnic women NGOs, which exist for a long time already, also provide language courses – sometimes with own staff, sometimes with external staff. At Berlin there is cooperation between one of the main providers of courses, the Volkshochschule (which is similar to Folksuniversitetet) and women ethnic NGOs – Turkish as well as Arabic ones (Al Nadi, Kidöb). These NGOs are run by paid social workers with ethnic background, who provide advice and counselling covering a lot of subjects including domestic violence. The language courses are held by BAMF-accredited teachers of the Volkshochschule at the place of the NGOs – so women can seek for advice in their own language while or after attending the language course. Similar structures are provided by INCI/Hamburg, Frauenprojekt Gallus/Frankfurt am Main and others.

Courses for women often provide parallel possibilities to bring children and have them looked after.

5. Findings of the interviews with managers in NGOs/ Language Centers

4 of 5 Managers/coordinators we interviewed were women, one was a man. 4 of them were language training coordinators of immigrant/intercultural organisations, 3 with a specific focus on women, that organize a variety of language courses at their organisations. The remaining Interview partner works for the Senate of Berlin and has insights of discussions for the official curricula. Only one of the interview partners was a language teacher himself.

1, Have you ever studied Human Rights or participated in any training in Human Rights?

All of the interview partners had some sort of training on human rights, though the majority had more specific trainings like fe. Diversity training, training on human rights in Islam, etc. Two of the interview partners said that they have regular trainings that touches human rights or human rights issues, the rest named training they did long time ago.

2, Do you think that Human Right values should be included in language training for newly arrive immigrants?

Four of the interview partner answered with a clear “Yes” but stated conditions and certain approaches on how to successfully integrate “human rights” in language classes:

1, No stigmatisation - The communication of human rights should never be done in

a top down or by saying: “We in Germany have fe. equal rights concerning gender while you don’t”. Family violence should not be addressed as an exclusive issue of migrants, examples should come from different cultures, also of those of the host-country. Students should not be addressed as either victims or perpetrators but as entitled to human rights. They should learn about the rights, not only about what is forbidden.

2, Students as entitled to human rights – Teaching about Human rights issues should empower people by letting them know about their rights. This is especially done in women-only courses by informing the women about all their rights and possibilities.

3, Inclusive - The students should be involved in the conception on how to address human rights in classes. The concrete topics should depend on what interests them. Often those students, who suffered from human rights violations themselves, feel a need to talk about human rights in classes.

4, Contextualized and concrete – Human rights should not be taught in an abstract way. It should rather reflect the current situation of the students as refugees and newly arrived immigrants. Also it should be taught with reference to specific relevant examples and embedded in the German context. Issues could be peace, respect, basic condition of a peaceful, diverse society, etc. Some organisations like “Pro Asyl” managed to embed human rights issues in orientation guides for newly arrived immigrants and thereby combine practical information with the communication of human rights.

5, Culture sensitive and sensitized – Teachers need training and knowledge to transport human rights issues in the right way. At best they themselves have a history of migration or flight.

One interview partner answered this question (2) with “No” : because it is “confusing for people” and “influencing”. Also the danger of double standards was addressed by this interview partner along the example how “The West” teaches human rights while at the same time states like Saudi Arabia are not criticised in their violation of human rights because the west depends on its oil.

Nevertheless, the interview partner suggested to promote individual rights in language courses like the rights of women and the rights of children, etc. This would promote integration because the people feel more secure in the host-country when they know about their rights.

3, What obstacles do you see regarding inclusion of Human Rights in language training for newly arrived immigrants?

1, Language barriers – first the people need to learn the basic language and the basic orientation in the host country. In the beginning the transportation of this knowledge is the most important.

2, An open mind - Also at first the people have to sort out their basic needs like a flat, health, privacy and basic orientation. Only if these conditions are provided they can focus enough.

3, Different cultural backgrounds of the students – the discussion of human rights is hard because language courses sometimes consist of people from many different societies with many different understanding of rights and values.

4, Peer pressure and group formation – Often men have trouble to accept the transportation of women rights or a female teacher. Sometimes you have many students from the same country of origin, religion or culture and they build a

community group in which the single person cannot stand up for another opinion. Therefore it is important to have mixed classes.

5, Time pressure and fixed curricula – in the official integration courses there is only 60 hours provided to transport the history, legal framework, etc. of Germany. In these courses you could transport human rights issues – but even for that the time is often way too short. In specific alphabetisation courses it is very hard first to teach the people how to write, then how to speak and then impart a lot of knowledge on top of that. Also the students have to pass a specific exam at the end of the course and the teachers have to stick to certain curricula.

6, It's not what you say but how you say it – teachers need knowledge, sensitivity and the right attitude to address human rights issues without victimizing or condemning whole groups of people wholesale.

7, High threshold issue – Human rights issues might be seen as a “luxury debate” if teachers do not succeed to link them to the actual daily problems of the people. They could be seen as a high threshold topic for “well educated” people, who do not have to face existential problems every day.

4, Do you see any conflict regarding professional ethics if Human Rights was included in language training for newly arrive immigrants?

The question was a little bit unclear to most of the interview partners. Nevertheless, most of them saw no problem with professional ethics. But the right attitude of the teacher is seen as crucial.

- The teachers need **training** how to approach human rights issues, they need a **clear definition** of human rights and a **clear position** on human rights and on the question what human rights mean to them personally.
- Talking about human rights (like talking about politics) could trigger emotional and heated discussions and bring the teacher in a difficult position. Therefore, it is probably better to invite **guest speakers** to discuss with the classes.
- Teachers should be culturally sensitive & “human”. The idea of a neutral and objective teacher is wrong because his or her position is anyway transported, even if only in a subtle way. It is better if teachers are transparent and clear about their position, while being fair and not judgemental at the same time.

5, Have you ever worked or cooperated with ethnic NGOs regarding teaching host countries values on Human Rights or Human Rights in general?

All of the interview partners answered positively and emphasized that it should be like this. Most of the interview partners are themselves from migrant organisations and they promote the combination of migrant organisations and language courses. Most cooperate closely on many different levels and with many different projects and organisations.