

Reasons for (not) participating in institutionalised forms of further education and training

Reflections from the perspective of German women with a so-called immigration background¹

Alisha M. B. Heinemann

Abstract

Various research approaches have been adopted to discover why institutionalised further education and training courses reach some target groups and not others. In this research, people who are said to have a so-called immigration background are often underrepresented. Results from a qualitative study are summarised below in which people with a so-called immigration background who are target groups of further education and training programmes are asked about their reasons for (non-)participation. It becomes clear how through associated social characteristics of not belonging, the socially constructed category of having a so-called immigration background can be effective when making decisions about further education and training. However, it also becomes clear that this aspect becomes less dominant when the interviewees have further educational or training resources. Some of these resources include significant rights as a citizen (permanent residency status, a work permit, the right to vote), a higher education and/or professional qualification recognised in Germany, good written command of German, a supportive, well-informed social network and capital that goes above and beyond a subsistence level.

1. Foreword

The statistics on further education and training have one thing in common. People with a so-called immigration background² take part in further education or training courses less frequently than the majority of the rest of the population. In the Adult Education Survey (AES³) people are categorized in one group, regardless of the time they have spent in Germany or the qualifications they possess (see BSW/AES Rosenblatt/Bilger 2008). Actually very little data currently exists of the type produced by the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) or the Sinus Milieu Studies which make a more differentiated view of this group possible (see Heinemann/Robak 2012, pp. 21-24). However, in order to carry out sensitive research, a selective approach is required that questions homogenizing categories. This is the only method of helping to shed light on distorted pictures created by discourse and fostered by inaccurate academic categories. These pictures portray a large, supposedly homogenous target group that appears to be hard to reach, has poor language skills and no interest in further education and training programmes. More distinguished categories on the term “immigration background” are required to enable alternative images and to take a closer look at the individuals, their qualifications and requirements. In his SOEP analyses on professional

¹ This is a slightly revised version of the article entitled *Reasons for and against taking part in further education and training* from the standpoint of German women with a so-called immigration background, published in Hessische Volksblätter für Volksbildung (01/2013) pp. 60-67.

² The definition of a person with a so-called immigration background according to the German Federal Statistical Office in 2015: Persons with an immigration background are defined as everybody who moved to today's Germany after 1949. It also includes all foreigners born in Germany and all people born in Germany and with German nationality with at least one parent who has immigrated, or a parent born as a foreigner in Germany.

³ Definition of “persons with an immigration background” according to the Adult Education Survey 2010: AES 2010 divided up the interviewees according to nationality and mother tongue. German citizens whose mother tongue is German are called Germans who do not come from immigrant families. This also applies when they have command of a second first language alongside German. German citizens whose mother tongue is not German are called Germans from immigrant families and foreign citizens are called foreigners (see <http://datenreport.bibb.de/html/4757.htm>).

development courses, Halit Öztürk shows that when looking at the “immigration background” category while focussing on various generations of immigrants, there is virtually no difference between participation in further education and training between the majority of the population and people who are second-generation immigrants (see Öztürk 2011, p. 151). These analyses indicated that people who do by definition have a so-called immigration background, but have no experience of immigration themselves, take part just as much in further education and training as people who are not labelled with that immigration background. Öztürk’s study also makes clear that there is a significant correlation between professional status, school qualifications and participation in professional development courses (ibid. p. 159).

The results of the study to be presented here, entitled “Participation in further education and training in an immigrant society” (Heinemann 2014) confirmed these analyses and differentiated them further. The study’s goal was to explore subjective reasons for and against further education and training. In contrast to existing studies driven by statistical data, the approach is qualitative and the women concerned were focused on as experts of their own actions. Women taking part and not taking part in further education or training were interviewed.⁴ The study concentrates on women between 25 and 50. What they have in common is that the majority of society classifies these women as having a so-called immigration background, but in choosing the interviewees the type of immigration was left open to start with. Women from the second generation of immigrants were asked, as well as those who have immigrated themselves. Some of them came to Germany as children; others did not come until they were adults. The majority of the interviewees have lived for several years in Germany. At the time of the interview, only one person had immigrated just a few months previously. As all these women’s lives are based in Germany, they are called “German women” in the context of this study. As we can also assume that the immigration background category is not a real, but a socially constructed one, the term “German women with a so-called immigration background” was chosen to highlight the construct.

2. Is an immigration background an impediment?

What are the implications of such an immigration background? What effect on and status does it have in interviewees’ day-to-day lives? Why should these types of backgrounds, which (as the name already implies) do not stand in the foreground, have an impact on whether people take part in courses of further education or training? The material gathered from the interviews allows us to attempt to answer these questions. The article will also show how a so-called immigration background can be a reason for not taking part in further education or training, because of the circumstances and structural conditions that govern the interviewees’ lives.

There is one important aspect that interviewees associated with the immigration - background criterion. They are perceived as being non-German and therefore as people who do not naturally belong to German society. Being non-German, or in other words different to the majority of society, is not a neutral positioning. In fact it is the basis on which structural, institutional and personal exclusion and devaluation are carried out. The idea of further education and training is to improve the way people engage with and act in society. Therefore, its purpose is questionable if people cannot perceive themselves as legitimate members of the society in which they live in the first place.

In fact, none of the interviewees thought of themselves as German. Even Alex who was born in Germany and whose appearance, habitus and language mean she could pass as a

⁴ In her current post-doctoral theses entitled “Zwischen Anerkennung und Diskriminierung. Weiterbildung in der Migrationsgesellschaft“ (2011) Annette Sprung chose a similar approach, but only asked people who had taken part in a further education or training course.

member of the majority of society⁵ did not feel that she was accepted on equal terms. She repeatedly notices that she is treated as if she had shortcomings in comparison with Germans who do not come from immigrant families.

Alex: Yes, you're always discriminated against. Or you're treated differently [...] Exactly. You're treated differently. As if you wouldn't understand anything. That's what I think anyway.

She primarily associates this experience with dealing with authorities where she is still considered "non-German", despite her appearance and language skills.⁶ The reason is that she has neither a German passport, nor one of the nationalities which are discursively and historically considered legitimate, equal and acceptable due to their national, ethnic and cultural similarity with that of a standard German. An example would be if she were a national of one of the Scandinavian countries, or a country like France, England, Canada or the US (see also Goel 2009, p. 101). As a result, these experiences with discrimination also mean that the interviewee still feels that she does not really belong here to German society.

In other words, an immigrant *background* is more prominent than we might be led to expect. The relevance of the background is also compounded when it appears to be visible. As a result, people whose appearances do not resemble that of a standard German, are repeatedly praised for their good German, even if they cannot speak any language other than German and are confronted with the typical questions about their origins⁷ (Battaglia). The fact that they are constantly asked where they come from catapults them to a place outside society. Another young interviewee called Milagros angrily talks about a situation that she experienced while taking part in a course:

Milagros: 'And the feeling from this other woman from Turkey. She's born here and so is really German. And [...] in the group someone asked her "Why, you speak such good German?" See what I mean? And that confused her because [...] it can't be taken for granted that [...] someone with a different-coloured skin is German ... that they're telling me that doesn't matter, or does it? I wasn't born here, but have been here eight years and then saying that to me. Thanks. But I can tell immediately if someone was born here. And then I think "Yeah, cool, then you don't have any problems with your visa" (she laughs). No, no, no. Because it's obvious to me. They're Germans.'

She defines herself as someone who has not been living for that long in Germany and therefore would be able to accept any feedback regarding the status of her language skills positively. At the same time she is cross about the discriminatory attitude in the majority of society, which due to the phenotype alone, in this case skin colour, repeatedly questions people's affiliations. This occurs while disregarding the fact that people of different nationalities and ethnicities and from diverse cultural backgrounds have been living in Germany for many years and generation after generation⁸ and are part of this society.

When people are asked questions, characterised and treated in this way, the so-called immigration *background* is repeatedly placed at the foreground of the interviewees' day-to-

⁵ The use of the word *pass* in this context means you can be part of a group in respect to certain markers without being labelled as someone different. This could apply to gender, religion, nationality etc. In this context, "pass as" means people who would be labelled as persons with a so-called immigration background but whose white skin and the language they speak allow them to be thought of as members of the dominant society (see Ahmed 2009, p. 270). The term is also used in conjunction with trans* people who from a particular point in time clearly pass as a man or a woman without being called a *trans by other people.

⁶ As regards the term "standard German" see here: Mecheril 1997, p. 177.

⁷ For an analyses of dialogues starting with 'Where are you from?' see here: Battaglia 2007, p. 181 cf.

⁸ As regards the nationality, ethnicity and cultural concept of other Germans see: Mecheril 2003, p. 10 cf.

day lives and therefore has an impact. It appears to be a discriminating category above and beyond discursive exclusion and governs the distribution of resources such as job and promotion opportunities, allocation of accommodation and access to education and social capital. In her country of origin Milagros is an educated academic. Discouraged she says: *I sometimes wonder why I'm doing a course because I have virtually no chances of ever having a management position.*

3. The wish to be part of as a reason for participation

At a discursive level, the positioning of not belonging is an aspect that crops up again and again in the interviewees' reasoning logic. At the same time, this logic is diminished or increased depending on the availability of civic, cultural, economic and social capital, as well as information about education or training programmes, their quality and the prospects for exploiting what has been learnt in the programme. We will briefly take a closer look at the points listed here below.

In this context, *civic capital* is defined as something that includes the right of residence, work permits and other civic rights etc. Firstly it is the cornerstone for being able to plan where your own life is based. Secondly, after completing a (professional/vocational) course it is also the basis for being able to put this to good use in terms of a job in Germany. If a guarantee like this cannot be given, taking part in the course is not thought to be beneficial. As a result, neither Tamy nor Soraya, two of the women interviewed, who have lived in Germany for years without any legal documents allowing them to stay, has been to a further education or training institute. Therefore, they do not contact advice centres because they are afraid of being caught and deported. It is only once they gain access to protected spaces where they do not see their residence as threatened, that at least Soraya begins to learn reading and writing in German courses.

The cultural, economic and social capital constructed by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1983, p. 183 cf.) which is relevant to everyone wishing to engage with society, regardless of whether they are people with a so-called immigration background, are important aspects of the information collated from the interviews. Therefore, the theory of the accumulation of education also applies to the interviewees. This theory assumes that people who are already well educated and have a good job will be more likely to take part in and benefit from further education and training courses. However, in their case recognition of the qualifications obtained in their country of origin also plays an additional role. Regardless of the cultural capital contributed, not recognising qualifications already gained can demotivate and have a crippling effect on people. Reading and writing skills in German are particularly effective in conjunction with cultural capital. They are one of the keys to a well-secured door which people need to pass through on their way to better qualifications and which remains closed to many of them. Because the high standards placed by norms on correct and therefore legitimate standard German cannot, or only with great difficulty, be fulfilled by many who learn German as a second language. As regards institutional racism, language and writing are one of the most effective ways of excluding people who immigrated to Germany. This is the case as long as the norms and demands placed on mastering the written German language are not reflected on and not questioned by institutions (see also Dirim 2010; Heinemann 2015).

If enough educational and training opportunities are available, the next step (especially for those not socialised in the German educational system) is to provide a guide to help them navigate Germany's further education and training landscape, which lacks transparency and is hard to understand. For the current situation of institutionalised further education or training, Faulstich coins a term called *average systemisation* (Faulstich/Zeuner 2008, p. 182). He uses this term to describe the special situation in adult education, which on the one hand discusses professionalization, curricularisation and institutionalisation and is on the other hand equally defined by internal differentiations and structures. The result is that many very specific

institutions compete with one another on the market. This leads to a structure that is difficult to understand, even for people who have grown up with the German education system. The 2012 Education Report emphasises that participating in further education or training is also more obvious when opportunities are perceived and recognized as such (see Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2012, p. 141). If opportunities cannot be gauged due to a lack of knowledge about the subject area on the part of the interviewees and the difficulty of not being able to judge their value in terms of improving personal skills, people have no reason to take part in training programmes. People who have a well-informed social network that they trust, might be able to harness it to gain access to further education or training. Interviewee Leyla calls for multi-lingual advice centres for everyone who does not have a network like this. In her view, personnel who speak the target groups' languages would also be able to minimise anxiety about German institutions. The common language would be able to put information across much better and diminish any concerns.

Leyla: [...] I'm sure a lot of people will come. Because we trust this information. Then we're not afraid.

[...] and I go to the front. But when a German woman comes then I have to work out what she said first. Sometimes I can and sometimes I can't. I'm uncertain [...] If I don't understand German very well, then of course it's better. I think it would be good if all foreigners were given information in their own language. Then they can go to the front. They are sure of themselves.

Quite apart from aspects specific to migration, other criteria play a role in the eyes of the interviewees. These criteria were repeatedly mentioned in previous studies on the target group of people who are not labelled with a so-called immigration background (see Brüning/Kuwan 2002, p. 17). These are factors such as how to put their skills to use after the course has finished where the people's age also plays a relevant role, but the interpretation of their own gender role too. Those female interviewees, who see it as their job to bring up children, only have the chance to focus their priorities on further education or training once they have made sure the children have everything they need.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis shows that the label of a so-called immigration background plays a relevant role and is a disadvantage for all interviewees as regards decisions on further education and training, even if it does not have the same impact on everybody. Because they are labelled, they *do not feel they belong* to German society, so that they question the basic idea of further education and training – in other words boosting their own engagement with society. Due to other conditions, such as the availability or lack of availability of civic capital, the recognition of qualifications obtained in the country of origin, reading and writing skills in German and the ability to navigate the German further education and training system, this experience is either reinforced, or pushed into the background due to other positive effects. Similarly to people without that immigration background label, the opportunities to put course content to good use, their age, as well as the necessity of looking after children can be relevant conditions for deciding on further education. People who already have plenty of resources in the areas described already take part in further education or training, regardless of what type of immigration background they have. On the other hand, those who believe they have little opportunities of improving their own situation through education or training, tend to place priorities on making sure they survive. In order to reach this heterogeneous group with further education and training opportunities, a more differentiated and sensitive approach is needed. In terms of addressing target groups and shaping different programmes, they must be adapted to suit the different starting points of the groups taking part. Programmes which

are directed across the board at people with a so-called immigration background are doomed not to reach their objective. Research into further education and training needs to face up to its enormous shortcomings in this area. The immigration society we live in will remain the 'norm(ality)' we have to deal with.

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