Inclusive practices in response to the German refugee influx: support structures and rationales described by university administrators

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  - Large gaps in students interested vs. enrolling

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Background

➢New and evolving challenges

➢The 16 federal states set own higher education policy

➢Public universities are the primary providers

➢Policies mediated by federal government and supports (DAAD) and by institutional priorities

➢This paper: 12 universities supporting refugee students; two separate interview-based studies of university faculty and staff

Background

➢ September 2015, Berlin pledged 6 billion euros ($6.6 billion) to support the 800,000 refugees; a quadrupling from 2014 (Park, 2015)

➢ But costs to German cities ranged from Euro 132 to 1,666/refugee/month (Friedrichs & Malter, 2016)

➢ Free higher education but only students with top grades admitted (numerus clausus); refugees compete with all international students

➢ Influx spurred new services for prospective students: credentials, language training, prep classes, buddy & mentoring, auditing classes, guidance and individual consultations

Theoretical Framework

❑Critical Theory acknowledges social, historical, economic and ideological forces impacting contemporary German universities and faculty, staff, students, and community stakeholders;

 ❑*universities reflect deeply entrenched social inequalities marked by class, race, disability and migration...Thus, universities reflect the inherent social inequalities within the nation state. When it comes to German and British state universities, what becomes apparent is the class and racial stratification of these institutions (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2016)*

❑Transformative paradigm emphasizes "the centrality of experiential knowledge" and encourages an intersectional approach, calling attention to the experiences of marginalized groups such as refugees (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 63)

❑Our focus: the power dynamics of the university setting, which can be split in broad terms into *de facto* (in practice) and *de jure* (formalized) operations

Methodology – Series A (Unangst)

➢Six public research universities in northern or central Germany (all former West), even distribution among large cities, a medium sized city, and large towns

➢Recruitment through personal outreach; 60 min interviews, 9 in-person, 1 Skype; Summer 2017

➢Standard interview protocol: open-ended questions on
  ➢administrator/faculty background
  ➢experiences with refugee and migrant students
  ➢conceptions of diversity at their university
  ➢institutional supports for their programming

Methodology – Series B (Streitwieser)

➢ From 3 universities of applied sciences (*Hochschulen*) in Berlin (East and West), recruited by a well networked senior administrator from one of the institutions

➢ Data collected over four days in January 2017, series of 1 hour long interviews

➢ Standard interview protocol, open-ended questions, asked administrators to
  ➢ describe the situation of refugees seeking access to their university
  ➢ main constraints and supports
  ➢ how the higher education sector is responding
  ➢ their motivations and goals for working with these students
  ➢ ramifications they expect in coming years

Respondent	Number	Gender	Migrant Background	University type
Faculty	5 (Series A)	2 male, 3 female (Series A)	1 faculty (Series A)	Research Universities (Series A)
Administrators	5 (Series A) 2 (Series B)	3 male, 2 female (Series A) 1 male, 1 female (Series B)	2 administrators (Series A) 1 paid student administrative assistant (Series B)	Research Universities (Series A) Universities of Applied sciences serving 10,000+ students (Series B)
German student support	3 (Series B)	2 female, 1 male (Series B)	1 male	

Total: 15 participants

Demographic characteristics of interview participants, Series A and B

Key findings – language proficiency

➢ B1 level proficiency is generally required for applicants to the university pathway programs

➢ C1 level proficiency to access Uni, which means:

➢ *[Student] can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices (Council of Europe, 2017).*

➢ Even higher language threshold for teaching training programs (C2 level)

➢ As a refugee coordinator at one Berlin universities noted, "My goodness, it will not just take a few months but a few years. How are they supposed to get by with just a rudimentary understanding of the language? (Series B)

Key findings – language proficiency

➢One language program was originally meant to bridge two language levels (from B1 to C1) in five months, which was found to be insufficient. In the third iteration of this initiative, the course is set to be one year in length (Series A)

➢A degree-seeking student with C1-level German skills dropped out of a political science program due to difficulty with the *Fachsprache* (he has since taken an internship and will re-apply):

"He took classes for the first six weeks and then he terminated his university program because, he said, the language barrier is so high". (Series A)

Key findings – distinct programs & contexts

❑The development of refugee support structures has varied widely by university

❑At one Series A institution, an orientation program is limited to 6-8 weeks, after which *"people can go into the educational settings and find out if the educational system in Germany will suit their expectations"* and then pursue being admitted as a degree-seeking student in the subject of their choice

❑Professional background of key constituents plays a critical role in how programs evolve; DAAD's *Integra* program has funded a range of initiatives proposed by post-secondary institutions, which were developed to match university staff capacity and perceived current needs (Kanning, 2017)

Key findings – distinct programs & contexts

➤One Series staffer noted that her prior experience has supported her current work: building on a network of university, political, and community-wide contacts, she developed a range of modules introducing students to various academic specialties at the university, and has continued a pre-existing series of networking meetings for community stakeholders

➤A Series A faculty member noted that her university had offered to host refugees on the university campus itself at the beginning of the refugee influx, and then convened a task force comprised of various university stakeholders to identify areas in which the institution could support prospective refugee students.

Key findings – "success" is opaque and inconsistent

❑Though "success" at respective institutions was not explicitly addressed, this emerged as a clear theme given a lack of data on student participation, benchmarking practices, uncertainty regarding future funding, and lack of a clear mission or vision at the institutional level

❑One student surveyed felt that many of the current programs were not well thought out or carefully targeted to meet the needs of the refugees themselves. She found it problematic that refugees had not been asked in an evaluation to critique the services they received (Series B)

❑Almost all Series A participants noted that Unis had little idea how many refugee students to expect; one staffer said that in October 2016, when programs launched, the Uni had *"no idea what the needs of the people participating in the program would be"* and that they *"developed the program on the fly"*. Only recently, he said, had they been able to proactively *"plan solutions"* for students, 2 years later

Key findings – "success" is opaque and inconsistent

Students, staff and faculty interviewed almost universallylacked familiarity with refugee support structures at other Unis. None of them had a clear sense of the most successful institutions; they were not aware of the number of refugee students in pathway or degree programs of other Unis

All Series A participants noted uncertainty regarding future funding for refugee programs

While a few participants in Series A highlighted the involvement of their university's vice president/rector, it was primarily related to securing funding for *Integra* programs, not to an overarching, long-term vision for refugee integration. Senior leadership level "talking points" don't seem to have translated to the faculty and staff level

One exception is notable: a faculty member who also holds a senior administration appointment spoke at length about their goals for the institution as a whole around not only refugees, but issues of diversity more broadly, including the integration of students from a migrant background

Key findings – enabling access for women as key goal

❑ Interview participants perceive women to comprise a minority of refugee students served at their institutions

❑ One Series A staffer noted that 14% of participants in refugee programs at her Uni were women, and that measures such as combining child care with programmatic offerings were being considered to increase participation

❑ In Series B, administrators also voiced concerns over the small number of Muslim refugee women in language courses going on to seek entrance to Uni; they noted a struggle between wanting to encourage a greater participation among women, while at the same time hesitancy to step into unfamiliar cultural territory and offend established norms

Key findings – gap between student interest in study and enrollment

❑ Series A participants reported that the number of enrolled, degree seeking refugee students was lower than anticipated. A few also indicated that education officials had underestimated how difficult it would be for refugees – even those with strong academic backgrounds – to access public higher education in Germany

❑ One staffer noted that "large groups" of people fulfill the "basic requirements" to attend Uni, but that "because there are so many barriers to get into the university" a gap between "formal" and "actual" access didn't allow for a "diverse student body"

❑ Another interview participant noted that he believed that in medicine, about 600 people applied for study places each year, though only about 15 places were available

❑ Several Series A staffers reported that students enrolled in pathway programs or workshops were sidetracked from pursuing credit-bearing study due to mental trauma, health issues, and family crises caused by war and displacement

Key findings – gap between student interest in study and enrollment

❑ Degree seeking refugee enrollment is low, but enrollment in pathway programs (housed at various so called *studienkolleg* locations and other sites) is strong, with some Unis serving several hundred students in this capacity

❑ One participant in Series A noted that while the pathway program at her Uni was the most popular program in the rural area, enrollment was capped, and prospective students were often forced to enroll in pathway programs at different sites in the region

❑ A staffer at a second rural university noted that in the previous year, 120 applications were received for the Uni pathway program, with 40 accepted. Concern was expressed that students would enroll at other universities when qualified for admittance -- return on investment?

Conclusions

❑Moving forward, as refugees continue in pathway programs and enroll as degree seeking students, it will be important to observe differences in student persistence rates at distinct Unis. Campus diversity, among other factors including state supports; diversity of the community at large; cost of living, etc., will likely impact persistence for this vulnerable student population.

❑Additional study on transitions between pathway program and degree enrollment is called for

❑Parsing the trajectories of men vs. women as well as distinct national groups seems critical

❑Better information sharing within the field is urgently needed: administrators supporting refugee programs should have a sense of best practices, the scope of activity at different campuses, etc.

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