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Language acquisition: refugees nearly achieve proficiency level of other migrants

By Elisabeth Liebau and Diana Schacht

Whether they're looking to participate in social life, enter the German labor market, or obtain relevant training certificates, learning German is a critical part of integration for the majority of refugees—and yet only a handful of studies have examined their language acquisition patterns and skill levels. The IAB-SOEP Migration Sample, which was collected by the Institute for Employment Research (Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung) and the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), offers new findings on German language acquisition among refugees; the present analysis, conducted by DIW Berlin, identifies factors that have been positively correlated with German language acquisition among refugees as well as non-refugee migrants.

According to the survey, most refugees did not speak any German upon their arrival in Germany—but with time, they approximated the German language proficiency of Germany's non-refugee migrants. Positively correlated factors include the refugee's age at the time of immigration as well as his or her prior educational background. Once they were in Germany, refugees' fluency improved with time, participation in the German education system, and frequent usage of the language, especially in the workplace.

Language skills are of paramount importance in the integration process of all migrants,¹ including refugees – proficiency is essential for social purposes as well as job market participation.² Nonetheless, few empirical findings on this topic are available when it comes to refugees in Germany.³ It is unclear to what extent comparable studies in other countries—for example, on the language acquisition of refugees in the Netherlands—or on other migrant groups within Germany can be applied to Germany's refugee population.⁴ Since refugees' biographical backgrounds and the situations in their respective host countries can differ from those of other migrants, their language acquisition processes may also follow different patterns. For example, refugees rarely prepare for their move to the host country, and for the most part have neither the time nor the opportunity to learn a new language in advance.⁵ Moreover, unlike other migrants, refugees' participation in language and integration courses depends on their obtention and the limitations of a residence permit, which can lead to certain disadvantages compared to non-refugees.

The IAB-SOEP Migration Sample⁶ allows us to evaluate which circumstances factor into the language acquisition of Germany's refugees, and to what extent these circumstances differ from those of other migrants. It is important to note, however, that the survey was conducted in 2013 and thus the data do not necessarily apply to

¹ Portes, A., Rumbaut, R. G. (2006): *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

² Van Tubergen, F. (2010): Determinants of second language proficiency among refugees in the Netherlands. *Social Forces*, 89 (2), 515–534.

³ See, for example: Geis, W., Orth, A. K. (2015): *Flüchtlinge – Herausforderung und Chance für Deutschland*, IW Policy 26/2015 or Brücker, H., Fendel, T., et al. (2016): *Geflüchtete Menschen in Deutschland: Warum sie kommen, was sie mitbringen und welche Erfahrungen sie machen*. IAB-Kurzbericht 15/2016. Nürnberg.

⁴ Van Tubergen, F. (2010), *supra*. For an international comparative study that includes Germany, see Kristen, C., Mühlau, P., et al. (2016): Language acquisition of recently arrived immigrants in England, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands. *Ethnicities*, 16 (2), 180–212.

⁵ Brücker, H., Fendel, T., et al. (2016), *supra*.

⁶ Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), data from 1984–2014, Version 31, SOEP, 2015. Doi: 10.5684/soep.v31.

Box 1

Data and operationalization

The Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) is a longitudinal survey of Germany's private households that has been being conducted since 1984. The present analysis is based on the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample, which was gathered in 2013 within a cooperative project between SOEP and the Institute for Employment Research (Institut für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung).¹

The survey solicited data on respondents' biographical backgrounds, respective integration indicators, and social participation. Using information on each respondent's entry status, roughly 400 refugees were identified among the sample.

¹ For details, see Brücker, H., Kroh, M., et al. (2014): The New IAB-SOEP Migration Sample: An Introduction into the Methodology and the Contents. SOEP Survey Papers, 216, and Kroh, M., Kühne, S., et al. (2015): The 2013 IAB-SOEP Migration Sample (M1): Sampling Design and Weighting Adjustment. SOEP Survey Papers, 271.

On average, they had been living in Germany for 18 years at the time of the survey. Due to the small sample size, further differentiations among the refugees—by country of origin, for example—is not possible.

The study participants were asked to rate their German skills in speaking, reading, and writing at two points in time: upon their arrival in Germany, and at the time of the survey. Each skill was self-assessed by the respondents using a Likert scale ranging from excellent (5), good (4), sufficient (3), poor (2), and none (1). Since the individual dimensions of German language skills are highly correlated (Cronbach's alpha $\alpha = 0.97$ upon arrival, and $\alpha = 0.94$ in 2013), they have been combined into one index, the average of all three dimensions. The difference between the German proficiency at the time of the influx and at the time of the survey in 2013 is interchangeably referred to as "language acquisition" or "language development."

the recent influx of refugees that began mid-2015. Respondents had spent an average of 17 years in Germany at the time of the survey, which means that the sample is primarily made up of refugees and other migrants who came to Germany in the 1990s.

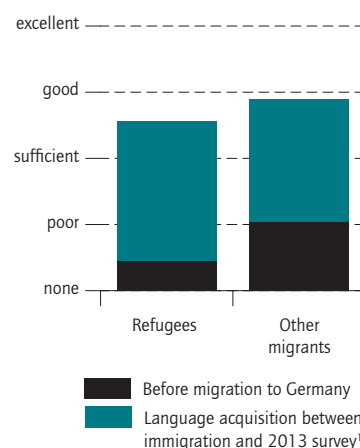
Due to many changes in the legal framework conditions and the respondents' countries of origin over time, the survey results represent a heterogeneous group. As well, because data are based on information provided by a relatively small sample size—just over 400 refugees—the results are subject to statistical uncertainties. Lastly, the retrospective survey of some biographical data can also lead to distortions. Nonetheless, the deep insight into the language acquisition of past refugees can help identify potential factors that may promote successful language acquisition among current and future refugees.

Refugees arrive with weaker language skills—but nearly catch up with other migrants over time

For the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample, respondents were asked about their German proficiency both prior to immigration and at the time of the survey. Using this information, the language development of two groups—"refugees" and "other migrants"—can be mapped between these two points in time. Before arriving, the German skills of refugees were lower than those of other migrants (Figure 1): most refugees indicated that they

Figure 1

Language proficiency and language acquisition among refugees and other migrants in Germany



¹ Controlling for differences between groups with different durations of stay in Germany.

Source: IAB-SOEP Migration Sample (2013) of SOEP.v31, weighted; estimations by DIW Berlin.

The language proficiency of refugees approached that of other migrants over time

Box 2

Methods

First, the language skills level at two points in time and the corresponding development controlling for length of stay are determined (Figure 1). In addition, the relationships between theoretically influential factors and language acquisition are analyzed both bivariate (Table 1) as well as multivariate (Table 2). The multivariate regression analysis makes it possible to investigate the respective relationships between several individual factors and language development. As well, the influence of all other factors considered relevant and available in the dataset is controlled for, thus reducing distortions resulting from spurious correlations to a certain extent.

In further robustness checks, all individuals for whom no language development was observed as well as those who already had upon arrival an "excellent" knowledge of German—the highest possible language proficiency level—are excluded. As well, a model was estimated in which the language level upon arrival is included in the analysis. These sensitivity analyses

confirmed the findings of the main analysis; the few exceptions are discussed in the respective footnotes.

In cross-sectional analyses, however, certain statistical problems—such as self-selection—cannot be ruled out, which means that questions about causal relationships cannot be answered using the multivariate methods. As well, both the self-assessment of one's own language skills¹ as well as the retrospective survey can lead to distortions.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the refugees in Germany as a specific immigrant group offers fresh and deep insight into their language acquisition as well as the possibility of identifying corresponding success factors that can help other refugees, now and in the future.

¹ Edele, A., Seuring, J., et al. (2015): Why bother with testing? The validity of immigrants' self-assessed language proficiency. *Social Science Research*, 52, 99–123.

had absolutely no German skills before moving to Germany, while other migrants reported at least a "poor" language proficiency, on average.

By 2013, of course, the language skills of both groups had improved significantly: on average, refugees and other migrants now described their German skills as "good." This implies that the German skills of refugees had almost approached the language level of other migrants in a comparable time span, even though refugees started out with no German skills on average. This is confirmed by the multivariate analysis (Table 2, refugees coefficient in column 2).⁷

In principle, the language acquisition of refugees and other migrants is related to their length of stay. This is more apparent in the "other migrants" group (Table 1, column 5). Refugees were able to develop their language skills more strongly than were other migrants, primarily within the first 19 years after arriving in Germany (Table 1, column 6). The results of the multivariate regression analysis, however, show no statistically significant

effects that indicate a differing correlation between language acquisition and the length of stay across groups (Table 2, column 3).

In general, refugees' pre-immigration German-language skills were poorer compared to those of other migrants. With time, however, this difference virtually disappears—and in fact, the refugees were able to improve their German skills faster than other migrants, on average. It is worth mentioning that no statistically significant differences between the groups were observable regarding a correlation between their language acquisition and their duration of stay in Germany.

Younger refugees learn German better

Apart from duration of stay, the age of the refugees has been confirmed by other studies as an important factor in language acquisition, with the consensus that it is usually easier for younger refugees to learn the language of their host country.⁸ In the present study, this factor was examined based on the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample.

⁷ When language skills of the immigrants upon their arrival in Germany are taken into account, however, no statistically significant differences in language acquisition between the groups are found. The limitations of the survey—such as the small sample size and the fact that respondents were required to provide information about a much earlier time period—could affect the results.

⁸ See, for example: Chiswick, B. R., Miller, P. W. (2001): A model of destination-language acquisition: Application to male immigrants in Canada. *Demography*, 38 (3), 391–409, or Hou, F., Beiser, M. (2006): Learning the Language of a New Country: A Ten-year Study of English Acquisition by South-East Asian Refugees in Canada. *International Migration*, 44 (1), 135–165.

Table 1

Language proficiency and language acquisition among refugees and other migrants in Germany

Bivariate Findings

| | German proficiency at immigration | | | German language acquisition in Germany | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------|------------|--|----------------|------------|
| | Refugees | Other migrants | Difference | Refugees | Other migrants | Difference |
| Duration of stay | | | | | | |
| 0 to 9 years | - | - | - | 1.79 | 1.46*** | -0.33* |
| 10 to 19 years (reference) | - | - | - | 2.11 | 1.85 | -0.26** |
| 20 years and more | - | - | - | 2.08 | 2.16*** | 0.08 |
| Age at immigration | | | | | | |
| Under 16 years | 1.22 | 1.78*** | 0.56*** | 3.27*** | 2.76*** | -0.51** |
| 16 to 24 years | 1.54 | 2.11*** | 0.57*** | 2.28*** | 1.81*** | -0.47*** |
| 24 to 44 years | 1.49 | 2.07*** | 0.58*** | 1.64 | 1.57*** | -0.07 |
| 44 years and older (reference) | 1.57 | 2.45 | 0.88*** | 1.34 | 0.75 | -0.59*** |
| Highest educational qualification obtained abroad or later in the German educational system | | | | | | |
| No/elementary education abroad (reference) | 1.40 | 1.67 | 0.27** | 1.54 | 1.46 | -0.08 |
| Secondary education abroad | 1.53 | 2.09*** | 0.56*** | 1.81** | 1.52 | -0.29** |
| Tertiary education abroad | 1.84 | 2.43*** | 0.59** | 1.92 | 1.47 | -0.45** |
| Later participation in German educational system | 1.29 | 2.11 | 0.82*** | 3.13*** | 2.35*** | -0.78*** |
| Participation in German Language Integration Course | | | | | | |
| No (reference) | - | - | - | 2.04 | 1.81 | -0.23* |
| Yes | - | - | - | 2.09 | 1.86 | -0.23* |
| Language used with family mainly German | | | | | | |
| No (reference) | - | - | - | 2.00 | 1.76 | -0.24** |
| Yes | - | - | - | 2.31* | 2.1*** | -0.21 |
| Language used with friends mainly German | | | | | | |
| No (reference) | - | - | - | 1.85 | 1.67 | -0.18* |
| Yes | - | - | - | 2.46*** | 2.14*** | -0.32* |
| Language used at work mainly German | | | | | | |
| No (reference) | - | - | - | 1.55 | 1.53 | -0.02 |
| Yes | - | - | - | 2.30*** | 2.00*** | -0.30*** |
| Not employed | - | - | - | 1.82 | 1.50 | -0.32* |
| Number of respondents (N) | 411 | 2,894 | | 411 | 2,894 | |

Significance level: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The findings in the table are based on self-assessed language proficiency at the time of arrival in Germany and language acquisition up to the point of the survey in 2013. Also shown are results of various t-tests. The comparison across groups is shown in the difference column (* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$). The comparison within the two groups of migrants is shown for each variable in relation to the respective reference group. For refugees who completed secondary education abroad, the results show a significant difference in language acquisition compared to refugees with either completed or no primary elementary education abroad (1.81** vs. 1.54). At the same time, there is a significant difference with respect to other migrants (-0.29**).

Source: IAB-SOEP Migration Sample (2013) of SOEP.v31, weighted; estimations by DIW Berlin.

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As expected, strong differences arise between the age groups both with regard to the German language skills they arrived with as well as their language development (Table 1). For the most part, refugees and other migrants who belonged to a higher age group had better knowledge of German upon arrival. However, younger refugees and other migrants experienced greater improvements in their German skills on average than did older groups. While refugees who arrived in Germany before age 16 increased their language skills from “none” to “good” between their arrival and 2013—that is, an increase of three possible answer categories—the language competence of most refugees aged 44 and over only in-

creased from “poor” to “sufficient”. This pattern is also found among other migrants, but the bivariate analysis suggests a slightly slower language development in each age group.

The results of the multivariate regression analysis, however, show that the differences between refugees and other migrants with regard to their language development over time are not statistically significant (Table 2, column 3), which indicates that a younger age at the time of immigration is beneficial for the language development of refugees and other migrants in a similar manner.

Table 2

Language acquisition among refugees and other migrants in GermanyMultivariate Analysis¹

| | Refugees ² | Interaction model ³ | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| | | Main model | Interaction |
| Group of migrants (reference: other) | | | |
| Refugees | – | 0.21 * | – |
| Duration of stay in Germany (reference: 10 to 19 years) | | | |
| 0 to 9 | –0.06 | –0.13 * | 0.07 |
| 20 and more | 0.03 | –0.01 | 0.04 |
| Age at immigration (reference: 44 years or older) | | | |
| Under 16 | 1.15 ** | 1.46 *** | –0.36 |
| 16 to 24 | 0.75 * | 0.80 *** | –0.08 |
| 24 to 44 | 0.27 | 0.59 *** | –0.38 |
| Highest educational qualification obtained abroad or later in the German educational system (reference: no / primary education abroad) | | | |
| Secondary education abroad | 0.23 | 0.17 * | 0.09 |
| Tertiary education abroad | 0.54 + | 0.33 ** | 0.28 |
| Participation in German educational system | 0.90 *** | 0.40 *** | 0.57 * |
| Attendance of language courses in Germany | –0.01 | 0.09 | –0.10 |
| Language used with family mainly German | –0.31 | 0.00 | –0.35 |
| Language used with friends mainly German | 0.16 | 0.12 | 0.04 |
| Language used at work mainly German (reference: no) | | | |
| Language used at work mainly German | 0.39 * | 0.27 ** | 0.14 |
| Not employed | 0.18 | –0.05 | 0.26 |
| Constant | 0.93 * | 0.62 ** | 0.58 ** |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.34 | 0.30 | 0.30 |
| Number of respondents (N) | 411 | 3,305 | |

Significance level: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

¹ OLS with robust standard errors. Dependent variable: language acquisition of refugees and other migrants. Additional control variables in all models: gender, migration background of partner in the household, presence of children below the age of 16 in the household, health restrictions, surroundings of residence (urban/rural), attendance of German classes abroad, region of country of origin, and illiteracy in relation to language of country of origin.

² The first model contains only refugees.

³ Interaction model containing all migrants. Here, each explanatory variable and the constant is interacted with a dummy variable indicating whether the migrant is a refugee or not. The main model therefore contains the results for all other migrants, and the interaction column gives the difference between refugees and other migrants.

Source: IAB-SOEP Migration Sample (2013) of SOEP.v31, weighted; estimations by DIW Berlin.

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Refugees with a background in higher education or participation in the German education system experienced more significant improvements in their language skills

According to current research, individuals who have achieved higher levels of education have an easier time acquiring a new language,⁹ and this can also be observed in the data used here.¹⁰ Refugees and other migrants with backgrounds in higher education usually arrive with better German skills (Table 1, columns 1 and 2). As

well, better-educated refugees also experienced larger improvements in their language development over time (Table 1, column 4).

For other migrants, the bivariate analysis indicates no statistically significant differences in the average language development patterns associated with their respective educational backgrounds (Table 1, column 5). But the results of the multivariate regression analysis, which takes other factors into account, indicate that a higher level of education goes hand in hand with stronger language development among other migrants (Table 2, column 2). In that respect, the highest level of education from abroad plays a critical role in the language development in the host country for both refugees and other migrants alike.¹¹

⁹ For studies on migrants, see Chiswick, B. R., Miller, P. W. (2001), loc. cit., or Dustmann, C., Fabbri, F. (2003): Language proficiency and labour market performance of immigrants in the UK, *The Economic Journal*, 113: 695–717. For a study on refugees, see: Hou, F., Beiser, M. (2006), loc. cit.

¹⁰ The survey solicited data on the highest level of education or training that each respondent had acquired abroad. All respondents who obtained or were in the process of obtaining educational or vocational qualifications in Germany are summarized in another category.

¹¹ Since we are unable to differentiate between formal education and actual skills based on the given data, we must assume that refugees with both higher cognitive skills as well as higher levels of education have an easier time learning German.

Previous studies have shown that refugees' participation in the host country's education system facilitates language development.¹² Correspondingly, the German language skills of the sample respondents who were studying or had already studied in Germany significantly improved. This pattern is observable in both the bivariate results (Table 1, columns 4 and 5) as well as in the broader multivariate regression analyses in comparison to individuals who had acquired a primary education (Table 2, columns 1 and 2) or—as demonstrated in an additional model calculation—a secondary education from abroad.

In this respect, obtaining an educational or vocational qualification and/or attending school in Germany was associated with a positive language development for both groups. This is especially true for refugees: if they participated in the German education system, their language skills improved more than did those of other migrants (Table 2, column 3).¹³

Overall, language skills experienced larger improvements among refugees and other immigrants who had acquired a higher education abroad. The same applies to individuals from both groups who were participating or had participated in the German education system.

Refugees' participation in German courses and language development

The language development of refugees and other migrants can also be influenced by support measures in the host country. Political and public discourse in Germany has centered on whether participation in language and integration courses helps promote successful integration.¹⁴ Using the IAB-SOEP migration sample, it was investigated to what extent past participation in a German language course was associated with refugees' language development. It is important to note, however, that it is impossible to differentiate which specific course the respondents participated in—that is, whether it was an integration course or a language course, how long it lasted, and what subjects it covered.¹⁵

The bivariate analysis shows that the refugees benefited only slightly from participation in a language or integration course: their skills improved somewhat more on average compared to refugees who hadn't participated in such a course. However, the results of both the bivariate (Table 1, column 4) and multivariate regression analysis (Table 2, column 1) indicate no statistically significant effects. The same is true for other migrants (Table 1, column 5 and Table 2, column 2). It must be noted that the lack of differentiation in the types of courses taken—that is, between integration courses and other offerings—as well as the content and the duration of the courses may have led to the statistical insignificance of these findings. It thus cannot be ruled out that participation in a German language course has a positive impact on refugees and other migrants—especially when the findings of other studies are taken into account.¹⁶

German usage at work associated with language development among refugees

Previous studies have shown that frequent German usage in diverse contexts plays an important role in language acquisition among refugees and other migrants.¹⁷ In this report, three social contexts—family, friends, and the workplace—are examined using the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample.¹⁸

The bivariate analysis indicates that refugees who spoke mostly German with family, friends, or at work were able to improve their German language skills more than those who did not (Table 1, column 4). This finding is most pronounced among refugees who spoke German at work, followed by those who spoke German with friends and lastly, those who spoke it with their families. These findings are observable among other migrants, but not to the same extent (Table 1, column 5). The multivariate regression analyses confirm that the predominant use of German at work is statistically significantly associated with

¹² Van Tubergen, F. (2010), loc. cit., Hou, F., Beiser, M. (2006), loc. cit., Dustmann, C., Fabbri, F. (2003), loc. cit.

¹³ If refugees who did not improve their German skills are excluded from the analysis (see Box 2), no further statistical significance can be detected. This may indicate that refugees who had acquired good German skills before arriving in Germany may have been more motivated to participate in the German education system after their immigration.

¹⁴ Robert Bosch Stiftung (Hrsg.) (2016) Chancen erkennen – Perspektiven schaffen – Integration ermöglichen. Report from the Robert Bosch Expert Commission to Consider a Realignment of Refugee Policy. Robert Bosch Foundation GmbH, Stuttgart, p. 113 et seqq.

¹⁵ In the past, only foreigners with a residence permit were entitled to participate in integration courses. Such courses comprise both language instruction as well as an orientation—for example, a discussion of the German legal system (see also the Integration Course Ordinance, IntV). It wasn't until October 2015

that asylum seekers and tolerated persons were allowed to participate (§ 44 IV Residence Act), though they are not entitled to admission to such a course. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees leads integration courses in cooperation with foreigners' registration offices, the Federal Administration Office, municipalities, migration services, and job seekers' assistance programs. There are also a number of other language courses on offer within different federal states and municipalities, in addition to those given by welfare organizations and volunteers.

¹⁶ Van Tubergen, F. (2010), loc. cit., Van Tubergen, F., Wierenga, M. (2011): The language acquisition of male immigrants in a multilingual destination: Turks and Moroccans in Belgium. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37(7), 1039–1057, Hou, F., Beiser, M. (2006), loc. cit. In recent studies, however, no statistically significant effects were observable.

¹⁷ Van Tubergen, F. (2010), loc. cit., Chiswick, B. R., Miller, P. W. (2001), loc. cit., Kristen, C., Mühlau, P., et al. (2016), loc. cit.

¹⁸ The survey took into account whether a respondent speaks mostly German with his or her family members, with friends, or at work. The other multivariate regression analyses factor in whether a respondent is employed, has children under 16, or has a partner (see footnote, Table 2).

positive language development among refugees and other migrants¹⁹—but when it comes to speaking German with family or friends, no statistically significant positive effect is observable (Table 2, columns 1 and 2).²⁰

Overall, the use of German was positively correlated with language development among refugees in Germany, and more frequent use of German—especially in the workplace—was associated with better knowledge of the language.

Conclusion

With the exception of highly educated or older refugees, the majority of the refugee respondents to the 2013 IAB-SOEP Migration Sample had no German language skills upon their arrival in Germany. This stood in contrast to non-refugee migrants, who reported better language skills upon arrival. Over time, however, the refugees' language skills improved to a larger extent than did those of other migrants, and by the time the survey was given—roughly 18 years after the mid-'90s influx—the refugees' German skills almost matched those of the non-refugee migrants. Younger refugees and those who had already obtained a higher education in their country of origin saw the biggest improvements in their German skills. As well, a longer duration of stay and a predominant usage of German at the workplace were positively associated with better language skills; these findings were also observed in the responses of other migrants. Note that the findings must be viewed in light of the fact that the survey has certain limitations—as previously discussed—and cannot encompass every detail, such as possible self-selection among particularly motivated refugees or the fact that some of them had to learn German for professional reasons.

19 Refugees may, however, obtain employment under certain circumstances. This is usually dependent on their residence permit (§4 para. 3 of the Residence Act), while asylum applicants without a permit are only allowed to obtain employment in exceptional cases (§61 of the Asylum Act). In the past, refugees' access to the German labor market was more restrictively regulated. See in this issue: Salikutluk, Z., Giesecke, J., et al. (2016): Refugees entered the labor market later than other migrants. Therefore, the refugees who were legally working in Germany may have been an especially positively selected group, and this may lead to distortions in the present results.

20 It must be kept in mind that in order for migrants and refugees to have the opportunity to use German with their friends and family, these social contacts must also speak the language. If only the individuals who indicated improvements in their language skills are taken into account, there exists a statistically significantly positive correlation between the use of German with friends and family and language development.

The findings related to the language skills and acquisition of Germany's refugee population help to identify the areas with the most potential for developing political measures related to integration, education, and labor market policy. Firstly, participating in the German education system is positively correlated with refugees' language development, and thus access to schools and vocational training should be provided as soon as possible after the refugees' arrival in Germany.

Secondly, the actual use of German while in Germany makes a difference—especially when it is spoken at the workplace. Since the legal requirements for access to the labor market are dependent on special regulations or the refugees' respective residence permits, such processes could be expedited to facilitate a correspondingly swift entry.

Thirdly, even though the results from the present study did not indicate any statistically significant effects of German language courses on refugees' language development, studies from other countries have shown a positive effect.²¹ Refugees themselves,²² as well as the job placement officers who supervise and advise them,²³ emphasize the importance of such language courses. Insofar, the limitations of this study should be taken into consideration, since these data do not provide information about what kinds of German courses the respondents had taken. The extent to which participation in integration and other language courses promotes language development, and whether certain kinds of such courses are especially helpful, can be analyzed in the future using the IAB-BAMF-SOEP refugee survey conducted by the Institute for Employment Research (Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung), the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge), and the German Socio-Economic Panel Sozio-ökonomisches Panel.²⁴

21 Van Tubergen, F. (2010), loc. cit., Chiswick, B. R., Miller, P. W. (2001), loc. cit.

22 Brücker, H., Fendel, T., et al. (2016), loc. cit.

23 Daumann, V., Dietz, M., et al. (2015): Early Intervention – Modellprojekt zur frühzeitigen Arbeitsmarktintegration von Asylbewerberinnen und Asylbewerber. Results of accompanying qualitative research. IAB research report, 3/2015, Nürnberg: 13.

24 The IAB-BAMF-SOEP refugee sample was drawn from the central registry of foreigners, and covers refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2015 and have already filed for asylum. The sample comprises roughly 2,000 adult refugees who are being surveyed for the first time in 2016.



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