# Migration and Cultural Diversity as a Challenge for Educational Systems in European Countries

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## Abstract

A closer look at the current situation reveals that there will be some social-structural change in the societies of central Europe, due to the reversed age pyramid, the declining number of students, a growing population of children with immigrant backgrounds, as well as an increased share of children from socially underprivileged classes. Heterogeneity and cultural diversity are becoming more and more important challenges for the educational systems in European societies. Higher rates of migration and more and more multi-cultural societies meet broader spectra of required competencies of young people. I.e. the question of second language acquisition is an often reported problem in different educational settings, but it is only one of the challenges. The situation demands particular attention, otherwise educational decline ('Bildungsabstieg') may be the result, and all gains in education which have been achieved so far are endangered.

**Migration and Cultural Diversity as a Challenge for Educational Systems in European Countries**

In our contribution we are going to line out future trends which might be relevant for European educational systems as well as for educational science. In this context, I will ask which aspects should be emphasized under the currently predominant problem of the increasing heterogeneity of the European population. What are the social-structural consequences or the general consequences for the field of education? On this, we must at first note:

**Educational research** is a discipline which becomes increasingly more significant, as it is indispensible for securing a high-quality system of education and vocational training. Education and vocational training are essential for a society´s wealth and social cohesion, as has long been known in the European Union. In this context, the way in which European systems of education and vocational training are organized plays a key role.

### Trends

A closer look at the current situation reveals that there will be some social-structural change in the societies of central Europe, due to

- the reversed age pyramid,

- the declining number of students,

- a growing population of children with immigrant backgrounds,

- as well as an increased share of children from socially underprivileged classes.
  **Thus, on the one hand we must assume a reduced number of young people, on the other hand a population structure which demands particular attention. Educational decline ('Bildungsabstieg')** may be the result, and all gains in education which have been achieved so far are endangered.

For the German society, but also for other European countries, a trend towards **"knowledge society"** can be shown. This trend suggests **opening up** all available **educational reserves** of society, in order of gathering more potential in the field of high-quality education and reducing the risk of increasing `educational poverty´('Bildungsarmut').

In all societies, the field of education is immediately related to the labour market as well as to labour market policy, but it is also connected to a society´s welfare system or welfare policy. If the share of those members of society as being characterized by **educational poverty** or poor training is too high in relation to the overall population, for any developed society this will result in a loss of economic growth, of the society´s wealth, of **social cohesion**. At the level of individuals, not only the latter´s chances for adequate jobs and sufficient income are reduced, but also their chances for social and cultural participation in society. This means that the social-structural consequences of missing educational opportunities result in a considerable threat to any society.

As a consequence, it should be a top priority issue for all modern European societies to focus their **research** on working against the social-structural causes for missing educational opportunities, on analyzing this development as far as the field of education is concerned, on identifying specific **risk groups ('children at risk')**, and on defining **addressee-specific support measures.**

## The current situation

Many European Countries have had *rising numbers of migrants through the last decades*. This has resulted in a high share of migrants into European societies. Big European cities are becoming increasingly divers. In many cities over the coming ten to fifteen years the population will reach an ethnic tipping point: The majority of the population will be of immigrant descent. This is already increasingly visible in primary and secondary schools. Many children of immigrants are now reaching higher education.

At the same time **migration becomes increasingly diversified**, with implications for the heterogeneity and variety of cultures and ways of life.

The educational systems of the European Countries had to face the challenge to integrate big numbers of children from immigrants, children with a different cultural heritage as the dominant population and, children which had to learn a second language and, who had to succeed in a much more complex socialisation process than other children because they had the burden to

be successful not only with the school curriculum, but with many additional tasks and acculturation steps on their way through the school system.

## Explanations – empirical results

As it is well known in Germany as in other European countries, we find a number of reasons for the ***non-integration*** of these groups of children, and *several explanations* are offered in the context of the subject-related discourse. One explanation results from the socio-economic situation of their families. **In general, it is parents' low educational and occupational status (SES) that significantly hinders children's outcomes, regardless of immigrant status.** The fact that many immigrant families suffer from a **lack of resources** is seen as an essential cause for a lower degree of educational participation of children and youths from certain migrant groups. Knowledge of the host language enables an immigrant student to follow the school curriculum. Unfortunately, many immigrant families do not possess sufficient language skills to help children in their language acquisition and with their homework. Thus, **at the end of their time at school** a part of the young people with a migration background suffer from **fundamental educational and qualification deficits** resulting from unequal starting conditions which obviously cannot be made up for in the course of their educational biographies. The most vulnerable are first-generation students and those who arrive in the later stages (i.e. as teenagers) of compulsory education. The second generation has an advantage[1i].

The current results of the longitudinal empirical study **SOKKE (financed by the German Research Foundation, DFG )** on German primary schools clearly show the unequal achievement of migrant children from the beginning on[2]. In the first grade we have big differences between migrant and non-migrant children. Disparities do not change during the time from first grade to fourth grade. Several areas of competences as reading and

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[1] *Recent results produce very mixed findings across the countries of Europe and there remains large variation across countries and across ethnic groups.*

[2] *The empirical research project SOKKE (DFG) is a longitudinal study conducted by L. Herwartz–Emden in the south German primary school system. 435 students from 23 primary school classes took part in the study. We researched four years from first grade to fourth grade. The composition of the classes shows an important amount of migrant children, 57% of all children with a so called migration back ground ('Migrationshintergrund') and a gender composition of 50% girls, 50% boys.*

mathematics were researched by SOKKE and the ratings in the subjects did not change: in the first grade we find the same differences between the two groups as in the fourth grade at the end of the (south German) primary school – which is the transition phase to secondary education. Differences will be growing from the beginning on in secondary school and later on during secondary education – a direct or indirect result of the starting differences. The German PISA - Authors Baumert, Trautwein und Artelt (2003) characterize the German secondary school system as differential contexts ('differenzielle Lernmilieus'), as learning milieus with continouisly growing disparities between the groups, including disparities which are mainly based in the migrant factor.

We may suppose that sufficient **language skills** of children and youths are an important precondition for success at school. The complex language situation particularly in the school system is definitely even more challenging for the various groups of migrants. Several empirical studies come to the result that achievements in the second language learning of the host country's language are a central factor which cause the migration based deficits and the disparities between the groups. We were able to show in our own study that language proficiency in the host country's language *is* the central factor in the explanation of migration based disparities from the first to the fourth grade. According to the language skills in the first grade we find growing or not growing achievements. The language expertise in the first grade has a big portion in explaining competences in the fourth grade.

However: There are certainly additional factors contributing to poor immigrant performance. As it was proven for the German educational system, we may suppose that there are **institutional mechanisms** resulting in discrimination and exclusion and being an obstacle for successful educational careers ('institutionelle Diskriminierung', Radtke and Gomolla 2002). Discrimination and exclusion from educational careers against migrant youths are problems in all European countries, which is announced in the international debate on educational participation in general and on performance at school in particular.

### Risk groups – a comparative perspective

Wether in respect of nationality and cultural origin nor in respect of vocational qualification, of social rooting and social positions it is possible to describe migrants in Germany as a

homogeneous group. If compared to the native population and to other migrant groups, that group of migrants being biggest in numbers, is those of turkish origin. It shows on average a lower level of qualification, and accordingly they are often employed in sectors with low demands on qualification. Regarding qualification and professional status, similar statements could be made for the group of migrants from other heritage.

At German schools, we have children living in poverty or being threatened by poverty increasingly – they count as risk groups. However: poverty is a risk on the way to succeed in the educational system. The risk to fall through the system is based on multiple risks. Multiple risks are determinants of the socialisation context of poor children or young people. **Immigration is not a general risk** it becomes a risk in combination with a weak social position of parents or a low educational training of parents. Risk groups at German schools in that sense, for example, are migrant children from a variety of groups of origin, but particularly children of Turkish origin. In a comparative perspective throughout Europe, compared to Germany, we find a similar immigrant situation in the Netherlands. Yet in contrast to Germany, the educational system of the Netherlands has had the potential to build up an elite group out of the Turkish immigrants, and it was possible to integrate them into academic careers – (see Crul 2012). Based on Cruls survey among the second generation in eight countries it becomes apparent that there are different pathways to higher education. The second generation faces on their route to higher education challenges that are different in the countries and depend on typical national characteristics of the school system and the interaction of the system with family resources. **As a result, we need to become aware of the typical challenges in each country to develop successful education programs**. Germany has established a segregated group on the bottom of the young population. On the other hand, Germany has a strong vocational system and has integrated an amount of the Turkish group into the labour market by the way through the vocational system (similar to Austria).

### Consequences for the educational field

A similar phenomenon in Germany as well as in other European countries is that the immigration of young migrants works most of all against the **over aging** of societies. Driving on the integration of migrants, supporting their participation in society, **securing their equality of**

**opportunity** and thus also maintaining social cohesion is considered a necessity in the public discourse of European societies.

This means that still one of the biggest challenges for educational systems - for many European educational systems (including the German one) – is providing **better conditions for the integration of children and youths with a migration background** at the various levels of the educational system, and this must happen now and in the future. This requires structural reforms and purposeful empirical **educational research in at least seven general points:**

1. Communicating cultural competence,

2. Dealing with heterogeneity in the context of teaching,

3. Reducing migration-related educational disadvantages,

4. Parent education and intercultural parent programs,

5. Reducing prejudices and stereotypes,

6. Fostering of language acquisition/dealing with bi- and multilinguality,

7. Creating new educational spaces of integration.

### Interventions and measures

A change of the educational system is necessary, and given the demographic change it is even more important, as it has been sketched above. For school this means that heterogeneity must clearly be taken more into consideration and that **particularly migrant risk groups** (in Germany this concerns migrants with a Turkish background, which prove to be the most disadvantaged groups at almost all levels of school education) **must be explicitly supported**.

Related to education policy (just like for Germany and other European countries facing similar problems), this leads to the conclusion that the **integration problem must become a focus of attention** and efforts. For the practice of education-political goals this means that support measures must be developed which are much more ready made for individual groups, and that individual phases of education, such as that of early childhood, must be viewed at more systematically.

*Four essential fields* must be tackled predominantly, as for them there is a clear need for research:

1. **Interventions during early childhood**

- Interventions must start at early childhood, as the discrimination of migrants starts already before and when they are included into the educational system. **As already mentioned on the basis of our own study migrants start their school career on average with an important deficit in basics and competencies and on a lower level of achievements than non-migrants**. Due to this fact an early start of promoting seems reasonable. Starting early – in the pre school age - with accompanying and supporting measures is a field which needs much more support by educational politics and should be one of the favorite researched questions in migration research. Children should have the opportunity to be taken care at day nurseries. For practical work this means: preparing and organizing **early childhood education** with a view at the transition to primary school.

- Precondition: **qualified elementary pedagogics** or primary school pedagogics.

2. **Supporting the acquisition of the education/national language ('Bildungssprache', Gogolin 2012)**

   - Developing appropriate and supporting measures in learning the second language, both in the elementary field and in all other fields of the educational system.
   - For school, this means: all-day school (in the federal system or Germany not all schools are all-day schools, but some countries start with 'Ganztagsschulen').
   - As far as teaching is concerned, this means: providing additional time for learning also within ordinary school settings. This means also qualified language support in all subjects at school.

3. **Institutional mechanisms – development diagnostics and educational standards/performance evaluation**

- Providing for **increased permeability** between individual educational phases.

- Furthermore, for so called risk groups this means: Providing for as well as scientific accompaniment of purposeful and **high-quality development diagnostics** in the field of schooling; this should happen in the entire educational field.

- Competent diagnostic accompaniment of the various levels children go through in the course of their education, particularly of **transition phases.**

- Critical reflection on current trends regarding educational standards, performance measurement and rating: educational standards and their one-sided orientation at cognitive performance must be reconsidered, and the heterogeneity of students must be taken into consideration by way of addressee-specific performance measurement.

- Furthermore, this means: **working against** a one-sided **over-cognitivization of educational goals and contents**. Regarding non-cognitive skills one should work towards making their function and their significance for learning and performance more a focus of the educational debate. There should also be efforts to make this a clearly more present topic of research (see Brunello and Schlotter 2011).

**4. Teacher training**

- Heterogeneity and cultural diversity change the practice of teaching. Teacher training needs changes for more effective practices.

- It is a serious deficiency (in the German school system as well as in other countries systems) that students' multilingualism and their experiences are not used. This can affect the students' language development, their self-esteem and their personal development in a negative manner. Basic questions are: What kind of influence does a multilingual background of students have on learning processes? In what way should linguistic heterogeneity in classes dealt with? Which kind of teaching approach is required?

- **Issues of heterogeneity and cultural diversity should be part of teacher training in all subjects, also in education related to scientific subjects.**

- Regarding both **teacher training** and **the training of prep-school educators**, this requires increased skills of dealing with multilinguality and supporting the language

of education/instruction. This must be done by teachers with intercultural competencies, by **supporting diagnostic skills, dealing with intercultural didactics etc.** Intercultural pedagogy is a field within pedagogy that can contribute with knowledge about learning processes that is crucial for teachers in today's schools. Intercultural pedagogy will support teachers approach and how they can take advantage of students' multilingualism and students' experiences in the classrooms.

- **Dealing with heterogeneity should become one of the focal issues of current didactic research.**

## Prospects for educational research

For education-scientific research or educational science this means that in all mentioned fields there must be much more **empirical research**. Essential in this context is **basic research**, but also **evaluations**, in order of the long-term accompaniment of support measures and purposeful interventions at school, thus also guaranteeing a scientifically secured transfer of scientific insights to schools.

For this purpose, educational research should be supported at the level of scientific institutions and most of all at university. Research centres, departments and institutes should deal with this topic by way of **empirical research**. In this context, **empirical research on teacher training** is one of the fields the support of which should have top priority. Apart from quantitative educational research, also excellent qualitative educational research should be supported, which takes a look at the aforementioned fields on the basis of selected paedagogical contexts and provides transferable and connectable results for education policy, also e. g. case studies and qualitative evaluations on the aforementioned fields.

## Scientific guiding idea

However, regarding Germany as well as other countries this does not mean research merely from a deficit perspective, but it means also researching the specific potentials coming along with cultural and ethnic plurality. In this context it is desirable that scientific concepts determining social-scientific thought in Europe as well as social-scientific and psychological

research, such as the universal idea of identity or individuality, will be reconsidered. **Knowledge stocks and scientific approaches are still clearly mono-cultural** and should be critically questioned for their one-sidedness. Scientific thought should become increasingly "**migratory**" and less territorial. Furthermore, cultural differences must not be considered to be absolute but to be a changeable potential. As **scientific guiding principles** these basic ideas should be included into educational ideas as well as into education-political and everyday educational thought.

Everyday educational thought and educational practices should be guided by the central knowledge stocks of 'Intercultural Pedagogics'. The general aim of intercultural pedagogy and intercultural learning has to do with education, teaching and learning through intercultural aspects (eg. ethnicity, gender, class). It is a rather new and undeveloped area of pedagogy and didactics. Intercultural pedagogy is a field within pedagogy that can contribute with knowledge about learning processes that is crucial for teachers in today's multicultural classrooms. Suggestions of intercultural pedagogics which can be offered are of how teachers can take advantage of students' multilingualism and students' experiences in the classrooms.

Both locally and at school this means: intercultural and gender-oriented pedagogics[3], frequent language education, addressee-specific measures and support mechanisms, taking heterogeneity into account for all educational and development phases of children and youths. Educational-scientific research should much more clearly be oriented towards all these essential points.

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[3] Intercultural pedagogics has a strong link to gender-oriented pedagogics which means that differences by gender are overlapped by cultural and social differences and can only be taken into consideration properly by professional sensibility towards these questions. The general aim of intercultural pedagogy and intercultural learning has to do with education, teaching and learning through intercultural aspects (eg. ethnicity, gender, class). Intercultural *and* gender oriented pedagogics is a rather new and undeveloped area of pedagogy and didactics (Herwartz-Emden et al. 2010).

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