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# Integrating into German Society through Politics and History

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The Effects of the  
Orientation Course to  
Refugees in  
Brandenburg, Germany

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Wilfred Dominic Josue

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The Effects of the Orientation Course (*Orientierungskurs*) to Refugees in Brandenburg, Germany

Wilfred Dominic Josue<sup>1</sup>

Abstract:

Germany received the most number of refugees from 2015 until 2017 but even after the “refugee crisis” the topic of migration and integration are still very much dominating day-to-day conversations in the country. Learning the German language and having a job is the ideal way to integrate. But is this enough for Refugees to best integrate into German society? Included in the Integration courses (German language courses with or without Alphabetization courses), the Orientation courses are strictly sanctioned by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). The Orientation course is a month-long civic education course focusing on German History, Politics, and Society. By using the perspective of “political integration through civic education”, this paper analyzed the effects of such orientation courses specifically in two groups of Refugees which took the same Orientation course in Rathenow and Falkensee in the district of Havelland which is in the State of Brandenburg. Although the two groups took the same course, the effects varied. The group in Falkensee had a better understanding of German Politics and History manifested by their active engagement in the community and high scores in the Test compared to the group in Rathenow. This study hopes to add to the academic discourses and debates on how best refugees can integrate into Germany society.

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## Introduction

*“Understanding and being understood – it’s what makes a country feel like home.”  
– Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier / Federal President of Germany*

The year 2015 is over but the issues from it are still far from forgotten as they are issues being actively discussed in the European Union and in Germany. The world remembers this year as the year when millions of refugees from conflict-ridden countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia walked miles, traversed the desert and / or crossed the Mediterranean Sea just to be in a safer place free from military conflicts or persecution. Some of them never reached their destinations but still others were able to step foot in Europe and seek refuge in the continent. As Europe saw the waves of people coming in, only then did it scramble to find a solution to the looming challenge. The EU signed an agreement with Turkey to help the country prevent human smuggling and illegal immigration. But still many refugees were able to circumvent sea patrols and reach Europe. Thus some EU countries responded by closing their borders. But there were also some who opened their doors and welcomed the refugees. Germany for its part welcomed a total of 1.5 Million refugees<sup>3</sup>. Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel and her government assured the public with the “*Wir schaffen das*” or “we-will-manage-it” mantra that Germany can manage the enormous task of providing refuge to those who came to the country and ensuring their integration into German society (Luft, 2017).

Germany had the option of letting refugees in or keeping them outside its borders but it appears that one factor determined the decision of allowing refugees to come to the country. The current demographics<sup>4</sup> of Germany show more Germans retiring and fewer Germans being born yearly. If this trend persists and no drastic measure will be put into place, there will be a deficit in the pension system. Young and able immigrants could help stabilize the system because when they work, they will automatically contribute to the insurance system which will ensure sustainability. And so young adults and adults mostly men came to Germany reaching the peak of Asylum applications to more than 700,000 by the year 2016<sup>5</sup>.

But before the refugees could work they will need to learn the language as it is a challenge surviving in a country with little or no knowledge of its language. Thus the German Integration Law of 2016 mandates early intervention by focusing on language learning for later employment.

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<sup>2</sup> Quote from a speech delivered to commemorate the day of German Unity on 03 October 2017 in Mainz, State of Rheinland Palatinate.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Table 1: Application for asylums filed and the corresponding decisions from 2012 and October 2017

<sup>4</sup> Refer to Table 2: Age Structure of people with and without Migration background in Germany 2016

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Table 1: Application for asylums filed and the corresponding decisions from 2012 and October 2017

Through the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge – BAMF*), the German government offers qualified foreigners courses which will help them integrate.

One such course is the Integration course (*Integrationskurs*). This course aims to help participants, young adults and adults who are and should be finished with basic schooling, to integrate faster into society through German language and civic education. Included in this course are the Literacy course (Reading and Writing) lasting to almost three months, Basic German language course from the level A1 to B1<sup>6</sup> which normally runs for about six months and after taking the Basic German language course the participants will take a German Language Test called “*Deutsch Test für Zuwanderer (DTZ)*” or German Test for Immigrants to assess their German Proficiency in listening, reading, writing and speaking. It is expected that they achieve the B1 Level and if not they have to take the test again. The courses and test are for free but on the fourth repetition of the Test the participants have to pay for their own (BAMF, 2015).

Afterwards the participants will take an Orientation Course (*Orientierungskurs*) where they will learn more about German politics, history and society. This course is conducted in German, has 100 Units (1 Unit = 45 Minutes) and it takes about a month or less to be completed depending on the duration on how it is being conducted. Once the Orientation course is done, the participants will have to take another Test called “*Test Leben in Deutschland – LiD*” or Life in Germany. 30 Questions about Germany and 3 Questions about the Federal State of the Participant will be selected from the more than 300 Questions about Germany and the Federal State where the participant is currently residing for the 60-Minute multiple-choice type of test assessing if the participant absorbed the contents of the course. It is expected that the participant will correctly answer 15 out of the 33 Questions so that he/she could pass. However, 17 correct answers are necessary for the participant to be qualified for German citizenship in the future.

Once the participant receives the level B1 from the Language Test and successfully answers 15 or 17 Questions from the Multiple-Choice Test, the participant will receive an Integration Certificate. With the knowledge of the German language and proper orientation in the country, participants should be able to integrate better in the country thus allowing them to find better working conditions. Later on they could use the Integration Certificate as a proof of integration if they want to apply for German citizenship<sup>7</sup> after six years.

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for Languages

<sup>7</sup> Naturalization requirements include a) an unrestricted right of residence at the time of being naturalized, b) adequate German-language skills and passing the naturalization test (Integration Certificate), c) residence in Germany for six years, d) a job or independent means of securing a living (including the family

This paper would like to focus on the Orientation Course, its history, objectives and how does it affect the integration of its participants, mostly the refugees. As the Orientation Course include topics on Politics and History, it is in effect a course on civic education and considering that the Orientation Course is the primary and perhaps only source of civic education which the participants will take which could help them achieve political integration in the country, is getting 17 correct answers enough to achieve “political integration” already?

In this academic endeavor I will be using two groups of participants from two towns in a rural district in the State of Brandenburg, Germany to answer the question: **Basing the data from two groups from a rural district in Brandenburg, is the Orientation Course in its current form enough so that refugees can attain political integration into German society?** Or could the Orientation Course just aid the minimum political participation of the participants in the democratic processes in Germany? If this is the case, should the Orientation Course be conducted as it is or is it time to improve or enhance it? Are there other factors other than the Orientation Course which could lead to the political integration of the participants? If so what are they and in what form should they be institutionalized?

This paper will present a comparative study of the two groups I previously taught in the district of Havelland. The first group came from the district center Rathenow and the second group came from Falkensee. Both groups took the Orientation course and Life in Germany test in different months. I will also describe their similarities and/or differences during and after taking the Orientation Course. And taking the cases of the two groups, I will argue that the Orientation Course alone is not enough for refugees to be politically integrated especially in the rural areas of Germany. In this paper I would also like to offer some recommendations on how to enhance the potentials of the Orientation Course and how best political integration of the refugees through civic education could be achieved especially in the rural areas. Because of its intriguing evolving nature and the importance of integration through language and civic education in Germany now, there is a need to contribute to the humble number of studies on this topic. And this topic is particularly relevant and essential not only for Germany but as well as for other countries accommodating refugees, especially in the European Union, because it tackles how best to enhance the integration of refugees in the political processes in the country through civic education.

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members entitled to maintenance) without resorting to welfare payments and unemployment benefit II, e) no convictions on account of a criminal offence, f) commitment to the free democratic constitutional order of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany and g) surrendering the former nationality (exceptions apply depending on the country of origin) Source: Citizenship Law of 13 November 2014

Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the President of Federal Republic of Germany, rightfully expressed it in his address to commemorate the day of German Unity for the year 2017, that “understanding and being understood” are indeed two important factors which make the country feel like home for the refugees. The Orientation course aids in this process because with enough knowledge, refugees could better understand Germany, make themselves more understandable to society and eventually allow them to appreciate the idea that Germany is their home as well. This sense of belonging will then enable them to contribute more to the development of the country because if the country succeeds, they too will.

## Historical Background and Literature Review

Before addressing the issue of whether or not the Orientation Course in its current form is enough so that refugees can attain political integration into German society, it is best to discover first few other important points such as the history of the Orientation Course, prior academic studies conducted to investigate this course, prior studies on the political opinion and participation of foreigners in Germany and the role of civic education in the political integration of foreigners specifically the refugees in this case.

To trace back the origins of the Orientation Course we need to go back to the year 2002. The Social Democrats and their junior Partner, the Green Party, got enough votes so that they could retain their majority in the Federal Parliament (*Bundestag*) and advance the policies which they were not able to accomplish during their first term. Gerhard Schroeder from the Social Democrats (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands - SPD*) remained as the Federal Chancellor and Joschka Fischer from the Greens (*Bündnis 90 – Die Grünen*) stayed as Vice Chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs. This alliance was dubbed Red-Green or “*Rot-Grün*” because of the colors of the parties in the coalition; Red for the Social Democratic Party of Germany and Green for the Alliance 90 / The Greens Party. The Red-Green alliance is the first coalition in the reunified Germany which recognized the importance of an integration policy in Germany. For so long the policies of past coalition governments emphasized on the German national identity and how to protect it. (Kaden, 2012). In their second coalition agreement<sup>8</sup> (pages 64-65) both parties aimed to prevent the mistakes done during the “Guest-worker” period from 1950s to the early

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<sup>8</sup> Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands und Bündnis 90/Die Grünen. (16 Oktober 2002). *Koalitionsvertrag 2002 – 2006: Erneuerung-Gerechtigkeit-Nachhaltigkeit. Für ein wirtschaftlich starkes, soziales und ökologisches Deutschland. Für eine lebendige Demokratie.*

70s. During this time as its economy boomed, Germany invited guest workers to work in the country thinking that after some years these workers will go back to their own countries. Germany neglected the possibility that the workers and their families will one day stay and won't go back to their countries anymore and it didn't help that nationalistic sentiment were strong during this period as well. The inevitable happened and the guest workers became permanent residents. Because any formal integration policy was not available at the moment, most if not all of the guest workers and their families could not or barely speak the language, stayed within their own communities and this created parallel communities in the country. Thus an Integration policy was imperative. (Herbert, 2001)

After two years in their second term, the government was able to deliver on its plan and they were able to pass the Immigration Law of 2004 (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*). This law provides for the Integration course for authorized foreigners legally residing in the country with the goal of disseminating to them the language, legal system, culture and history of Germany. Simultaneous with the new law coming into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2005, the former Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees (*Bundesamt für die Anerkennung ausländischer Flüchtlinge – BAFL*) became the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge – BAMF*) which is still known in Germany with the same name until today. Previously the task of this federal office was just to administer the central foreigner's registration and the promotion of their return to their home countries but with the new Immigration law, BAMF was given the additional task to promote and manage the Language and Orientation Courses as well. But even before accepting this important task, BAMF already drafted the Integration Course Regulations (*Integrationskursverordnung*) on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2004 which stipulates that the Integration Course will have 600 Units of Language Courses and 30 Units of Orientation Course (1 Unit = 45 Minutes).

By 2007 as the Immigration Law was enhanced by the law on the implementation of the residence and asylum guidelines of the European Union, BAMF also increased the units for the Orientation Course from 30 to 45. Consequently, the publishers of the authorized books to be used for the Orientation Course also adjusted their text books alongside the changes mandated by BAMF. Three year later the first academic study on the Orientation Course was published. Dr. Dorothea Hartkopf published her book entitled "*Der Orientierungskurs als neues Handlungsfeld des Faches Deutsch als Fremdsprache*"<sup>9</sup> in 2010. In her analysis of the Orientation Course she argued that teaching German and the Orientation course is not the same as the Orientation Course is a

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<sup>9</sup> The Orientation Course as the new area of activity of the German as a Foreign Language Subject – English title translated from the German original



course on civic education. Teachers who were teaching the German language course previously were not ready to teach the Orientation Course for the simple reason that the course demands more competencies on politics and history which the teachers didn't have because they studied German as a foreign or second language and not Political Science or History. She recommended that Integration Teachers be offered further training in order for the Teachers to be more competent in teaching the Orientation Course and the quality of the Orientation Course will not be compromised.

Two year later another study was published but this time the focus was not only on the Orientation Course but also on the Citizenship Test (*Einbürgerungstest*) comprising of 250 Questions during this time. Marco Kaden argues in his book "*Der Orientierungskurs des BAMF: Eingliederungshilfe oder Gesinnungsprüfung*"<sup>10</sup> (2012) that even if the Course and the Test were expected to help Immigrants orient themselves better in Germany, it appears that both were not of a big help in reality because by investigating the conception of the course, it could be realized that the course and test were one-sided giving more priority to the conservation of the German state rather than including the needs of the foreigners. He recommended that the Course and Test should not only exist with symbolic function but should work as a true catalyst to integrate foreigners living in the country.

In the same year Stephanie Müssig and Susanne Worbs from the research arm of BAMF published their study "*Politische Einstellungen und politische Partizipationen von Migranten in Deutschland*"<sup>11</sup> (2012). In this publication they argued that the duration of stay and political rights, especially the lack of voting rights, affect the political participation of foreigners in Germany. Both researchers studied the political views and participation of Migrants living in Germany from 2002 to 2008. Müssig and Worbs (2012) explained that the political dispositions needed to participate in Politics were minimal especially among the first generation of Migrants in Germany because the interest to participate is low and the interest is low because Migrants<sup>12</sup> from the first generation were excluded from voting. For the authors political participation is a process and needs time just like Integration and the orientation phase to the political system of Germany is the essential first step so that Migrants could better find their way involving themselves in politics.

Prof. Sabine Achour believes that civic education for Migrants is an essential part of this Orientation phase and she wrote one of the definitive scholarly works in Germany on the role of

<sup>10</sup> *The Orientation Course of BAMF: Integration Support or a Test of Conviction? – English title translated from the German original*

<sup>11</sup> *Political views and political participation of Migrants in Germany – English title translated from the German original*

<sup>12</sup> *with the exception of citizens from the European Union who are eligible to vote since 1994 in the local elections and elections for the European Parliament*

civic education in the midst of Migration, Integration and Islam. In her book *“Bürger muslimischen Glaubens – Politische Bildung im Kontext von Migration, Integration und Islam”*<sup>13</sup>(2013) she argues that the central goal of civic education, especially in schools, is the political integration of future citizens. To reach this goal civic education must motivate the political nature of everyone with or without a migration background (Achour, 2013). Thus the role of competency and professionalism of local and international teachers are key in this endeavor. But what does political integration mean? She derived her definition of political integration from the Social Integration Dimensions by the Social Scientist Hartmut Esser. For Prof. Achour there are four key Dimension of political integration;

1. Cultural Integration manifested by the competencies in language, skills and knowledge
2. Structural Integration or the ability to independently position oneself in the society through rights, jobs and proper residency
3. Social Integration reflected through community and societal interaction
4. Integration by Identity substantiated by subscribing to the values of the country, claiming the citizenship of the host country and through active and engaged citizenry (Esser, 2001; Achour 2013).

For foreigners who are finished with schooling but are new to the country the Orientation Course is the primary source of their civic education and 45 Units to learn about the German legal system, culture and history is just too short. Thus as the changes were made to the Immigration Law to allow for family members of legal foreigners to work in the country, the units for the Integration Course were also increased. By 2013 a participant of the German Language Course could avail of an additional Literacy Course<sup>14</sup> comprising of 300 Units, and an additional Review Course of the basic German Language Lessons which could also be a preparation for the Language Test comprising of 300 Units as well.

By 2013 as well the test after the Orientation Course previously called Citizenship Test was renamed *“Test Leben in Deutschland”* or Life in Germany Test. The Orientation Course also benefitted from these changes as the units were increased from 45 to 60. With this change came the next adjustment made by the text book companies so that their text books will be suitable to the new 60 Unit Orientation Course.

<sup>13</sup> Citizens of Muslim belief – Civic Education in the context of Migration, Integration and Islam

<sup>14</sup> A Course on how to read and write.

Another study about the Orientation Course was published on 2016. In her book *“Typen des Widerstandes im Kontext Deutsch als Fremdsprache: Kulturelle Orientierung von Teilnehmenden an Integrationskurse”*<sup>15</sup> (2016) Dr. Rebecca Zabel used the perspective of cultural studies to argue that according to the empirical data she gathered, there is a need to enhance the curriculum of the Orientation Course as there is contradiction between the “assimilating” nature of the goals and content of the course and the “participatory” Learner and Activity-centered approach in its supposed implementation. Such discrepancy was also evident in the education materials and course interactions. (Zabel, 2016).

By 2015 the total numbers of migrants, mostly asylum seekers, increased dramatically to almost 1.1 Million and Germany needed to be proactive to ensure their proper integration into German society. Dr. Sabine Pokorny entitled *“Was uns prägt. Was uns eint. Integration und Wahlverhalten von deutschen mit und ohne Migrationshintergrund und in Deutschland lebenden Ausländern”*<sup>16</sup> was published by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a political foundation closely associated with the current ruling party of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands - CDU*), to assess the integration and voting attitudes of Migrants thereby assessing their political integration in the process as well. Dr. Pokorny agrees with the study conducted by Müssig and Worbs (2012) that Immigrants in Germany needs time in order for them to better orient themselves in the political landscape of the country. But unlike Müssig and Worbs however, she recommends that civic education and preventive works be strengthened. She further argues that Germany needs an Integration Law to accelerate cultural and structural Integration of migrants in the country because Integration “takes a while.” (Pokorny, 2012).

The Federal Government (*Bundesregierung*) comprising the coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU / CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) under the leadership of Dr. Angela Merkel then proposed an Integration bill and on the same year the bill passed the Federal Parliament (*Bundestag*) and the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*) and it became the Integration Law of 2016.

<sup>15</sup> *Types of resistance in the context of the subject German as a foreign language: Cultural orientation of participants of Integration courses. – English translation from the German original*

<sup>16</sup> *What characterizes us. What unites us. Integration and election attitudes of German with and without Migration background and foreigners living in Germany – English title translated from the original*

This law allowed for the early access to German language courses and with the new law came the new Regulation for the Integration Courses (*Integrationskursverordnung*). A new curriculum<sup>17</sup> for the Orientation Course was also released by BAMF on April 2017 and it laid out the goals<sup>18</sup> of the course;

1. Trigger the understanding of the German Political System
2. Develop the positive assessment of the German State
3. Convey the knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of residents and citizens
4. Develop the ability to orient oneself better (Methodical Expertise)
5. **Enable the participation into society (Individual Competency)**
6. Gain intercultural competency

According to the new regulations the units of Orientation Course were increased from 60 to 100 so that the following points<sup>19</sup> will be thoroughly addressed.

- Systematic emphasis on the meaning of constitutional principles, fundamental rights and values for a constructive and societal co-existence in all relevant points in the curriculum
- Consistent orientation on values-based civic education and promotion of social participation
- Consistent reference to and analysis of ones' own reality of life and the German society
- Fundamental rights and democratic principles as standard and framework for the independent assessment and individual localization of the participants.

This time the additional units were integrated into the Orientation Course to better support the needs of the participants and demands of the State. Interestingly the new curriculum provides for 10 Units for excursions or trips outside the classroom which will help the participants to better understand the three main modules of the course;

- a. Politics in the Democracy,
- b. History and Accountability and the
- c. Individual and the Society.

<sup>17</sup> Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. (2017). *Curriculum für einen bundesweiten Orientierungskurs*. Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge Referat Fragen der sprachlichen und politischen Bildung.

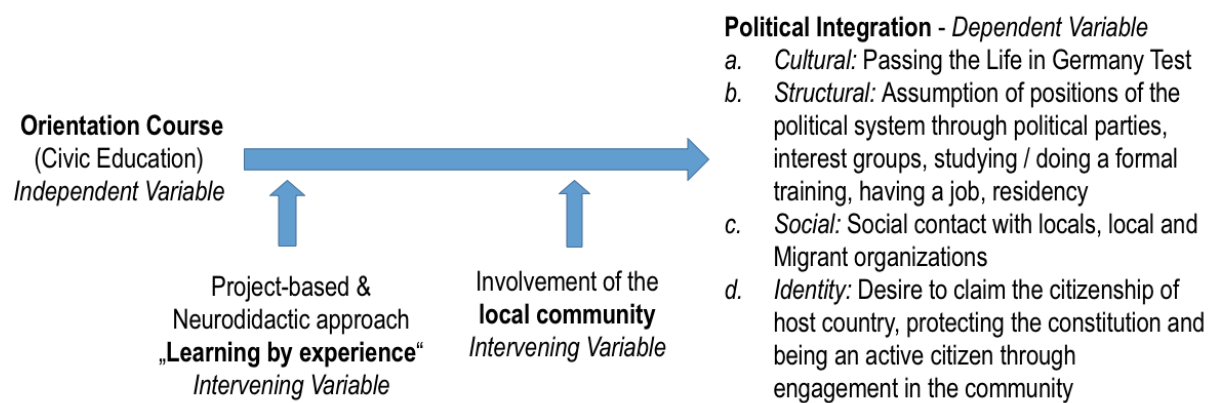
<sup>18</sup> English translation from the German original

<sup>19</sup> English translation from the German original

Further the “*Test Leben in Deutschland*” or Test Life in Germany has now 33 Questions which will come from a pool of more than 300 Questions about German politics, history and society and about the German federal states of the participants. BAMF is also currently financing the additional Training for authorized Integration Teachers in Orientation Courses so that their competencies in teaching politics and history will be enhanced. However, the latest online study<sup>20</sup> of the Robert Bosch Foundation on the Integration of Refugees in selected rural areas of Germany suggest that rather than giving clear and practical insights to political institutions and social realities, the 100 Units of Orientation Course are inadequately used. Thus it is crucial to ask if in its current form, is the Orientation Course is enough so that a participant could attain political integration especially in the rural areas of Germany?

## Theory

### Theoretical Framework:



Above is the diagram of the basic theoretical framework I will follow in this study. The Orientation Course in its current form will be the Independent Variable and the Political Integration will be the Dependent Variable. The operationalization of the Political Integration was inspired by the definition provided by Prof. Achour but this study will also consider other concrete manifestations existing in the current set-up in the communities of the course participants. The following are the operationalized indicators of the four aspects of political integration:

<sup>20</sup> Ohliger, R., Schweiger R. & Veyhl, L. (2017). *Auf dem Weg zur Flüchtlingsintegration in ländlichen Räumen: Ergebnisse einer Bedarfsanalyse in sieben Landkreisen*. Retrieved from <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/de/publikation/auf-dem-weg-zur-fluechtlingsintegration-laendlichen-raeumen-ergebnisse-einer>

- a. Cultural – One of the goals of the Orientation Course is the understanding of the German political system and passing the Test (Life in Germany Test) is a manifestation of basic understanding and appreciation of German Politics, History and Society.
- b. Structural – More than having a job or doing a formal training, participating in activities of political parties and / or interest groups such as election campaigning will be considered part of structural integration as this is a manifestation of three goals of the Orientation Course: Conveying the rights and responsibilities of residents and citizens, develop the ability to orient oneself better and enabling the participation into society.
- c. Social – Gaining intercultural competency as one of the goals of the Orientation Course could be seen through consistent social contacts with locals and organizations in the community, either through regular meet-ups in a common place. New friendships made by the refugees especially with locals in the community will also considered part of social integration
- d. Identity – Integration by Identity is easily identifiable by German Citizenship. But the German Citizenship indicator for this dimension will still take a while as the participants of the course are new in Germany and they must reside in Germany for six years first in order to apply for German Citizenship. Thus for the purposes of this study, the desire to claim German Citizenship will instead be considered as an indicator. This is because the desire to claim German Citizenship could be the direct result of one of the goals of the Orientation Course which is to develop the positive assessment of the German State. If the participant has a positive assessment of the German State, then the learner will be more motivated to become part of it through citizenship. Other indicators for this dimension are active citizenry and engagement in the community.

Political Integration will be considered successful if the participants of the Orientation course possess any operationalized indicators in all of the four dimensions of political integration (cultural, structural, social, Identity) and the Orientation Course will not lead to political integration if the participants lack even just one operationalized indicator in any of the four dimensions. Thus the two main hypotheses of this study are the following:

**Positive Hypothesis:** The orientation course is enough for participants to achieve political integration.

**Negative Hypothesis:** The Orientation course is not enough for participants to achieve political integration

This study will also consider two intervening variables; The “Learning by experience” and the “Involvement of the local community” variables. The “Learning by experience” is a project-based Neurodidactic approach I want to test to teach the Orientation Course. As topics on Politics and History could be a challenge to teach given the vast amount of knowledge one must be exposed to, not to mention that the language used is German, so too is keeping the interest of the participants high during and after the course. As a certified Integration Teacher of BAMF I am inspired by the Neurodidactics used in foreign language teaching because it tells how the process of learning in the brain works and what could be done to stimulate the brain so that the brain will find a certain topic interesting.

Neurodidactics suggest that curiosity in the limbic system in the brain must first be activated because the limbic system is the one responsible for assessing if the incoming impulse is important or not thus determining the direction of the success of learning. Indeed, for learning to be interesting and successful, Neurodidactics suggest that learning must be based on the previous knowledge of the participant regarding a topic, learning methods must be diverse, movement while learning should be considered, different visual media should enhance the learning experience and most importantly positive emotions must be triggered because positive emotions lead to motivation and motivation leads to success in learning (Grein, 2013). All of these considerations could be encapsulated if learning will be done with a project-based plan. When the learners are involved and they have a goal to reach, then they will be more motivated to reach it. It also helps if learners learn in groups because learning in a group could be fun as well (Juchler, 2013).

Project-based learning is already a staple in teaching civic education in schools in Germany but it has yet to be tested on Orientation Courses for Refugees and the one of the goals of this paper is to assess if the project-based Neurodidactic approach (Learning by experience) could have an effect on the learning of Politics and History among the learners and how this effects manifest in their political integration into German Society. In this study I would also like to assess if the involvement of the local community affects the political integration of refugees because they are the first line of contact among the learners. Therefore, for this study I am proposing another Hypothesis:

**Alternate Hypothesis:** By combining the Project-based with the Neurodidactic approach and involving the local community, participants will better achieve political integration through the orientation course.

## Research Design

In this study I will use the **qualitative comparative study of the two groups I taught** from the district of Havelland in the State of Brandenburg. I choose the district of Havelland not just because I work in the area but also because it is very interesting to study Integration and political integration of refugees in this district while being faced with a high presence of far-right and anti-refugee street protesters on the average ranging from 500 to 1000 (Botsch, 2018, p.2). The first group is composed of six male learners all coming from Syria but currently residing in Rathenow, the district capital of Havelland. The participants of this course are all authorized by BAMF to have the course for free because of temporary protective status and their longer perspective to stay in the country. I started teaching the group last November 2016. However, after two months I was sent to Falkensee, the biggest city in the district. My group in Rathenow continued their Orientation course but with another teacher and took the Life in Germany Test last June 2017.

On the other hand, I started in Falkensee last January 2017. This group is composed mainly of young men from Afghanistan, Iran and Eritrea. Just like in Rathenow, the participants of this course are all authorized by BAMF to have the course for free because of their status as refugee and their longer perspective to stay in the country. Their Orientation Course took place from August to September 2017 or exactly during the campaign period for the federal parliamentary elections (*Bundestagswahl*) in Germany. The group took the Test last September 2017. As previously mentioned I tested my project-based neurodidactic approach with my group in Falkensee. The project “Democracy up-close” has a set of activities with the goal of exposing the learners on how democracy works in the local / municipal level, state level, federal level and European level. At first I asked my participants where they think Democracy occurs in Germany and from all their answers we collectively decided on which practical places we could visit so that we will attain our goal of learning democracy by experiencing it right where it occurs:

- a. The Local City Hall of Falkensee – We asked the mayor if we could visit the City Hall and if we could have a dialog with him. During this time the closing of temporary settlements for refugees and asylum seekers in the city and nearby places was a controversial topic among the participants because they were directly affected by it. The participants were able to ask questions and were able to have a dialogue not only with the Mayor but also with the Integration Coordinator of the city. They even got an impromptu lesson on the division of east and west Berlin and Germany from the Mayor. However, they were not able to get the answers they wanted to hear from him.



- b. The State Parliament of Brandenburg in Potsdam – We asked the Visitors Center of the State Parliament of Brandenburg in Potsdam if we could have a tour of the State Parliament so that we could see where State Parliamentarians work and how does their day look like and how does their work feel like. After the tour we were able to meet some State Parliamentarians from different political parties (CDU, The Left and the Greens) who also live currently in Havelland. They talked to us regarding the prospects of Integration in Havelland and in Brandenburg. In the end to assess if they were convinced by the local politicians, I gave my students a sample ballot so that they could vote the party which deserves to lead Germany according to them. I did this so that my students could experience voting even if it is just a practice and for the local politicians to gauge their popularity among my course participants. As Germany practices a dual ballot system, meaning a direct vote and a vote for a party, the sample ballots I presented to my learners also had the same system. The representative from the CDU won the direct vote and the Green Party won the vote for the party.
- c. The Federal Parliament of Germany (Bundestag) in Berlin. – Even before visiting the Federal Parliament in Berlin, we already invited parliamentary candidates from different political parties but are residing in Havelland or in Falkensee to join us so we could discuss topics most important to refugees; Fight against Right-Wing Extremism, Housing, Job and Family Reunification. However only the candidate from the Left Party joined us and assured the participants that his party will stand with the refugees and fight for their rights and interests. We still went to Berlin afterwards and visited not only the parliament but also the different political and historical places in the city. I initiated this so that my participants could connect the facts they learned in the classroom to the actual place where it happened or is currently happening.
- d. The European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium – It was my dream to bring Refugees to the European Parliament in Brussels because of the symbolism it will convey. Additionally, I haven't read any information about Refugees visiting the pinnacle of European Politics in Brussels. Thus I wanted my participants not to be the topic of discussion anymore but part of the dialogue. Luckily we were able to get an invitation from one European parliamentarian and with the help of donations from private members of the local welcome initiative in Falkensee, I was able to bring my participants together with other locals from Falkensee to Brussels. Together we explored the city of Brussels, experienced its culture, visited the European Parliament and other institutions

of the European Union and learned a lot about how the EU works and what other things could be done to improve the system especially the Migration System. Finally, we were able to talk to Fransiska Keller, MEP, one of the co-chairs of the European Green Party.

Prior to any activity I asked my group first their initial expectations of the activity and after the activity through a **focus group discussion** we would be discussing if their expectation were fulfilled, if they learned something new and how they assess the German political system, Germany and Democracy in general. We do this so that we could assess if the activities lead us to our goal of understanding and appreciating Democracy in Germany. Even if the group in Rathenow did not do any outside activity I still did a focus group discussion with them and coupled it with a field observation of the situation in the city.

## Results and Analysis

*“I know more about Politics than my cousin who grew up in Germany.”*

– Participant AT from Falkensee

### Results from Rathenow

The following results show the effects of the Orientation Course on the political integration of the group in Rathenow. These results are based mainly from my Focus Group Discussion with the group and my Field Observation in Rathenow.

- Cultural – Most learners from Rathenow only achieved the A2 Level of the German Test for Immigrants and all of them were not able to pass the Life in Germany Test.
- Structural – Participants from this group were not active during the September 2017 German elections and the mayoralty election in Rathenow last January 2018.
- Social – Even if there were local meet-ups organized by the Workers' Welfare Federal Association (*Arbeiterwohlfahrt* – AWO) and even if there is a local Islamic Community Association, the group in Rathenow remained within their own set of friends two years since coming to Germany.
- Identity – The desire to go back to their own countries is high among the participants in this group.

If we will analyze the cultural dimension, it could be said that the results of the Life in Germany Test of the participants reflected also on how efficient or not the methods used by the teacher. If all of the participants failed the test, then there is something in the methodology of the teacher that is inefficient and ineffective and must be drastically changed immediately. In terms of the structural integration it could be said that the lack of knowledge and contacts lead also to the lack of engagement of the participants in the democratic exercises. The absence of an Integration Advisory Council (Beirat für Integration) in the city and district where foreigners could be nominated, vote and be elected for a position also trigger why there are not avenues for the participants to voice out their concerns.

When we look into the social integration of the participants, we could determine that perhaps because AWO is known to be supported by the government to provide such meet-ups, that is why the motivation for locals to come was not that high and meet the refugees. We could also determine that the local Islamic Community Association has the same members as the friends of the participants. Hence the circle of contacts of participants did not grow. However, one interesting factor to consider here as well is the absence of an independent local community organization which helps that integration of the refugees. As mentioned in Havelland there are still a high number of supporters of far-right and anti-refugee organizations but could this be the reason why there is a lack of motivation to help the refugees and become friends with them? Or are there other reasons? The topic on the readiness to help and the actual help delivered by locals in rural areas in order for Refugees to better integrate should then be further investigated. Finally, the Orientation Course by the participants in Rathenow did not trigger in them the desire to claim German citizenship because of the fact that they would rather go home.

We could then determine now that from these results, the Positive Hypothesis which stipulates that the Orientation Course by itself is enough to achieve political integration is not true. On the other hand, the Negative Hypothesis is considered true as the case of the group in Rathenow suggests that the Orientation Course in its current form is not enough for the refugees to achieve political integration.

### **Results from the Falkensee Group**

- Cultural – Most learners from Falkensee achieved B1 Level of the German Test for Immigrants and as Table 3 shows, except for the one who got sick, all participants passed

the Life in Germany Test with high scores and three participants even got the perfect score of 33.

Table 3: List of participants with results of the Test “Life in Germany” September 2017

<b>Test Candidate (Initials, Birth year and Birth place)</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Grade (Perfect Score 33)</b>
1. MH, 1995, Kunduz (Afghanistan)	successful	31
2. MN, 1994, Kabul (Afghanistan)	successful	33
3. SA, 1994, Massawa (Eritrea)	successful	31
4. GRJ, 1991, Maidan Wardek (Afghanistan)	successful	29
5. NK, 1995, Maigorzi (Eritrea)	successful	32
6. YB, 1988, Mendefera (Eritrea)	successful	33
7. MRDF, 1987, Ahvaz (Iran)	successful	30
8. DF, 1997, Malmeya (Eritrea)	successful	31
9. HH, 1994, Asmara (Eritrea)	successful	33
10. OM, 1995, Teseny (Eritrea)	No result	No Grade
11. AT, 1995, Zaga (Eritrea)	successful	32
12. HM, 1995, Kartoum (Sudan)	successful	33

- Structural – Some participants became politically active during the parliamentary elections of 2017 and campaigned for the Green Party.
- Social – Most participants have good relationships with the community. It also helped that there is a special organization in Falkensee, the welcome initiative “B80” dedicated to help Refugees to integrate in the city faster.
- Identity – The group from Falkensee became more aware of the different political and democratic systems around them manifested by their keen interest in having the German Citizenship in the future.

The fact that four participants got the perfect score of 33 in the Life in Germany Test suggests that something in the delivery of the Orientation Course was effective and efficient. As the learners experienced the project-based neurodidactic approach, perhaps the knowledge of the course remained in their brains and it resulted in the high points earned by the participants. Thus we could say that not only by the Orientation Course alone could the participants attain such an achievement but also through the creativity, expertise and motivation of the teacher. But even if the results of the Test are positive and one participant even said the he knows more about German politics and history compared to his cousin who grew up in Germany, the group in Falkensee has the impression that the Course was short in order to fully grasp the content of the course.

In Falkensee there is no Integration Advisory Council (Beirat für Integration) as well but as the motivation was high because of the “Democracy up-close” project and because of the local contacts they made in the community and nearby areas, participants in Falkensee were motivated to engage more in political parties and their activities in the community manifested through their active participation in campaigning for the Green Party during the last federal parliamentary elections.

The presence of the local independent welcome initiative is an important factor to the social integration of the refugees. Because of this group and their numerous activities not just for Syrians but also for other nationalities including the LGBTQI refugees, the participants were able to widen their circle of contacts not just among their peers but also among the locals in the city. The readiness of the people of Falkensee to help the refugees, especially in donating for our trip to Brussels, clearly resulted in the positive assessment of Falkensee by the participants. This positive assessment then helps them to overcome their shyness and fear of the local community enabling them to socialize more with the people around them.

Finally, the combination of the Orientation Course, and the project-based neurodidactic approach of the teacher together with the involvement of the local community especially during the course resulted in the positive view of the German political and democratic systems. This positive view is manifested by the desire of the participants to be part of the Germany by applying for citizenship in the future.

The case of Falkensee disproves the Positive Hypothesis as well. It is therefore not true that the Orientation Course by itself is enough to achieve political integration. The Negative Hypothesis is considered true as the case of the group in Falkensee suggests that the Orientation Course in its current form is not enough for the refugees to achieve political integration. However, the case of Falkensee also proves the alternate argument that by combining the project-based Neurodidactic approach with the involvement of the local community, participants will better achieve political integration through the orientation course.

## Conclusion

From the results of the cases presented we could then determine that the Orientation Course in its current form is not enough so that refugees can attain political integration into German society. There are other factors to be considered in order for political integration to be successful. The results so far negate the positive Hypothesis and validate the negative Hypothesis as reflected by the results in the group from Rathenow and Falkensee which indicate that the Orientation Course alone is not sufficient in achieving political integration. The alternate Hypothesis was validated as well by the results in Falkensee. The data suggests that by combining the project-based Neurodidactic approach and involving the local community, participants will better achieve political integration through the orientation course.

As previously mentioned the Orientation course could be the primary and perhaps only source of civic education of adult refugees and this course could help participants, especially the refugees, achieve political integration in the country, but the course in its current form could not by itself alone bring participants to political integration. The expertise and engagement of the teacher and the community must be fully supported because both of these variables help the Orientation course reach its goals. Thus institutional reforms are necessary to enhance the potential of the course so that it can fulfill its duties properly and reach its goals.

## Recommendations

“...let them take their share in the life of this country, whether it be municipal, provincial or national. Let them be electors as well as citizens. We do not want nor wish that any individual should forget the land of his origin. Let them look to the past, but let them still more look to the future. Let them look to the land of their ancestors, but let them look also to the land of their children.” – Sir Wilfrid Laurier (Canadian Prime Minister 1896 - 1911)

This quote from the former Canadian Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier should inspire the current German government. Germany must provide ways on how refugees will become responsible future citizens and informed voters. It already started with the Orientation Course and indeed it is a good start. But the Orientation Course is currently offered for free only to those who are recognized refugees or those receiving temporary protection as they have a long-term perspective staying in Germany. Still there are other Asylum Seekers who are in the process of Asylum but are excluded from taking the course as their perspective to stay is still unclear. If

the German government is serious in its quest to make integration work, then the Orientation Course should also be offered for free even to those who are still seeking Asylum. Most critics of this idea think that by allowing Asylum applicants the course false hopes will be generated among the applicants and the lessons learned will just be in vain if they are sent back to another country or their own. However, these critics fail to see that offering Asylum applicants the Orientation course will still be a win-win situation for Germany no matter what the result of the Asylum will be. If the application of Asylum seekers is unfortunately denied and they are sent away, these people could still propagate the democratic values of the German state wherever they are. In effect they could be future ambassadors of good will for Germany. If the application of Asylum seekers is granted on the other hand, time will be saved for these individuals and they could integrate faster into German society.

In the midst of right-wing populism especially strong in East Germany and in the rural areas, the German government must consider increasing the units offered for the Orientation Course so that participants in this course would better equip themselves of the knowledge they need to confront right-wing populism present in their daily lives. Additionally, if the Orientation Course is the initial and only source of civic education for adult migrants, then 100 Units are definitely not enough. If additional units would be provided, then there would be no need to hasten learning the topics in the Orientation Course. As the modules in the new curriculum contain heavy content, very much compact and the language level of the participants does not correspond to the desired language level of the course, it is best to expand the units for each module to 100 Units:

- a. Politics in Democracy – 100 Units
- b. History and Accountability – 100 Units
- c. The Individual and the Society – 100 Units

Further, if more units will be added, more hands-on learning will enhance the quality of the Orientation course. To diversify the course, additional important topics should be offered as well such as:

- a. Consumer rights and responsibilities – 100 Units
- b. Cultural, historical and regional lessons about the City or Community, District and the Federal State where the participant is currently residing - 100 Units
- c. Lessons about the European Union and the United Nations - 100 Units

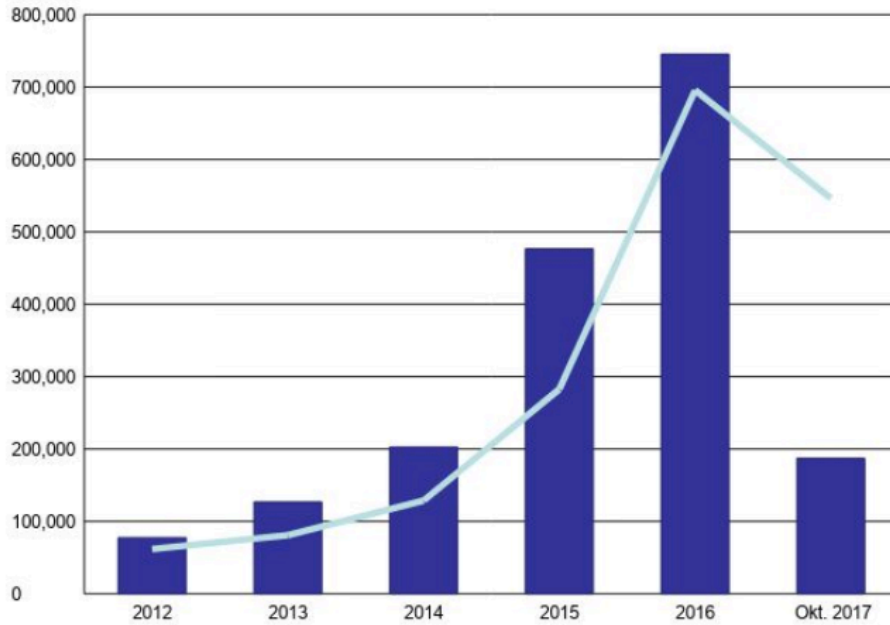
Teachers must also keep themselves socially engaged and abreast of the current events happening in the surroundings of the participants. Thus Integration Teacher must attend the additional training for Teachers teaching the Orientation course not only because it is free, but also it provides the teachers additional, creative and fun ideas on how to deliver the Orientation Course. On the other hand, BAMF must consider the professionalization of the Integration Teaching a priority as well because this act will trigger the motivation on the part of the Integration Teachers to improve their teaching. Currently most Integration Teachers in Germany are working on a freelance basis or they are employed by local course providers. While this may work in the meantime, this system is not ideal and not sustainable. Integration Teachers must be given the recognition and respect they deserve because the nature of their job is just like any highly-paid teacher in a public school. BAMF should consider an institutional system in which the Integration Teachers will be recognized as Federal Civil Servants just like the police, soldiers, teachers and other civil servants and be given the appropriate wage for them. With the title and privilege, BAMF could demand more quality on the part of the teacher and because the teacher sees a career perspective, the teacher will work hard ensuring that he / she will properly execute the important responsibility of ensuring that the integration of refugees, wherever they live, through Integration or Orientation courses will properly occur.

The States and districts could also help in ensuring the political integration of refugees by supporting the continuing education of the teachers, institutionalizing the existence of an Advisory Council for Integration and Migration, strongly supporting the establishment of local organizations helping refugees and intensifying the campaign against violent right-wing, anti-refugee organizations, movements and protests.

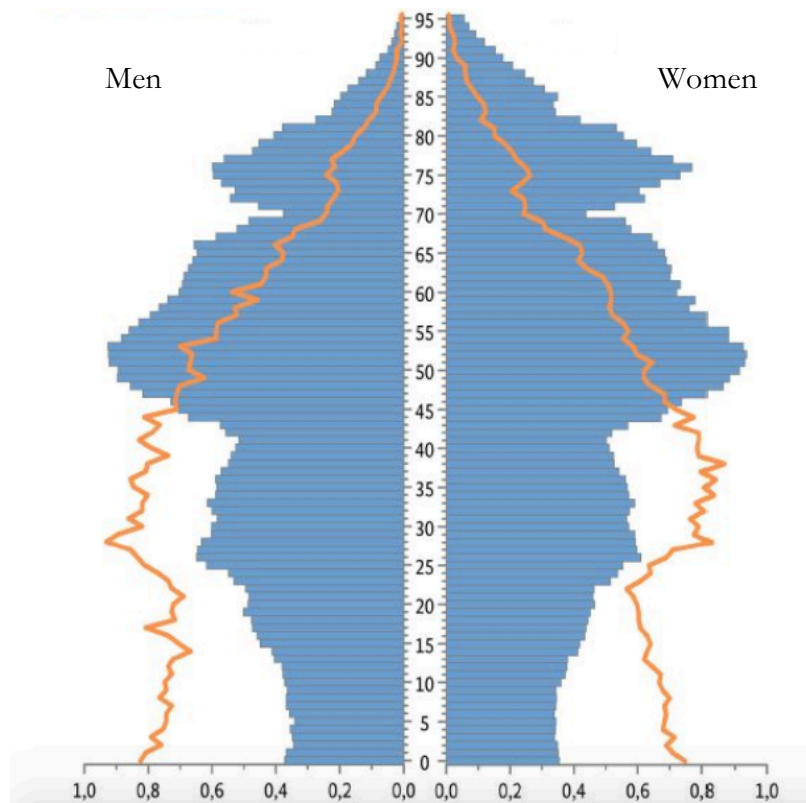


Annex

**Table 2: Application for asylums filed and the corresponding decisions from 2012 and October 2017.** Source: Weinbrenner, 2017 p.4



**Table 1: Age Structure of persons with / without Migration Background in Germany, 2016.** Source: Weinbrenner, 2017 p.3



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