

The impact of participation in adult learning on life satisfaction of people with a migration background and natives – a longitudinal analysis

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Theoretical background

Increasing population proportions of people with migration background underpin the relevance of integration as a key policy goal (Ager & Strang, 2008; OECD, 2019), making it important to identify the conditions of successful integration into receiving societies (Kogan, Shen, & Siegert, 2018). Although integration conditions have already been broadly researched in different disciplines, a majority of scholars so far have focused on *objective* parameters of integration, such as employment and labour market outcomes (Burkert & Seibert, 2007; Drinkwater, 2017; Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010) or educational and occupational accomplishments (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008; Volante, Klinger, & Bilgili, 2018). *Subjective* conditions of integration (e.g., subjective well-being (SWB) and life satisfaction) have only recently gained academic attention (Koczan, 2013; Kogan et al., 2018). However, the significance of these subjective parameters for the process of integration has become increasingly evident in research work (Amit, 2010). Although the level of SWB is found to be lower within the group of immigrants compared to the group of non-immigrants (Bartram, 2010; Hendriks, 2015; Safi, 2010; Sand & Gruber, 2018) and does not increase with the length of their stay in the receiving country (Amit, 2010; Hendriks & Burger, 2019), scholars argue for immigrants' subjective well-being (SWB) to be a significant indicator for integration success: Immigrants that are more integrated are happier compared to less integrated immigrants (Hendriks, 2015; Virta, Sam, & Westin, 2004); higher (subjective) assimilation was found to be associated with higher life satisfaction of immigrants (Angelini, Casi, & Corazzini, 2015). Thus, with SWB and life satisfaction being indicators for individual integration success, examining the integration-related conditions of immigrants' subjective well-being and the characteristics that promote their life satisfaction constitutes a promising way for identifying mechanisms and determinants that facilitate or hinder integration.

With regard to the case of Germany as a country of immigration, a strategy to facilitate

integration often targeted by politics is via education because “integration works best through education. This applies to the many immigrants who have been living in Germany for a long time - as well as to people who come to us as refugees and asylum seekers” (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2019). Whilst a majority of political initiatives and public debate in Germany focus on the relevance of (formal) education for integration processes, the integration of adults with migration background and the relevance of their continuing education, hereafter referred to as adult learning and education (ALE), is gaining increasing attention (Amit & Litwin, 2010; Schimany, Rühl, & Kohls, 2012; Steinbach, 2018). In view of the increasing proportions of older people with migration background (e.g., in 2017, over 60% of individuals arriving in Germany were over 25 years old (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, 2019), the rising (academic) interest in older people with migration background and their integration does justice to the pressing societal and political task. Also in research, scholars argue for ALE, e.g. in language courses or integration courses, to support integration (Ager & Strang, 2008) and to enhance immigrants’ subjective well-being (Angelini et al., 2015). However, the research base on the effects of ALE on subjective parameters is only sparse. Therefore, generally speaking, there is a need for (1) more research on the subjective conditions of successful integration and (2) research on the integration-related effects of ALE of people with migration background in the receiving country. Thus, in this research, we aim at contributing to the literature by investigating the impact of participation in ALE on life satisfaction of people with migration background, as a key subjective parameter for integration success, in a longitudinal manner.

Our theoretical approach is based on assimilation theories (Alba & Nee, 1997; Gordon, 1964). Assimilation theorists argue that the integration process of immigrants is characterised by several subsequent stages. The *structural* assimilation as an early stage, here understood as entering the social structure of the receiving society by having access to

employment, educational institutions and neighbourhoods (Feliciano, 2009), is a “catalyst” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 830) that depicts the most significant stage for the integration process. In other words, assimilation theories argue for integration as a straight-line process in which immigrants’ life conditions and by this also their subjective well-being conditions are improved over time (Hendriks & Burger, 2019). In line with this argument, prior research (e.g., Angelini et al., 2015) shows that higher (subjective) assimilation is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction. Accordingly, participating in education as a form of *structural* assimilation paves the way to higher and improved (objective) well-being conditions. Based on this, we derive the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses

H1) Individuals with migration background show lower levels of life satisfaction compared to individuals without a migration background. The individual level of life satisfaction does not increase with the length of stay in the receiving country.

H2) Over time, individuals who participate in ALE show higher levels of life satisfaction compared to individuals that do not participate in ALE. The higher the change in the individual participation volume (e.g. more courses, more hours of ALE), the higher the change in life satisfaction.

H3) The effect of ALE on subjective well-being is stronger within the group of people with migration background compared to the group of people without migration background (interaction effect).

Sample

We use data from the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) (Blossfeld, Roßbach, & Maurice, 2011). The NEPS is an annual panel study with now ten waves that consists of six starting cohorts (new-borns, kindergartners, fifth graders, ninth graders, first-

year university students, adults). NEPS collects longitudinal data on educational processes as well as sociodemographic and psychological variables in Germany. We will seven waves (wave 4 – wave 10) of longitudinal data (collected in 2011-2018) with a sample of 1,002 adults with migration background and 5,391 adults without a migration background that were interviewed in each wave. We performed no data analyses testing the specified hypotheses at the time of the pre-registration.

Measures

Predictors

To measure the individual participation in ALE, participant's *number of ALE courses* was assessed with “How many courses or seminars have you attended since the last interview?”. *Participation in ALE in hours* was assessed with “How long does / did this course or seminar last in hours?”. Besides this, the exact *start month* and *end month* of the courses were assessed.

Outcomes

Individual *satisfaction with life* was measured with six items. The items were “How satisfied are you with your life at the moment, all in all?”, “How satisfied are you with what you have? Think of the money, income and things you own”, “How satisfied are you with your health?”, “How satisfied are you with your family life?”, “How satisfied are you with your circle of friends?” and “How satisfied are you with your work?”. All six items were answered on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“not satisfied at all”) to 10 (“completely satisfied”). The items were developed based on the life satisfaction items used in SOEP (TNS Infratest Sozialforschung, 2009) and the Personal Wellbeing Index by Cummins and Lau (2005).

Statistical Models

We explore an impact of participation in ALE on SWB. However, the causal direction of the relationship has not been researched yet. Thus, it is also conceivable that SWB might affect ALE participation. To explore this, we will perform Random Intercept Cross Lagged Panel Models (RI-CLPM). Further, we will perform group comparisons for relevant groups (e.g., people with vs. without a migration background, immigration generation).

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