

Acculturation in the Integration Course for Immigrants in Germany: A Study from the Cultural Bridge Approach

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Abstract: Acculturation processes as inclusive cultural interactions may or may not be motivated by educational contexts. This paper studies the acculturation process in the integration course that the German government offers to hundreds of thousands of immigrants. The framework is the Cultural Bridge (CB) that happens when individuals or communities participate in diverse cultures while preserving their own culture. The method is the content analysis of semi-structured interviews. Six immigrants provide information about their experience in the integration course. The results show approaches to and limitations for cultural inclusion. Finally, the discussion interprets the findings from the CB, compares this study with other results and presents some implications. In conclusion, the integration course leads to partially inclusive acculturation processes.

Keywords: acculturation, assessment, immigrants, inclusion, integration, learning, teaching.

Acculturation processes as inclusive cultural interactions may or may not be motivated by educational contexts. When immigrants converge towards a new cultural context, tensions among the communities emerge. During such tensions, people experiment the acculturation as cultural changes, adaptations, or accommodations, which could be voluntary, imposed, agreed, exclusionary, or inclusive (Gibson, 2001; Redfield et al., 1936). Mainly, inclusion might reduce cultural tensions. Cultural inclusion happens when individuals recognise, validate, and participate in different cultures without prejudice. In Germany, the government offer an integration course to immigrants. Around 940.000 people had begun an integration course between 2005 and 2013 (Reimann, 2013). Moreover, more immigrants started the course after 890.000 asylum seekers arrived in 2015 (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2016). In this panorama, the question arises: does the integration course for immigrants lead to inclusive acculturation processes?

Researchers warn about the negative influence of teachers' practice on students' acculturation processes. For instance, Makarova et al. (2019) identify the teachers' teaching strategies and styles as a risk for negative acculturation of students. Furthermore, Makarova and Herzog (2013) provide evidence of the teachers' negative attitude toward students' acculturation and the tendency to punish them. Although the results make evident that immigrant students have greater academic success when they identify more with the local culture (Sheikh & Anderson, 2018) and, above all, because of language proficiency, not everything about acculturation is positive. For instance, Deslandes et al. (2022) recognise that language proficiency does not warrant the mutual cultural understanding between students and peers and teachers or good relationships between the students and their families or communities. Furthermore, Salloumk et al. (2020) highlight how teachers use the local language as a power device in culturally diverse schools.

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Studying acculturation in educational settings contributes to planning and enacting inclusive processes. Understanding the relationships among contents, individuals and cultures, provides information to transform educational experiences. This transformation would be seeking for the value of cultural diversity (Guédez, 2005), the active participation of marginalised communities (UNESCO, 2008), the democratization of contents (López & Küper, 1999), and the social justice and cohesion (Council of Europe, 2008). Research reports such as those of Kloubert (2020), Schachner et al. (2017) and Migliorini et al. (2015) on diverse European educational scenarios reveal different dimensions of acculturation. The authors pointed to conditions, such as immigrants' expectations and the relationship between accommodation and educative strategies, to consider new and more inclusive acculturation experiences. Education in this sense promotes individuals cultural awareness, which is mutual trust and respect (Sani, 2014).

This research aims to study whether the integration course for immigrants leads to inclusive acculturation processes. Specifically, this study seeks to analyse the learning, teaching, assessment, relationships between participants and teachers, and relationships between cultures in the curriculum in the integration course. For this purpose, it is necessary to identify a framework to study acculturation in educational settings. The following subpart provides a view of the general approaches to understanding acculturation to identify some elements that will constitute the framework for the study. The second subpart offers a view of specific educational approaches to understand acculturation and more factors for the framework.

General Approaches to Understand Acculturation Processes

The traditional metaphors to describe acculturation do not provide feedback to build a frame to design or study acculturation in educational settings. However, alternative approaches provide some elements to describe the relationships between cultures in educational settings. Those theoretical elements are –a) the possibility for immigrants to transit between cultures while preserving their cultures (bidimensional view), and b) the acculturation is a process in both directions between locals and immigrants (bidirectional view).

Consequently, Wagener (2009) develops a theoretical study on the Melting Pot (conventionally assumed as assimilationist and mono-cultural) and Salad Bowl (commonly presumed as integrationist and intercultural) metaphors. The author's analysis reveals that the acculturation processes guided by the studied metaphors will not be inclusive. For example, the Melting Pot metaphor looks to induce immigrants or minorities to assume the local culture, but it fails because of the individuals' resistance and social distancing. Likewise, the author proves that the Salad Bowl metaphor fails in its purpose of inclusion through a "standard, average or common culture" between locals and immigrants because, in the end, locals and immigrants must assimilate this "new culture".

Complementary, Berray (2019) cites different cases to argue the limitation of Melting Pot and Salad Bowl. Instead, Berray (2019) uses the Ethnicity in Exile theory to explain that acculturation is not an antinomy between exclusionary or inclusive. For the author, immigrants might simultaneously be part of their ethnic group and the local ethnic group. Finally, Berray (2019) underlines the need for theories to promote a multicultural society where immigrants can participate in the new culture while retaining their cultures. However, from Josefova's (2014) perspective, multiculturalism cannot fall into the coexistence of communities in the same space but socially isolated and without mutual empathy. As an example, Profanter and Lintner (2011) describe a multicultural but socially distanced village in Italy. As a solution, Josefova (2014) specifies plural multiculturalism, in which communities recognize each other, empower their cultural identities and interact.

Horenczyk et al. (2013) summarise and analyse a set of acculturation explanatory models: a) Mutual Acculturation Model, b) Interactive Acculturation Model, c) Concordance Model of Acculturation, d) Relative Acculturation Extended Model and, e) social psychological contributions. The authors identify differences and commonalities among the models. First, those models have a ground on the intergroup interactions and mutual acculturation. Therefore, the models are bidimensional because they consider that non-dominant communities may participate in the new cultural context without losing their cultural background. Furthermore, the mentioned models are bidirectional because the acculturation happens in both national and immigrant individuals.

Acculturation in Educational Settings

Educational research addresses the acculturation process as relationships between cultures in educational settings. First, a group of alternatives describes, guides and evaluates cultural relationships in educational processes from the side of the minorities. However, those frameworks are not clear regarding the local communities' role. Another group of alternatives embraces cultural relationships through interactions between epistemologies in the curricula. A part of these proposals is exclusionary, and another part is inclusive. The inclusive approaches provide referents such as pluralism and interculturality to shape the frame to describe, plan, enact and evaluate inclusive educational practices.

Within the first group of approaches, the Differential Approach in Colombia (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2013; Ministerio del Interior of Colombia, 2015) aims to guide institutional actions according to minorities characteristics as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and identity, history, disability and other vulnerabilities. In this frame, Pineda et al. (2019) report on a case in which indigenous students obtain differentiated support for their inclusion in the urban schools. From another point of view, Aikenhead (1996) uses the Cultural Border-Crossing approach to explain and guide indigenous students in Canada to participate in science lessons as a culturally sensitive process. Similarly, in Italy, Terranova-Cecchini and Toffle (2014) describe the Identikit as a tool to connect refugees with their cultures as part of the integration program.

Among the second group of approaches, Mpofu et al. (2014) describe different integration models between epistemologies belonging to different cultures in the classroom. Furthermore, Ludwig and El-Hani (2020) propose two explanatory models of the ontologies-epistemologies power relationships in the curriculum. In both cases, the imposition of a knowledge system or epistemology on another means exclusion and dominance. This relationship leads societies to clashes and injustice. In this line, Tovar-Gálvez and Acher (2019) analyse the inclusion in the teachers' teaching practice from the relationship between epistemologies point of view. The authors identify diverse teaching strategies, experiences and proposals that address dominant and non-dominant epistemologies in the classroom. A part of the findings is exclusionary or partially inclusive teaching strategies since they either completely dismiss non-dominant epistemologies or place them in a hierarchy below the epistemology of the dominant culture.

In addition to the displayed approaches, Tovar-Gálvez and Acher (2019) identify another collection of works. To this set belong the plural and intercultural approaches. Pluralism recognises and validates the communities' knowledge, experiences, values and products as independent epistemologies (Cobern & Loving, 2001). Science, as dominant epistemology, is only one of multiple epistemologies and points of view (Sedano, 2012). Furthermore, interculturality is a symmetric interaction or relationship among cultures or epistemologies (Walsh, 2009) and a mutual acknowledgement, respect and learning between communities (Tubino, 2005). Specific works propose the possibility of crossing cultural borders (Aikenhead

& Michell, 2011) through intersections, commonalities, resemblances and complementarities (Lowan, 2012; Mpofu et al., 2014; Valladares, 2011).

Within the plural and intercultural works, the Epistemological Bridge (EB) (Castaño, 2009) proposes that teachers build knowledge in the classroom by using the potential of science and communities' epistemologies. Castaño et al. (2011) report on experiences in which teachers guide students to employ biology and farmers' traditional knowledge to solve local environmental problems. For this collection of works, communities' wealth has an intrinsic epistemological identity and validity, and they use it as independent content in an inclusive relationship with science. As a way to bring the EB to the classroom, Tovar-Gálvez (2021) defines it as a didactic process through which teachers engage students in producing explanations about phenomena from an inclusive relationship between epistemologies. The author expresses the EB in the principles of 'epistemological independence' and 'epistemological similarity' to guide teachers in the EB enactment.

This Study

This study attempts to reach an interdisciplinary view of the cultural relationships in educational settings. Thus, the research takes theoretical elements from the social psychology –the acculturation frame, and the education –the teaching practice frame. An interdisciplinary view provides a broader analysis of the cultural interactions and new possible alternatives to transform the power relationships. This study's results contribute specifically to the understanding of the context in Germany regarding the immigrants in the integration course. Research on this course that the government offer to the immigrants could lead to more inclusive processes. However, the results could also contribute to the general interest through a framework to analyse culturally diverse educational contexts. In addition, the present study could offer some experimental data to better understand cultural interactions and some insights to make possible more inclusive experiences.

The being of the researcher also shapes this study. The author is an immigrant in Germany who came to make a PhD in educational sciences in teacher education from an intercultural view. Thus, the author seeks to establish frameworks to understand and guide education, taking into account culture, diversity, interactions, teaching practice, curriculum and inclusion. As an immigrant married to a German and as a researcher with a culturally differentiated academic background, the author experiences the cultural interactions in the German context. In addition to doing the PhD at a German university, the researcher takes the integration course, and reads these scenarios as an immigrant, teacher, teacher educator and educational researcher.

Consequently, with the introduction, the present study defines as a problem the emerging cultural interactions in the integration course that Germany offers to immigrants. The literature cited in this section reports reflections and empirical studies on the influence of the educational process and teaching practice on the students' acculturation process. The literature review also identifies theoretical elements in the general approaches to understanding acculturation and specific approaches to understanding cultural interactions in educational processes. Those elements are –a) the possibility for immigrants to transit between cultures while preserving their cultures, b) the acculturation is a process in both directions between locals and immigrants, c) cultural pluralism, and d) intercultural interaction. In the educational literature, the epistemological bridge approach guides educational communities to include non-hegemonic epistemologies in the curriculum.

Those theoretical elements and the epistemological bridge are the starting point to develop the Cultural Bridge (CB) as a frame to describe, plan and enact inclusive educational practices and conduct the present research. From this framework, this study aims to answer the question –does the integration course for immigrants lead to inclusive acculturation processes?

The cultural bridge (CB) as a frame to describe, plan, enact and evaluate inclusive educational practices

The Cultural Bridge (CB) is the experience when individuals or communities decide to participate in diverse cultures while preserving their own culture. Like the metaphor, the endpoints of the bridge are the different cultures as the set of values, traditions, customs, beliefs, epistemologies, senses, symbols, languages, institutions and conventions, among others, that communities have built and constitute part of the individuals' identity. The walkway which connects the endpoints is a commonality for crossing from one side to the other. Individuals use such a road to go to different cultural contexts (endpoints). There, individuals participate in the new culture, but they can go back to their side of the bridge. The exchange and transit between cultures depend on the common path and the subjects' willingness to cross (Kuran & Sandholm, 2008). Furthermore, at the end, the individuals decide if they remain in one endpoint, in the common region or whether change permanently.

Pluralist approaches support the idea of diverse and differentiated cultures, as the CB describes. For Medina and Bang (2013), individuals create psychological distance from subjects who belong to other cultures. This distance emerges when people recognise elements that make them different from others and constitute their own identity (Berray, 2019). The convergence of individuals with this feeling establishes diverse cultural identities. However, plurality as the recognition of differentiated cultures does not mean that cultures are static or limited (Seiler, 2013). On the contrary, the convergence of changes in individual identities triggers cultural changes and, therefore, new cultural identities.

Intercultural approaches support the idea of cultural interaction based on commonalities, as the CB describes. Therefore, it is necessary to use flexibility and crossing borders approaches to understand such interculturality. First, Grimberg and Gummer (2013) propose that individuals move through diverse cultural settings without losing their cultural identities, more like continuous adaptations to the new cultural environs. Similarly, for Anzaldúa (2016), subjects permanently build cultural identities while moving among cultures. Second, cultures may have similar values, goals, ideas, traditions, objects, processes, conditions, projects and more aspects that constitute intersections (Lowan, 2012) or bridges (Castaño, 2009; Molina & Mojica, 2013) to crossing cultural borders (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011). However, the interculturality must be a respectful interaction, negotiation, and mutual learning, recognising the inequities critically and looking for social justice to change the power relations (Faas et al., 2014; Walsh, 2009).

Communities, institutions, individuals and other leaders might use the CB as an approach to plan, enact and evaluate inclusive educational experiences. The CB is in the same focus of decolonial but progressive education in which individuals reaffirm their cultures while participating in other cultures (Manthalu & Waghid, 2019). This focus provides the CB with two characteristics, according to Horenczyk et al. (2013) –bidimensionality because the individuals participate in new cultures while preserving their own culture, and bidirectionality because of the real cultural interaction embraces the non-hegemonic and the hegemonic communities. The CB expression in two practical principles constitutes a set of guidelines to describe, plan, enact and evaluate inclusive educational practices as follows:

- Cultural independence principle –The curriculum and educational actors recognise diverse cultures, validate their points of view and resources, and use them as content to teach. Thus, there are two conditions to guarantee the enactment of this principle in educational settings –a) teachers select elements from diverse cultures and organise them as content, and b) teachers engage students in learning and participating in the independent cultures.
- Cultural similarity principle –The curriculum and educational actors recognise that the diverse cultures have commonalities, validate them as the basis of communication and cooperation, and use them as part of students' learning goals. Thus, there are two conditions to guarantee the enactment of this principle in educational settings –a) teachers identify commonalities between cultures (values, knowledge, practices, traditions, symbols, and other elements from the different cultures which resemble each other or have a similar aim), and b) teachers engage students in using such similarities for crossing borders to learn about the different cultures.

For example, a teacher plans to teach nature, taking into account science and indigenous knowledge. This teacher identifies that stones are relevant for life from both points of view. From the indigenous perspective, a stone is a living being, and it is part of the harmony of life. From the scientific view, a stone is a cluster of minerals, part of ecosystems. The teacher engages the students to study stones from both ideas. In this case, the teacher is enacting the Cultural Bridge. The teacher recognises the existence of two communities, validates their knowledge for understanding reality and uses those kinds of knowledge as part of the curriculum. The ideas from every community are independent but related through similarity.

Methodology

This research aims to study whether Germany's integration course for immigrants leads to inclusive acculturation using the Cultural Bridge (CB) approach. The CB is a framework to understand the relationship between cultures in educational contexts through two practical principles –cultural independence and cultural similarity. Six immigrants participated in individual interviews to provide information about their experience in the integration course. The participants are from different cultural backgrounds and took the course in different moments, schools and cities. First, the research design has an initial evaluation by the experts of the funding organisation. Then, the author presented advances to a research team at the university and two congresses on education. Finally, the research design has an evaluation by reviewers of a journal that published another part of this study with a teacher.

Participants

Six participants constitute the sample by convenience (Robinson, 2014). The convenience criteria for calling them are –a) they are people close to the researcher, which guarantees researcher-interviewee trust and thus the collection of accurate information (Muthanna, 2019), b) they were willing to participate, c) the language schools were closed because of the pandemic context, so it was not possible to contact more students. However, this group also meets a purposive sampling criterion (Robinson, 2014) –to guarantee the participation of specific communities, in this case, looking for cultural and gender diversity.

They are immigrants from Colombia, Iran, Syria and Turkey. There are women and men. Some interviewees identify themselves as homosexuals and others as heterosexuals. Some participants are married to German citizens, others to compatriots and others are single. Some of them came to Germany for studies, others for family reunification and others as refugees.

Their religious options are Christian Catholic, Muslim Shia, Muslim Sunni, and non-religious. Some participants take or took the course with only a teacher and others with more than one. The participants take or took the course in one of two schools in Halle (Saxony-Anhalt) or one in Berlin. This diversity provides a more comprehensive and wide picture of the integration course.

Instrument

The interview aims to approach the participants' views regarding the acculturation process within the integration course. The interview inquires by the topics –a) learning, b) teaching, c) assessment, d) relationships among participants and teachers, and e) relationships among cultures. The interview design started with the initial proposal evaluated by the experts of the funding organisation. Then, the researcher structured the interview in a version for teachers and used it for studying a case. Next, experts in a congress and the reviewers of a journal evaluated this case. Finally, the journal published the paper. After that, the researcher adapted the interview for students. The interview and informed consent have English, German, and Spanish versions, considering the participants' profiles and preferences.

The researcher finalised the instrument structure during the first participant's interview. This interview took place in two online sessions. After the first session, the researcher identified some missing elements and formulated a new question for the interview. Despite the topics and questions in the interview structure, during the process, the researcher formulated questions to delve into some aspects (Muthanna, 2019).

Data Collection

The participants obtained information about the research project and the interview purpose. Additionally, they read and signed an informed consent form. The interviewed students knew about the pseudonymisation process and the possibility of retracting or withdrawing at any moment. One of the summoned people withdrew. The researcher deleted the information regarding this person. Some participants opted for a videoconference interview, and some for a face-to-face interview in the open-air areas at the university and following the biosecurity rules. The researcher recorded the audio of the interviews and downloaded the files as student 1, Student n, etc. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher deleted the audio recordings.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The data analysis procedure consists of a conducted content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). First, the researcher identifies trends or patterns in the students' testimonies. This procedure involves –a) transcribing the interviews, b) codifying excerpts (quotations) with information about the general topics, c) grouping codes by comparison (if they have similar or confluent meaning, sense or focus), d) identifying possible emerging categories that are additional to the interview themes, and f) proposing substantive theory emergent from the data and limited to the population. Second, through the cultural independence and cultural similarity principles, the Cultural Bridge approach is the frame to discuss whether the integration course leads to culturally inclusive processes. Third, additional discussions emerge by comparing the findings with other research reports and when pointing to some implications.

Results

The integration course is a scenario with the potential to promote inclusive acculturation processes. The aspects that bring the orientation course closer to cultural inclusion are in the official contents on German culture and the unofficial ones on the cultures of students and teachers. Likewise, the possibility of achieving cultural inclusion is in some teaching and assessment methodologies teachers carry out. There are recognition, cooperation and mutual identification between subjects and their cultures. The integration course's limitations to achieving inclusive acculturation processes are different. Some limitations have to do with the rigid structure of the program and the little time to address the contents. Other problems rely on the teachers' actions because they must focus on the book and the test. However, some teachers have little interest in student learning. There are also cultural tensions between students that difficult the connivance and learning.

Category Learning

This category groups information about learning. The data here grouped describe the course's content –official or not, learning modalities and learning difficulties. The most predominant idea about learning is that content is more than grammar and vocabulary. The students declare that they have learned basic grammar, vocabulary and everyday situations in Germany. Two cases add learned aspects like how to interact with people, skills, the students' and teachers' cultures, and the German culture through the book or the teachers' testimony. Students identify the orientation course as the most crucial scenario to learn about the German culture – history, how to write a job application, politics and society. Furthermore, along with the interview, they tell aspects related to learning about cultures. Additionally, some students develop collaborative strategies for learning.

Regarding the content, the students' opinions are diverse. One of them would have like to improve more the communicative skills, another going gradually with the grammar and two students learning specific topics –more history and how to make bank transactions. In the same order, they state that the general topics are meaningful for them, except for some specific topics, data to memorize and the excess of forms to fill out.

Some learning problems are related to the limitations of the first time dealing with the language, lack of alphabet dominion, slower learning and family issues. Other learning difficulties include relationships between students, such as adaptation, teamwork, people who have learned on the street and consider that they know enough, and students who speak loud. A different kind of issue is regarding grammar, and the more common are declinations, the alphabet dominion, and transference of elements belonging to other languages. Some students find a limitation that the teachers do not assess learning to identify the advances or needs. Moreover, in one case, the student considers limitations for learning –that the book is confusing, all the audio files are not accessible, the short time at the school whereby students must learn at home, the different educational level and background.

Category Teaching

This category groups information about teaching. The data here grouped describe the teaching strategies and their features.

The students frequently mentioned active strategies like role play, games, variety, interactive board, videos, audios, test online, rotating learning partnership and special activities for students with difficulties, among others. The more frequent activities are book, forms for filling out and more material extra, listening to audios, speaking about topics (phrases,

conversations and telling about everyday life), writing letters and emails and in the whiteboard, reading loud out and answering questions from the test (catalogue). A regular part of the program is going to a museum or excursions out of the school. The interviewed also pointed out some strategies that included the cultural dimension as –teaching contents related to the German, students’ and teachers’ cultures, asking everyone how the things in their countries are or happen, and the book section “projects” regarding the cultures.

Regarding the flexibility, the interviewed reported on some rigid teachers centred on the book, the test and forms for filling out. The flexible teachers took into account the students’ learning needs and the variety of activities. There are other characteristics that the students found necessary in the teaching methodology —a collaboration between teachers, motivation and scaffolding for students, and the teaching sequence—. Additionally, the students identified, as negative, teachers who led them to overwork. Regarding teaching methodology, the interviewed suggest taking into account —motivating more interactions between students, organizing groups according to the learning needs, and engaging Germans in the course for interaction.

Category Assessment

This category groups information about assessment. The data here grouped describe the learning assessment strategies and their characteristics.

The most usual assessment strategies and means were –ICT, feedback on conversations, emails, letters, homework and developed material (copies from other books or printed from the internet, and forms for filling out), the assessment book section, and a specific tool (a special notebook for students writings managed by the teacher). Concerning the assessment frequency, the interviewed reported cases where the teachers’ did not assess learning, others in which assessment is incomplete because of the time, and others in which assessment was part of the whole process. All the participants reported that the assessment focused on the test. Finally, the most frequent report on the learning assessment was as feedback and a metacognitive process. The students pointed out that sometimes the teachers reported the learning assessment using a scale with words like “good” and “very good” or a few times based on numbers. In a case, a student expresses that the assessment was not clear and would like to understand the criteria.

Category Relationships between Participants and Teachers

This category groups information about relationships between participants and teachers. The data here grouped describe the cultural relationships among educational actors in the course and the learning goal.

In the course participants’ relationships, a student identified indirect trouble with the teacher. For this person, it was frustrating that the teacher was not interested in the students’ learning, only in the program development. However, the other students did not report problems with the teachers.

Furthermore, the interviewed reported different kinds of problems between students, but not related to themselves in general. For example, some students expressed discomfort because others used to speak in their native languages. However, it was okay for them to speak in English (which is not the official language of the course either). The most common clashes are culture-related because of religion, intolerance to different forms of expression, stereotypes and misunderstandings. Other cultural tensions happened regarding specific topics as –the acceptance of homosexuality, gender equity, and the prohibition of underage women marriage in Germany, which are addressed oppositely in other countries. Another frequent issue between students has to do with the personalities –tensions with people who were not interested in

learning, some making fun of others, students who did not want to work with others, people disturbing the lessons, the personal hygiene and the different educational experience. An interviewed reported on a case when a student stated superiority over others. A few cases were direct verbal and physical aggression between students.

Concerning the possible troubles between students and teachers, the interviewed reported on two kinds. First, a set of problems is the students' personality –lousy attitude towards the lesson, intolerant student with others' learning rhythm and punctuality. The other type of indirect troubles students-teachers relies on teachers' actions –making comparisons between students (to teach comparative and superlative), exceptional attention to a specific student, speaking in a different language with a specific student, and antipathy towards students.

Category Relationships between Cultures in the Curriculum

This category groups information about relationships between cultures in the curriculum. The data here grouped describe the power relationships among cultures in the course content, lessons, materials and interactions.

The first topic related to the relationships between cultures category is the diversity in the classroom. The students reported having teachers of different nationalities –Egypt, Germany, Poland and Ukraine. Furthermore, the classmates came from – Afghanistan, Armenia, Australia, Bosnia, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, East Asia (no specification), Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Finland, France, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Moldavia, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Russia, Somalia, Spain, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, Vietnam and Yemen.

Regarding the inclusion of the students' culture in the course curriculum, the interviewed consider that it is relevant to consider the culture. One reason is that learning about the different cultures may lead to understandings, communication and mutual respect. However, one interviewed stated that knowing about other cultures not always leads to mutual comprehension and respect. This student reported a case in which a classmate several times expressed contempt for homosexuals and considered that the German government should not allow them to marry. The student reporting the case did not feel comfortable with the classmate's expressions and found it incoherent according to the freedom, equity and democracy values addressed during the course.

Another reason for considering culture in the integration course is for organising groups according to the students' learning needs, supporting according to the students' styles and rhythms, teaching some topics that are taboo for some cultures but not in Germany, and organising the teamwork taking into account the customs of some cultures. Furthermore, one of the interviewed suggested establishing groups by separating cultures and economic and educational levels.

The interviewed students also reported how the teachers considered the cultures during the lessons. For example, the teachers used to ask students very often about how the topics in the program are or happen in their countries. For instance, if the topic is food, the teachers ask every student about the food in the correspondent country. Another teachers' strategy is developing the projects' section of the book. Those projects are active strategies related to cultural interchange based on the contents. A student said that the teacher explains some learning styles and characteristics according to nationalities or regions, expecting more tolerance.

Another aspect of the relationships between cultures is the respect and recognition of the participants' and teachers' culture in the classroom. The students identified two sorts of negative situations regarding cultures. First, when the teachers did not give enough time for students to speak about their own culture, the teachers' cultural bias, and when someone outside

the class doubted that a foreigner was the teacher. Second, when some students interacted based on stereotypes on others and when a student manifested to be superior to others.

Regarding the Germans' participation in the course, the students had different experiences and opinions. The majority reported that they did not have contact with Germans during the course or that their only contact was with the teachers. The most common way of contact with German a part of the teachers is visiting museums. A student suggests that the school should plan interaction between German learners and the groups of Germans learning foreign languages. A student considers that the contact with Germans is not relevant in the frame of the course.

Emerging Categories

Additional to the information provided by the participants to the researcher, some excerpts tell something different to the interview themes. Grouping those excerpts produce two emerging categories.

Category Feelings during the Course

Under this emerging category, there are two types of feelings. First, the students' good feelings are regarding the classmates –motivation, comfortable because of cooperation between students, happy learning about other cultures and sharing. Other good feelings have to do with the teachers –their positive attitudes, the mutual identification and the motivational activities.

Into the students' bad feelings is, for example, uncomfortable because of different reasons –does not match with the classmates, someone does not want to work cooperatively, others do not care learning, some classmates are intolerant or unfriendly and because cannot learn everything. Another bad feeling is a disappointment because the teachers do not care about students' learning, or do not have control of the group and their bad attitudes (making fun of students' mistakes). Moreover, the students felt terrible when some classmates suggested that they were superior to others or because of the problematic interaction because of religious issues. In another case, a student is unhappy with the school and the material. This student believes that the book is confusing, that the school does not provide all the learning materials, and that the school does not teach anything, forcing students to learn at home.

Additionally, a student tells about an identity crisis. The German language is a great barrier to integrating into German society for this student. The student mentions an experience in other countries feeling greater cultural and linguistic identification. The crisis consists of meeting with elements from the origin country, another culturally closer country and Germany.

Category Processes beyond the Lesson and Classroom

This category groups some situations that the interviewed told and which mean actions added to the course program. One situation is when students visit each other in their living places as colleagues or when they establish a commonalities-based friendship. Furthermore, the students consider it an extra commitment when teachers invest time and effort to support students with learning difficulties.

Discussion

Interpreting Findings from the Cultural Bridge Framework

The data analysis leads to the affirmation that the integration course for immigrants in Germany guides partially inclusive acculturation processes. This statement emerges because the Cultural Bridge framework identifies approaches and limitations to cultural inclusion in the testimony of the participants. The way to identify these approximations and limitations is through the practical principles of the CB.

Cultural Independence Principle Enactment during the Course

There is evidence on approximations to enact the cultural independence in the integration course by introducing content belonging to the diverse cultures and some inclusive teaching strategies. Nevertheless, there is evidence of limitations in motivating students to learn about the German culture and their classmates' cultures.

The first condition to enact the cultural independence principle should be that elements from the different cultures are part of the content. Regarding this condition, the students learned content from the different cultures. They learned about German culture through the official contents, teachers' experiences and some excursions. Likewise, the students learned about other cultures through some topics in the curriculum and interactions with teachers and classmates.

Well, the truth is that to me, it was very interesting to know more about the cultures because one thinks that everyone is Arab and that everyone speaks Arabic, but one really does not understand to what extent someone is Arab, Syrian, the difference between cultures, or their countries and divisions. (Person 4)

In the excerpt, the student expresses learning from the classmates' cultures in addition to the German culture. A risk for excluding cultures as part of the content in the integration course is the teachers' cultural bias. Their simplification of cultures potentially excludes content belonging to every culture.

In many opportunities, the teacher asked us for describing pictures on the book [...]. And the teacher guided us to say something like [...] "because of the skin colour, this person comes from Africa". For me, it is clear that the whole planet is diverse and we have Afroamericans, AfroEuropeans, Afroasians [...]. I searched information about Afrogermans [...] and showed it to the teacher. [The teacher] only answered me something like "yes, yes, but this information doesn't matter", something like that, but it was not a positive answer. (Person 3)

In the excerpt, the teacher considers that people with a specific skin colour only can come from a region. In this case, the teacher denies ethnical and cultural diversity. However, the risk of excluding cultures from the content is not just marginalising foreign cultures. For example, the interviewed students reported that they do not have much contact with Germans in the frame of the course apart from some German teachers, administrators, and museum guides. This limitation is significant because probably students have no access to other dimensions of the German culture.

The second condition to enact the cultural independence principle should be that teachers engage students in learning and participating in the independent cultures. Regarding this condition, the teachers implement particular strategies that may be a part of the teaching requirements to encourage learning from different cultures. The special activities are for motivation, scaffolding, and supporting students with learning difficulties. Some strategies motivate students to learn about other cultures. Flexibility is also a positive characteristic that the interviewees perceived in some cases.

I had two classmates, [...] who had a lot of difficulties and I remember [...] that while we were developing our normal activities, the teacher had a notebook to prepare extra activities for [those classmates]. And I remember hearing that one day the teacher told them that if they wanted on Wednesdays after class they could stay an hour longer to reinforce [learning]. (Person 1)

In the event above, the teacher used novel strategies to motivate some students to know the local culture. This is proof of an effort to participate in a cultural domain. The students reported some difficulties that potentially limit learning in the local cultural domain. Some personal difficulties are the capacity to recognise the need to learn, adapt, work collaboratively, and break stereotypes. The experiential difficulties include lack of alphabet knowledge, slower learning, and family issues. Furthermore, the teaching limitations are related to lack of learning assessment, which does not help understand the process, confusing materials and a rigid methodology.

Other reasons limit the cultural independence enactment. First, the cultural clashes significantly restrict the disposition to learn about other cultures. The main clashes are related to religion, gender and sexual identity. Clashes are a way to distinguish a culture from others but not for interaction. Second, invalidating a culture is part of negating its intrinsic and independent value from other cultures' values. For example, when some students do not agree that others speak in their languages but approve of speaking in English (also a foreign language) is an invalidation of the languages.

[This person] considers that the German government should not allow people of the same gender to get married. So, every time that the book showed this [homoparental families], [that person] said "oh, teacher, I am sorry, you know, I am democratic, but I consider that this is not good and the German government should not allow it". (Person 3)

The excerpt describes a cultural clash situation that probably limits students' mutual identification and comprehension and, therefore, the possibility of learning about other cultural domains.

Cultural Similarity Principle Enactment during the Course

There is evidence of approximations to enact the cultural similarity due to the teachers' encouragement to students to learn about other cultures and identify common elements. However, there is evidence of personality and cultural limitations to motivate students to cross borders to the German culture and their classmates' cultures.

The first condition to enact the cultural similarity principle should be that teachers identify commonalities between cultures. Teachers assure this condition when they promote learning about different cultures. Through this process, they might lead students to identify

elements for mutual identification. A part of this learning comes in the official program, but it is a more emergence of everyday interaction.

The students' suggestions on the methodology can encourage the border crossing taking into account cultural similarities. Some proposals are: motivate more interactions between students, organise groups according to the learning needs, and engage Germans in the course for exchange.

It would have been more interesting to do something different because, in addition to that the course leads one to imagine things and how to really integrate into society, it is also necessary to find a way to interact with other groups of people. For example, interacting with Germans who were studying English or who were studying Spanish [in the same school]. So, it is how you can try to integrate the local people. (Person 4)

The student's suggestion in the excerpt considers the common interest in language learning to encourage cultural interactions. The second condition to enact the cultural similarity principle should be that teachers engage students in using similarities for crossing borders. At this level, the teachers use strategies that stimulate students to identify commonalities, similarities or convergences between cultures. For example, the teamwork and rotation of working partners have the potential to lead students to recognise and participate in similar cultural elements. Moreover, students interact and interchange when teachers enact the projects book section.

In the orientation course, I think that the teachers always tried to listen to our opinions to identify that our culture was similar or different with respect to the topic of discussion. For example, when we are discussing the political system, they asked us what the organisation was like in our country if it was a democracy or not. (Person 1)

In the narration, the student highlights a teaching strategy that motivates students to identify cultural similarities through the course topics. The interviewed expressed emotions might be the product or motivation to cross the cultural borders. Some feelings emerge from the cooperative work and mutual identification with classmates. Other feelings emerge because of the teachers' work and mutual identification. This commonalities-based mutual identification is relevant because it leads to partnership for learning and friendship.

[...] so my teacher was very, very good. She had a good plan for us and she had a good strategy for us too. She had good strategies. And I appreciate our teacher and I still visit her [at the school]. [...]. For sure, she treated us like a mother treated her children. (Person 5)

In this case, the student describes positive emotions that motivate learning, thus crossing the bridge from the own culture to the local culture. On the other hand, some situations are obstacles to experimenting with mutual identification and interactions. A part of those situations concerns the students' personalities. For instance, when students disturb the class, they do not recognise the shared value of learning, reducing possible mutual identification. Another part of those situations is about the teachers' attitudes and actions. Person 2 said, "Two of these [teachers] were not really caring, just going to the checkbox, the list and checking the box "I have seen the grammar, I said this, I said that", just only going through it." This is an example

of when teachers' do not pay attention to the students' learning needs or suggestions. This situation discourages mutual identification.

There are critical cultural phenomena that limit the interaction. First, cultural clashes have a vital role in increasing social distancing and decreasing the possibilities for interaction and peaceful connivance. When communities clash, they may think that there are no motivations for interacting. Furthermore, the limited contact with Germans in the course is a risk for experiencing a real interaction between cultures. The lack of communication restricts the identification of common elements for peaceful connivance between locals and immigrants. Person 2 stated, "Never happens something like this [interaction with Germans]. Only the two German teachers. But it never happened that as part of the learning plan they invite someone with German speaking." The excerpt describes the scarce contact between Germans and immigrants in the course context. This cultural distancing also reduces the immigrants feeling like part of the German society.

In Dialogue with Other Studies and Perspectives

Kloubert and Dickerhoff (2020) report some findings that support and validate some results of the present research. The authors study the didactic process in the orientations course—a part of the integration course aimed at addressing German history, culture and society. Kloubert and Dickerhoff (2020) use the dialogical education framework to identify advances and limitations for intercultural interaction. The authors report that time and a high amount of content are relevant limitations to encouraging cultural exchange, as the present work reported. The limitation for an authentic cultural interaction increases when some teachers, without apparently accurate educational formation, limit the course to an instrumental transfer of content to the students, as both research accounts. However, these studies in dialogue also identified advances in a possible cultural interaction—a part is related to the program and materials, and another part is related to some teachers' strategies. Some teachers try to diversify the teaching activities, promote the students' participation and include personal-cultural elements and experiences as content.

Migliorini et al. (2015) provide empirical data that suggest the need for specific educational programs and educational strategies according to the students' particularities. The authors study the acculturation strategies adopted by students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The quantitative data indicate that every cultural group tends to have different acculturation strategies. Based on these findings, the authors propose to design educational strategies to mobilise students towards inclusive acculturation strategies. In the same line, the current research reported different learning limitations and experiences that could lead to different acculturation strategies. A possible solution to avoid the student's learning failure and frustration is creating other programs or new teaching practices to attend every community. Nonetheless, this potential solution implies a flexible curriculum that allows teachers to adapt the program and strategies to the students' needs.

On the other hand, the studies and perspectives of Makarova et al. (2019), Migliorini et al. (2015) and Rowan et al. (2021) point to the need to engage the local community in the acculturation process. The cultural Bridge approach and the cited authors' works propose that an inclusive acculturation process implies that all the cultural groups in the context should transit between cultures while preserving their own culture and every direction. The problem emerges when the local culture and, therefore, the curriculum and educational programs expect that only the non-hegemonic communities make the adaptation or cross the bridge. This position is a deficit vision of the subjects of non-dominant culture, which promotes assimilation and could lead to social resistance.

Implications, Transferable Considerations and Challenges

The educational policymakers should consider that the immigrants' inclusion through educational processes must be broader and deeper than transmitting some content relative to the local or hegemonic culture. Teaching immigrants the local language, values, traditions, history and social and political system is an advance. However, the inclusion of a reciprocal relationship between cultures demands that the immigrants or non-hegemonic subjects' cultures be recognised, validated and experienced in the curriculum. This equilibrium in the power relationship contributes to justice-based acculturation.

Another critical point for the policies and programs confection is flexibility. This feature should lead to more possibilities in content and teaching strategies. However, it is necessary to recognise that educational systems require some standards or criteria to follow the policy development and the participants' learnings. Nonetheless, this system could contribute more when it allows teachers to propose new contextual content and strategies based on their formation and experience. This equilibrium between standards and freedom leads to more dynamic curricula and processes.

Also, inclusive acculturation implies changes, negotiations, mutual recognition, validation, and experience. Thus, to guarantee inclusive acculturation, the different individuals-communities must participate. As inclusive acculturation is not a concern or commitment of only non-hegemonic subjects-communities, the local or hegemonic subjects-communities must consider an engagement in the cultural interaction. This equilibrated participation of the communities in the cultural interaction opens the possibility of a more mutual understanding and respect.

The Cultural Bridge approach is a framework that policymakers, researchers, teacher educators, teachers and other educational leaders may use to plan, enact and evaluate the inclusive educational process. The CB synthesises elements such as bidimensionality –the possibility of experiencing a new culture while preserving the own culture, bidirectionality – local and non-local communities transit between cultures, pluralism and interculturality. From those theoretical elements, the CB describes the cultural independence principle and the cultural similarity principle as applicable criteria to design and study inclusive educational experiences.

However, some challenges remain. Some of them belong to the individuals' personalities, which do not lead to a reciprocal cultural interaction. Other challenges must do with cultural barriers regarding customs and values, such as those that differ from western equity, equality, freedom, democracy, and others.

Conclusions

According to the testimonies gathered through the interview, the integration course that the German government offers to immigrants contributes partially to inclusive acculturation processes. However, the course limitations to lead inclusive acculturation processes come from the course contents, structure, established methodology and time, the teachers' practice, the students' conditions and dispositions, and the German community participation.

Learning and crossing cultural borders depend not only on or emerge from teachers' strategies and the curriculum. Additional to the official contents and methodologies that propose German culture and foreign cultures as content, the individuals' connivance promotes other cultural contents. Personality, previous experience, the possibility of interaction, mutual cultural identification and cultural clashes are conditions for the emergence of cultural contents and motivations to learn those contents.

The Cultural Bridge process in the integration course case counts on different endpoints and possible walkways. The bridge endpoints or individual cultures are not only the German

and “immigrant”. Immigrants participating in the integration course are diverse and have cultural clashes between them. Thus, an individual’s acculturation experience in the course not solely depends on the relationship between the own culture and the German. The interaction with other immigrants’ cultures also shapes the acculturation process. Therefore, the content should emerge from both German and foreign cultures. Furthermore, the curriculum should identify common elements between German culture and immigrant cultures, as well as between immigrant cultures.

The Cultural Bridge process is a construction between communities. In this regard, the educational community isolation in its classrooms is a limitation for a complete cultural interchange with the German culture. For this reason, Germans and immigrants could learn about each other and mutual identification when they increase the cultural interactions.

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