From language class to higher education: assessing refugees in transition*

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Starting point

Access to **education** as a fundamental **human right**

(... *and is being recognised as essential to *successful* resettlement*)

(e.g. Ager & Strang, 2008; Sen, 1999;

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 26, 1948)

Refugee students run **five times** as high a risk of dropping out of HE compared to traditional students

(e.g. Wong et al., 2018)

Topic under-researched (esp. in Germany)

(e.g. Grüttner et al., 2018; Mangan & Winter, 2017; Ramsay & Baker, 2019)

Background and Design

Research context

Universities of Bremen:

Preparation programme for future students with refugee background

(*HERE-Studies*)

Language programme on campus:

- intensive classes

- accompanying tutor programme

→ C1 (entrance) test → academic studies

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Research aim today

Pathways of participants into and through HE
[focus: language]

#RQ1:

How do refugees, tutors, teachers perceive the refugees' linguistic preparedness for academic studies?

#RQ2:

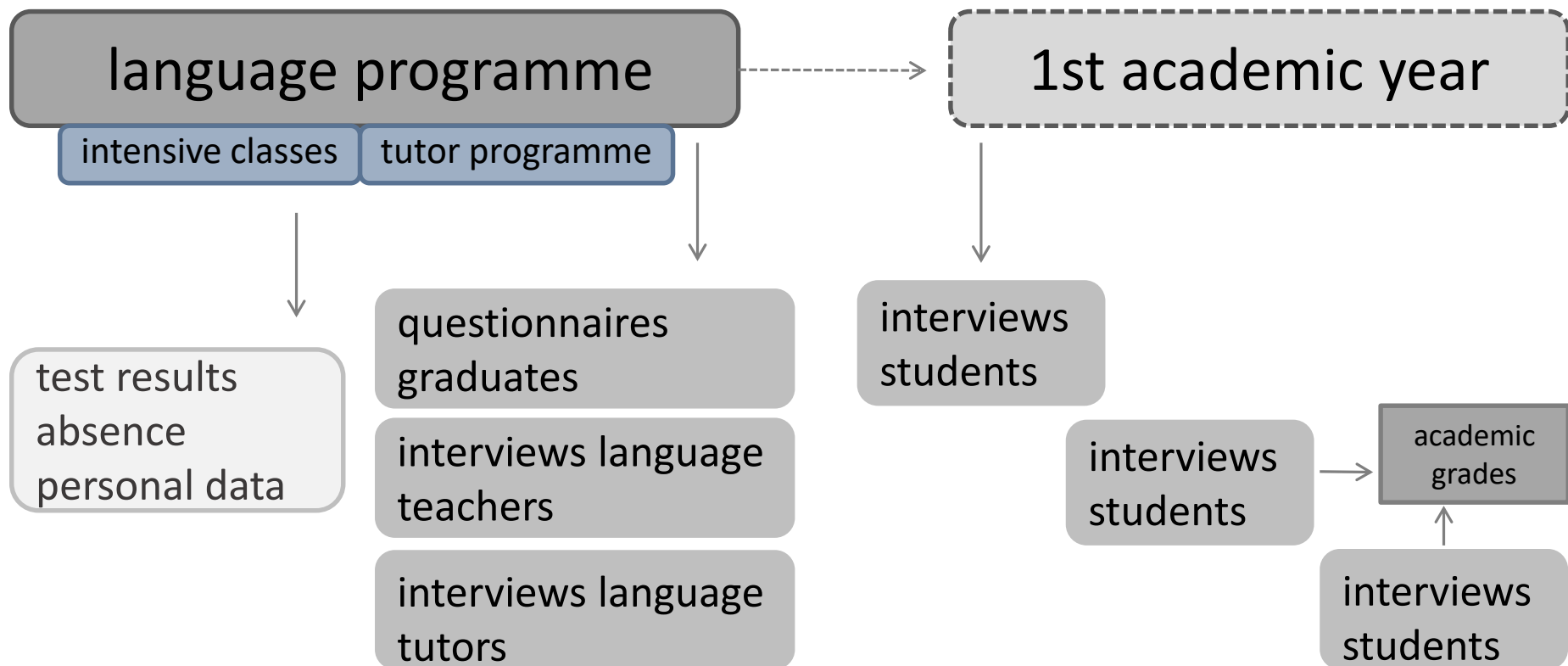How do the graduates cope linguistically during their 1st terms at HE?

#RQ3:

What is the relation between C1 test scores and students' future academic success in German HE?

Research design

Design at a glance:

➢ longitudinal
➢ multi-perspectives
➢ mixed-methods

language programme ┄┄→ **1st academic year**

intensive classes | tutor programme

test results
absence
personal data

questionnaires graduates

interviews language teachers

interviews language tutors

interviews students

interviews students → academic grades

interviews students

Participants language programme

- 1st graduation cohorte
  - n=80
  - 4 courses / different starting levels (A1, A2, B2)

- C1 test takers
  - n=52 examinees　　➡　　Ø C1 results: 73.5/100 (SD 9.7)
    　　　　　　　　　　　➡　　Pass rate: 90%

  - n=47 graduates

  → group of „**high-performers"** [*We were really motivated*]

Preliminary results

RQ1_Linguistic preparation

Perceptions of linguistic preparedness graduates

*How well do you think the **intensive language classes** prepared you linguistically for the following areas?*

very good – not good at all

		gut	gut	weniger gut	haupt nicht gut
1	Für das alltägliche Leben, z.B. für Gespräche mit Nachbarn, Wohnungssuche, … *(everyday life)*				☐
2	Für den Hochschulalltag, z.B. um sich im Studierendensek engang zu informieren, um einer vereinbaren, … *(everyday academic life)*			☐	☐
3	Für ein Studium, z.B. um ein Referat vorzubereiter tur zu recherchieren, um einer Vo *(academic studies)*	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Für andere Bereichen, und zwar:	☐	☐	☐	☐

RQ1_Linguistic preparation

Perceptions of linguistic preparedness graduates

Grad (n=41)	LTea (n=3)	LTuT (n=7)

■ feel overall well prepared for
  – **everyday life**
  – **everyday academic life**
  – **academic studies**
 	
■ give more credit to the preparation via intensive language classes than via tutore programme
	■ perceive graduates to be very well prepared for **everyday and everyday academic life**
	■ expect them to cope rather well during their academic studies
		■ perceive the graduates to be well prepared for **everyday life**
		
		■ more sceptical concerning their preparation for **everyday academic life and academic studies**

RQ2_Linguistic coping

Perception of linguistic coping students (n=21)

- OVERALL
  - ‣ struggles, of course
  - ‣ (slow) **improvements** over time
  - ‣ but: term2**>**term3

- SPECIFIC language use situations

> - Listening to **lectures**
> - Taking **notes**
> - Complement **scripts**
> - Prep. /follow-up **reading**
> - Read&process content **orally**
> - Read&process content in **writing**
> - Interact in **groupwork**

RQ2_Linguistic coping

- Most challenging term 1:
  ‣ note taking / [reading]

- Most challenging term 2:
  ‣ writing / [complement script]

- Most challenging term 3
  ‣ complement script / speaking

Background features

- No further language classes

- ~ 70 % Engineering/ Math/ ComSc/ NatSc

RQ3_Relation C1 test scores – academic sucess

What is academic success ?

- heterogenous, complex construct
- influenced by multiple variables

> academic grades
> individual qualities of success

(Kuh et al. 2006, York et al. 2015)

Our data on academic success as expressed in grades – **very sparse!**

- transcripts of records (1 to 5, 1 =best)
- n = 13 (term1)

RQ3_Relation C1 test scores – academic success

C1 overall score   – academic grades

C1 subskill scores – academic grades

			Ø academ. grades term1	C1 overall result
Spearman-Rho	Ø academ. grades term1	Korrelationskoeffizient	1,000	-,355
		Sig. (2-seitig)	.	,233
		N	13	13

			Ø academ. grades term1	C1 writing component
Spearman-Rho	Ø academ. grades term1	Korrelationskoeffizient	1,000	-,440
		Sig. (2-seitig)	.	,132
		N	13	13

First implications and discussion topics

Implications and discussion

Transitioning into and coping in academia….

- inconclusive link between C1 test results and academic success

- what is success?

Status quo

- dropping out?

- various [target- group- specific] challenges

  - language
  - study system
  - social connections
  - **finances**
  - **family responsibilities**
  - **psychological issues**

→ HE as best option (?)
→ issue: "wasted" time
    → grit / perseverance

Implications and discussion

Transitioning into and coping
in academia....

- inconclusive link between
  C1 test results and
  academic success

- what is success?

- role of social contacts?

dry / cold / distant
easy and nice, but indifferent
not very helpful
competitive
young

Implications and discussion

Transitioning into and coping in academia....

- inconclusive link between C1 test results and academic success

- what is success?

- role of social contacts?

- how to ease transition?

- allow time

[*I am exhausted , need time to breathe*]

- low-stakes, target-group-specific counselling

- ...and language support

- multichannelled information

- ...

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