SOCIAL SKILLS FOR REFUGEE TRAINEES IN DUAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A GERMAN CASE STUDY

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Labour market integration in Germany is strongly linked to a vocational qualification in a training occupation or a university degree. For the participation of young refugees, labour market integration is important, but it is often just as difficult to get access to the formalized German VET system as to pass the examinations to enter into a trade. Failing to successfully enter the labour market is mostly justified with a lack of language skills, but training companies also suggest that newcomers lack social and (inter)cultural capital. This article shows how a mediation training for instructors helps refugee trainees learn the social competencies needed to gain labour market entry in Germany. Embedded in the overall context of dual vocational training (dual VET), the article first provides an overview of its system and explains the situation of refugees opted for a training. The project is then presented with the initial results.

L'intégration sur le marché du travail en Allemagne est fortement liée à une qualification professionnelle dans un métier à formation reconnue ou à un diplôme universitaire. Pour la participation des jeunes réfugiés, l'intégration au marché du travail est importante, mais il est souvent tout aussi difficile d'accéder au système allemand formalisé d'enseignement et de formation professionnels (EFP) que de réussir les examens d'entrée dans un métier. L'échec se justifie le plus souvent par un manque de compétences linguistiques, tandis que les entreprises de formation invoquent également le manque de capital social et (inter)culturel comme obstacle. Cet article démontre comment une formation en médiation pour les éducateurs aide les stagiaires réfugiés à acquérir les compétences sociales nécessaires pour entrer sur le marché du travail en Allemagne. S'inscrivant dans le contexte général de la double formation professionnelle (double EFP), cet article donne d'abord un aperçu de ce système et examine la situation des réfugiés ayant opté pour une telle formation. Les résultats préliminaires du projet sont ensuite présentés.

INTRODUCTION

For the participation of young refugees, labor market integration is highly important. Our paper presents results from the Service-Learning Project "Social Skills for trainees in dual vocational education and training and mediation training for their instructors" (SKM) from Germany. All trainees have to pass an examination before they graduate from their apprenticeship. Subsequently, they gain a higher salary and improve their standing. As a result of their participation in the program, the hope is that the refugees experience higher labour market participation rates and more successful integration into German society. Unfortunately, too many trainees with escape experience and migration backgrounds[1] fail within the vocational education system and do not successfully pass their apprenticeship examinations (Kroll & Uhly 2018). The

1 The term migration background is used differently in surveys and official statistics in Germany. One definition is based on the programme for international study evaluation (PISA). According to this, a migration background is present if young people themselves or at least one parent was born abroad. The federal statistical office defines the term regarding to the citizenship of young people and their parents (Will 2020, German Parliament 2018). In SKM, only young people participated who had fled or emigrated themselves.

Service-Learning Project temporarily connects university students to trainees with escape experience and migration backgrounds at the University of Vechta in Germany. The goal is for the students to assist the refugees in developing their social skills in the hopes that this will encourage them to stay in the apprenticeship programs and to develop the 'soft skills' needed to obtain employment as graduates.

Embedded in the overall context of dual vocational training (dual VET), the article first provides an overview of the program and explains the situation of those refugees who have opted for the training. We end the paper by presenting preliminary results.

DUAL VET IN GERMANY

The roots of today's dual VETi in Germany can be traced back to 1869 (Trifonov, 2013, p.15). Since then, vocational training in Germany has been in constant evolution, now part of a complex system. Today, it is governed by two regulations: the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) and the Crafts Code (HWO). There are separate training regulations for each of the approximately 330 regulated training professions. The diploma that graduates receive after a successful apprenticeship usually allows graduates direct entry into a career (Seibert & Wydra-Somaggio 2017).

One of the basic requirements for successful labor market integration in Germany is the attainment of an apprenticeship diploma or degree. Refugees often find it difficult not only to access training, but also to maintain their participation in the training period until they successfully complete their diploma (Stein, 2012a; 2012b). Not surprisingly, those who do not have a formal qualification or degree have a particularly difficult time finding suitable employment. If they become gainfully employed, they have a lower income, lose their jobs more quickly, and their risk of long-term unemployment increases. In the VET Report of 2019 (BiBB 2019, p.43), a lack of a vocational qualification is associated with "considerable negative consequences for those affected and society as a whole".

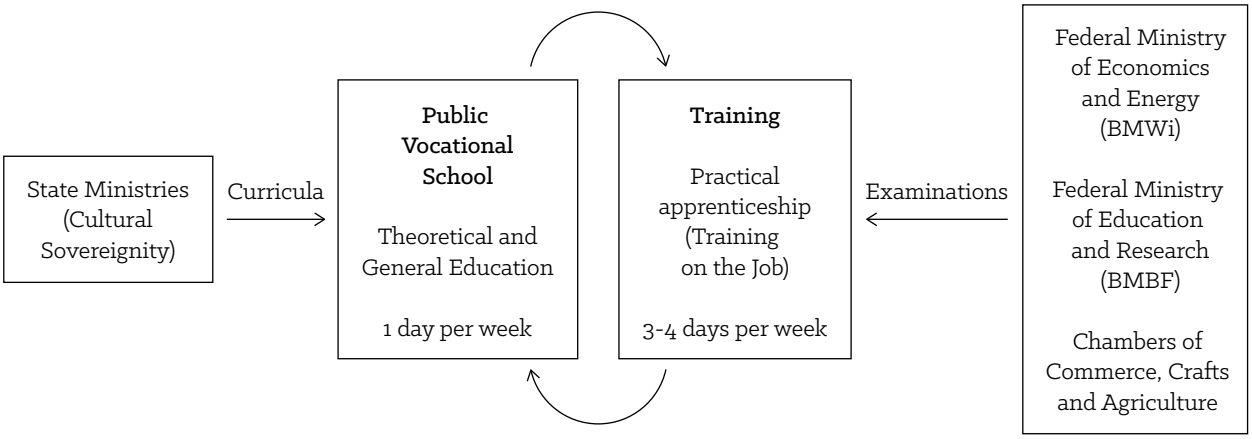
CONSTRUCTION OF DUAL VET

The term dual VET arises from the two learning venues, the training company and the vocational school, whereby trainees learn the practical work in the company and the subject-related and general-education content in the schools (Trifonov 2013: 5). Most of the training takes place in the companies (Figure 1). State vocational schools and companies work together to provide placements for the apprentices (Arnold et al., 2020; Arnold & Müller, 1997). The aim is to provide all graduates with a general and professional basic education in vocational schools and in their training companies as well as special skills which are gained on the job. For companies, investing in training young people is a building block to meeting their need for young professionals. In 2017, 74% of graduates gained permanent employment in their training company at the conclusion of their apprenticeship (BiBB 2019, p. 12).

SCHOOL EDUCATION

Vocational schools see themselves as part-time schools and are open to unemployed young people and those with an employment relationship without vocational training. The curriculum consists of practical (skills), occupational theory (knowledge) and general education (German, history etc.) (Gudjons, 2001). A common critique of the current system of vocational training is that is does not adequately support young people in the very high and low range of services. Both groups drop out of these programs more often (Stein & Schmidt, 2013). In fact, trainees with a migration background (Stein, 2012a; 2012b) and with refugee experience struggle with difficulties.

FIGURE 1: SYSTEM OF DUAL VET IN GERMANY (STEIN, 2004, P. 258)



COMPANY TRAINING

The legal basis for starting an apprenticeship is the apprenticeship contract concluded according to legal regulations (BBiG or HWO), similar to an employment contract. The training company pledges to pay a training allowance and to comply with labor law conditions and the standards set out in the training regulations. A "personally and professionally suitable" trainee must be active in the company, who is responsible for the structured and practical training (§28 BBiG). Trainees are introduced to the tasks of their profession on the job and actively work in the company accompanied by trainers (GOVET 2019).

For their part, trainees commit themselves "to strive to acquire the professional ability to act that is necessary to achieve the educational goal." (§13 BBiG). This includes the acknowledgment of the rules in the company, school attendance, following instructions, and maintenance of a report booklet, in which training content is recorded.

The training includes an intermediate and final examination prescribed by the training regulations. The exams are taken by the state-mandated institutions, the professional chambers (Section 5 of the BBiG).

AFTER GRADUATION

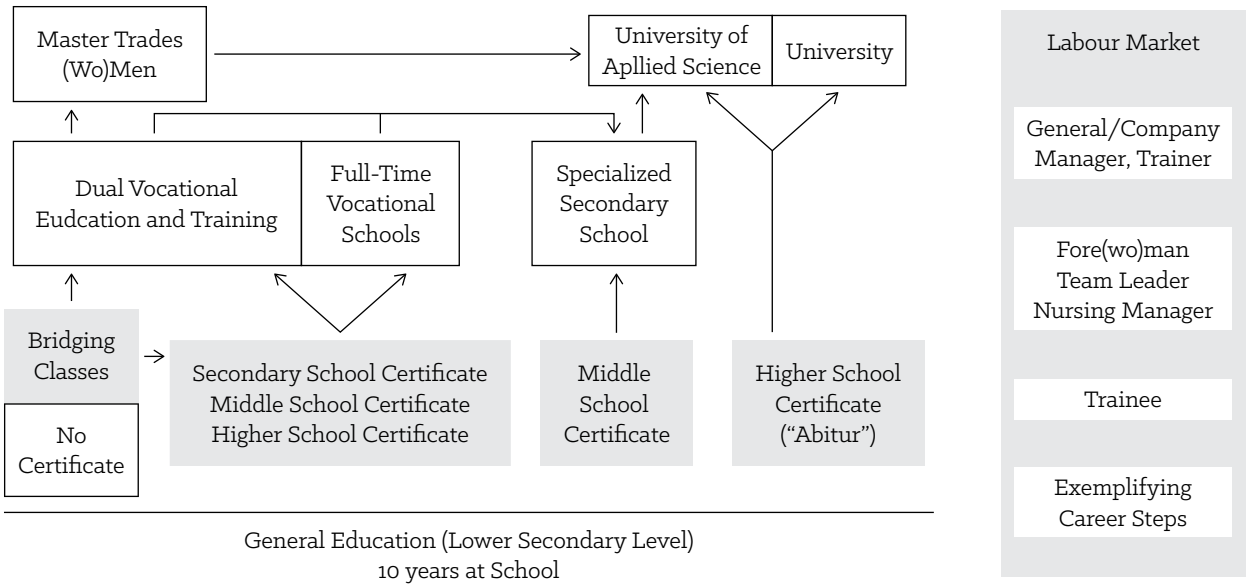
After successfully completing their training, graduates have the prerequisites to apply for employment in their trade (Section 2.1). Depending on the profession, there is the possibility of advancing to middle management. To become self-employed, advanced training to become a master is required. From there or after completing a supplementary school visit, it is possible to pursue the academic path at a University of Applied Sciences. Figure 2 provides an overview of access to the labor market.

REFUGEES IN THE DUAL VET

The formalized training system poses a challenge for some immigrants. A cohort study by the Federal Employment Service (BA 2018, p.16) shows that a majority of refugees had no formal vocational training (86%). This is not surprising in that the German training system is not known in the countries of origin. In addition, evidence of professional experience is often missing or there is no comparability or usability for the German labor market. Refugees are often placed in jobs with low qualifications (BA 2016, p. 7).[2] At the same time, there are various efforts to build bridges to the first job market.

In countries of origin, vocational degrees are often considered as less valuable, have lower social status, and the choice to pursue vocational training "often becomes a 'one-way street' that rules out enrolling in a university degree program later." (Stöwe 2018, p. 36). Furthermore, trainees must deal with their family's expectations for higher levels of education, or some-

FIGURE 2: ROUTES INTO MAINSTREAM EMPLOYMENT, BASED ON A LECTURE OF DONEIT / KERRI / VASKE 04/2019, VECHTA, OWN DIAGRAM



2 Another reason is that job-seeking refugees are young compared to German job-seekers. Their education process often could not be completed in the country of origin (BA 2016 p. 6).

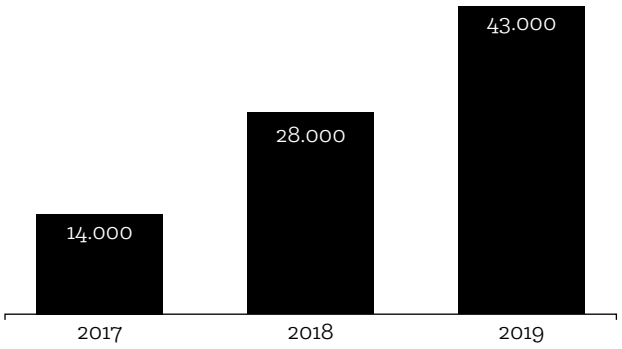
times they may have to support their families at home (Wiedner et al. 2018, p. 28, Müller 2019). Among the main reasons that refugees decide against vocational training is that pay levels for apprentices are lower than the salaries for unskilled workers.

NUMBERS AND DATA ON THE TRAINING OF REFUGEES

With the influx of people seeking protection in 2015-2016, particularly men of younger age groups (BA 2019, p. 7), there is also an increasing demand for those needing training opportunities. This observation is reflected in the labor market statistics on dual VET: from October 2018 to August 2019, around 37,000 refugees nationwide were looking for a training place with the help of the state employment agency.[3] Approximately 27,000 of these young people were able to start the desired or alternative vocational training, but approximately 28 percent of these individuals had to wait and could not be placed until 1 August 2019.

As of March 2019, approximately 43,000 trainees from the major refugee-sending countries of origin worked in dual VET.

FIGURE 3: REFUGEES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (DATES: FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT AGENCY 2018 + 2019), OWN DIAGRAM



The district of Vechta in Lower Saxony, in which the SKM project is offered, is characterized by a high employment rate and a high demand for qualified workers. In April 2019, the unemployment rate was only 3.3%. In the Oldenburg region, which includes the Vechta and Oldenburg districts, 7,700 refugees were registered as looking for work. Refugees are discussed here as "potential for the job market" (Müller 2019) to reduce the shortage of skilled workers. In the 2017/2018 cohort, 796 refugees were registered as seeking training with the employment agency. Of the 409 trainees who were able to start their training in the "Oldenburger District" on 1 August 2018, 308 were still in training in April 2019. Every fourth apprentice left the apprenticeship early without completing any exams (Müller 2019). Unfortunately, the report did not specify the reasons why approximately 25% of the refugees left within the first year of apprenticeship.

CHALLENGES FOR REFUGEES AND THEIR TRAINERS

In Germany, job placement measures end with the start of training. The premature termination of training relationships is mostly justified on the part of the companies due to their apprentices' lack of language skills. Studies by the KOFA (2017) and OECD (2017) also mention the lack of social and (inter-) cultural capital as particularly challenging for employers. The "German work mentality" or the "company tone" are given as examples for conflicts and misunderstandings. Problems of understanding arise when trainees lack the implicit knowledge or specific incorporated cultural capital that is acquired through family, education and interaction (Bourdieu 2015). Given that it is difficult for refugees in refugee accommodation to establish important social contacts with the host society (Wiedner et al. 2018; Rusert et al. 2019; "Bridging social capital" according to Putnam 2000), it is perhaps understandable that they would experience difficulty navigating the work world in their new home.

UNIVERSITY PROJECT SKM

To address the cultural and social capital knowledge gaps, the project, located in a rural area at the University of Vechta and funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, focuses on inter-ethnic contacts between trainees with refugee experience and students. The aim is to strengthen the trainees' social skills by having a volunteer student accompany them in tandem for one semester, with participation being voluntary for everyone involved. According to Stein (2003), social skills are defined in the project as sensitivity, ability to make contacts, sociability, team orientation and assertiveness.

SERVICE PROCESS OF SKM

Linked to the elective module *Research Colloquium* as a Service-Learning Project, students are prepared for mentoring and work with the individually determined needs from the meetings with the participants. What is unique in comparison to other intercultural training courses is that the needs of students as members of the host society as well as

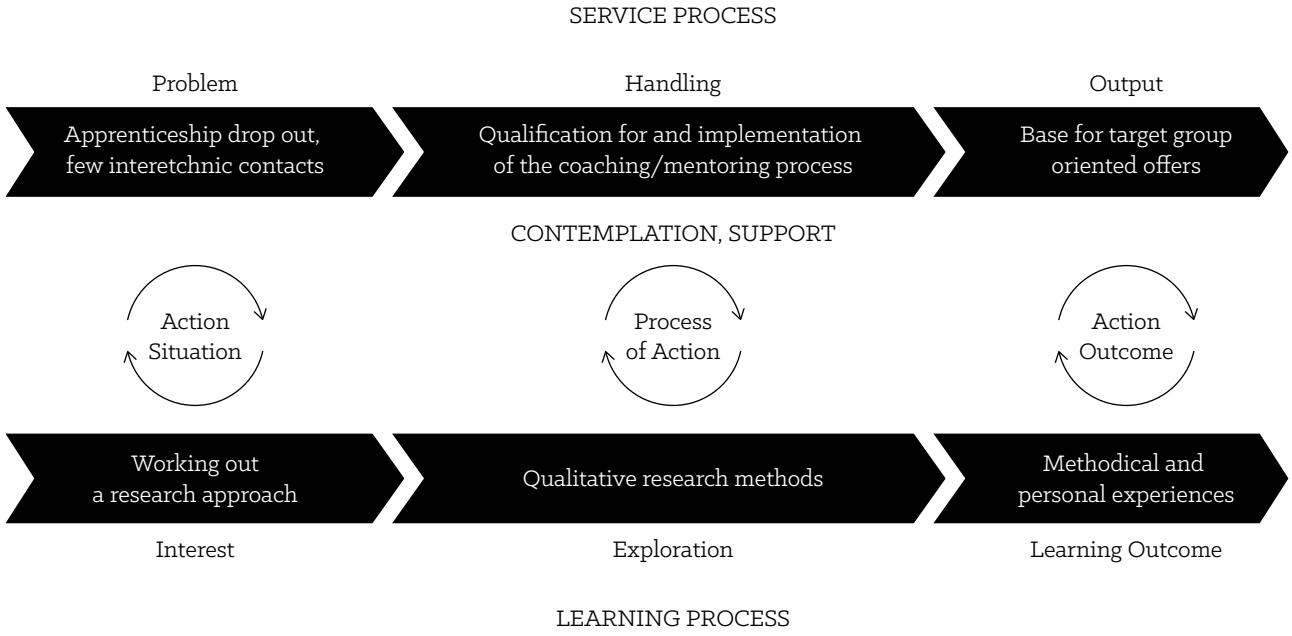
3 In order for those looking for training to be included in the placement process, they must demonstrate the language skills and basic school knowledge required for vocational training ("qualification for training"). The statistics of the employment agency therefore do not cover all job seekers.

refugees are addressed, and that reciprocity enables education through encounters with one another. Students learned about intercultural understanding and diversity, while the refugee apprentices learned about German workplace culture. The interest among the refugee apprentices was so great that there were not enough accompaniments available.

In the initial phase of the project, an interview is conducted with student volunteers and refugee apprentices. The interviews as part of the examination are evaluated in the seminar. In this way, students are introduced to their curricular learning goals in a participatory way by addressing civil society needs (Schnebel & Gerholz 2019).

The sequentially linked service and learning process in the SKM project is shown in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4: SERVICE PROCESS IN SKM (RUSERT ET AL. 2019, P. 385 SIMILAR TO SCHNEBEL & GERHOLZ 2019)



CONTEXT: LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION AND PARTICIPATION

Participation in the labour market provides opportunities beyond earning money; there are additional tangible benefits (Stiglitz et al. 2009, p. 15). When newcomers find gainful and meaningful employment, health and housing outcomes also improve (Söhn & Marquardsen 2017, p. 8; Figure 5).

In contrast to Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), where the integration efforts for refugees are coordinated from a single source, the support services in Germany are more fragmented. Identification and networking of those involved and those affected was essential so that the project and existing offers could interlink or connect.

The cooperation partners of the SKM project primarily support work and education, partly also habitation for newcomers. Due to the focus of the current project, health was not given much attention. Future research should consider the health and stress levels of refugees as these may influence the ability of many refugees to complete their apprenticeships.

FIGURE 5: DIMENSIONS OF PARTICIPATION OF REFUGEES' LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION, OWN DIAGRAM



The actors meet regularly at events on the topic, including the actions of the project. A more structured form of cooperation was desired by some participants but has not yet been implemented.

In mentoring,[4] they act as contact points for problems such as the search for a new apprenticeship position, arrange contacts with companies and trainees, provide information about local conditions and sharing their background knowledge. At the same time, they exchange information on the project results.

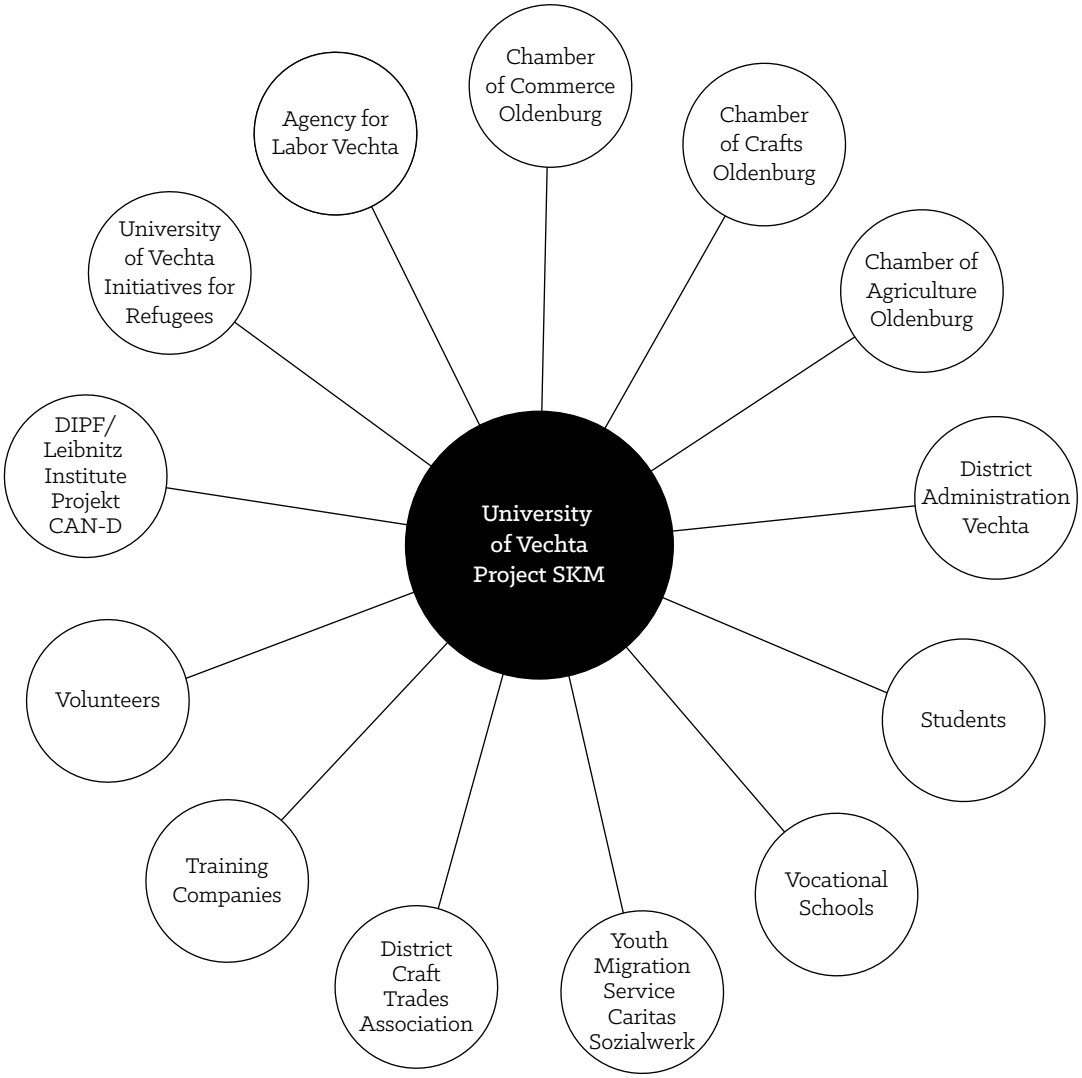
INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS

In the first half of 2019, 17 qualitative interviews were carried out with trainee-refugees. The trainees who participated in the program could clearly state their needs and use various help systems. Some of them had successfully completed general education with a university entrance qualification in their country of origin. Five trainees left school without a qualification in their country of origin, while three of them did not attend school.

At the time of the interview, they had been in Germany for an average of three years. Most of them had completed a language course before their training or completed a school-leaving certificate. Six apprentices completed a one-year entry qualification, i.e. a preparatory internship with attendance at a German vocational school, before they started their training.

Language skills are a great challenge both in the vocational school and in the company. Following the lesson content, technical terms, the writing of class assignments, and reading comprehension were highlighted as particularly difficult for the refugee-trainees. The helpfulness of the teachers and

FIGURE 6: NETWORK TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING IN VECHTA



4 Students go through a qualification and receive weekly supervision. In addition, the teachers have guaranteed a readiness for stressful situations. More information about the training for mentoring can be found in Rusert, K., Kart, M. & Stein, M. (2019)

classmates is rated positively. Some trainees receive support through state-funded programs either individually or as a group.

Communication difficulties in customer contact occurs especially when local dialects are spoken (Low German). Here, too, the trainees surveyed appreciated the willingness of their superiors and colleagues to help. They mostly describe the relationship with the manager, trainees and work colleagues as positive. Satisfaction in the company has a positive effect on the course of training. Previous professional experience and individual resources also have a positive influence on their volition to complete the program.

Other factors that were listed as beneficial were affiliation (e.g. through a good class and working atmosphere) and through support networks such as advice centers, projects for refugees, volunteers, teachers, etc. are also named as very beneficial.

Some trainees report conflicts with superiors and work colleagues. To this end, they mainly developed avoidance strategies such as "avoiding each other", "saying nothing" or "accepting the opinions of others", but some were able to ask someone to mediate in particularly difficult interactions. They focus on their goal of successfully completing their training. Mentoring was used to discuss ways in which conflicts can be dealt with constructively.

The trainees also found it difficult to live in limbo. A temporary residence permit (official toleration status) protects refugees from possible deportation during their training but does not mean they are able to remain in Germany permanently. Nevertheless, they report – especially trainees from Afghanistan – enormous pressure and express great anxiety with regards to the complicated bureaucracy involved in obtaining tolerated status even during their apprenticeship. They consider their prospect of staying dependent on successfully completing their training and taking on an employment relationship.

CONCLUSION

There is a heterogeneous group of individuals with the only common experience being the flight from their own country. SKM takes this heterogeneity into account in several ways:

There is no standardized one-to-one support, meaning that the volunteer students and their refugee-apprentice trainees must 'work through' and discover solutions on their own. This is a beneficial experience to both parties because each will be confronted with challenges in their future professional lives; getting involved in the world of clients, students as well as customers means acting in uncertainty. In the seminar, students receive extensive preparation and intensive support in the form of reflection and on-call service by the teachers for difficult situations in order to avoid being overwhelmed.

Trainee-refugees also learn that their personal concerns and interests are the basis for research in the project. The perceived appreciation was expressed several times in the interviews and documentation.

From this perspective, no standardized integration roadmap will emerge in the project, but rather guidelines based on personal resources that:

> Are released from the tight management of a standardized placement and qualification offer for education and occupation and [...] do not conceptualize migration experiences deficiently but develop them as a biographical education and coping resource for young people [...]. (Stummbaum 2012, p. 33)

The traumatic experiences and limitations of young refugees are recognized as well as their previous experience, skills and abilities, which they may also have gained while fleeing.

In order to raise awareness of the heterogeneity and resource orientation in companies, more target group-specific training and intercultural competence training for trainers are necessary. This also includes establishing an error culture in the company that promotes open communication and makes implicit knowledge accessible.

Refugee-trainees need reliable contacts, whom they can also turn to in order to know their rights and obligations and to reflect on their own behavior and that of their colleagues and superiors. A low-threshold offer could be made available through school social work. According to information from the vocational schools, their funds have recently been greatly reduced.

The refugee-trainees often lack social contacts with locals, which is a reason for them to participate in SKM. Such encounters can be made possible through projects and low-threshold measures, but also through leisure activities as part of the training.

Understanding problems with words and formulations makes it necessary to rethink the way exams are designed. More flexibility in the types of examinations would be more inclusive and would expand possibilities for trainees who may have different restrictions and/or varying levels of ability. Regional actors in the field are well networked in rural areas, such as in the Vechta district. The training companies expressed the wish for a more structured cooperation with the Vechta administration and help organizations. The increased administrative effort to employ refugees could be lessened if the companies had a contact point to address their questions to the right place and to initiate clarification processes. As labour shortages increase and the number of refugees seeking apprenticeship training increases, investing in collaboration networks between companies and help organizations would

be beneficial in the long run. Setting up a central coordination point as a guide could at the same time coordinate training offers and motivate more companies to hire refugees. The holistic support of trainees and companies in dual VET thus makes a valuable contribution to the inclusion and participation of refugees.

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