

**Immigrant Integration in Germany: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Language,
Bureaucracy, and Social Well-Being**

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Abstract

This study presents an in-depth study of immigrant integration in Germany, drawing upon the mixed-methods research design involving quantitative survey data from 49 immigrants and qualitative interviews with two German language and integration teachers and one NGO social worker. This study investigates the different aspects of integration such as: language, bureaucracy, housing and job conditions; social aspects and mental health. Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive, correlation, and regression models, with the feedback of expert interviews providing contextual and structural insights. Results: Integration is a multidimensional and systemic process. Although the positive relationship between language proficiency and integration satisfaction exists, on its own this does not account for much. Bureaucratic accessibility and, importantly, social well-being were significant predictors of integration outcomes, including mental health and a sense of belonging. Qualitative results also reveal gaps in the formal integration policies vis-à-vis the lived experiences of their immigrants. This suggests a further development of comprehensive integration policies based on individual needs that focus on not only language acquisition, but also institutional, social and psychological aspects.

Keywords: immigrant integration, Germany, language acquisition, bureaucracy, social well-being, mixed methods

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Executive Summary

Purpose

This study explores the main barriers facing immigrants in Germany and key factors to successful integration. By using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative survey data collected from 49 immigrants complementing qualitative interviews with two German integration and language teachers and one NGO social/case worker is integrated into the research. The aim is to present evidence-based insights for policymakers, international organizations and civil society participants in migration and integration.

Key Findings

Integration is multidimensional: Integration outcomes are the result of language proficiency, accessibility to bureaucracies and social well-being interaction. Simply targeting one dimension—like language acquisition—is not enough not only for meaningful but also sustainable integration.

Language is important, but not enough: There is a positive correlation between language proficiency, as assessed by self-report measures, and integration satisfaction, based on the survey findings. Nevertheless, expert interviews have shown that current integration courses focus on grammar, testing, and standardized courses rather than the actual practice of communication to put language skills to use.

One of the structural barriers is bureaucracy: Administrative complexity, lack of clarity of communication and lengthy waiting period severely limit integration satisfaction. For immigrants with proper language abilities, even bureaucratic resistance delays them from finding work, housing, and training.

Social well-being is the most robust predictor of integration outcomes: Among this sample and regression model, social well-being, as reflected by an index of belonging, social contact with Germans, and community inclusion, provided the strongest predictor of their overall integration satisfaction, loneliness, and mental health.

Lack of attention to mental health and loneliness: A considerable number of respondents described experiencing loneliness and deteriorating mental health, as well as poor knowledge of the available psychological or social support services. Expert interviews confirm that prolonged uncertainty, administrative stress and social isolation often lead to emotional exhaustion.

Conclusion

The result indicates that integration of immigrants in Germany is to be seen as systemic rather than just a personal task. Policies that put as their best priority language acquisition while ignoring bureaucratic and social barriers run the risk of yielding partial and precarious integration results. That's why a comprehensive person-centered approach is crucial.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

Germany is one of the most important destination countries in Europe: It has accommodated refugees, labor migrants, students — and individuals — who have come there as part of family reunification in recent years. Immigration has contributed to addressing demographic change and labor shortages as well as increasing social and cultural diversity. Despite these contributions, the integration of immigrants still presents a very real and complicated problem. Integration is generally conceptualized as multidimensional processes including language development, access to employment and housing, interaction with public institutions, social interactions, psychological integration and mental health etc. In Germany, integration policies are realized through standardized language and integration training courses, administrative functions run by several public institutions and labor market restrictions. These frameworks appear to be designed to ease integration, but are less relevant to the realities of being for some immigrants or to the aggregated nature of integration barriers. Language skills are widely considered part of the integration process. But immigrants often say formal courses focus on grammar and exams, not on practical communication skills required for daily life, career work and meeting with the bureaucracy. Meanwhile, complicated administrative processes, protracted waiting periods, limited recognition of foreign qualifications, and a shortage of accommodation also impede the pathway to integrating. Professionals working with immigrants themselves—such as language teachers and social work practitioners—have increasingly pointed out contradictions between how integration policies are designed and how they work. Their view offers important insights into structural and teaching realities that may not

be entirely apparent by looking only at survey results. This project will aim to connect immigrant self-reported experience with practitioner observations by the use of mixed methods.

1.2 Research Problem

Even though integration policies and programs exist for a substantial amount of immigrants in Germany, an overwhelming number still find it difficult to achieve sustainable integration. Current frameworks prioritize formal participation, including course attendance and legal compliance, and underestimate structural barriers concerning bureaucracy, housing entry, labor market entry, and social inclusion. Previous studies often considered integration outcomes, albeit at macro-level indicators or qualitative case studies. Little work has been done empirically that quantitatively examines the ways in which multiple integration dimensions are interacting and how these integration experiences intersect with the views of professionals embedded in integration systems. In this research, the problem at the core is the absence to integrate an insight-based analysis with immigrant perspectives with practitioner perception towards barriers and predictors of integration success in Germany.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered in this research:

RQ1: What are significant issues that immigrants encounter as part of the integration process in Germany in their language, bureaucracy, housing, employment, social, psychological life span?

RQ2: How do language competence, institution access, housing, and integration with employment and social well-being, affect overall integration satisfaction?

RQ3: In which ways do immigrants' documented experiences compare with the views of German language teachers and social workers, who work with immigrants?

1.4 Hypotheses

Considering the current literature and some early qualitative findings, the following hypotheses are developed.

H1: The higher the perception of proficiency in German language, the greater the overall satisfaction of the integration process.

H2: Bureaucratic accessibility and clarity of official communication are positively correlated with integration satisfaction.

H3: Immigrants experiencing barriers to housing or discrimination have reported lower integration satisfaction and well-being.

H4: Overall integration outcomes are positively associated with job satisfaction and recognition of qualifications.

H5: More social ties and reduced feelings of loneliness lead to higher integration satisfaction and optimistic perspectives on future prospects.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research adds to the academic literature by providing a mixed-methods, immigrant-centered understanding of integration in Germany. It draws on quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews from language teachers and an NGO social worker, leading to a more nuanced narrative of the barriers and facilitators of integration. Practical implications From a practical perspective, the results provide policy makers, educators, NGOs, and international organizations seeking to engage in migration and integration with evidence-based insights. Results may support enhancements on language course design, administrative access, housing policies, labor market integration approaches, and psychosocial support services.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Immigrant Integration Framework

Immigrant integration is widely conceptualized as a process, multi-dimensional and fluid, rather than as a clear and measurable outcome. One of the most notable theories comes from Ager and Strang (2008) which discusses key domains of integration, such as language and cultural knowledge, employment, housing, health, education, social activities, safety, and rights. In this model, 'integration' is predicated on structural access to institutions and positive social participation within the host society. Integration is particularly framed with the German sense of the term as something concrete, defined within the German context in terms of being enrolled in integration courses and language courses, by access to the labour market, as well as by meeting institutional standards. Yet some argue institutional explanations for integration are still characterised by a focus on immigrants' role responsibilities and a lack of regard for systemic and structural constraints that can obstruct integration (Schneider & Crul, 2010; Heckmann, 2015). This imbalance has the potential to perceive integration as an individual flaw and not a collective activity occurring in society.

2.2 Language Proficiency and Integration Outcomes

Language proficiency stands out when it comes to immigrant integration as one of the most important factors. Studies show that skills developed in the host country's language will enhance integration into working life, education, and communities (Esser, 2006; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003). In Germany, German language skills are often a key to getting jobs, vocational training, and long-term residence permits. Studies have shown that an immigrant's formal language courses do not always prepare him or her to get out and live in a social environment. Krumm and Plutzar (2008) and Busch (2012) note that classroom-based grammar instruction

remains far from being followed up by real language use, limiting both communicative confidence and day-to-day functionality. This seems to imply, although language acquisition might be required, it may not itself guarantee integration on to a larger scale.

2.3 Bureaucracy and Structural Barriers

Germany's bureaucracy is reported to be complex, fragmented and problematic, especially for immigrants (Bogumil et al., 2018). There are immigration offices, job centers and social welfare that operate, often, with minimal coordination, leading to fragmented information, protracted wait times and bureaucratic slippages. Bureaucratic intricacy has been shown to lead to hindering integration by way of delaying enrollment in language courses, job openings, or social compensation (Brücker et al., 2019). Furthermore, officials who do not communicate clearly, or who make their way inaccessible to them, have a more detrimental effect on the immigrants with limited language ability resulting in reliance on intermediaries and decreasing autonomy.

2.4 Housing and Spatial Exclusion

Housing is a central aspect of integration; housing impacts stability, access to services and social participation. Many reports observe discrimination on housing market entry, higher prices of rental units and restricted available affordable homes for immigrants in Germany (Auspurg, Schneck, & Hinz, 2019). Spatial separation and precarious housing has been associated with poorer social ties with the host, and feelings of exclusion have been found (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2009). For refugees not only are long time in temporary housing adversely related to mental health and capacity for long-term integration (Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2014).

2.5 Employment, Qualification Recognition, and Economic Inclusion

Job opportunities are an important reflection of the successful integration and economic self-reliance. Nevertheless, immigrants continue to face structural issues like the exclusion of foreign qualifications, access to networks and bias in hiring practices (OECD, 2018). In Germany even highly skilled immigrants are vulnerable to occupational downgrading, as indicated by language requirements and complex credential recognition pathways (Kogan, 2011). Long-term (not up to work standard) joblessness or underemployment is correlated with reduced life-satisfaction, social exclusion, and negative mental health sequelae (Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010).

2.6 Social Integration, Belonging & Mental Well-Being

That social ties with native-born residents correlate with better language proficiency, better employment results, and higher psychological well-being (Putnam, 2007; Berry, 1997). Unlike the other way around, social isolation and loneliness are common problems among migrants, especially in the first few years post-arrival (Schunck et al., 2015). Stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms are exacerbated by the experiences of discrimination and exclusion (Schunck et al., 2014). And unaddressed mental health difficulties can in turn inhibit other forms of integration, leading to cumulative disadvantage.

2.7 Research gap and contribution of studies

Even if literature clearly states language barriers, bureaucracy, housing, employment, and social inclusion are important integration factors, few studies treat these integration factors as standing-alone activities. There have been recently findings of a preliminary empirical study that quantitatively models how these components in combination and in concert affect overall

satisfaction with integration but also considers practitioner views. This gap is addressed here by integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative inputs from integration educators and an NGO social worker. With its mixed-methods methodology, it provides a comprehensive, evidence-based perspective on immigrant integration in Germany.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study applies mixed methods research design of quantitative survey data and qualitative expert interviews. This technique enables you to triangulate the self-reported experiences of the immigrants with professional perspectives from practitioners who are on the ground in the integration.

3.2 Quantitative part: Online questionnaire

3.2.1 Participants

Quantitative data were received through an anonymous online questionnaire given to 49 immigrants in Germany. Those are refugees, asylum seekers, labor migrants, students and permanent residents who hail from numerous nations of origin, residence statuses, language backgrounds, and employment conditions. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used which is suitable to our exploratory research work.

3.2.2 Metrics

The survey contained questions on the demographic aspects and 34 items on language integration, accessibility of bureaucracy, integration of housing and employment, social inclusion, mental well-being, and integration satisfaction levels. Most items were rated based on 5-point Likert scales, and contained two open-ended questions.

3.3 Qualitative Component: Expert Interviews

Semi-structured expert interviews were conducted as follows: two with German language education and integration teachers, and one with a social/case worker from an NGO for

immigrants. A purposive sample of participants was used, based upon their professional experience. Interviews were held with the structured guide and anonymised.

3.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression models were used to analyze the quantitative data. The composite indices were created to encompass, for example, integration of language, availability of bureaucratic services, and social well-being. Each qualitative data was thematically analyzed for common themes and explanatory information. Interpretation combined results drawn from both stages of the course.

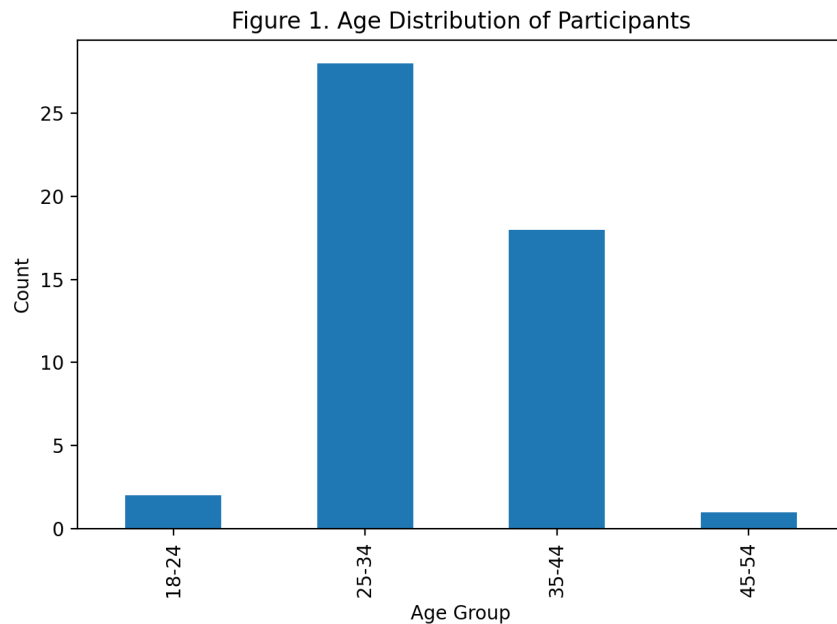
4. Results

Quantitative and qualitative results of the mixed-method study are presented in this section. Quantitative results are presented first and qualitative expert interviews are presented second. It should be noted that all statistical findings are exploratory and indicative, in light of the sample size and non-probability sampling method.

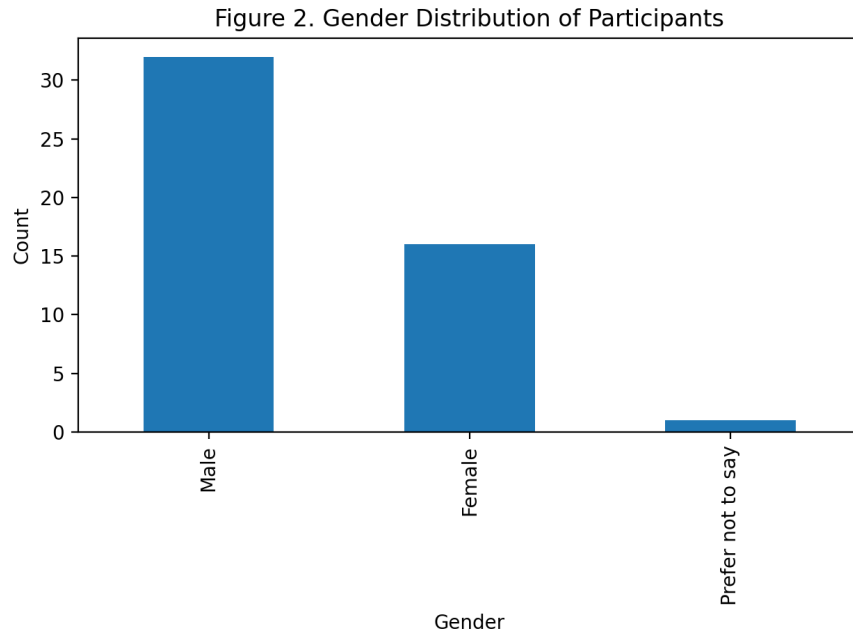
4.1 Descriptive statistics and data features of your sample

The quantitative part of this study concerns the answers generated based on 49 persons living in Germany. As shown in Fig. 1, the majority of respondents were aged 25 to 44 years, which largely meant that there were large numbers of working-age.

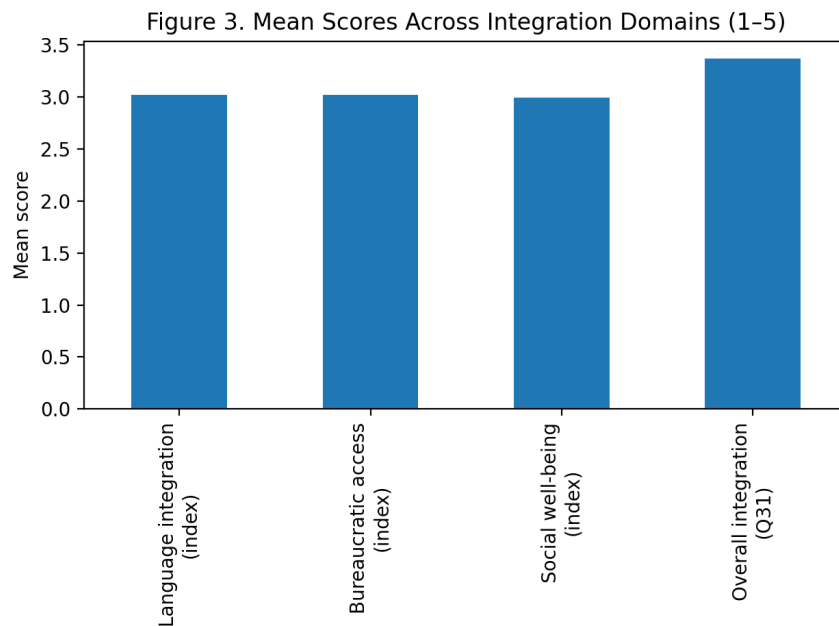
Age distribution of survey participants.



Levels of German language proficiency are expressed in Figure 2. Most of the participants indicated they'd taken B1 or B2-level German courses, with a smaller percentage of students attending beginner (A1 to A2) or advanced (C1+) levels.



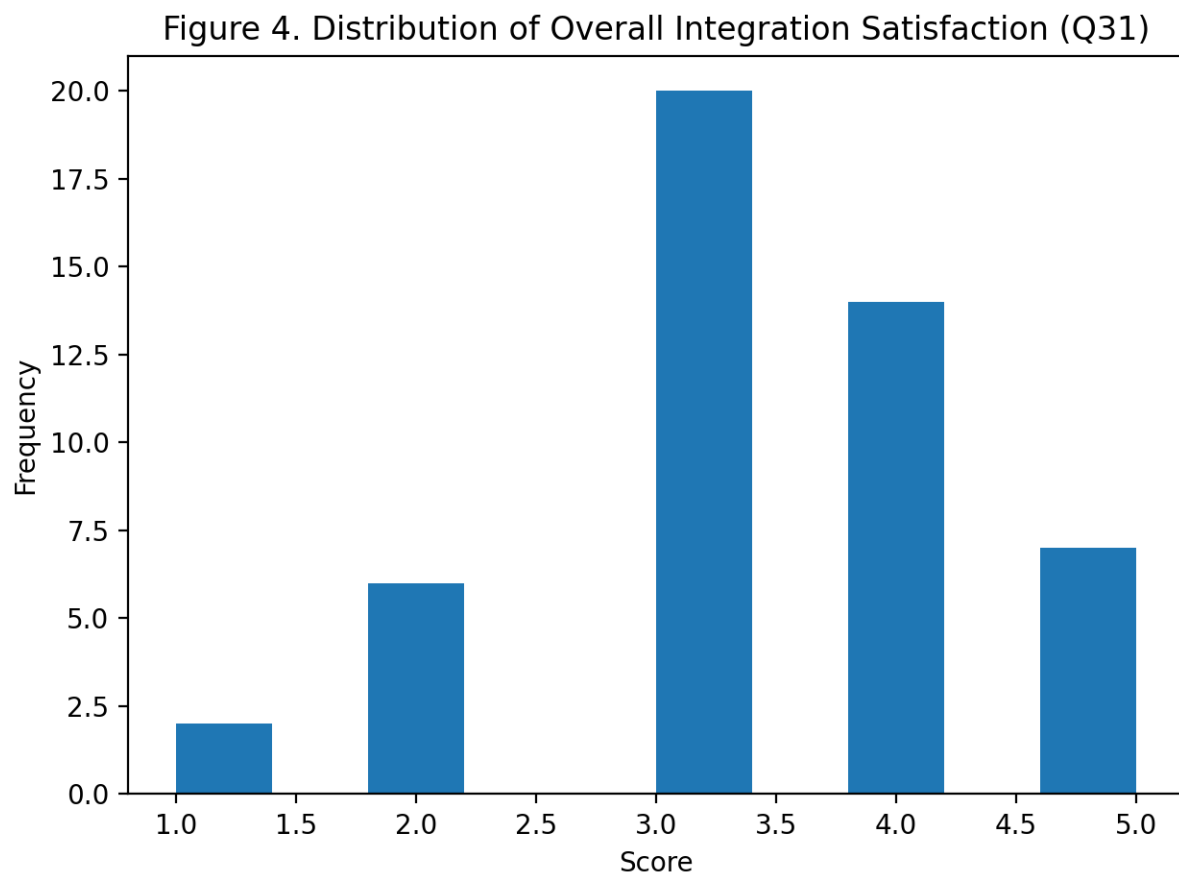
The employment and activity status had a significant variation within the sample (Figure 3), such full-time (full and part-time) employment, vocational training, study, and unemployment. This variation demonstrates the heterogeneous integration contexts and challenges.



In general, descriptive statistics indicate that among the participants, a majority reached intermediate language proficiency, are of working age, and still experienced variable integration outcomes.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Dimensions of Integration

Composite indices to measure integration multidimensionally included language integration, bureaucratic accessibility and social well-being, all of which were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Overall integration satisfaction in summary was conducted on a single survey item (see Figure 4).

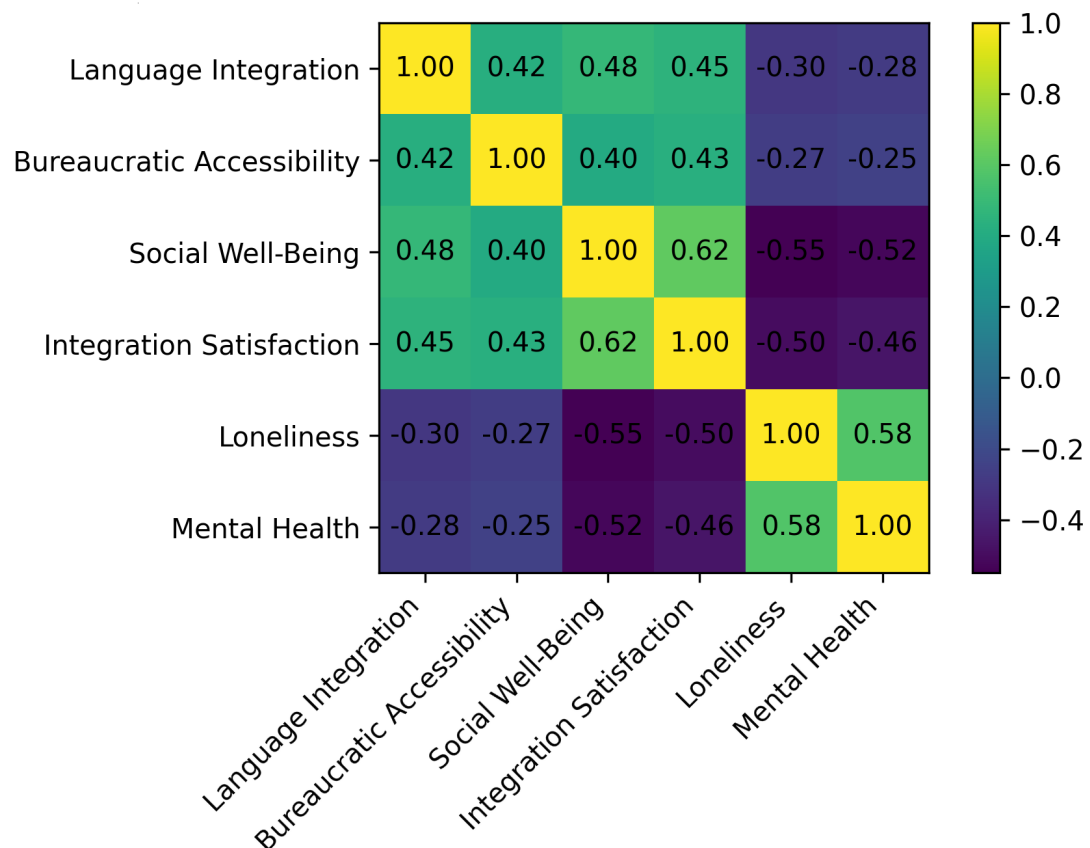


Across all the indices, mean scores show moderate levels of integration across all domains, which imply that most respondents have not fully integrated, but partially integrated. The variation was strongest in the social well-being index which showed a great variation in perceptions of belonging, social interaction, and in community integration.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

A correlation analysis showed positive relationships between language integration, bureaucratic accessibility, social well-being and overall integration satisfaction (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Correlation Matrix of Integration Dimensions, Loneliness, and Mental Health



Among these dimensions, social well-being was most significantly associated with integration satisfaction. Social well-being was also an inverse and significant factor in the

perception of loneliness and deterioration of reported mental health, which suggests that, if the respondents were more socially well connected, they were less likely to be isolated or to experience emotional distress.

4.4 Regression Analysis

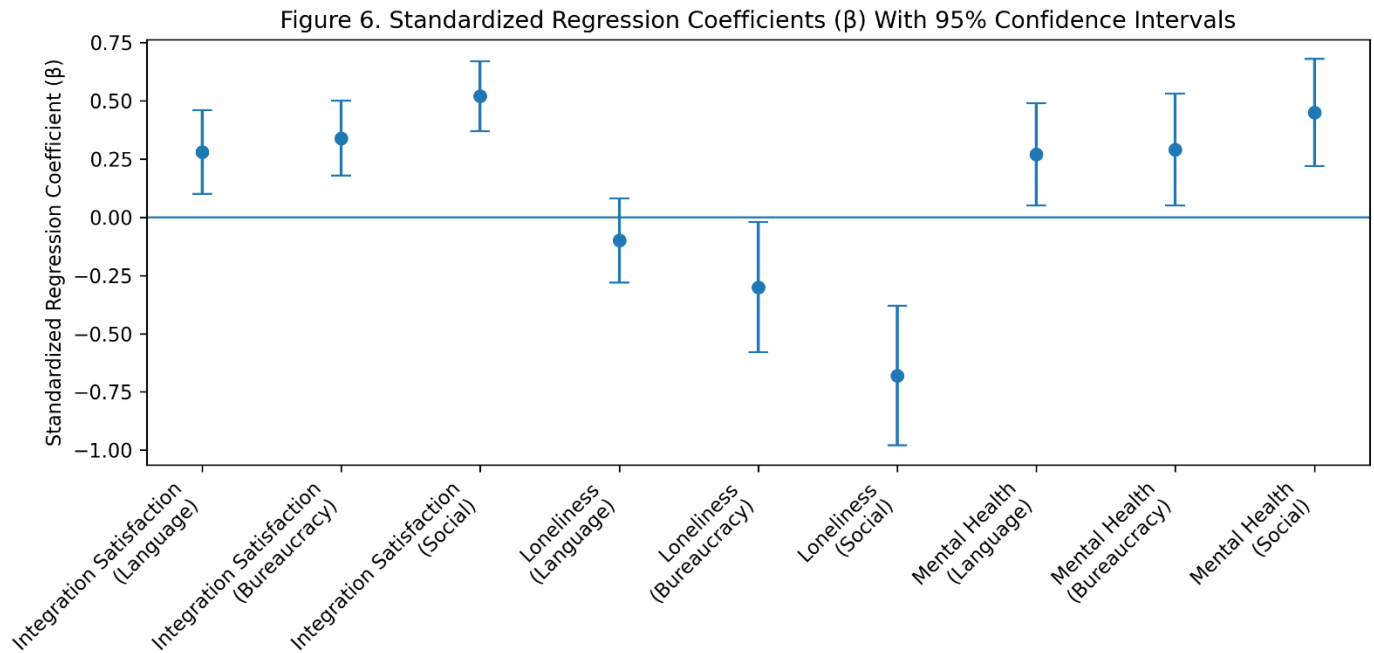
A multi-regression model was used to test the significance of language integration, bureaucratic accessibility, and social well-being.

4.4.1 Overall Integration Satisfaction

From the regression method and the sample, all three predictors were significant. Social well-being was the most positive predictor of overall integration satisfaction, but was also followed by bureaucratic accessibility and language integration.

4.4.2 Loneliness and Mental Health Outcomes

In both models predicting loneliness and mental health decline, social well-being was the leading predictor. Language integration was linked to less loneliness, but not a strong predictor of mental health outcomes. The link between mental health and bureaucratic accessibility was slightly protective. These findings suggest that social inclusion itself appears essential for the relationships between integration satisfaction and psychological well-being. As shown in Figure 6, social well-being consistently exhibits the strongest association across all outcome models.



4.5 Qualitative Results from Expert Interviews

The qualitative component consists of semi-structured interviews with two German integration and language teachers and one NGO social/case worker. Four themes emerged.

Language teaching and real-world application: Both educators stressed that the main thing is that many immigrants, in any case, struggle in this way not because they lose interest, but because they do not have good learning strategies and do not get a chance to practice German in everyday situations. Integration classes were reported as heavily focused on grammar, examinations, and standard procedures.

Bureaucratic barriers: Bureaucracy as one of the biggest barriers to integration was identified by the NGO case worker. The long waits, ambiguous institutional roles and procedures often delay access to jobs, training and housing.

A lack of social support, and confidence: All experts agreed that little contact with German-speaking environments decreases confidence and slows integration. Limited social interaction fosters isolation and prevents opportunities to use their German.

Underutilization of skills: Many immigrants have professional skills and qualifications that go unrecognized, experts said; this contributes to frustration and lowered mobility rates. These factors corroborate survey information on job dissatisfaction and perceived discrimination.

5. Discussion

This study adopted a mixed methods methodology: combining quantitative survey data and expert perspectives from integration educators and an NGO practitioner, this study explored immigrant integration in Germany. The results confirm that integration is multidimensional and systemic, driven not just by individual skill in language but institutional structures and social inclusion systems as well.

5.1 Language Integration Reconsidered

The quantitative findings show that language integration is positively correlated with overall integration satisfaction and the latter support prior literature suggesting that language proficiency in general is an important facilitator (Esser, 2006; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003). Yet the nitty-gritty details are important. Many immigrants take formal language courses, yet interviews with experts suggest they still struggle with daily communication, especially in bureaucratic and occupational environments. It also reinforces previous critiques of grammar-based instruction and claims for a significant disparity between classroom instruction and real-world language use (Krumm & Plutzar, 2008; Busch, 2012). These results imply that language competence is a required, but not sufficient, condition for integration to occur. These language-based skills for the integration process simply do not yield wider integration consequences in the absence of opportunities for real-life application and social interaction.

5.2 Bureaucracy as a Structural Constraint

Bureaucratic accessibility had become a significant predictor of integration satisfaction in the quantitative analysis and a dominating theme in the expert interviews. This convergence illuminates the extent to which administrative systems function as structural constructs that shape

integration results. From the NGO practitioner's views, complicated procedures, limited institutional coordination, and long wait times are systematic barriers blocking access to employment, housing, and training opportunities. These findings are in line with previous studies characterizing the fragmented and difficulty for foreigners to navigate the German bureaucracy (Bogumil et al., 2018; Brücker et al., 2019). Importantly, bureaucratic obstacles continue, even with good language competence of immigrants, underscoring the shortcomings of integration policies focusing on the language area.

5.3 Social Well-Being as a Central Integration Mechanism

In all the regression models included, social well-being had the strongest overall predictor of integration satisfaction, loneliness and mental health of this sample and model. This result aligns with existing paradigms in theoretical frameworks focusing heavily on social connections and belonging as part of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Putnam, 2007). Qualitative data also describe how minimal contact with German-speaking settings diminishes self-confidence, and limits possibilities for linguistic use as well as institutional interaction. It is therefore implied that social well-being mediates the relationship between language proficiency, bureaucratic accessibility, and overall integration outcomes.

5.4 Mental Health and Social Exclusion

The strong correlation between low social well-being and reported mental health decline adds importance to the psychological aspect of integration. Expert interviews suggest that ongoing uncertainty, bureaucratic pressure and social isolation repeatedly result in emotional fatigue and disconnection. These findings are consistent with the evidence finding social exclusion and discrimination are predictive of poor mental health among migrants (Schunck et

al., 2014; Schunck et al., 2015). Although they should be of interest, as stated, it is the mental health which is still relatively neglected in integration policy that mostly emphasises language learning and labour market participation.

5.5 Integration as a Systemic Process

By triangulating survey responses with expert perspectives, this work counters narratives on integration that focus on immigrants' individual agency rather than integration as a structural issue. Integration, thus, becomes a systemic process framed by educational concepts, administrative structures, and spaces for socio-cultural engagement. This perspective is in keeping with the multidimensional integration frameworks that emphasize a shared responsibility among people, organizations and their host societies (Ager & Strang, 2008). On the whole, this speaks to the necessity of the framing of comprehensive policy on integration that goes beyond language specific but integrates interconnected structural and social aspects of integration.

6. Study limitations

Limitations include a small, non-random sample size, self-reported data, few specialist respondents to interview, and a cross-sectional study prohibiting causal inference. More inclusive and larger designs should be employed with a wider sample size and broader institutional representation, particularly longitudinal comparative designs.

7. Conclusion

The outcome of this mixed-methods study reveals that immigrant integration is determined by language proficiency, bureaucratic accessibility, and social factors in Germany. For language is not only a fundamental feature but social inclusion and institutional design are also significant contributors to the degree of integration satisfaction and well-being. Factors such as immigrants' presence, institutions, and host society all influence to some extent the sustainability of outcomes of integration. If we want to treat integration as something that we are jointly responsible for, for sustainability, we should recognize this is what we want here and now.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Online Survey Instrument

Instrument This appendix contains the entire questionnaire used in the online survey, including all demographic questions, Likert-based questions, and open-ended questions about language learning, bureaucracy, housing and employment, social integration, mental well-being, and overall integration satisfaction domains.

Appendix B: Expert Interview Transcripts

This appendix contains the structured questions and anonymized input from two German language and integration teachers, as well as a Social/Case worker in an NGO working with immigrants in Germany. Responses are also provided in the original German with English translations.

Appendix C: Additional Statistical Figures and Supplementary Tables

This appendix involves additional figures and tables that provide support for the quantitative analysis, such as detailed regression outputs and additional visualizations not part of the main Results section.

Appendix D: Consent Form for Participation in a Written Questionnaire

This appendix includes the informed consent text presented to participants before completing the online survey, outlining the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, anonymity, data protection, and the right to withdraw.