



Policy Brief

Teacher Training in Germany: Preparing Educators for Increasingly Diverse Classrooms

Summary

All too often, Germany's teachers are left to their own devices in everyday school life. They are expected to provide individual support for rising numbers of young refugees and for many children and young people with additional educational needs, but only a fraction of the teachers feels prepared to take on this task. This is compounded by, among other things, significant shortcomings in teacher training in Germany's 16 states (*Bundesländer*). Despite the voluntary commitment of state governments to promote cross-cultural skills in teacher training, the day-to-day-work of teachers in linguistically and culturally diverse classes continues to only play a secondary role in teacher preparation. As a result, only a small number of teachers learn to structure their lessons in such a way that all children, regardless of their origin, can improve their spoken and written language skills, thus improving their chances of reaching a (higher) level of education. Native speakers would also benefit from additional language support; every seventh child in the state of Brandenburg, for example, has very weak language skills.

During their initial training at university, aspiring teachers encounter extremely varied learning conditions. While some universities expect all teachers-to-be to have basic language teaching skills and train them accordingly, students elsewhere are not required nor do they have the opportunity to learn how to handle linguistic and cultural diversity. Even though twelve states have instituted rules designed to standardise university practices, often these state requirements remain vague and have no visible effect in practice. **The only states where all future teachers are required by law to complete one or more courses on literacy and language development are Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate and Schleswig-Holstein.** In the other parts of Germany, teachers start their teaching careers largely unprepared in this area because even during the practical component of their initial training most states leave it to chance whether young teachers learn how to deal with linguistic and cultural diversity in a pedagogically appropriate way.



In-service teacher training is also inadequate when it comes to dealing with diversity: **An analysis of the central course catalogues of the 16 states shows that work with linguistically and culturally diverse groups continues to play a secondary role.** Even when teachers find the right course, these are usually short lecture-style seminars that are attended sporadically and thus are not very effective in achieving actual transfer into classroom practices.

Even 20 years after the states agreed on providing diversity training to teachers at all levels, dealing with diversity is still considered a special qualification in most schools. This is, on the one hand, understandable because, e.g. newly arrived young immigrants are first taught by specialists in the German language. On the other hand, the linguistic and cultural diversity has long been a reality in the German school system. Therefore, teachers at all levels are required to be prepared accordingly:

- (1) **Mandatory basic training:** In the future, all teachers-to-be should acquire basic skills in language teaching and learn how to deal appropriately with cultural diversity. This requires concrete state regulations and university-level training that is more strongly oriented around classroom practice.
- (2) **More effective in-service training:** Throughout Germany, teachers should be given more opportunities to further their knowledge and skills in language teaching, refugee needs, and other urgently needed skills. To ensure that what is learned can also be applied in practice, courses should last several days and target entire teams of teachers.
- (3) **More transparency:** Comprehensive information about initial and in-service teacher training content should be accessible in a central location. It would be advisable in this case to make more use of the states' course catalogues and the nationwide teacher training database, the *Monitor Lehrerbildung*.