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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Inclusive education for refugee students from Ukraine—An exploration of differentiated instruction in German schools

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Abstract

Currently, refugee Ukrainian learners are attending German mainstream schools, leading to an even more diverse student population. Given that the German school system is committed to provide inclusive education for all, this study aims to examine how teachers address Ukrainian students learning needs by means of differentiated instruction. To this end, a qualitative study was conducted in which eight elementary school and advanced secondary school teachers were interviewed. Findings revealed that refugee Ukrainian students in German mainstream schools are taught alongside German students, but are also placed in separated classrooms. Additionally, they occasionally participate in remote learning via Zoom from Ukraine. Furthermore, teachers reported using more frequently tiered assignments or peer tutoring systems. In contrast, practices such as mastery learning or open education are seldomly implemented. Implications of the results, as well as limitations and further lines of research are discussed.

KEYWORDS
differentiated instruction, inclusive education, inclusive practices, refugees, student diversity, Ukraine

Key points

- This study follows a qualitative design. The study wants to gain insights into inclusive teaching for refugee students in German schools. Up until now, there is not much research into inclusive teaching of refugees. Therefore, the authors decided for an explorative design including the interviews of eight teachers from both, primary and secondary education to get comprehensive insights into inclusive teaching from year 1 to 13.
- Results reveal that teachers use certain differentiated practices (such as tiered assignments and tutoring systems) to ensure inclusive education for Ukrainian students in German classrooms, however, they do not realize the full potential of differentiated practices (e.g., they do not make use of mastery learning or open education practices).
- Teachers mention several problems when implementing inclusive education for refugee students, such as the language barrier or the traumatic experiences they made when fleeing their country. Teachers and also peers have to be aware of and sensitive for such difficulties and find a way to deal with them.
- Teachers not only have to include refugee students into their teaching but also ensure the social integration into the learning group. Both can be linked by the use of specific differentiation practices, such as tutoring systems or intentional grouping.

INTRODUCTION

With the German education system not yet fully recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, it has further faced additional social challenges since the spring of 2022 (Jakobs, 2022). With the start of Russia's invasion in the early 2022, more than 90,000 Ukrainian students have been integrated into Germany's education system (Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 2022). Due to the raising immigration numbers, the educational situation of such refugee students has become increasingly relevant. Currently, policy-makers, experts and key educational stakeholders are discussing how to be responsive to students who have experienced displacement due to war in their home country considering the inadequate resources within schools (Massumi et al., 2015). Moreover, a key concern is how to provide refugee students with meaningful education in order to ensure a successful transition into not only the general educational system but also a further professional life. Thus, a successful inclusion largely depends on how quickly and effective, refugee students can learn and develop their German language competences and actively participate in the country's education system provisions (Freudenberg-Findeisen et al., 2021; KMK, 2016). In particular, social integration must be addressed within the context of educational processes, with the aim of including all students in learning environments (Martschinke et al., 2012). The German school system is fundamentally committed to providing inclusive education for all regardless of each individual's learning needs. The educational situation of refugees can be improved through providing language education and support, by dealing sensitively with cultural diversity in teacher education and training, as well as by allocating resources in a way geared to meeting their specific needs (Baur & Gröpler, 2020). Moreover, inclusive education also advocates the participation of all students in mainstream classes (Hillenbrand, 2014; Letzel-Alt et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). Empirical research concerning the educational inclusion of refugees is relatively scarce (Preuß, 2018). However, results stemming from the available scientific output has already shown that social and ethnic segregation of students with migration backgrounds and refugee biographies causes even more disadvantages to such vulnerable groups (Baur & Gröpler, 2020). Disparities between students with or without migration backgrounds are particularly evident in the secondary school sector: Refugee students attend less frequently secondary school (de Paiva Lareiro, 2019). Additionally, teachers lack knowledge on how to effectively teach and deal with the learning needs of refugee students, inherently and severely impacting their educational development (Schuelka, 2018; Schwaiger & Neumann, 2014). Thus, in order to ensure refugee students' right to meaningful and appropriate education as well as to reduce further educational inequity, schools and teachers are encouraged to provide inclusive teaching offerings, through the implementation of differentiated instruction (OECD, 2023).

Against this background, and given the dearth of studies concerning the inclusive educational provisions for Ukrainian refugees in schools, this study aims to explore teachers' differentiated instruction to address the learning needs of such students.

Inclusive education

The overarching goal of inclusion in a society envisions recognizing all individuals as equal (Budde & Hummrich, 2014; Lindmeier & Lütje-Klose, 2015; Schwab et al., 2021), for which carry an important key role. Education, therefore, should be designed to enable the participation of all individuals (Diehl et al., 2016; Schwab & Alnahdi, 2020). Inclusive education has been described as a 'slippery concept' (Artiles & Dyson, 2005, p. 43) given the different frameworks and conceptualization in each country's educational context. Following a narrower understanding of inclusive education, it could be interpreted of it as the integration of students into mainstream schooling (Wenning, 2017). In this sense, inclusive education focuses on students (e.g., those with migration backgrounds or with special education needs) adapting to the learning conditions within mainstream education. However, inclusive education envisions the design of the learning environment in mainstream schools in such a way that it respects and embraces the heterogeneity of the entire student body (Biewer, 2010). Thus, a broader understanding of inclusive education therefore conceptualizes diversity as multifaceted and intersectional concept which does not solely focus on disabilities or vulnerable groups (Lindmeier & Lütje-Klose, 2015). It sets as its goal the maximizing of societal participation by all individuals, regardless of their personal learning needs (Werning & Baumert, 2013). For the purpose of this study, inclusive education is conceptualized and understood under a broader framework.

Inclusive education is therefore geared to meeting the needs of all students by embracing students' various aspects of diversity, such as age, gender, interests, language competences and readiness. It also takes into consideration to their backgrounds and contexts such as parental support, socio-economic status, (native) language and communication skills, as well as any prior migration and/or refugee experiences (Hardy et al., 2019). Depending on the situation, certain aspects may be more relevant and are prioritized. For instance, during the COVID-19, pandemic schools drastically shifted to emergency remote learning, stressing the focus on factors such as access to technology, parental support and individual self-directed learning skills, all of which may not be as relevant in normal classroom settings (Fischer et al., 2020). Heterogeneity is a dynamic phenomenon that teachers need to give its due in lesson preparation

and delivery. To make inclusive education a reality for a diverse student body in the classroom requires the concrete application of differentiated teaching approaches (Loreman, 2017; OECD, 2018). Differentiation is recommended for addressing diversity in schools and classrooms and is the responsibility of all schools and teachers (UNESCO, 2017). Teachers are called for adapting instruction to various developmental stages and needs, different levels of knowledge and performance, different cultures and disabilities (Deunk et al., 2018). Differentiated teaching promotes effective teaching and helps foster a more equitable education system that eliminates educational disadvantages and provides equal opportunities (Letzel-Alt et al., 2022; Maulana et al., 2020; OECD, 2023; Parsons et al., 2018).

While both in-class and external differentiation measures exist, the former tend to be the more desirable and inclusive option (Klafki & Stöcker, 1976). In the following section, we distinguish between various approaches to differentiation.

DIFFERENTIATION MODELS

A heterogeneous student body is a part of everyday school life. Handling it constructively is, therefore, the education system's responsibility at its three levels: macro (school as a societal institution), meso (individual school) and micro (classroom) (Budde, 2012; Schuelka, 2018). This calls for a nuanced approach to student body diversity in all its aspects.

Ludwig (2010) distinguishes between various forms of external and internal differentiation. For external differentiation, he draws distinctions between (a) school-type differentiation, (b) class-uniform differentiation within schools and (c) class-partial external differentiation (in the form of course or subject-performance differentiation). For his macro-level school-type differentiation, he assigns students to a particular school type based on their performance level, for example, *advanced secondary school* versus comprehensive non-differentiated school (Gemeinschaftsschule) in the secondary school sector. For the meso-level class-uniform solution, he differentiates complete learning groups by performance level within a particular school type. In his class-partial external differentiation, learners are assigned to performance-differentiated courses in designated grade levels, temporarily breaking up the regular class group. In most cases, these courses are taught concurrently but in separate locations. For micro-level internal differentiation, Ludwig (2010) distinguishes between a longer term division of students within a class group and a division of student work groups, usually limited to a single class session.

In addition to internal differentiation based on performance groups, there are other measures for addressing heterogeneity within the student body. Internal differentiation, also termed classroom differentiation is understood more broadly as the 'totality of all measures that serve to tailor instruction to different subgroups of students within a learning group' (Letzel et al., 2020, p. 333). An expanded understanding classroom differentiation is useful when it is meant not only to compensate for different learning deficits but also if utilized for building the profiles of individual students by nurturing their particular strengths (Niggli, 2013). The various measures available to teachers on the micro-level should be employed intentionally. Letzel et al. (2020) divide classroom differentiation into the following six categories (Table 1). We use this taxonomy in this study as a structuring device for categorizing inclusive measures deployed in the classroom.

TABLE 1 A taxonomy of classroom differentiation (Letzel et al., 2020).

Taxonomy tier	Differentiation measure
Cat. I	Tasks and materials graded qualitatively (e.g., according to degree of difficulty) and quantitatively (e.g., according to quantity or processing time)
Cat. II	Student work groups intentionally composed according to performance criteria or criteria beyond performance
Cat. III	Longer term established tutoring systems
Cat. IV	Non-verbal graduated learning materials (e.g., flash cards)
Cat. V	Mastery Learning or goal-oriented learning
Cat. VI	Measures for opening up the classroom or granting students autonomy

Although teachers are aware of the need for make using of DI practices, the DI implementation rate in lesson preparation and delivery is low (Schwab et al., 2015). The reasons for this are manifold: they range from insufficient preparation for using classroom differentiation during teacher training to the considerable amount of preparation required and may also include a lack of commitment on the teacher's part (e.g., Park & Datnow, 2017).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

Given that there has not been much research into the teaching of Ukrainian students, we conducted this study to provide exploratory insights into the differentiated lesson design at German schools that cater to Ukrainian students. It is important to highlight that for the purpose of this study, focus will be placed particularly on the teaching of refugee students, which are children under the age of 18 years, who are foreign born and who is forced to flee their own country because of (or fear of) persecution and is unable to return to his or her country of national origin (Faltis & Valdés, 2010; UNHCR, 2024).

Using a qualitative research design, we collected data in eight semi-structured guided interviews with four elementary school teachers and four high school *teachers* in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). These two types of schools were specifically selected to assess the overall situation and incorporate inputs from teachers of students from grades 1 to 13. Moreover, those school tracks each hold the largest number of refugee students in the primary and secondary school sectors (Primar-bzw. Sekundarschulbereich) (Statistical State Office of Rhineland-Palatinate, 2022). For the purpose of this study, we purposefully chose the participants in order to create a homogeneous group that shares critical similarities related to the research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). We interviewed only teachers who are currently teaching Ukrainian refugees in their classes. Moreover, we only interviewed teachers in one state in Germany, in order to ensure comparability of the situation by only selecting teachers teaching within the same school system. The teachers (six female, two male) averaged 8.6 years of professional experience. The interviews lasted from 25 to 65 min.

The purpose of qualitative research, especially in form of interviews is 'to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees' (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). Within the interview situation, we had the role of researchers, However, in order to develop a positive relationship with the interviewees and to establish rapport, we made clear from the beginning that we would like to gain information from the teachers about their experience in teaching both students with and without escape experience (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). We wanted to point out that there is no right or wrong in their responses, and that we just want them to report the reality in schools. With this, we wanted to prevent that the teachers adjust their responses according to social desirability (Bergen & Labonté, 2020).

The guided sessions were initiated with the following prepared narrative prompt: 'Please describe the interaction with Ukrainian students at your school'. To keep the interviews focused, the subsequent questions explicitly inquired about differentiation measures at the meso and micro-levels. We transcribed and analysed the transcripts using qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2014). We adopted an inductive approach to exploratively extract information from the text material. This made the most sense in this early survey phase, given that currently no studies exist on how Ukrainian refugee students are handled in German schools. The reliability of the analysis was ensured with an intercoder reliability coefficient of 0.87 (Holsti, 1969), which corresponds to a good value. Sense units were coded in the form of whole sentences and grouped into categories (see Table 2).

RESULTS

Coding matrix

A total of 151 items were coded.

Of the total codings, 86 fell into the main category of 'teaching formats'. Within this category, we collected data on how local schools implement the education of Ukrainian refugee students. With 22 codings, the second main category of 'social integration' provided insights into the extent to which social integration was achieved and into the social behaviour of Ukrainian and German students. The third main category, comprising 43 codings, pointed to areas where barriers complicate the implementation of inclusive education.

Teaching formats

The main category 'teaching formats' contained the most codings ($n=86$). Three different formats were identified in the text material. Firstly, Ukrainian refugee students are temporarily placed in regular classes alongside German students and participate in regular classroom activities. The descriptions suggest that Ukrainian students were assigned to regular learning groups, and that this assignment in some cases had to be made ad hoc, as there was obviously not much time to prepare for this situation. However, there were also hints in the text material that not all teachers favour teaching Ukrainian and German students together in the same classroom.

> ***Teacher 1 (high school):*** 'There are also some colleagues who are completely against having Ukrainian students in the school – i.e., in regular classes"Well, they don't understand anything anyway, and they're just going back, so what's the point?'"

The teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education for all students seem to vary within a faculty, with both positive and negative attitudes surfacing towards the inclusive education of Ukrainian refugee students.

Nevertheless, with 42 codings pointing to internal differentiation, the material also provided clues to how a successful coexistence of students of both nationalities in a learning group can be engineered. For example, teachers will make efforts to differentiate lesson content and assignments for Ukrainian students by communicating them in English or Russian. A high school teacher mentioned that older Ukrainian students come with good English skills, while younger students tend to be overwhelmed by the language barrier. An elementary school teacher reported that all pieces of classroom furniture were labelled in both German and Ukrainian, turning them in effect into a

TABLE 2 Coding matrix.

Main category	Subcategory	Number of codings
Teaching formats		**86**
	Differentiated instruction	42
	Intermittent external differentiation through intensive courses	28
	Teaching via Zoom	16
Social integration		**22**
	Social behaviour (interaction with peers)	22
Barriers to implementing inclusive education		**43**
	Language	12
	Mindset of the Ukrainian students: 'I won't be here long'	7
	Coping with refugee experiences	8
	Grading or assessment	6
	Gap between familiar versus new teaching culture	4
	Disciplinary problems	2
	Classroom practice factors	4
Total codings		**151**

Note: The numbers in bold are the sum of the other in this category values being added.

non-verbal learning aid (Category IV of our classroom differentiation taxonomy, cf. Letzel et al., 2020). This would be equivalent to differentiation through measures from Category I of the taxonomy, which involves the qualitative adjustment of tasks and materials, including overcoming language barriers and providing tasks and materials in multiple languages. To facilitate this form of adjustment, teachers from both school types report resorting increasingly to the use of digital translation tools.

Moreover, digital tools, such as the tablets provided to many Ukrainian students upon entering school, serve not only for translating tasks but also for housing learning apps that familiarize Ukrainian students with the German language, as reported by this teacher:

> ***Teacher 1 (elementary school):*** 'Here is how it goesfor everything related to math, the kids actually join together, and for everything related to German they currently often fall back on this app so they can start as it were by learning 'hello,' 'goodbye,' body parts, and numbers'.

The quote underlines that inclusive education is less problematic in some subjects, such as mathematics, than in others where the language barrier is more significant. A high school teacher also reports excellent performance by Ukrainian refugees in mathematics, stating that Ukrainian students are even 'far superior' to German students in this subject. In subjects like ethics, teachers in elementary schools tend to rely more on verbal instruction to ease the Ukrainian students' participation in regular classes.

Another form of classroom differentiation, as reported by teachers from both school types, relies on long-established tutoring systems (Category III). Teachers refer to these systems as 'mentoring systems'. A high school teacher describes the tasks of German students acting as mentors or tutors as follows:

> ***Teacher 2 (high school):*** '[They translate or explain, exactly. For larger assignments… […] if a task is set that takes longer or even involves working in a group – yes, they take that on. Then often… there are organizational matters like schedule changes or if there is some kind of cancellation, room changes, and so on, the mentors handle it. They also keep in touch, even by phone, so their charge could inform them about an absence for whatever reason or being ill]'.

The mentors/tutors render not only in-class but also out-of-class organizational assistance. The above quote implies the deliberate formation of student work groups (Category II), indicating another implementation of classroom differentiation strategies. The teacher reports that the mentors/tutors also assist Ukrainian students in group work, implying that both mentor and mentee are assigned to the same work group. In forming these work groups, the teacher's intention appears to be ensuring support from the mentors and simplifying organizational in-class processes. Another high school teacher also confirms that Russian-speaking students in the class translate assignments for Ukrainian students. In addition to classroom differentiation measures within the learning groups, the surveyed teachers' schools also resort to partial external differentiation for their classes

(Ludwig, 2010) by having Ukrainian refugee students attend a set number of hour-long German courses ($n=28$). In these language courses, they learn German together with other Ukrainian students and temporarily leave their regular learning group. Among the advantages of partial external differentiation, the teachers cite the elimination of language barriers and creation of opportunities for social interaction between Ukrainian students with similar refugee experiences. However, teachers also worry about a potential downside to this organizational form: By giving Ukrainian students a chance to mingle only with other Ukrainian students, they risk neglecting social interaction with German students.

The text material indicates a third form of organization, under which some Ukrainian students are taught via Zoom by Ukraine-based teachers ($n=16$), as explicated by this high school teacher:

> ***Teacher 3 (high school):*** '[Because] almost all Ukrainian students also have Zoom lessons in parallel, they go at it quite intensively. […] And it's also strange; some of these teachers are sitting somewhere in a bunker, amidst the sirens, still conducting their lessons. […] That's a lot you have to pay attention to, curriculum-wise, and then they have their own lessons on the side to boot'.

The teacher explains that the Zoom lessons from their home country supplement the lessons for Ukrainian students at German schools. This teacher seems to regard the organizing of sometimes duplicative lessons as problematic.

Social integration

In the social integration category (22 codings), the teachers report cases both of successful integration into the class community and where integration appeared to present challenges. In this category, the focus is on how students interacted in a class, as seen from the teacher's vantage point.

An elementary school teacher reports exemplary social behaviour on the part of both German and Ukrainian students, seemingly indicating successful integration:

> ***Teacher 2 (elementary school):*** 'Yes, actually really super, I must say. They genuinely reach out to the children. I think they all grasp to some extent why this child is here right now. It's a topic that has also been discussed at school. And, yes, actually, all the children who are with us are well integrated and open to everything. It's really … I'm not sure I would be as open to it if I found myself in a foreign country'.

The teacher suggests that discussion of the situation with the class prior to the arrival of the Ukrainian refugee students helped prepare the ground. This seems to have led the German students to take the initiative in seeking contact with the newcomers. The material also underlines that Ukrainian students, their emotional state and potential (traumatic) past experiences need to be handled with great sensitivity:

> ***Teacher 3 (high school):*** 'Maybe she was in a bad mood, somehow she retreated into herself. […] was just watching videos on her phone and showing no interest, even when the class suggested going out for ice cream together, saying that she didn't have time […]. But the class tries to do something to make it all right. They put a lot of effort into it'.

This quotation shows that, on the one hand, the German students seem to be quite willing to plan joint activities with the Ukrainian students. On the other hand, close attention needs also to be paid to the individual emotional state of the refugees and their past experiences always being factored in when assessing certain situations. It is also worth noting here that many Ukrainian students suffer from severe psychological stress, as emphasized by the Permanent Scientific Commission of the Conference of Ministers of Education (Das Deutsche Schulportal der Robert Bosch Stiftung, 2022, see also McBrien, 2005).

Another high school teacher reports actions by the school community and the Anti-Racism Working Group aimed at assisting the incoming Ukrainian students. She mentions poster campaigns and weekly bake sales to raise money for the Ukrainian refugees. An elementary school teacher cites the organization of a charity run. Social integration in these cases is organized at the meso-level, that is, at the level of the individual school. However, there is no indication that social integration is actively promoted at the classroom micro-level through instructional measures.

Barriers to implementing inclusive education

The material we already touched on in the previous section will now be analysed in greater detail: Implementing inclusion generally in various areas and particularly in education is not without its challenges.

Six problem areas in the implementation of inclusive education have been identified in the material based on 43 codings. The majority of these codings ($n=12$) is attached to the problem area of language barriers. Elementary school teachers report difficulties in including students in regular school activities because the refugee students, not knowing either German or English, are unable to follow the lessons. In contrast, the high school teacher reports that many students possess excellent English language skills.

The text material reflects a certain attitude on the part of some Ukrainian students, as reported by the

high school teacher. Seven codings indicate that these students may not be motivated to learn the German language or integrate much because they believe they would not have to stay at their current place of refuge for long and will soon be repatriated.

Another challenging aspect, revealed in six codings, is that both elementary and high school teachers have difficulty dealing with the experiences of the Ukrainian students:

> ***Teacher 3 (elementary school):*** 'See, you already know about the hardships many children have endured. Not all of them are here with their parents. In that connection, it must be said, yes, the children as things stand don't have it easy when it comes to family. But at present, the children don't express much of that'.

The elementary school teacher points out that some Ukrainian students tend to share little information about their experiences and their current family situation. Both elementary school teachers report that as a result they skirt sensitive topics, especially in subjects like ethics.

A high school teacher also states that clearly the Ukrainian students are affected by what they have experienced.

> ***Teacher 4 (high school):*** 'You can tell that they are sometimes quite distracted. I think they just have bigger problems than learning math, French, or history with us'.

This issue appears to affect both younger and older students alike.

Another issue primarily raised by the high school teachers concerns grading (Notengebung) and placement (Einstufung). Students who have already attended a higher grade-level in Ukraine are placed at a lower level in Germany, which is a source of frustration for them. Furthermore, the teacher reports that they can be graded in some subjects like mathematics and Russian, but not in others like German. To date, no uniform solution for this anomaly is on the horizon. Another high school teacher describes that the students were promoted 'for educational reasons' during the awarding of grades (Notenkonferenzen) and promotion conferences (Versetzungskonferenzen) at the end of the school year.

We also found hints (n=4) of a discrepancy in teaching culture between Germany and Ukraine. A high school teacher surmises that in Ukraine, rote memorization is more prevalent, describing it as more 'drilling'. With just two codings, the subcategory of discipline problems is negligible and it includes statements about the Ukrainian students paying little heed to the teacher's admonishing them to 'behave better'.

Finally, the material references instructional practical factors that may complicate the implementation of inclusive education. Factors cited by the teachers include 'lack of staff', the time expended on preparing for differentiated instruction for Ukrainian refugees, the lack of experience in dealing with refugees and a shortage of teaching materials.

DISCUSSION

The present contribution provides insights into differentiated teaching approaches for Ukrainian students in German schools. From the material, we drew exploratory information about the organization of teaching, social integration and challenges in implementing inclusive education.

For inclusive education to succeed, appropriate resources must be provided (see, e.g., Massumi et al., 2015). The findings showed that some Ukrainian refugee students were given tablets upon starting school and were taught German in intensive language courses at all schools (Baur & Gröpler, 2020). This support brings into sharp relief a key aspect of heterogeneity that occupies centre stage in this acute situation: Ukrainian refugees differ significantly from their classmates due to their migration background, which is associated with their origin, (native) language and linguistic expression. These facets demand special consideration at the micro-level in lesson planning and delivery and in being addressed with differentiated offerings.

The schools provide language support both through external differentiation options (intensive courses) and classroom differentiation measures. In some cases, Ukrainian students may be taken out of regular class and taught separately. According to Ludwig (2010), this corresponds to class-particular external differentiation. Individual schools make these decisions at the meso-level. Our material further revealed that some Ukrainian students are additionally taught via Zoom by their Ukrainian teachers, an option that is decided on outside the German school system not within it. At this juncture, it would make sense to coordinate both instructional offerings. On a micro-level, individual teachers have been shown making efforts to integrate Ukrainian students into regular school activities through classroom differentiation (Ludwig, 2010). To this end, they employ various measures like those from Categories I, II and III of the taxonomy of classroom differentiation (Table 1) including implementing tutoring systems or grouping students according to specific criteria (Letzel et al., 2020). Teachers also try to translate assignments so that participation in regular classes is at least partially possible, and they use material learning aids to overcome the language barrier. This amply demonstrates that the repertoire of classroom differentiation measures is by no means exhausted. It further shows that inclusive education at the micro-level would benefit even more intensively by deploying measures from Cat. V

and Cat. VI, such as target-oriented learning or classroom opening. Material learning aids could evolve from single translated words into more complex forms such as (graduated) flash cards. The use of Mastery Learning measures (Cat. V) is explicitly recommended for dealing with refugees in class when setting obligatory minimum requirements and standards (Massumi et al., 2015). Although this requirement strictly speaking relates to the state (Länder) level, it could also be implemented at the meso or micro-level.

Another potential resides in the intention underlying the selective composition of student work groups (Cat. II). Teachers implement classroom differentiation measures to make it easier for the Ukrainian refugee students to fit into the regular German classroom. The purpose of resorting to tutoring systems, according to the teachers, is to smooth organizational processes for Ukrainian students. Indeed, our material contains no hints that teachers intend to force the social integration of students through the targeted use of classroom differentiation measures, as might be inferred from their resorting to tutoring systems and the selective setting up of student work groups. The interviewed teachers do not explicitly express the intention to also promote socialization by mobilizing tutoring systems. Beyond the implementation of measures from Categories II and III of the taxonomy of classroom differentiation measures, we could glean nothing further from the material regarding the implementation of such measures for social integration. Conceivably, additional measures for goal-oriented learning (Mastery Learning) (Category V), such as group competitions, or measures for opening up the classroom (Category VI), which also aim at social learning (Letzel et al., 2020), could be made part of the mix. The social integration of Ukrainian students is primarily carried out by the students themselves. No explicit instructional measures for social integration are reported by the teachers in the survey material.

The form of classroom differentiation measures currently in vogue indicates that local schools tend rather to stress compensating the differences between students (Niggli, 2013), thus resulting in integration instead of inclusion (Biewer, 2010; Lindmeier & Lütje-Klose, 2015; Werning & Baumert, 2013). Educational opportunities accessible to all students in the spirit of inclusive rather than merely integrative education might, for example, take the form of opening up the classroom (Category VI). Thus, teachers could, possibly in consultation with Ukrainian teachers, make available learning stations and materials for use by any student.

In this way, there would be no need to compensate for a language barrier through tutoring systems. Instead, all students could work according to their strengths and weaknesses and be included in regular lessons. However, a multi-professional collaboration at the micro-level that fosters inclusive learning is (a) contingent on certain prerequisites, (b) must be integrated into teacher training and professional development (Schneckenburger, 2016; Schuelka, 2018) and (c) undoubtedly entails a higher workload in terms of lesson preparation. To ensure that, above all, teachers commit to the principle of inclusive education, appropriate resources should be made available at both the meso and micro-levels.

Implementing inclusive education depends not only on contextual factors but also on teachers' attitudes, as these guide their actions (Bosse et al., 2016; Seifried, 2015; Smets & Struyven, 2020). Teachers with more positive mindsets towards inclusion or differentiation tend to structure their lessons accordingly (see, e.g., Bosse et al., 2016). Our material suggests that some teachers oppose integrating the students into mainstream schooling (Regelschulbetrieb). This aspect should also receive greater emphasis in teacher training and professional development (Massumi et al., 2015).

The surveyed teachers articulate manifold difficulties in implementing inclusive education on the micro-level. They provide important insights into what conditions the success of inclusive educational provisions for refugee students. These difficulties can be classified into individual challenges in dealing with Ukrainian students, as evident in the material when teachers mention language barriers and students' attitudes that stem from believing that their stay in Germany in any event is only temporary. Lack of experience and increased preparation time also complicate implementation. Furthermore, dealing with students' experiences (see also McBrien, 2005), staff shortages and a lack of materials, as well as grading and the differences in teaching culture between Germany and Ukraine, are problem areas that should be addressed within the classroom and school organization. This calls for sensitive pedagogical approaches by individual teachers. Conceivably, these issues could be addressed in teacher training and professional development (Schwaiger & Neumann, 2014). Additionally, uniform decisions regarding grading should be made on the meso- or macro-level to provide clarity for both students and teachers. To address discipline problems that can *originate in the individual feelings of students* as well as *within the classroom or school organization*, further in-depth studies from the perspective of students would be appropriate.

LIMITATIONS

This exploratory qualitative study has several limitations. Being qualitative, this study cannot lay claim to being representative. Nevertheless, a qualitative approach is defensible since there are as yet no tools that could have been used to make a qualitative study representative. With many more Ukrainian students expected to make their way to Germany in the future, in the event it should be possible to constitute larger samples of teachers to be drawn upon for research. Thus, one approach for future research would be to replicate or refute the results obtained within a qualitative

design through quantitative means. Another factor that limits representativity of the study is that our data were collected solely from the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate. Nevertheless, this investigation can serve to stimulate reflections on concrete approaches to dealing with refugees and on promoting inclusive education, thus facilitating the optimal integration of Ukrainian students.

We surveyed teachers from both primary and secondary school levels only to identify and document possible differences in dealing with older and younger students. Consequently, no distinctions among different types of secondary schools can be discerned from the material. However, other research does suggest that refugees from different countries of origin tend to attend different types of secondary schools (de Paiva Lareiro, 2019). Thus, it would be interesting in the future to include various types of secondary schools, and possibly even vocational schools, in the research design.

Lastly, this study solely focuses on the perspective of teachers. To further refine the present results, future research should also explore the subject from the perspective of Ukrainian and German students.

CONCLUSION

The results from this study show that Ukrainian students have been provided support by teachers and schools. However, these types of support have only promoted the integration of Ukrainian students rather than fully establishing them in an inclusive learning environment. This only resembles a cycle of incorporating students into mainstream education that does not realize the full potential of inclusive education. Moreover, these findings highlight the ever-growing limitations teachers face when dealing with student heterogeneity (Letzel, 2021; Pozas & Letzel, 2019). Consequently, teachers and future teachers require to have strong knowledge and competences to put DI into practice, not only when it comes to teaching Ukrainian students but all students' diverse learning and well-being needs.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

All participants were interviewed after being informed of the purpose of the study and were given the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions. Participants were also informed of the right to refuse participation or to discontinue participation at any time without any consequences to them. All principles of anonymity, autonomy, justice, nonmaleficence and beneficence to participants were upheld throughout the research process. As such, participant identities are anonymised throughout this article.

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