

Impairment and Traumatization as Crucial Factors for Didactics and Pedagogy of Adolescent Refugees

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Abstract

Discussions about the extent of integration of adolescent refugees as well as integrating displaced people ‘correctly’ in the respective education system of the target country have long been held about. Since crisis caused by, for example, war or the Covid-19 pandemic increase the numbers of refugees all over the world, a high number of displaced people suffer from experienced traumas and might therefore be impaired in participating in curricular education. For this study, the observation of three adolescent refugees who attend different sports classes, thus being encompassed by variable social settings, has been at the center of attention for one semester. To ensure data variety, principals, PE teachers, refugee students, ‘regular’ students have been interviewed, respectively.

The analysis revealed that huge differences in terms of adaptation as well as impairment could be observed among the participating adolescent refugees. While one of the refugee students easily adapted among the observed manifestations (non-)verbal communication, social form, behavioral strategies and potentials of physical education, the other adolescent refugee displayed severe impairment in all of the manifestations mentioned above; hence, experienced traumata experienced before, during or after flight require newly arriving students being psychologically examined and monitored.

Keywords: adolescent refugees, traumatization, impairment, inclusive physical education

1. Introduction

On February 24th, 2022 Russia launched a wide-ranging attack on Ukraine after officially recognizing the two breakaway regions in the East of Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk. Without further commenting on the conflicting parties, committed war crimes and fatal attacks on cities, war – no matter where on earth it takes place - always causes humanitarian crises. Merely a small proportion of ailment, disease and suffering among afflicted people is experienced by either neighboring or non-adjacent countries – most commonly in the form of media coverage about people fleeing their home country. Bearing in mind the latest European refugee crisis (in 2015 and the following years) during which a huge proportion of migrants (some of them might even be considered as refugees) started their journey from countries torn by war, for example Syria and Afghanistan (Austrian Ministry of Interior, 2021) together with their parents or relatives. However, a constantly rising number (nine per cent) among newly arrived people, reached Austria individually (without parents or close relatives), thus being referred to as UMF (Note 1) or “unaccompanied minor refugees” (Austrian Ministry of Interior, 2021). In contempt of different reasons for migration or persecution in former years compared to the attack on Ukraine, the saying ‘history repeats itself’ seems to be true, especially from the perspective of another migration movement within the borders of Europe. Currently, almost 10 million people are displaced either within the Ukraine or outside its borders (International Organization for Migration, 2022).

The majority of people fleeing from Russian invasion of their country are women accompanied by their children since all male Ukrainians aged 18 to 60 are not allowed to leave the country because they have to join armed forces (CNN, 2022). Despite minor differences in terms of origin, major differences among migrants and displaced people will definitely be revealed in terms of their history of origin including flight experiences, literacy embracing first (and possibly second or third) language skills; most importantly, many of the displaced children and adolescents leaving Ukraine are students at an age at which compulsory education is mandatory as it has been proven in the aforementioned migration crisis (Puschautz, Dauer, & Hager, 2022; Blossfeld et al., 2016; Burrman & Mutz, 2016; etc.).

Due to the above mentioned differences among refugees in terms of language skills, experiences with curricular education as well as possibly experienced traumata before or during their flight in combination with the increasing quantity of displaced people having arrived in Austria since 2015, many of whom being obliged to attend school (ÖIF, 2018), the Austrian education infrastructure again meets this challenge obviously unprepared.

Discussions have been held about whether and to what extent displaced people can be integrated ‘correctly’ into target country’s educational institutions. Physical education and sports are frequently regarded as school subjects facilitating the integration of potentially vulnerable human beings (Australian Sports Commission, 2006; Tiemann, 2013; Tiemann, 2015). However, disabled people and the integration of handicapped student groups has been at the center of attention quite often (Black & Stevenson, 2012) which led the author of this article to analyze the contribution of physical education toward the integration of adolescent refugees, therefore, subsequent research questions should be answered:

- 1) Which manifestations does the adaptation process among both juvenile refugees and ‘regular’ students during physical education in Austrian sports classes show?
- 2) In what way do experienced traumata before / during or after flight impair adaptation processes in Austrian (sports) classes?

The design of the study, embracing participants, analysis tools and important background data will be presented first. Afterwards, the results of the analysis among school authorities as well as representatives within the Austrian school system focusing strongly on conducted interview files will be given. This then is followed by a vital discussion of applied strategies in terms of integrating adolescent refugees in Austrian school classes. The paper concludes with future goals, measurements and further challenges.

2. Material Studied

2.1 Area Descriptions

Research on (adolescent) refugees frequently leads to discussions about the notion of de-segregation (Booth, 2008; 2012), integration as well as its “qualitatively advanced concept” (Feyerer, 2012, p. 4) – inclusion. The majority of research being conducted in the context of refugee and migration research focuses on ‘bottom-up’ approaches (Booth, 2008; 2012; Hinz, 2013) analyzing the corresponding study question merely from one perspective, namely that of refugees and their social surroundings. In the course of this study, analysis through conducted interviews (N = 15) with school authorities, principals and sports teachers has been applied simultaneously.

Bearing in mind the high vulnerability of affected study participants, the ethical review commission of the University of Vienna analyzed the study design, which had been submitted in advance of the study. After the positive evaluation, the researcher applied the “principle of a temporary participation in the area of investigation” (Thiele, 2003, p. 14) which should facilitate the understanding of juvenile refugees’ behavior in Austrian physical education classes from ‘the inside’; hence, the study design consisted of an observer as a so-called passive participants – a commonly chosen design in social settings (Lamnek, 2005; Thiele, 2003). The observation of three different juvenile refugees who attend different schools and therefore participate in varying sports classes have been observed.

2.2 Participants

It was a prerequisite of this study, that each of the three selected schools and the equivalent sports classes consist of a so called ‘focus student’. The selection of focus students has also been at the center of other successfully conducted studies (cf. Breidenstein, 2006, 2008; Huf, 2006; Kamper, 2015). In this study, the focus student should have arrived in Austria only recently (i.e. from 2017-2019) and is likely to remain in the selected class at least for the observation time of this study, allowing the researcher a profound analysis and in-depth description of social interactions with both classmates and teachers experienced in the course of the semester.

As can be seen, Table 1 illustrates that among the observed juvenile refugees, one female and two male students who attend different school types have been selected and thus observed. In comparison, Table 2 shows adolescent refugees’ differences in terms of origin, the time of their arrival in Austria and the attendance in the corresponding sports group.

Table 1. Sampling of study participants

Focus student	School type	Academic year
Andreas (male)	Grammar school	11
Benjamin (male)	Secondary school	8
Clara (female)	Secondary school	8

Table 2. Context-based information of the focus students

Focus student (sex)	Country of origin	Duration of residence in Austria/student as part of sport class
Andreas (male)	Syria	Since 2018/ since the school term 2018/19
Benjamin (male)	Afghanistan	unknown/ since the school term 2018/19
Clara (female)	Afghanistan	unknown/ since the school term 2017/18

2.3 Methods

Lofland et al. 2006 claim that the majority of social settings (sports classes can also be classified as social settings) include ‘hierarchical aspects or inequalities’; thus a two-tier approach for data collection has been chosen – ethnographic observations and interviews with principals, sports teachers, focus students and their class mates (‘regular’ students) have been conducted.

Concerning the analysis of the focus students (Note 2), each of them as has been mentioned, being an adolescent refugee (one of them being even unaccompanied, thus referred to as ‘UMF’) each sports class has been observed once a week over a period of one semester starting in September 2018. In total, 49 observations including observation reports (cf. Lamnek, 2005) have been conducted. However, before any observation at school and the corresponding social setting could commence, each class had been instructed that a stranger will encompass them during their physical instruction classes. This should avoid distractions among students at the start of the study. In addition, remaining questions of students could be answered, despite their parents being already informed via an information letter at the beginning of the new school term.

Data reliability for the conducted observations has been ensured by both a fixed and mobile camera; consequently, all corners of the playing field (or the gym) including scientifically relevant situations could be filmed and, later on, analyzed from various angles. All observed lessons have immediately after the lesson been recorded according to Bodgan and Tylor’s (1975, p. 62f.), seemingly archaic but still useful, recommendation: “[R]ecord your notes as soon after the observation session as possible [...]”

2.4 Data Analysis-Techniques

Overall, a two-tier system has been applied in order to analyze both the conducted interviews as well as the observation reports. The analysis of the film material from both the mobile and the fixed camera position was carried out simultaneously with the analysis of the comments from the observation reports which allowed additional comments and remarks as video documents conserve both visible and audible incidences guaranteeing insights into undertaken interactions (Dinkelaker & Herrle, 2009). All data, observation reports as well as interview files were transcribed onto a word file.

The researcher used Grounded Theory Method (GTM) (Strauss & Corbin, 1996; Glaser & Strauss 1998) for data analysis derived from the above described word files. Codes were applied to text passages being of high relevance for the overall study questions or the research topic as such. At this stage of data analysis it is of tremendous importance that one follows Saldana’s (2016, p. 7f.) advice:

Coding requires that you wear your researchers’ analytic lens. But how you perceive and interpret what is happening in the data depends on what type of filter covers that lens and from which angle you view that phenomenon.

Nonetheless, the establishment of suitable categories to the appendant data which then suggest interesting insights into the research topic was the ultimate goal (as it is in all scientific researches using GTM). The generation of themes, concepts and, ultimately even a theory, requires several cycles of coding as Saldana (2016, p. 9) highlights: “Coding is cyclical act. Rarely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly attempted.”

Among the three basic steps of coding, the first step is commonly referred to as ‘open coding’ (Strauss & Corbin 1996). The categorization of phenomena resemble a pattern of rhythm as well as changing and repetitive forms of action-interaction plus the pauses and interruptions that occur when persons act or interact (Corbin & Strauss,

2015, p. 173). The application of names and concepts can either be done through using terms/concepts from literature based on similar study projects, or by in-vivo-coding in which terms/concepts are generated from the data. The latter procedure is frequently applied “in educational ethnographies with youth” (Saldana 2016, p. 106).

The next step, as Lofland et al. (2006, p. 121) mention, is characterized by forming “major units of social organization” since comparisons between text passages including similar characteristics is performed. Similar notions are applied to similar manifestations which in GTM-language is called categorization.

‘Focused coding’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1996) is the process in which codes or categories from the first two steps are grouped, renamed and frequently reorganized “to determine which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones [... and to] reorganize the data set” (Boeije, 2010, p. 109). The final step of focused coding embraces the generation of a major (sometimes even abstract) core category which matches all other so far established categories.

In order to ensure high sensitivity towards adolescent refugees and, simultaneously, dismiss a “one-size fits all reasoning” (Tiemann, 2015, p. 55) in Austrian school settings, the main themes (i.e. major categories) derived from the observation reports and from the interviews will be presented in the following section.

3. Results

The results of this study are presented on the basis of four main themes deduced from a profound analysis of observation reports and interview data: 1) (verbal and non-verbal) communication; 2) social forms; 3) behavioral strategies of teachers and students; 4) potentials of physical education. A selection of the most prominent quotations shall emphasize the results. Crucially, statements of participants should not be regarded as the opinion of individuals, but as a comprehensive frame of common understanding (Dahlin-Ivanof & Holmgren, 2017).

3.1 Verbal/Non-Verbal Communication

This category focuses strongly on patterns of communication between adolescent refugees and ‘regular’ students as well as between refugee students and their sports teacher. The category also embraces non-verbal communication since non-spoken instances (i.e. body language) equally convey important insights into didactics of refugee education as the following statement suggests:

During the arrangements of the teams, she (i.e. focus student) is merely sitting in a corner of the gym (keeping a distance of approximately three meters to the next student) with tucked up legs while fixing the floor with her view. Many of the class mates do not even recognize her leading to a finished process of team arrangements in which three teams have been established, obviously without her being in any of those teams. (3-16; 16) (Note 3)

Despite participating in the sports group for almost a year, one can easily notice that the observed refugee student applied avoidance strategies displayed especially in non-verbal communication. Luckily, the sports teacher interfered by prompting the other students: “Hey ladies, not everybody has been allocated to a group – Clara participates in the game as well” 3-16; 16. Sadly, one of the students replied: “It does not make a difference whether she plays or not – she does not participate at all. But choose her, so that we can finally start.”

As can be seen in the instances above, the focus student Clara, who has already been a member of the observed sports group for almost a year displays non-verbal avoidance strategies. Likewise, she shows hesitancy during instructions when, for example, the teacher has to assign her to a group: “Clara, take a volleyball and join a group!” (3-1; 18).

From the perspective of the teacher a frequently chosen communicative strategy has been encouragement which was directed towards the focus student aiming at her active participation. In contrast to the former mentioned instructions between teacher and focus student, these communication patterns resemble a soft invitation to participate in the lesson:

Miss R. (i.e. teacher) moved to Clara and stated: “Come on, Clara, let’s try it together. I stand here and we play back and forth.” [...] Miss R. tried once more to motivate Clara carefully: “Clara, don’t you want to try it? You’ll see, it is fun!” (3-15; 24).

Contrasting the above mentioned instances of a highly impaired refugee student, subsequent (non) verbal communication patterns display instances of an adolescent refugee student being at the attention center of the relevant sports group (1-1;14): “What have you been doing at the weekend, Andreas?” Andreas: I have been cycling and studying German. My father says that German is important. Suddenly, another student said to Andreas: “That’s true. But you speak German already quite well.”

A very common topic among the sports group surrounding Andreas seems to have been football. Interestingly enough, the refugee student is well informed about the topic making himself a welcome conversation partner (1-12; 15):

Andreas: They (FC Salzburg) will win the championship; but Rapid Vienna is not that bad either.

Moritz: Have you already heard about him (Stöger) being trainer at Dortmund?

Andreas: Yes, of course. He is a very good trainer. At the moment, he is the best for Dortmund.

The instances of communication above shown between adolescent refugees, 'regular' students and teachers are obviously extracts. Nevertheless, even these extracts reveal a stark contrast between the two observed refugee students, Andreas and Clara. In terms of impairment and avoidance strategies, especially non-verbal communication displays challenges of integrating refugee students suffering from high impairment, which can also be seen in the next section.

3.2 Social Forms

Similar to the communicative patterns of refugee student Clara which have been described in section 3.1 also her social contacts in and outside the classroom might be characterized as scarce and hesitant. Especially outside conventional teaching situations (i.e. immediately before or after the lesson) a rather passive behavior could be observed (3-4; 8-13):

[...] Many of the girls were talking about varying topics like 'attractive boys', school, clothing or make-up. Clara, who was not involved in any of the conversations, was standing with her back to the group fixing the floor with her view.

Even when some of the girls actively tried to involve her in one of their conversations ("What do you think? Have you had a boyfriend yet?" 3-3; 4-17) the overall social setting did not alter a lot. As a response to the above mentioned question, Clara only briefly looked up to the girls before moving directly into the gym leaving the other girls astonished behind. The ignorance of the question obviously caused laughter among the other girls while some of them even rolled their eyes as a form of disparagement. When asking the teacher about Clara's hesitant social behavior, she stated that "Clara simply can't or doesn't want to integrate into the sports group" (3-1; 11).

In contrast to Clara, the male refugee student even assisted his classmates which, in return, caused enthusiasm and gratefulness he had accomplished a technically advanced gymnastics exercise (1-12; 32):

When Michael tried to accomplish the upward circle forwards, he was assisted by Andreas. Sadly, Michael failed the first attempt so that Andreas assisted him once more by making him aware of the most important aspects of the exercise (You have to tighten your arms while pressing your knees against the bar). This time, Michael managed to accomplish the upward circle forwards; immediately, he jumped off the horizontal bar, running to Andreas with raised arms and saying "Thank you" to Andreas.

Due to Andreas' extraordinary sports skills, he was very often selected by the sports teacher for demonstration reasons. Whenever Mr. A (i.e. sports teacher) wanted to show the other students how technically advanced exercises (should) look like, he used Andreas as a model (1-12; 39-40):

At the second attempt to jump (over the vaulting box) Mr. A invited Andreas to demonstrate the jump once more, so that he could highlight the importance of the extension of the upper body while pushing away his arms (Imagine the surface of the box is a hot stove – push away your arms! Exactly as Andreas does!)

Social forms explained in the latter instances means that parties involved in the relevant sports class approach each other; admittedly, the focus student, due to his extraordinary sports skills, plays a tremendous part in that. Getting into contact with others in the course of sports classes also seems to be linked to sports skills parallel to openness towards social interaction. However, Clara lacks this openness - probably because of being impaired.

3.3 Behavioral Strategies

They have fear and many are traumatized and above all there are those, who have lost their parents in war. (T2; 14)

This citation of an interviewed sports teachers highlights Clara's situation or flight biography. The losses she has experienced in combination with other, not less gruesome experiences during her flight, massively influence her behavior during sports classes. Regrettably, one of her behavioral strategies, as already indicated in the sections above, seems to be avoidance caused by traumatization. Many observation reports imply that the refugee student cannot handle the traumatizing experiences in her life. This became apparent in only one of the observed lessons,

in which the focus was lying on the topic of volleyball. At the beginning of the lesson, when the majority of students was involved in the setup of the net, a critical situation could be observed (3-15; 26):

Suddenly, Clara ran out of the gym without speaking to anybody or showing any signs. Since the observer was the only one noticing her absence, he informed the teacher, Miss R. about the situation. The teacher, being shocked and a bit scared about the unfamiliar situation [...] also left the gym in order to look for Clara. As the other girls were involved in playing volleyball, they did not notice Miss R, telling the observer about the situation she had experienced in the locker room. Miss R. found Clara having a nervous breakdown. She was lying on the floor of the locker room, crying and whispering the name of her (obviously dead) parents.

The above described traumatization of the focus student obviously has an impact on the behavior strategies of the teacher. In the beginning, the teacher was shocked about a student instantly leaving the gym. It was only when the teacher realized the seriousness of impairment of her refugee student that she stated: What can a teacher do in a case like that? I have not been trained to deal with problems like these (3-16; 13).

Apart from the shocking situation described above, behavioral strategies can also be characterized as ambitious. For example, when the focus student Andreas was involved in a high jump competition, in which the spectating as well as the opposing students granted him the victory (1-3; 38-39):

All eyes were focusing Andreas, who was cheered by all of the spectating students. Even the teacher, Mr. A, said to Andreas: "Come on, you will do it. Concentration!" When Andreas was running away, all the students remained silent. As soon as he accomplished to pass 1.85m, many students jumped exultantly (Note 4). Some of them even ran towards him und hugged him while still lying on the mat, which could clearly be interpreted as cheering. [...] When he was leaving the mat, also his contender came to him and said: "Well done! How do you do that?" Even Mr. A congratulated and said to the other students: If you apply the right technique, almost everything is possible. You obviously have to show the right prerequisites and a certain amount of ambition [laughing towards Andreas].

The behavioral strategies described in the course of this section are diametrically opposed. While Clara seems to be severely impaired by her flight and war experiences, Andreas does not show any signs of negative influences through flight or war; what is more, he fully engages in the set sport activities and outperforms his classmates, while Clara's behavior can be described as (mentally) handicapped.

3.4 Potentials of Physical Education

Unfortunately, what I experience while working with adolescent refugees is that they do not associate sports with fun as our kids do or as a leisure time activity, but as a duty. It is only after a certain amount of time that duty can turn into fun. (T3; 82)

This ambivalence mentioned by a sports teacher (i.e. fun vs. duty) especially applies to the observed focus student Clara for whom the latter aspect seems to prevail. As a matter of fact, this perception was also highlighted in the course of a conversation between her and her teacher after all the other students of her class had already left the gym (3-5; 58-61):

Miss R: Clara, why don't you participate in the sports lessons? [...] try to place the fun factor in the foreground!

Clara was fixing the floor with her view during the whole conversation.

Miss R.: Clara, I am really concerned about you. Try not to see sports as a must, but as something joyful, okay?

Clara was briefly nodding and immediately left the gym towards the locker room.

The reduction of physical education to a mere performance of one's duty, as illustrated in the conversation between Miss R. and the focus student, has similarly been observed in another conversation between the refugee student and a classmate while leaving the soccer pitch. At the end of an exciting sports lesson in which a baseball-like game led to a draw between the two sports teams composed of the class, one class mate said to Clara that this had been one of the most exciting sports lessons ever while Clara only replied: "Not for me. I am only here because I have to!" (3-2; 30).

Unlike Clara's perception of institutional education, the second observed focus student appreciates both sports and fun and friendships emerging from physical education. This even led to a link between sports at school and societal participation shown in the subsequent example, in which the focus student was invited to extra-curricular activities in the afternoon:

We go mountain biking in the afternoon. Do you want to join us? 1-8; 48

Marco, Michael and I, together with some others, meet to play soccer after school. It would be cool, if you joined as us as well. 1-10; 27

Likewise, the focus student was even urged to join a local soccer club, due to his extraordinary soccer skills shown during many sports lessons:

Overall, students tried to utilize Andreas's speed of action. This even led to the team's second goal in which Andreas escaped the defense by making a feint. Being alone in front of the goal keeper, Andreas seized the chance to score. Consequently, one of his team players sprinted towards Andreas and screamed: If you join our local football club, nobody has a chance! (1-1; 17-20)

Reading the descriptions from the observation reports, one could critically argue that outstanding physical abilities combined with a certain amount of skill in the relevant form of sport ultimately leads to respect and even fame among classmates. According to the author, however, this point of view is somewhat short-sighted, as also the female focus student might be able to outperform some of her class mates in terms of physical abilities and well defined skills. Crucially though, she is incapable of proving her skills due to the experienced traumata. It is only on condition that potentially experienced traumatizing events linked to war, persecution and flight, can be overcome that "sports can cause understanding among nations" as a representative of the Austrian school system stated (M; 76).

4. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to analyze whether and in how far sports students and sports teachers adapt within a period of one school semester (September to January). As other studies focusing on juvenile refugees exercising in the course of physical education classes have indicated that a high number of adolescent refugees suffer from impairment or even traumatization (cf. Kölbl, 2021), this research paper aims at contributing to a more extensive idea of adolescent refugees in both national and international pedagogy.

As far as the first research question is concerned, the establishment of adaptation, which can be defined as a multi-layered, sometimes subconsciously chosen process of humans to their social surroundings, as the core category has been determined. Both the presence as well as the attendance of adolescent refugees causes all native participants (i.e. local students and teachers) to adapt in sports classes. This adaptation, however, is not limited to one characteristic but occurs on a scale of peculiarities: Verbal and non-verbal communication, social forms and physical and psychological behavior strategies of both teachers and students. Interestingly, the attendance of adolescent refugees also alters the potentials of physical education. Most importantly, all manifestations depend strongly on the extent of impairment caused by war, flight and persecution, respectively. Traumatization definitely has to be placed at the most severe end of the 'impairment scale' and must be taken into account in all forms of refugee didactics and pedagogy – independently of subject.

Next to the already established core category 'adaptation' embracing its manifestations (i.e. verbal and non-verbal communication, social forms, behavioral strategies and potentials of physical education) the establishment of another crucial characteristic has to be highlighted - the impairment of juvenile refugees. While the male focus student shows little to no impairment and a high adaptation despite his flight from his home country (Syria), which he successfully managed together with his whole family. Especially his physical skills enable him to raise interest not only among the other students but also among his sports teacher.

In contrast, the female focus student (fleeing from Afghanistan) shows high impairment from the beginning to the end of the observation time. Despite the ambitious goal of fostering her active involvement in class, the severe psychological problems (i.e. witnessing the death of both of her parents) prohibit the active participation in class and even caused a nervous breakdown in one of the physical education classes.

As can be seen in the *Inclusive physical education with adolescent refugees* model (Figure 1) the theoretical frame supports the results gathered through empirical research. Empirical research combined with theory proves that sensitivity towards a heterogeneous sports group is a precondition for social intercourse with juvenile refugees, and, as Tiemann (2015, p. 55) states "has to be taken into consideration in all didactic decisions". Furthermore, being open-minded towards all forms of differences, for example religious beliefs, cultures, languages, opinions and perceptions facilitates adaptation processes in the above mentioned areas of (verbal and non-verbal) communication, social skills, potentials of sports classes and behavioral strategies of participants of sports classes (i.e. local students and teachers).

Most importantly, adaptation among adolescent refugees depends tremendously on potentially experienced negative impacts. Depending on whether refugees have experienced a low or have suffered from a highly

negative impact during their flight to the target country, adaptation proceeds faster or more slowly in the course of physical education or even resembles a boycott of education. The latter has been observed among one of the target students who, while fleeing from Afghanistan to Austria, has witnessed both her parents being killed. Adolescent refugees cannot overcome experienced traumata like the aforementioned; unsurprisingly, a mental breakdown of the target student could be observed.

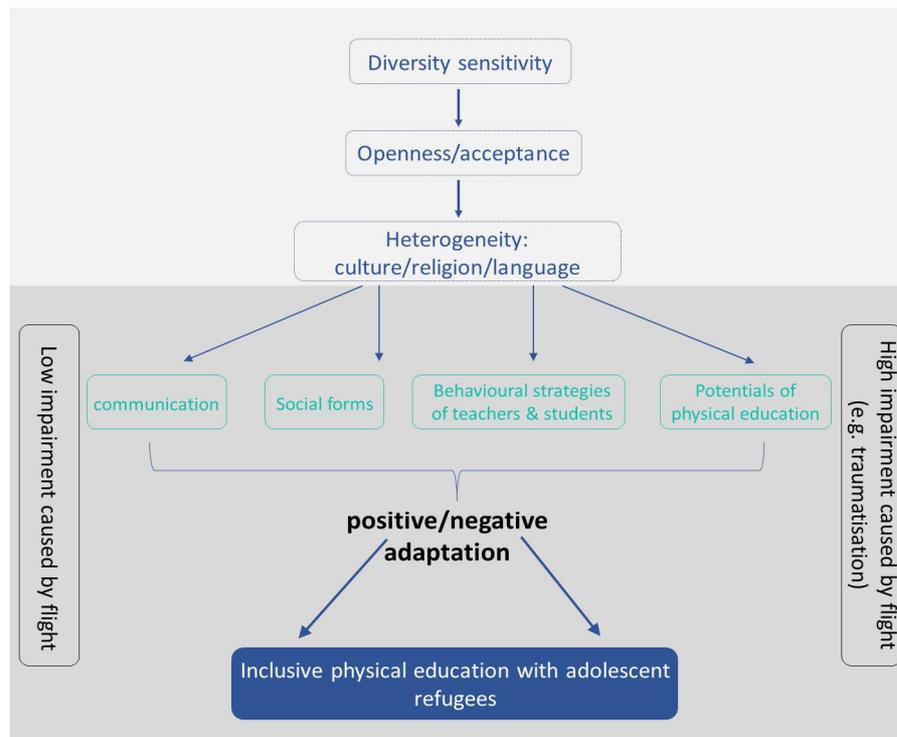


Figure 1. Inclusive physical education with adolescent refugees

5. Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to analyze which scales, and more specifically, which manifestations adolescent student refugees and local students adapt to each other in the course of curricular physical education. As can be seen, the results provide evidence that either group of students (both refugees and locals) and also physical education teachers adapt. Adaptation occurs among a broad range of manifestations embracing verbal and non-verbal communication, social forms, behavioral strategies as well as potentials of physical education.

For the future work with juvenile refugees, independent of school subject, the consideration of the individual flight background of juvenile refugees is of tremendous importance to as this might cause impairment on a psychological level which then also affects physiological participation in sports classes as can be seen in the observation reports (cf. section 2). With regard of inclusion efforts of juvenile refugees in the Austrian school system, some of the above mentioned strategies embracing inclusive educational efforts have (consciously or unconsciously) been utilized by school representatives (i.e. teachers) as well as classmates approaching refugee students with a positive attitude; however, inclusion efforts in sports pedagogy or didactics focusing on juvenile refugees has hitherto neither been evaluated in general nor in relation to physical education. Again, it is crucial to consider when working with refugee students that a high number of them might suffer from traumatic experiences they have faced due to war or on their way fleeing their war-torn home countries. Metzner & Mogk (2016) even assume that a majority of adolescent refugees is affected by post-migratory stress.

Similar to individual approaches towards the inclusion of adolescent refugees, school subjects resembling also for refugee students positive or negative characteristics (depending on individual preferences), might foster heterogeneity (Burrmann, 2017; Burrmann & Mutz, 2016; Krüger & Gebken, 2017). Just as rising numbers of refugees influence and even shape society (Heckmann, 2015) causing a higher number of refugee students in the respective country, more heterogeneous student groups, consequently, do also influence the respective school subjects; hence, teacher training and professional education irrespective of different school types has to focus on and implement heterogeneous classroom conditions in its curricula.

Global displacement is rising and will continue doing so due to natural disasters, violent aggression and war. Likewise, the Covid-19 pandemic, despite continuing travel restrictions and immobility, has led to an even greater imbalance of access to health care causing especially people from South American and African countries to suffer most from the pandemic. Once travel and mobility restrictions are loosened millions of people will move to countries in which access to vital systems and goods is guaranteed. Obviously, this is also the prime reason for people leaving their war-torn home country, like for example Ukraine. Regardless of the reasons behind large scale migration and flight movements, target countries including school and education infrastructure have to be prepared more frequently in the time to come. The establishment of early psychological screening for adolescent refugees should be a primary goal of every affected country as a differentiation between (highly) impaired and non-impaired refugees in terms of flight or war experiences is made possible through screening methods enabling juvenile refugees (and possibly also their parents) a prosperous future in a new country. Overall, the conducted interviews and the extracts presented should contribute to that ambitious goal.

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Notes

Note 1. This abbreviation stands for “Unbegleiteter Minderjähriger Flüchtling” and means unaccompanied minor refugee.

Note 2. However, data derived from the focus student Benjamin have not been further analyzed in the course of this manuscript.

Note 3. Anonymity among study participants has been ensured by a three-tier system for indicating quote references has been applied: while the first number indicates the specific focus student (i.e. 1, 2 or 3), the second number suggests the number lesson observation of this corresponding focus student, the third number points out

the line number of the transcript, this citation can be encountered. In some cases also the function of the interviewee in the school system (M = Ministry, P = Principal, T= Teacher, S= Local student; RS=Refugee student) is indicated.

Note 4. 1m resembles 1,28ft.

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