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Course Progress in the General Integration Course

Pia Homrighausen and Salwan Saif

SUMMARY

- The General Integration Course (GIC) is the most attended of its kind, registering a total of over 350,000 participants in around 17,000 courses in the years 2018 and 2019. The number of participants varies over the duration of a course, as some participants drop out and new participants join in.
- The majority of first-time participants (62 percent) from the year 2018 attend the GIC continuously from the first to the last language course section without any interruption. In contrast, the remaining 38 percent drop out before the end of the language course, often in the first two course sections.
- However, dropping out of the integration course does not necessarily result in unsuccessful course progress or German language acquisition. As our results show, more than one-third of participants who drop out of their course go on to attend another integration course. Yet, around two-thirds of all participants who drop out of the GIC do not resume their integration course participation within the analysis period.
- Estimates show that, on average, participants with a medium or high level of education, women and people aged 35 to 50 are more likely to participate in an integration course from the first to the last language course section without any interruption. If course participants drop out, those with medium and high levels of education, women, and participants who are obligated to attend an integration course are more likely to return after a dropout.
- Half of the participants who only interrupt their course return to another course within three months. Those obligated to visit an integration course have, on average, a longer interruption period, which also applies to a lesser extent to women. In contrast, participants with a high level of education return to the course system earlier. The majority of participants who transfer to another course typically take part in the following course section and thus do not deviate from the intended regular order of course sections.



INFOBOX 1: EXPLANATION OF TERMS

The terms *dropping out of* and *leaving* an Integration course are used synonymously in this study. They express the fact that a participant does not attend a particular integration course to its end. However, these terms do not necessarily reflect a failed integration course attendance or German language acquisition because participants can attend another integration course immediately or at a later point in

time after dropping out of the course. Thus, only an *interruption* of course attendance takes place. Participants who do not attend a new integration course within at least nine months after dropping out are considered *inactive*. Nevertheless, even these participants can resume their integration course attendance at a later point in time.

Introduction

Language skills are considered a key element of successful integration and social inclusion of immigrants. Numerous empirical studies show that speaking and understanding the language of the host country of residence facilitates access to social contacts, education or the labor market (e.g., Chiswick/Miller 2015; Esser 2006; Lochmann et al. 2019; Orlov 2018; Warman et al. 2015). The integration course, a nationwide learning assistance program for adults seeking German language skills, is the main federal integration measure in Germany.¹ From its introduction in 2005 until 2019, over two million people have attended an integration course (BAMF 2020). The aim of the integration course is for participants to be able to act independently in terms of the German language and find their way around in everyday life after attending the course. In order to adapt to the changing needs of various (new) groups of course participants over time, the integration course system in Germany has undergone constant development since its introduction to promote integration course progression and German language acquisition.

However, course participants' successful German language acquisition does not only depend on the institutional settings and pedagogical framework of the course system (e.g., suitability of the course provider, qualification of the teachers, curriculum, course materials, etc.). Individual learning factors in particular play a significant role in the acquisition of German (Esser 2006; Scheible/Rother 2017). In addition to participants' learning efficiency (e.g., age, education and language learning experience), opportunities for language use (e.g., family, friends, neighborhood, media) or motivation to learn German (e.g., intentions to stay, taking up employment), the current life situation

of course participants (e.g., flight-specific trauma, childcare) must also be taken into account (Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit 2021; Tissot et al. 2019; Tissot 2021). Thus, a variety of factors can affect progress in an integration course, resulting in either a successful completion of the course or in difficulties that could even lead to a permanent course dropout. Long-term illness, relocation, a lack of childcare, and also taking up employment are among the most common reasons why participants stop attending their integration course for a while or completely drop out (BAMF 2016).

The so-called „dropout rates“ (Cindark et al. 2019: 20) of integration course participants are a regular subject of public discourse and often labelled as a failure of the integration course system. However, an early course dropout cannot automatically be equated with unsuccessful course progress or even unsuccessful German language acquisition, nor should we assume that all participants who leave a course do not return to the integration course system and do not take up another course, i.e., remain inactive.² However, to which extent participants who drop out of an integration course take up another course at a later point in time and resume their German language acquisition has not yet been empirically investigated.

To answer this research question, we investigate the course progress of integration course participants. This is the first study to analyze in detail which (language) course sections participants fully attend in chronological order and after which course sections participants typically drop out of the integration course. Subsequently, this study examines which dropouts partic-

¹ For further information see: <https://www.bamf.de/DE/Themen/Integration/ZugewanderteTeilnehmende/Integrationskurse/integrationskurse-node.html> (01.05.2021).

² The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees classifies a "course dropout due to inactivity" in its statistical evaluations if there is no subsequent activity (course or exam participation) of a course participant for more than nine months (Deutscher Bundestag 2020: 21).

INFOBOX 2: THE INTEGRATION BUSINESS FILE (INGe) OF THE GERMAN FEDERAL OFFICE FOR MIGRATION AND REFUGEES (BAMF) AS A DATA SOURCE

The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has developed the IT application “Integration Business File” (InGe) (German: Integrationsgeschäftdatei) in order to efficiently coordinate and overview the implementation and accounting of integration courses. This system facilitates data collection and data exchange between the BAMF and external agencies that are also involved in the integration course process in accordance with the Integration Course Regulation (IntV) (German: Integrationskursverordnung) (e.g., foreigners’ offices, course providers, test centers and providers of social security benefits). Although the InGe data are not primarily designed for scientific purposes, they may be processed and analyzed in anonymized form in accordance with the IntV for research purposes.

For the analyses conducted in this study, an anonymized data sample covering the relevant integration courses as well as their participants was created from the Data-Warehouse-System of the BAMF. At the participant level, the created dataset contains information on the sociodemographic characteristics of course participants, their course entry and further course progress. Since the InGe dataset only contains information on course participants who receive financial support from the BAMF to cover the costs of integration courses, analyses based on InGe data do not include information on course participants who finance their participation in the integration course themselves.

ipate in an integration course again during the analyzed period, as well as which reasons could potentially have led to a course interruption in these cases.³

The following analyses are based on a data sample from the Integration Business File (InGe) with information on course attendance of integration course participants until the end of September 2020 (see Infobox 2). The focus of this study is on 6,677 General Integration Courses that started in the year 2018 with their last course section ending no later than by the end of December 2019.⁴ The dataset contains information on a total of 163,106 participants who ever attended these courses. We examine the course progress of participants from their individual course start in 2018 until the end of September 2020. If participants drop out of the initial course, information on their subsequent course progress is available for at least nine months after their last possible dropout in De-

cember 2019.⁵ Since the underlying dataset is a custom sample, the results of this study are not comparable with the results published in the Integration Course Statistics (German: Integrationskursgeschäftsstatistik) publications of the BAMF.

Course structure of the General Integration Course

The General Integration Course (GIC) is the most attended of its kind in a nationwide system of integration courses.⁶ It covers a total of 700 teaching units (TU) à 45 minutes, consisting of a Basic and Advanced

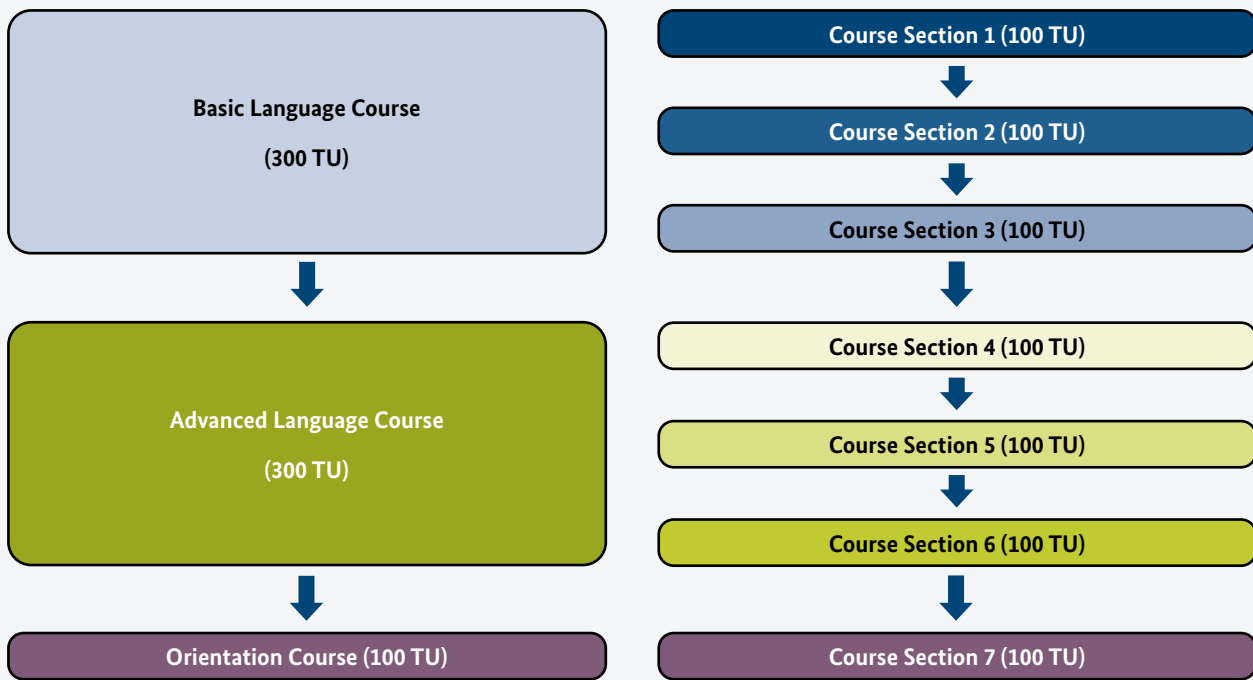
3 This study does not use information on (successful) participation in final exams of the Language or Orientation Course. Instead, it is based on participation in the individual course sections of the integration course.

4 Extending the analysis period to courses that started before or after the year 2018 is not reasonable from a methodological point of view due to the adjustment of the Integration Course Regulation (IntV) in the year 2017 and Covid-19 pandemic-related course interruptions in the year 2020. Thus, integration courses and participants are not comparable across an extended time period.

5 Since information on integration course participants is only available until the end of September 2020 (data cut-off), it is conceivable that individuals will return to the integration course system at a later point in time. It is also possible that individuals may have decided against returning to the integration course due to pandemic-related circumstances and course interruptions in the year 2020. In these cases, this study overestimates the number of inactive course participants and underestimates the number of people who only temporarily interrupt their integration course attendance as well as the duration of the interruption.

6 66 percent of new integration courses that started in the year 2019 were General Integration Courses (BAMF 2020). In addition to the General Integration Course, there are special courses for different target groups that can be offered depending on individual requirements. Currently, there are a total of eight different course types: General Integration Course, Literacy Course, Integration Course for Parents, Integration Course for Women, Integration Course for Young Adults, Catch-up Course, Integration Course for Students learning an additional Alphabet, Intensive Course. The scope of a course varies depending on the course type.

Figure 1: Regular course structure of the GIC



Source: own illustration.

Language Course (600 TU) and an Orientation Course (100 TU) (see also Figure 1).⁷

In the course sections of the Basic Language Course (course sections 1 to 3), participants learn basic German language skills over 300 TU in order to understand frequently used expressions and be able to communicate in simple and familiar situations. Following the Basic Language Course, the Advanced Language Course provides further 300 TU (course sections 4 to 6) to further develop the acquired German language skills, enabling the participants to talk independently about everyday topics and exchange ideas with others (BAMF 2015). This corresponds to the level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Each language course ends with the language exam “German test for immigrants” (German: Deutsch-Test für Zuwanderer, DTZ).

If participants successfully pass the exam and/or demonstrate sufficient German language skills, they proceed to the next stage of the integration course, which is the Orientation Course with 100 TU (course section 7). The Orientation Course provides participants with knowledge about the German legal system, history, culture and values. At the end of the Ori-

tation Course, participants take the final test “Life in Germany” (German: Leben in Deutschland, LiD).

Figure 1 shows the regular order of the course sections of the GIC. Course participants without prior German knowledge typically complete the entire course from the first to the last course section. If the assessment test before the beginning of the course reveals that a person has some prior knowledge of the German language, he or she will start in a more advanced language course section. Depending on their learning progress, participants can also skip or repeat a course section on the recommendation of the course provider. Under certain circumstances participants might also repeat up to 300 additional language TU at the end of the language course. It is possible that some integration course participants do not attend the Orientation Course since this is not obligatory for all participants (such as long-term residents who have been obliged to attend an integration course but have already taken part in other integration measures in the EU).⁸ To sum up, individual course progress, i.e., the order and number of attended course sections, might differ from the intended regular course structure outlined in Figure 1.

⁷ For further information see: https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Dossiers/DE/Integration/integrationskurse-im-fokus.html?n=284228&cms_docId=411136#a_411136_0 (01/05/2021).

⁸ For further information on (obligatory) participation in the Orientation Course see § 44a (2a) AufenthG.

Number of participants throughout the GIC

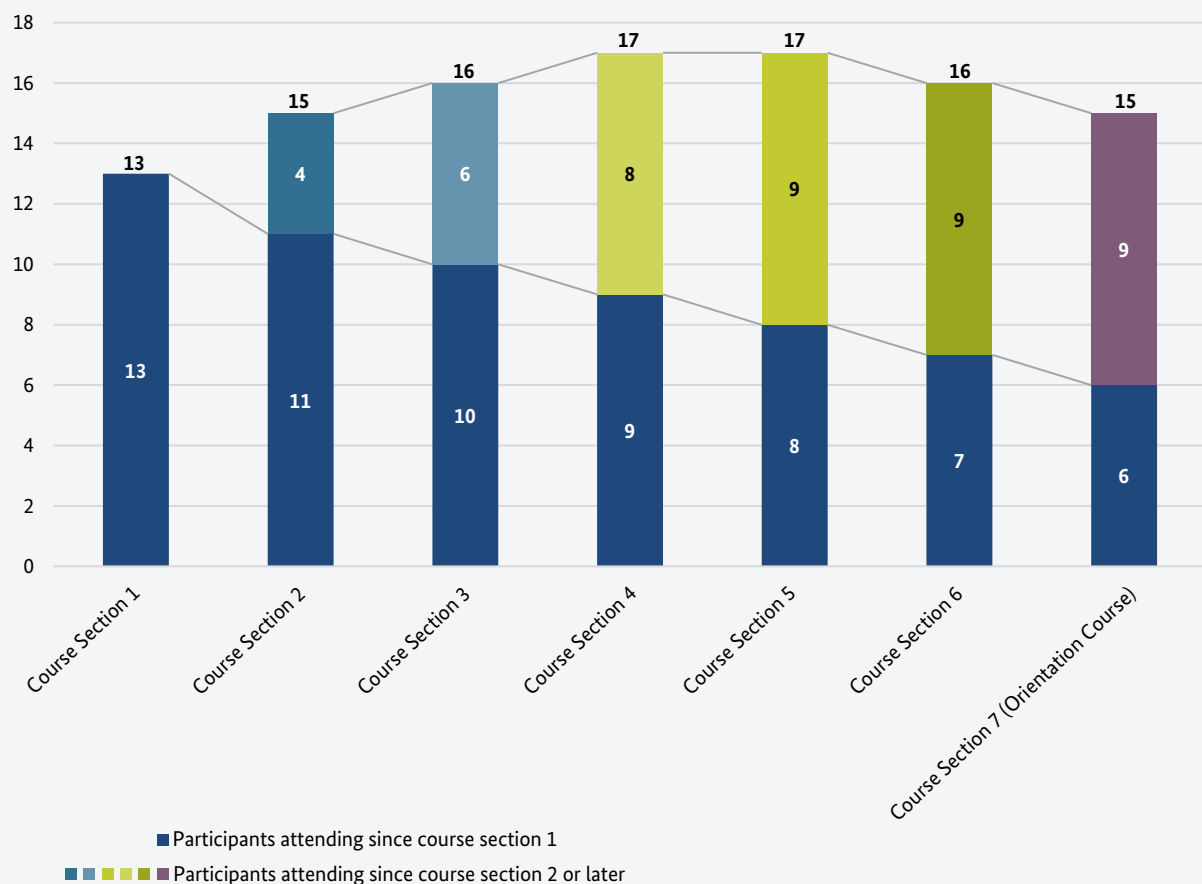
We first examine the average number of participants in the observed GICs across all course sections. We observe 8,642 GICs with a start date in the year 2018 that end no later than in December 2019. 6,677 (77 percent) of these courses start with course section 1 while the remaining courses start with either course section 2 or a more advanced section.

Figure 2 shows the average number of participants by course section (i.e., course size) of the 6,677 GICs considered. A total of 163,106 participants attend these integration courses. As we see, the average number of participants varies slightly across the course sections. This can be explained on the one hand by participants dropping out of the course they've started and on the other hand by new participants joining ongoing courses. The latter participants have already attended an integration course or have otherwise acquired German language skills prior to joining in the observed course.

Since throughout the first course sections more participants join in than leave the observed, the average course size increases steadily from 13 participants in course section 1 to 17 participants in course sections 4 and 5. In the following course sections, the average number of participants decreases slightly, as on average more participants leave than join in the courses. In the last integration course section, the Orientation Course, an average of 15 participants remain attending.

Figure 2 also distinguishes between participants who attend the same course since course section 1 and participants who join in later. More than half of the participants (on average 7 out of 13) who start a GIC in course section 1 still participate in the last language course section (course section 6) of the course they've started. On average, 6 out of 13 participants also attend the Orientation course section of their initial GIC. Therefore, around half of the participants drop out of the GIC before it ends. However, this fact is barely evident from the observed course size across course sections, as the total number of participants

Figure 2: Average number of participants by course section



Source: InGe, own calculation.

Sample: 6,677 GICs that start with course section 1 in the year 2018 and end no later than in December 2019. A total of 163,106 participants attend these integration courses. Around 13 percent of the GICs end with the sixth (final) language section, thus without an Orientation Course section.

changes only slightly due to new participants joining the course.

Course progress of GIC participants

Dropping out of an integration course can have various reasons and does not mean per se that the integration course will not be finished, as course participants can resume their language acquisition in another integration course. In order to gain more insight into the course progress of integration course participants shown in Figure 2, the following section examines in detail the order in which participants complete course sections, starting with their first course participation in course section 1 or higher. We focus on 114,654 participants who have not attended any other integration course prior to the initial course shown in Figure 2.

The analyzed course sections can all take place in the first attended GIC, or in other courses after leaving the initial integration course.

Figure 3 shows the individual course progress of new integration course participants presented in Figure 2. These participants have a total of 1,512 different individual course sequences, i.e., the order in which they complete the course sections. According to Figure 3, the 20 most frequent individual course sequences represent over 85 percent of all individual sequences. Therefore, the course progress of most course participants is similar, but there are also some cases of atypical course progress (as illustrated with the grey-shaded area).

As Figure 3 shows that almost one third of the participants (29 percent) attend the integration course from section 1 to section 7, which is the intended regular order for participants without prior German language skills at the beginning of the course. Another 20 percent of participants do so after starting the integration course in a more advanced course section. Additional 8 percent of the participants repeat up to 300 TU after completing the language course. Although they have attended all sections of the language course, in some cases also starting in a more advanced section, 10 percent of the participants have not (yet) begun an Orientation Course. These participants may have not yet attended the Orientation Course during the analysis period or they are not obliged to do so.

In summary, two-thirds (67 percent) of all individual language course progress correspond to the regular order of course sections laid out in the integration course concept. The remaining course sequences

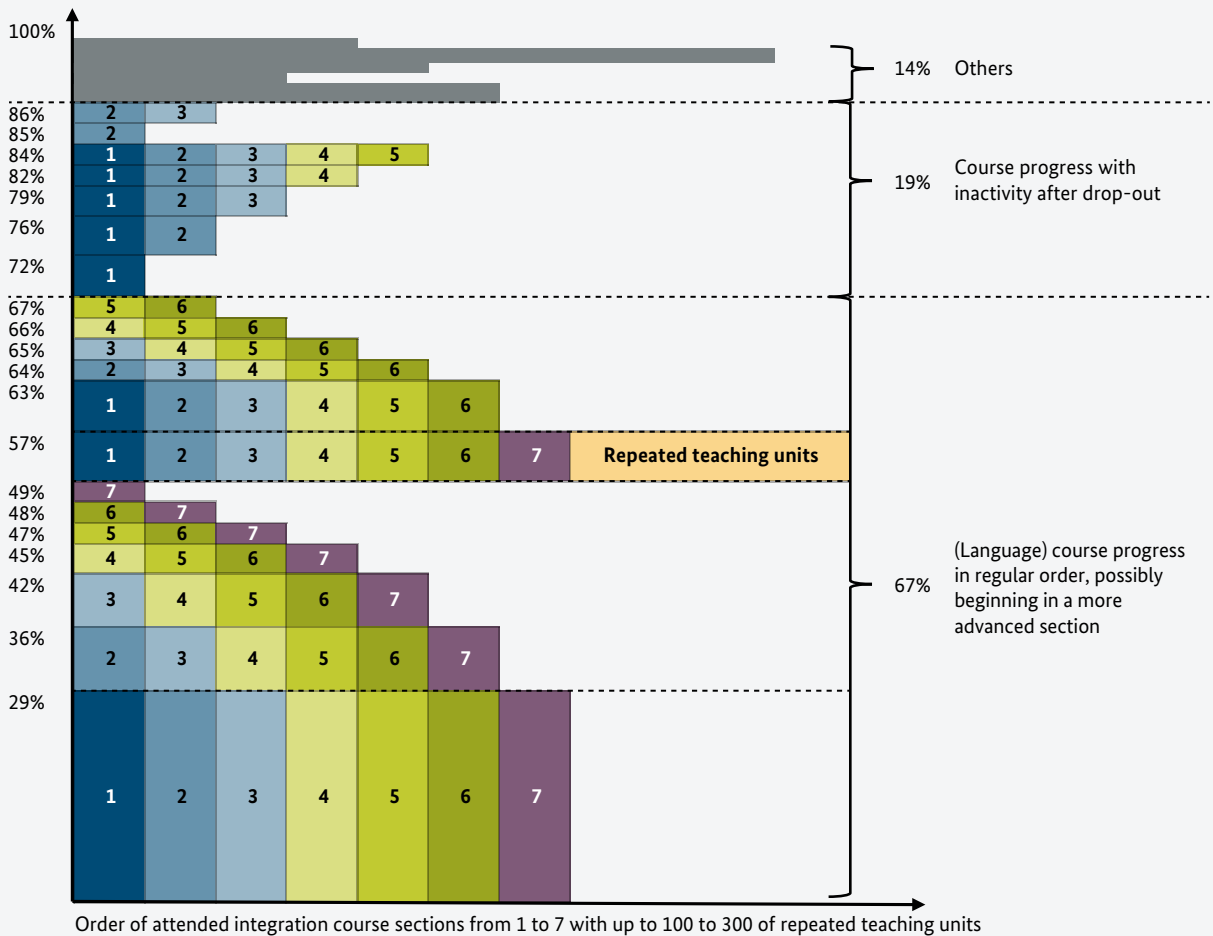
shown in Figure 3 do not comply with the regular course structure insofar as they begin with course section 1 or 2 but the residual course sections have not (yet) been fully attended by September 2020. Individual course sequences that significantly differ from the regular course structure, for example, due to skipped or repeated course sections, are not among the 20 most frequent course sequences and are therefore not shown separately in Figure 3. These are often special cases and are included alongside other course sequences in the grey-shaded area, which represents the remaining 14 percent of all course sequences. The longest individual course progress of this type observed in the data consists of 13 attended course sections. Such a long and rare course progress occurs particularly when participants repeat sections several times and/or transfer to a different type of integration course.

Figure 2 illustrates that on average half of the participants drop out of the GIC before its conclusion. However, Figure 3 shows that a large share of participants completes the sections of the integration course in the intended regular order. This indicates that participants who drop out of the course resume their participation in another integration course, either directly right after their dropout or later. Figure 4, therefore, analyses in detail the course progress of all integration course participants presented in Figure 3 who started the GIC from the first course section. This applies to 66 percent of all participants in Figure 3. We examine whether these participants remain in the same integration course after completing a language section (course progress shown in blue) or whether they drop out of the course early but take up another integration course immediately afterwards or at the latest within the analysis period of at least nine months after the course dropout (course progress shown in green). The course progress illustrated in grey represents participants who drop out of the course after the end of the respective course section and have not yet taken up a new integration course by the end of the analysis period in September 2020, i.e., they remain inactive.⁹

Participants may drop out of their course because they transfer to another integration course at the end of a course section (e.g., due to relocation, being under-challenged or overwhelmed by the course) or because they (temporarily) stop attending a course (e.g., due to employment or job training take-up, illness, preg-

⁹ A return to the integration course system after the end of the analysis period is still possible. However, analyses using longer analysis periods show that the take-up of another integration course after an interruption of more than nine months is rather unlikely.

Figure 3: Individual course progress of integration course participants (representation of the 20 most frequent course sequences in percent)



Source: InGe, own calculation.

Sample: 114,654 first-time integration course participants from one of the 6,677 GICs shown in Figure 2.

Notes: A total of 1,512 different individual course sequences are observed. The figure presents the 20 most frequent course sequences, which represent over 85 percent of all individual course sequences. The remaining course sequences are represented by the grey-shaded area.

nancy or childcare). Participants might also be forced to transfer to the upcoming section of a different integration course because their initial course was discontinued. This, however, cannot be traced from the data. How long it takes to take up a new integrations course (green colored course progress) depends on the individual situation of the participants and whether a suitable integration course is available.

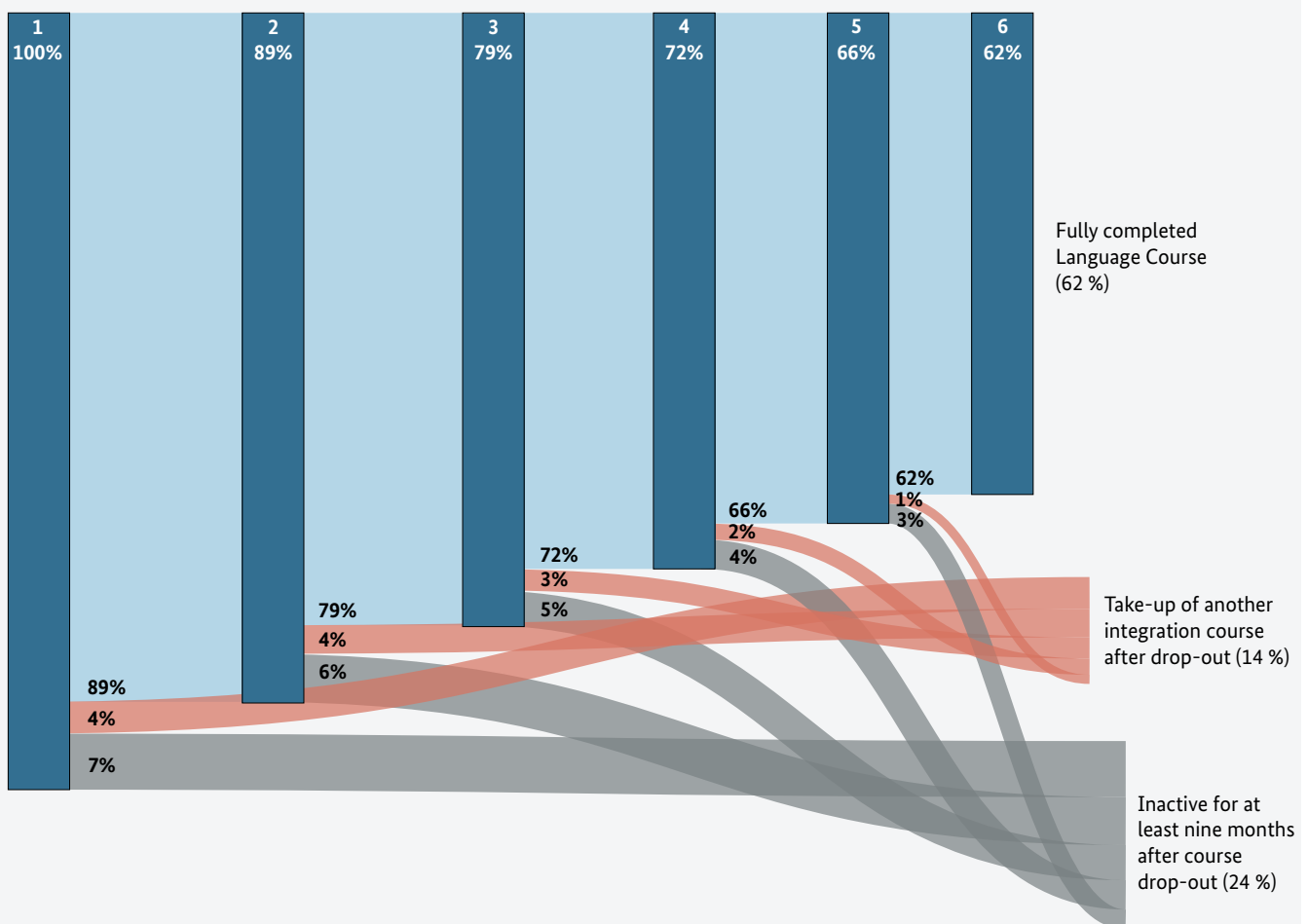
According to Figure 4, 89 percent of all first-time participants who start a GIC in course section 1 continue their attendance in the following section of the same course. In contrast, 11 percent of the participants drop out of their course after the first course section. Of these dropouts, 4 percent remain in the integration course system, i.e., they take part in another integration course after dropping out. The remaining 7 percent stay inactive until the end of the analysis period after dropping-out of the course early after section 1.

More participants leave their initial course over the remaining course sections. Most of the participants in Figure 4 who interrupt their course or become inactive do so after the first or second course section. The course progress in blue shows, in line with Figure 2, that nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of the participants attend their initial GIC up to the last language course section (course section 6).¹⁰ 24 percent of all participants who started an integration course in section 1 leave the initial course and remain inactive for at least nine months after dropping out.

Moreover, we investigate the relationship between the individual course progress presented in Figure 4

¹⁰ In contrast to Figure 2, participants who had previously attended an integration course are excluded in Figure 4. This explains the difference in the share of participants who leave the course early.

Figure 4: Share of participants remaining in the initial integration course from course section 1 to course section 6 (in percent)



Source: InGe, own calculation.

Sample: 76,007 first-time integration course participants who started one of the GICs presented in Figure 2 in the year 2018 from course section 1.

Notes: The course progress is analyzed up to course section 6, i.e., the end of the Language Course, since the Orientation Course is not mandatory for all participants. The flows are shown in proportion to the share of participants with the respective course progress.

and personal characteristics of the participants.¹¹ Estimations show that, on average, medium and high educated participants are less likely to drop out of the integration course. On average, they are also more likely to resume their language acquisition in another course after a dropout. The educational level of participants, thus, seems to play a crucial role in a successful course progress. On average, women have a higher

probability than men to participate in an integration course without any interruption and are more likely to return to an integration course after a dropout. We do find an inverse U-shaped relationship for age: individuals between the ages of 35 and 50 are more likely to complete the integration course and are more likely to resume in a new integration course after leaving the initial course. Participants under the age of 35 or over 50, however, are on average more likely to remain inactive after they drop out. Typically, older participants do have a slower learning curve and a worse health condition (Jurt/Sperisen 2020; Metzger et al. 2020). This could be a decisive barrier to re-entry into an integration course after a dropout. Since persons who are obliged to participate in the integration course usually comply, they are on average more likely to return to the course system after a course exit than those who are not obliged to take part in an integration course.

¹¹ In our linear regressions we control for gender, age, age squared, education, nationality and obligation to course participation. Information on the educational level of course participants is based on the assessment of course providers and is assigned to the categories of the International Standard Classification in Education (ISCED 1997) (ISCED 0-1 = Low educational level, ISCED 2-4 = Medium educational level, ISCED 5-6 = High educational level). The results are available on request.

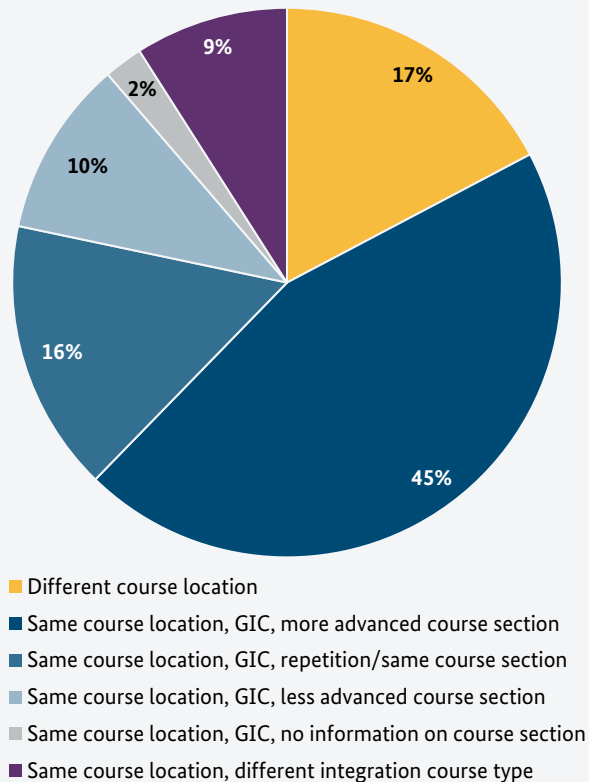
Transferring to another integration course

As Figure 4 shows, more than one third of integration course dropouts subsequently take part in another integration course. This raises the question about the reasons why participants leave their initial integration course and transfer to another one, and how much time passes before they start a new integration course.

Besides relocation, illness, childbirth, over- or under-performance, taking up employment or job training, various other reasons can cause a course dropout and/or a transfer to another integration course. Although the InGe data does not contain any information on the reasons for course dropout, information on the following integration course provides a first approximation of the possible reasons for dropping out of or transferring to another course, which is up for future research. Figure 5 describes the subsequent integration courses the participants transfer to after their initial course exit.

Figure 5 shows that 17 percent of all participants who transfer to another integration course take up a

Figure 5: Newly attended integration courses following a GIC dropout (in percent).



Source: InGe, own calculation

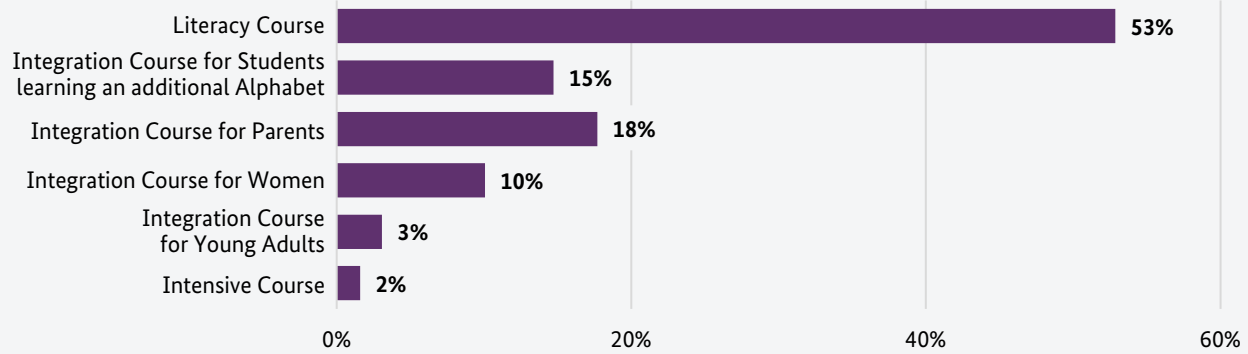
Sample: 10,459 first-time integration course participants who started one of the GICs presented in Figure 2 in the year 2018 from course section 1 and took up a new integration course after a dropout.

new course at a different location (municipality). This indicates that relocation might play a role in the course dropout of some participants. However, a change of course location might be necessary for course dropouts if there is no suitable integration course available locally. This could be particularly the case in rural areas.

About half of the participants (45 percent) who transfer to another integration course resume the course in the following more advanced course section at the same course location. Despite the possible time gap between the two course visits, these participants seem to build on their previously learned language knowledge and do not repeat the previously attended course section. In contrast, 16 percent of all course participants who transfer to another course repeat the previously attended course section. Perhaps some course participants do not attend the previous course section until its end, or the time gap between the old and the new course take-up is too long. It is also possible that some participants leave the integration course because their language skills are not advanced enough to continue the course in the following course section. 10 percent of participants who transfer to another integration course at the same location but to a lower level course section might have been overwhelmed or they might have lost the language skills acquired in their previous course due to a longer interruption period.

As shown in Figure 5, only a few participants (9 percent of all participants transferring to another course, or 944 participants) transfer to a special type of integration course after their dropout. Taking up a special integration course instead of a GIC may be due to a shift in family status (e.g., a transfer to an Integration Course for Parents after childbirth) or a temporary shortage of more suitable courses. Transferring to a special course can also point out that a participant's language learning skills were not assessed accurately in the assessment test before course start and therefore a participant felt overwhelmed or underchallenged in the GIC.

Figure 6 shows the newly attended course types for integration course participants who transfer to a special course following a dropout. More than half of these participants (53 percent), and thus the majority of the small number of participants who transfer to a special course, subsequently take part in a Literacy Course, a course for people with insufficient or no literacy skills. A further 15 percent of the participants transfer to a course that teaches a second alphabet. In the Integration Course for Students learning an additional Alpha-

Figure 6: Special courses following a GIC dropout (in percent).

Source: InGe, own calculation.

Sample: 944 first-time integration course participants who started one of the GICs presented in Figure 2 in the year 2018 from course section 1 and took up a special integration course after their dropout.

bet participants can first get acquainted with the Latin writing system in order to learn German more easily. However, 2 percent of the participants resume their German language acquisition in an Intensive Course, thus, change to an integration course with faster learning progress. The Intensive Course is a course for people with good learning and educational abilities. Almost one-third of those who transfer to another integration course type attend an integration course for parents (18 percent), for women (10 percent) or for young adults (3 percent) after the course dropout. Since only a few participants change to a different type of course at all, a wrong classification of their language learning skills at the assessment test or a shortage of suitable courses to begin with might not be a major reason for dropping out of an integration course. Therefore, it seems that the available courses largely meet the requirements of the (heterogeneous) group of integration course participants. However, whether participants are able to change to a more suitable course at all, depends, of course, on the number of course types offered by the providers.

Focusing on the elapsed time between course dropout and new course take-up, we find that half of the course participants who leave their initial integration course take part in an integration course again after no longer than three months. About 20 percent of participants who transfer to another course even return to an integration course within a month after their last completed course section. In contrast, around 10 percent of course dropouts return to a course after more than a year. The longest observed time interval between two courses is over two and a half years. Taking up a new integration course after more than one year is therefore rather rare, but not unlikely. Participants who transfer to an integration course at

another location have a comparatively longer interruption period. Perhaps there is a big organizational effort involved in relocating and changing integration course providers. Most participants (72 percent) who take up a new integration course only transfer once to another course. However, there are also some participants who take part in up to seven different integration courses during the analysis period.

Our analyses¹² show that, on average, it takes slightly longer for women to take up a new integration course than for men. More educated participants have a comparatively shorter interruption period. This may be due to the fact that a larger share of more educated participants take part in a course again after a dropout. It might also be easier for them to find their way around the institutional settings and therefore they are able to take up a new course more quickly. In addition, more educated participants might also be more motivated to resume their language acquisition as soon as possible, as learning German is much easier for them and they therefore have better prospects of successfully completing the course and finding a job afterwards. On average, participants who are obliged to attend an integration course have a comparatively longer interruption period between the initial and following integration course. Perhaps, obligated participants who have to return to the integration course system face higher bureaucratic hurdles and/or are less motivated to take up a new course as quickly as possible compared to non-obligated participants who attend an integration course voluntarily.

¹² See footnote 11. Here we also control for relocating or transferring to a different course location, as this is associated with a longer course interruption on average.

Summary and conclusion

Integration course dropout is often equated with unsuccessful course attendance or failed German language acquisition. Based on a special data sample from the Integration Business File (InGe) of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), this study analyses for the first time in detail the individual course progress of General Integration Course (GIC) participants who started an integration course in the year 2018. The study examines the sequence of completed course sections and the course sections after which the participants typically leave the course (prematurely). Following this, the study analyses whether participants return to another integration course after dropping out and the potential reasons for them leaving the initial course.

The results show that about two-thirds of the participants attend the language course of the GIC continuously from the first to the last section. The remaining participants drop out early, typically after the first or second course section. However, a course dropout does not necessarily result in an uncompleted integration course. As it turns out, during the analysis period, one-third of the dropouts resume their language acquisition in another integration course. On average, participants with a medium or high level of education, women and participants aged 35 to 50 are more likely to participate from the first to the last language course section with no interruption. In case of an early dropout, medium and high skilled participants, women and participants who have been obliged to attend an integration course are also more likely to attend another integration course afterwards.

The majority of people who participate in different integration courses transfer only once to another course. Typically, they resume the integration course in a more advanced course section and build on their previously acquired language knowledge. Therefore, despite possible early dropouts, most of the course participants attend the (language) course sections in the regular order. Individual course progress that differ from the regular course section schedule, e.g. repeated course sections during the language course, are rare. The same applies to people who transfer from a GIC to an integration course for a special target group. The fact that only a small share of course participants attend the integration course sections not in the regular order or transfer to other course types seems to confirm that the integration course program meets the needs of its (heterogeneous) group of participants. However, systemic hurdles (e.g., a change of the course provider

is only possible in certain circumstances (§ 14 (4) IntV), a possible shortage of available courses especially in rural areas) may also prevent changes of the course type or individual course progress, as they allow only limited deviations from the regular course schedule despite the participants' needs.

Half of the participants who transfer to another integration course take up a new course within three months after leaving the initial course. Even though there are participants who transfer to another integration course without a significant time gap, there are also participants who take up a new integration course after more than one year. On average, it takes slightly more time for women to take up a new course. Highly educated participants join a new integration course more quickly. On average, the duration between course dropout and new course entry is comparatively longer for those who are obliged to attend a course.

To sum up, even though there are participants who drop out of the GIC before its end, some dropouts take up another integration course afterwards. Thus, an early course dropout does not necessarily hinder successful course participation and German language acquisition. Whether and how participants' course progress and course interruptions affect successful German language acquisition is up for future research. Course interruptions might influence the learning progress of participants transferring from one course to another. However, an unstable learning environment due to a frequently changing course group can also have an effect on the remaining course participants. Future research should also focus on the group of inactive participants that have left the course and have not returned for a very long time (see Figure 4, course progress shown in grey), since a re-entry into an integration course more than nine months after course dropout is rather unlikely. For these participants, it is important to investigate the reasons for dropping out of the course in order to find out - if necessary - how course dropouts can be avoided or course interruptions shortened by giving greater support in re-entering the course system.

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