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## **ACADEMIC ADAPTATION OF DISPLACED CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY OF A MIXED-AGED CLASS IN GERMANY**

*The paper focuses on the initial experience of a mixed-aged group of newly arrived Ukrainian children and their new Ukrainian teacher at a school in Germany. To assess the efficiency of the first four months of the transition period and to outline the recommendations for the further steps in teaching the Ukrainian asylum seekers a mixed method study including qualitative and quantitative analysis was applied. Interviews with the acting Ukrainian teacher, her reflective analysis of the observations of her group of 26 Ukrainian children aged 11–16, indirect feedback collected from the local teachers involved in working with the learners, as well as the answers to two mixed anonymous questionnaires conducted on the twenty learners who consented to participate were used to collect data on the interim outcomes of the transition period. In-class interaction and communication with the teacher, along with the desire to socialize and make new interpersonal connections, were among the most significant factors in fostering positive experiences and engagement for children in school. Learners mentioned up to six subjects lacking in their German schools, with mathematics being the most frequently cited, some students desired additional language classes, including Ukrainian, English, and German. The organization of the initial four-month-long stage of the transition period has served the purpose of providing young asylum seekers with sufficient psychological support and an opportunity to get back to normal life. In the upcoming*

*academic year, it is urgent to establish clear academic expectations, avoid treating children as overly special, and prioritize their integration into society.*

**Keywords:** *displaced person, learners' needs, multi-grade class, transition period, unplugged teaching.*

## INTRODUCTION

Military aggression unleashed by the Russian Federation against independent Ukraine forced millions of civilians to flee the zone of conflict and seek safety in other countries. Over 5 million people have left Ukraine for neighbouring countries, mostly EU member countries (Atkinson, 2022). Thus, only Germany has registered more than 200,000 Ukrainian refugees (Stickings, 2022b). A huge influx of displaced Ukrainian people in European countries posed a significant challenge to different spheres, the field of education in particular, though before that, high- and middle-income countries around the world had already been hosting overwhelming numbers of displaced persons – 65.6 million (UNHCR, 2018) – as a result of conflicts, violence, persecution or human rights violations.

Urgent measures directed at providing the basic support and conditions for integrating the newly-arrived asylum seekers from Ukraine had to be taken based on the experience which the hosting countries had before (the examples of Chad, Ethiopia, Germany, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, and Uganda (Mendenhall, et al., 2018; Bariscil, 2017). The experience includes guidelines, practices and directives aimed at helping refugees affected by natural and non-natural disasters, crises, violence, conflicts, wars, etc. Now the situation is more challenging and differs considerably from previous experience mainly in terms of a great number of displaced people. On 4 March 2022, the Council adopted Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, known as the ‘Temporary Protection Directive’, which provides temporary protection (the Council Decision). The Commission was adopted in 2020, as a recommendation for an EU Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint. It was meant to provide an operational framework to monitor migration flows and migration situations and to organize a situational response to a migration crisis. Since January 2022 this work has been fully coordinated with the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) and the Blueprint report is included in the weekly Integrated Situation Awareness Analysis (ISAA) report. The Blueprint continues to share and consolidate all situational and relevant information on migration management related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, including the implementation of Directive 2001/55/EC (Temporary Protection Scheme, 2022). A ‘Solidarity Platform’ has been set up to gather information and study the needs identified in the Member States and coordinate the operational follow-up in response to these needs. Temporary protection includes the process of minimizing different formalities to enable people to reintegrate into society. Adequate protection is “the respect for human dignity and therefore a dignified standard of living (such as residency rights, access to means of subsistence and accommodation, emergency care and adequate care for minors) has to be ensured in respect of everyone” (Temporary Protection Scheme, 2022). Temporary protection implies access to education and the asylum procedure. Refugees from Ukraine have access to housing, labour market, and education.

As teachers usually play an important role in the lives of children, this role becomes even more crucial when it comes to refugee children who need not only education but mainly psychosocial first aid and well-prepared teachers who had psychosocial training (Handaka, et al., 2022). All teachers understand this responsibility and they educate and care for young learners to help them get education (Mendenhall, et al., 2018). In Germany, children are enrolled in normal classes but spend about half their time learning German. They are offered

up to a year of special lessons at schools and integrated into kindergartens to allow their mothers to look for work (Stickings, 2022a). To provide successful integration children are admitted to welcome classes in Berlin instead of going straight to mainstream schools. Schools also try to offer native language lessons for Ukrainian students (offline or online) to enable them to return to the Ukrainian education system (Niesner, 2022; Grieshaber, 2022). All these steps and approaches show that schools will need much more support to help successfully integrate Ukrainian schoolchildren while maintaining the quality of education.

In this article, we are looking at the experience of one of these displaced teachers and her students, a group of newly arrived Ukrainian children, who were kindly offered a chance to continue their education by a local school in a small town in Germany.

The research question was whether the transition period organized according to the experience of the previous waves of refugees in Europe was efficient enough for displaced children from Ukraine during the first four months of the Russia-Ukrainian War 2022.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In crisis contexts of any kind (natural disasters, armed conflicts, wars, etc.) different categories of people are affected. Since children account for over 50 percent of all refugees and more than 40 percent of all internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Mendenhall, et al., 2018), they prove to be the most vulnerable category. During and after any disaster children experience “a range of stressors such as fear of death or loss of a loved one, the loss of a home and community, displacement to a strange neighborhood or school, and even separation from their family” (Handaka, et al., 2022). The influence of any disaster on children of different ages is more considerable than on adults of different ages. Children and adolescents are less resistant to stress and suffer heavily. They might have “insomnia, anxiety, depressive mood, re-experience, and so on” (Chang et al., 2015), which in its turn has physical, psychological, and social impacts on the individual, family, and the community.

The challenge for the educational sphere is seen in terms of several aspects of education and groups of people. Access to education involves preparedness for three stages – “pre-disaster, emergency response, and post-disaster” (Handaka, et al., 2022) which will ensure different kinds of support and help including psychological, social, medical, etc. In crisis-affected contexts, other educational problems evolve displaced teachers, shortages of teachers, the need for educational plans for refugee children, and psychosocial and psycho-educational strategies. Displaced teachers have limited opportunities, access, choice, and power (Watanabe, 2007). Internally displaced and national teachers provide education to the millions of children and youth affected by crises and overcome a myriad of difficulties, disadvantages, and limitations.

As specified by the Conference of Ministers of Education, more than 20,000 refugee children and young people were admitted to general and vocational schools in Germany on 3 April 2022 (Niesner, 2022). “Authorities in all of Germany’s states have discovered that the influx of refugee children is far greater than expected. Now they are looking for schools with free classrooms and teachers who specialize in German as a foreign language”. Udo Beckmann, the federal chairman of the VBE education association (Bosen, 2022). The educational system has faced lots of challenges: the number of refugee children (children with family members and lone refugee pupils), a severe shortage of teachers, practices, and approaches to provide education for those who had to leave Ukraine.

The German Teachers’ Association expects the need for 15,000 additional teachers including kindergarten teachers. Berlin has been struggling with acute teacher shortages for years. A lot of factors have led to it, particularly, a lack of students who want to become teachers and a large-scale influx of refugees or IDPs. In Germany an estimated 24,000 teachers will be needed to meet the needs of refugee children (Vogel & Stock, 2017). According to the

Education and Training Association about 158,000 teachers could be missing in Germany by 2035. This does not include the additional needs of the Ukrainian refugees. To solve the problem (Niesner, 2022) they have to involve students, retired teachers, and career changers, also hiring Ukrainian teachers who had fled to Germany.

Germany is one of the countries that has hosted a great number of people and is doing everything possible to help refugees. German schools want to make sure that Ukrainian refugee children do not lose out on education, so they care about refugee children as a “national challenge”. There is a great solidarity among people who want and who are ready to help (Bosen 2022). Using the experience gained during the influx of Syrian refugees (2015–2016), Germany pays a lot of attention to the education of refugee children and to the integration of families and children into a new society and culture. As “initial one-year residency permit will grant right to education and employment” (Stickings, 2022a), education becomes a crucial issue.

To help Ukrainian learners integrate into a national education system and a new community, two approaches were mainly used – transition and direct mainstreaming of children (Mapping host countries’ education responses, 2022). Both forms could provide a protective environment for refugee children. Two levels within these forms promote students’ integration – educational level and language learning. Transitional education is a type of education “during emergency, conflict, and post-conflict situations” the aim of which is to “ensure quality education in challenging contexts for refugees in countries affected by adverse situations” (Transitional Education Plan Preparation, 2016). For such cases, a transitional education plan (TEP) was prepared. TEP is “a national policy instrument, developed under the leadership and responsibilities of state authorities (national and regional)”. It is highly important for the educational sphere as it introduces reforms that will make education “accountable, inclusive, and effective” (Transitional Education Plan Preparation, 2016). TEP is closely connected with ESP (Educational sector plan preparation) and HRRP (a Humanitarian / or Refugee Response Plan).

Unplugged teaching, learner-centered principles, dogme and other concepts belong to the terminology which is currently used in the field of teaching. These terms are closely connected and interrelated and are effectively combined as methods together.

Teaching Unplugged is a new movement, a specific teaching method which includes three main goals: teaching through conversation, taking out external input such as coursebook and technology and letting the lesson content be driven by the students rather than being pre-planned by the teacher (Teaching Unplugged, 2010). Unplugged teaching enables students to become active, motivated, and encouraged participants (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). Unplugged activities increase students’ satisfaction and self-esteem, and help to overcome difficulties. Some teachers manage to combine plugged and unplugged activities successfully. Their students’ reflection on the usage of two types of activities was highly positive (Erümit & Şahin, 2020).

Dogme “isn’t a set of rules, it’s an example of emergent, shared practice” which supports learner-centered principles and promotes the development of communicative competence focusing on “learners’ own needs, interests, desires and dreams” (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009; Williams & Burden, 2010). Communicative competence is a basic competence which includes grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences (Brown, 2000, p. 196) all of which advance communication skills. A dogme-based approach (Dogme ELT) is a new approach to teaching which is usually seen as an alternative to coursebook-based lessons. Using this approach teaching becomes *conversation-driven*, using *materials-light* and boosting *emergent language* (Worth, 2012; Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). Students’ communicative competence develops as they interact with each other and initiate conversations. Studying does not involve heavy materials or particular coursebooks, and the focus is on the emergent language.

Dogme-based teaching includes conversation-driven principles that produce interaction and discourse which start with students' lives and preferences and develop in accordance with their interests and needs (Banegas, 2012). Dogme-based teaching is strongly linked to the learner-centered approach, both of which can be highly effective in the process of teaching and facilitate teacher development and creativity.

Learner-centered teaching aims at most of students' engagement "in a community of learners", taking into account their needs and preferences. Learner-centered principles enhance students' motivation, "improve their perception of the class and teacher", increase "professor – student rapport" (Richmond, et al., 2019).

Teaching a multigrade classroom refers to a type of educational process (Novianti et al., 2022) which involves students of different ages, grades, abilities, and skills. Accordingly, in multigrade classrooms, teachers have to "deal with different grade levels concurrently". Such classrooms are not homogeneous, they require distinct teaching methods, time constraints and specific approaches to the choice of methodology (Karaçoban & Karakuş, 2022). Research proves that by working in a group together with students of different ages and abilities, students learn to become more responsible, cooperative, sociable, tolerant, supportive, and encouraged. They demonstrate a positive attitude to other students, teachers, and school, and show much better results in studying.

All the aforementioned concepts of unplugged teaching, dogme-based approach, and learner-centeredness can be combined and used while teaching multigrade classrooms, from which both students and teachers will benefit significantly.

## **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

A qualitative case study approach was employed to assess the efficiency of the transition period for the group of Ukrainian displaced learners and their teacher, and the role of factors that affected the children's reintegration into the new environment. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze the data collected over four months.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The subjects of the study were twenty-six children (thirteen boys and thirteen girls) aged 11–16, and their teacher, all of them asylum seekers from Ukraine, who found themselves in Germany in the spring of 2022 after fleeing the zone of military conflict. The period of work we are looking at comprises four months, starting late March till late July 2022, after the Ukrainian teacher got a position at the school in Germany and started working with young asylum seekers till the end of the academic year. Initially, it was a group of eight children aged 11–16, which gradually became a group of 26 learners. The new students to the group were registered as late as June 2022. The newly-created class was provided with a comfortable classroom and stationery; at lunch break the children were given free meals.

Similar to young refugees of the previous waves, the displaced children had traumatic experiences of various degrees of intensity, ranging from the loss of homes, family members, everyday routines, etc, to witnessing destruction and death. Nevertheless, there were a few characteristics that made this wave of displaced people different. The military conflict broke out at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. After almost two years of online and hybrid learning, some children could have issues with social skills development (SeEVERS & Jones-Blank, 2008; Miyamoto, et al., 2015) and post-pandemic disorders (Pace, et al., 2022). Thus previously imposed limitations on social contacts and travel might have made some changes in the surroundings excessively challenging. On the other hand, the fact that their ties with schools and classmates they left behind had been weakened by the limited social contacts might have made the feeling of the loss of school and classmates less acute; an opportunity to

get into an off-line classroom and make new friends with similar backgrounds might have been rather attractive for teenagers, motivate them to attend school and help re-integrate into the new context.

## **DATA COLLECTION TOOLS**

Starting from the day of her employment, the displaced teacher had regular online conferences with her colleagues in Ukraine, providing detailed reports on her progress in managing and teaching the children, her observations, and her analysis of different aspects of the experience. Notes taken during the interviews provided qualitative data on the teaching context and learners' reactions.

At the end of the fourth month work, two questionnaires were designed to collect feedback from the learners. To avoid any pressure on the young participants and ensure free expression of opinion, both of the questionnaires implied optional anonymous participation. Moreover, any questions that could signal direct identification of the participants, and therefore prevent the children from being sincere in their answers were deliberately avoided. As a result, only about 77% and 73% of the learners provided their answers to the first and the second survey respectively. The first one, consisting of nine close-ended and five open-ended questions yielded responses from 19 learners and helped to indicate the learners' level of engagement in the learning process and the level of satisfaction with different aspects of the learning environment.

Based on the results of the first questionnaire, the second one, consisting of nine close-ended, three open-ended, and three mixed questions, was developed and offered to learners within a ten-day period. This time, 20 learners provided their answers. This survey provided information about learners' expectations for their learning and further integration into the new environment.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Interviews with the acting teacher and answers to the open-ended questions in the survey yielded qualitative data; therefore, a thematic analysis was applied. The answers from the interviews were transcribed, grouped according to the themes, and summarized. The information obtained through open-ended questions was examined and classified for further interpretation.

Quantitative data obtained from the surveys provided information on the ratio of different choices and attitudes; statistical analysis through calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient (PCC) (Rodgers & Nicewander, 1988) provided information on the correlation between the obtained sets of data.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**How It All Started.** The first four months of the transition period in the lives of the group of young Ukrainian asylum seekers and their teacher were focused on getting children into the classroom as a part of integration into the new community and overcoming the shock inflicted by the military action in their homeland.

Besides the lessons with the Ukrainian teacher, the Ukrainian learners were involved in the academic process with local students at the lessons of music, English, and PT. They also had German lessons three times a week with a local teacher from another school who offered her service to the Ukrainians as her personal volunteering project. The other subjects were not available to the Ukrainians throughout the spring term.

The school also hired a local teacher assistant who was qualified to teach mathematics but was not supposed to teach her subject to this group regularly. Apart from her main responsibility to reinforce the lessons designed by the Ukrainian teacher, she gave the students occasional logical tasks of her own design. Regular lessons in mathematics seemed potentially problematic for two reasons: too much difference in the level of the students' knowledge, which made the preparation for teaching the multi-level group time-consuming for the teacher assistant, and the language barrier which made the explanation of any complex topics by a native speaker of German incomprehensible for the learners who had just started learning the language.

The Ukrainian teacher worked with the group for seven hours five days a week. Neither the education department nor the school imposed any curriculum on the Ukrainian students. The main requirement was to keep the children engaged in school activities and the process of studying. The session contents and the interaction patterns were chosen by the teacher based on her initial training and her assessment of the learners' needs; necessary books and other teaching materials were provided by the school administration at the teacher's request.

**Unplugged Format.** The contents and the format of the work were selected by the Ukrainian teacher in the process of work. During the first day with the initial group of eight students, the teacher interviewed about the students' preferences and what subjects they would like to learn outlining her own qualifications according to her university degrees and personal interests. As a result, the academic work was focused on literary studies with a strong accent on Ancient Greek mythology. The other subjects that were offered and accepted by the learners were the History of Ukraine and social studies. The most frequently used activity was the whole group discussion of literary works. The students and the teacher made themselves comfortable in a circle without tables and shared their opinions and ideas, discussed new material, and reviewed home assignments.

This work was not assessed officially as the refugee learners were not supposed to get any certificates at the end of the academic year. The only formal record of presence and participation required by the school was carried out in the form of daily reports on absentees submitted by the teacher to the school administration.

Nevertheless, the students were offered a set of rules according to which their work in and out of class could be evaluated. To motivate the students to make an effort, they were given points for reciting poems, writing essays, presenting individual projects, analyzing literary works, etc. Each student's scores were accumulated; five students with the highest score by the end of the semester were promised personal presents from the teacher. This technique definitely promoted more active individual participation while group dynamics seemed to be endangered.

As the number of learners in the group increased, the whole group work grew less efficient: more active students dominated the discussion while less eloquent ones were left disengaged. If the teacher tried to moderate the discussion and limit the contribution of the discussion leaders, the latter felt demotivated.

At this stage, the teacher decided to introduce competition between teams. With this purpose, three teams were formed within the class. Following the learners' preferences, a combination of age and gender criteria was applied for the grouping. As a result, Team 1 consisted of younger boys and girls, older girls formed Team 2 and older boys were united in Team 3. While individual competition continued, outcomes of team activities such as role plays, games, team projects, group discussions, group story writing, etc. were rewarded by points for a team. The team with the best results was promised a trip to another city with all expenses covered by the school.

Work in teams was used till the end of the semester and, according to the teacher's observations, provided a satisfactory level of engagement and interpersonal interaction. New arrivals were encouraged to join any team of their choice, taking into consideration the age and

gender criteria. Nevertheless, by the first week of July, the children started demonstrating a significant drop in willingness to participate in indoor classes, and a few students adopted a habit of taking lengthy bathroom breaks during lessons. What could keep them engaged were outdoor classes, field trips, and discussions of the present-moment situations which did not require any prior preparation on the learners' side. That was the period when the attempt to sum up the experience was made.

**Questionnaire 1: Learning Experience and Motivation.** Two questionnaires were presented to the children within a week. The answers, provided by the children, confirmed some of the teacher's assumptions while others presented food for thought, the interpretation of which is given further.

The first two questions were focused on the students' attitude to their present-moment learning experience. The answers to the questions *Are you satisfied with your experience of studying in the gymnasium as for now?* and *If you could choose, would you like to continue studying here?*, 68.4% of the students expressed their high satisfaction with their experience in the gymnasium, 15.8 % are fairly satisfied and 15.8 % of the respondents found their studying experience unsatisfied. The answers to the second question revealed almost the same students' mood and attitude to their school experience in Germany. Only two students, which comprises 10.5% of all respondents, would not like to continue their studying at the gymnasium though it can indicate students' desire to come back to Ukraine but not a negative attitude toward the school itself. 21 % of the students would rather continue their studies at this school, while 68.4 % would like to go to this particular school. The latter shows that students' satisfaction with their school experience completely coincides with their desire to remain at the gymnasium.

The next question offered the learners to self-assess their own level of engagement in the studying process. While only three students evaluated their level of engagement as very low or low, more than one-third of the participants characterized their engagement level as satisfactory, and 31.6% and 15.8% of the students ticked options high or very high respectively.

To find out if the students' overall level of satisfaction with the experience at school correlated with their level of engagement in studies, statistical data analysis was applied. The PCC (Turney, 2022) was applied, where a zero coefficient represents no correlation between sets of data, 1 represents a perfect positive correlation, and -1 identifies a perfect negative correlation. The PCC for the sets of data on the overall satisfaction with the school experience and the level of engagement in studies was 0.74, which demonstrated a strong positive correlation.

The next question was focused on the factors that affected the students' motivation to attend the gymnasium. The participants were presented with nine statements on reasons to attend, and the three options for each of them. The English translation for the statements and the options are shown in Fig. 1.



The English equivalent for the question			
What motivateds you to attend the gymnasium *			
	It's not about me	Maybe	Yes, it's about me
1. I'm willing to study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I want to be among other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I've got friends here	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I want to find friends here	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I enjoy talking with my teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I enjoy participating in classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I want to attend a school in Germany	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I don't want to stay at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. My parents make me attend school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 1. **The students' motivation for attending the gymnasium**  
Developed by authors

The participants' answers are presented in Fig. 2.

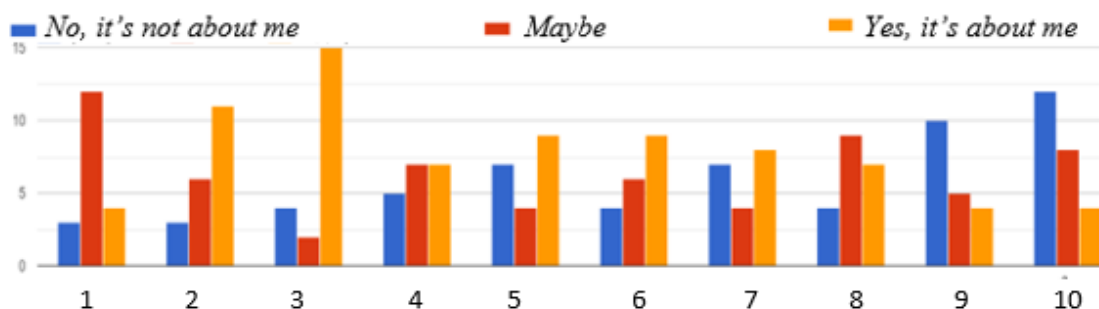


Figure 2. **The students' answers to the question about their motivation for attending the gymnasium**  
Developed by authors

The answers proved that the desire to be with other people and to be with their newly-acquired friends were among the leading reasons to attend school. The first statement, *I'm willing to study* did not generate much excitement, with only four students (21% of the participants) selecting the option *Yes, it's about me*, while the majority of the participants (12 students – 63%) opted for the neutral (*Maybe*) answer. The second statement, *I want to be among other people* received more enthusiastic support with 11 students claiming it was true about them. The absolute leader among the motivating factors turned out to be the statement *I've got friends here* which received 15 supportive votes. Only four and two students selected the options *It's not about me* and *Perhaps* respectively for this statement. The next four statements, (4) *I want to find friends here*, (5) *I enjoy talking with my teacher*, (6) *I enjoy*

participating in classes, (7) *I want to attend a school in Germany*, received about the same number of *Yes, it's about me* votes. Statement 8, *I don't want to stay at home* yielded rather neutral responses with nine *Maybe* options. Statement 9, *My parents make me attend school* received the lowest level of support. While the majority of students were not willing to answer an open-ended question and present their original reasons for attending school, two participants mentioned studying Greek mythology and one student noted down communication with local students as the source for their motivation. Further evidence to support the statement that being with other people, both local and Ukrainians, was among the main attractions for the children could be found in their answers to another open-ended questions about their preferable activities at school: "I like the way we work together here"; "I enjoy having fun with my friends"; "I want to know German better and have more friends here".

Statistical analysis through calculating the PCC for the motives to attend school provided suggestions on the role of the listed reasons on the students' satisfaction with the school experience and their level of engagement in the studies. The results of the statistical analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

### PCC for the reasons to attend school

Statements to evaluate	Overall level of satisfaction with the experience at school	Self-assessed engagement in studies
1. I'm willing to study	0.19	0.36
2. I want to be among other people	0.29	0.29
3. I've got friends here	0.33	0.19
4. I want to find friends here	<b>0.62</b>	<b>0.55</b>
5. I enjoy talking with my teacher	<b>0.64</b>	<b>0.61</b>
6. I enjoy participating in classes	<b>0.70</b>	<b>0.78</b>
7. I want to attend a school in Germany	0.36	0.39
8. I don't want to stay at home	0.48	0.36
9. My parents make me attend school	-0.20	-0.28

Developed by authors

According to the obtained coefficients, in-class interaction and communication with the teacher were the most significant factors for providing positive experiences and engagement for the children while at school. The desire to socialize and make new interpersonal connections was another factor that was placed on the top three list.

**Questionnaire 1: Learning Environment.** To make sure that the answers provided by the participants were valid, more questions were asked about the school life components. This time the question was about the participants' attitude to the contents of studies, learning environment, relationship with the teacher, relationship with classmates and local students. The

students had five options for each statement: I totally dislike it, I rather dislike it, 50/50, I like it, I like it a lot. The students' answers are presented in Fig. 3.

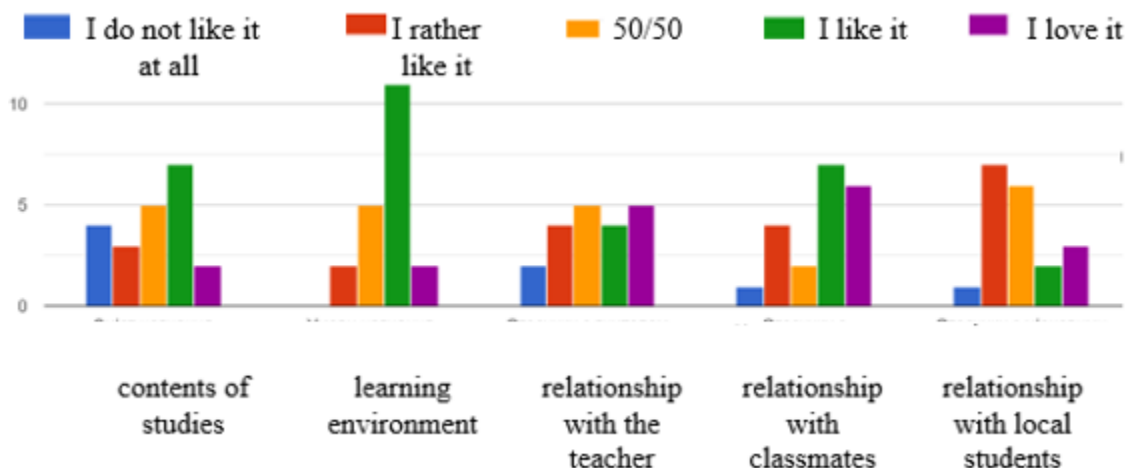


Figure 3. **Identify your attitude to the following school life components**  
Developed by authors

To find out the level of significance of the components of school life listed above for providing overall satisfaction with the experience at school, and for getting students engaged in learning, the PCC was calculated for each pair of datasets. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

**PCC for the attitude to school life components**

Statements to evaluate	Overall level of satisfaction with the experience at school	Self-assessed engagement in studies
contents of studies	<b>0.59</b>	0.38
learning environment	<b>0.58</b>	0,35
relationship with the teacher	<b>0.63</b>	0.44
relationship with classmates	0.56	0.25
relationship with local students	0.52	0.46

Developed by authors

As we can see from the table, the positive correlation of different degrees was identified for each of the components, while the relationship with the teacher had the strongest correlation with the level of satisfaction with the school life experience. The correlation between the contents of studies and the learning environment, and the level of satisfaction with school experience, proved to be quite significant with the PCC 0.59 and 0.58 respectively.

While the relationship with local students had a significant impact on both the satisfaction with school experience and the level of engagement into studies (the PCC is 0.52 and 0.46), the relationship with the classmates was essential for the level of satisfaction with the school experience (the PCC=0.56), but was more than twice less important for providing

the engagement in studies (the PCC=0.25). This result demonstrated the same tendency as presented in Table 1, where the correlation between having friends as a motivating factor for attending school and the level of satisfaction with school life, and between having friends and the level of engagement in studies were rather low with the PCC=0.33 and the PCC=0.19 respectively. Thus we could conclude that the role of the teacher, learning environment and the contents of studies were more essential for re-integrating the refugee children into the new school environment compared to their relationship with classmates.

The answer to the question why the relationship with classmates was not of primary importance for the displaced children could be found through analyzing the information obtained through private interviews with the learners and answers to the next set of questions in the second questionnaire.

As it was mentioned above, the young refugees attended the majority of classes as one mixed-aged group with a gradually increasing number of learners. In a private interview with the Ukrainian teacher, one of the first-to-join students mentioned that the first eight students sometimes felt like a privileged group while the others were viewed as intruders; the later they joined, the less privileged they were supposed to be. This situation presented a definite challenge for positive group dynamics.

Another challenging factor was the mixed-aged composition of the class. In Ukraine, school children usually study in fixed groups attending all classes with the same classmates of about the same age. In Germany, the majority of lessons were delivered to them as a mixed-aged group; it was only for such classes as German, English, Music and PE that they were invited to join same-age classes of German children for lessons. To understand the learners' attitude to the semi-fixed grouping mentioned above, the following questions were asked: 1. *In your school in Germany, you've been attending most classes with other children from Ukraine. Are you satisfied with such organization of the learning process?* 2. *In your school in Germany, you've been attending some classes with local learners. Are you satisfied with such organization of the learning process?* (1 – not at all; 10 – perfectly satisfied). The answers to these questions are demonstrated in Fig. 4.

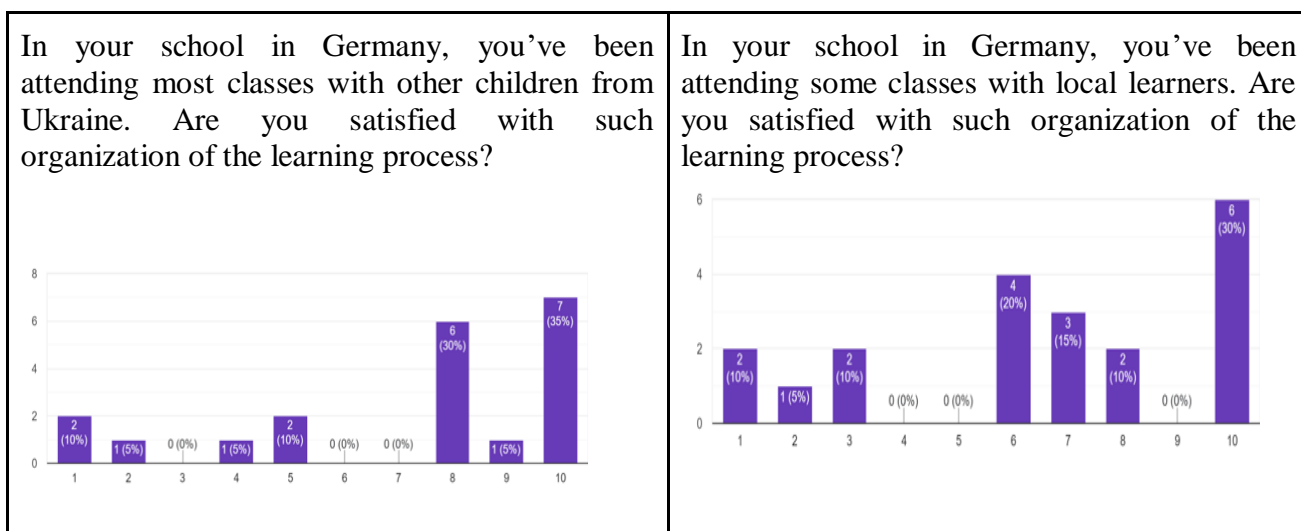


Figure 4. Learners' attitude to the semi-fixed grouping

Developed by authors

The visual analysis of both charts reveals the lack of unanimity in the participants' opinions with a notable number of choices at the extremes of both scales, though calculating the PCC for these sets of data reveals a strong positive correlation between them (the PCC=0.80). We might assume that the participants' attitude was affected by some objective

factors such as age or the duration of studying at the school, which cannot be identified due to the anonymity of the questionnaire.

Meanwhile, a question about learning in a mixed-age group demonstrated a lack of satisfaction with it, with 55% of the answers acknowledging different extents of negative emotions.

The correlation between the data on the attitude to classes with other Ukrainians and studying in a mixed-age group proved to be rather high (the PCC=0.75), which might identify the mixed-age grouping as a controversial solution that does not meet each learner's needs.

Moreover, the visual analysis of the distribution of the participants' answers reveals two peaks of data, which is likely to indicate the presence of two groups (Freeman& Dale, 2013). We might assume that those groups were primarily based on the age factor and resulted in differences in attitudes, preferences, and emotional responses.

More light on the learners' perception of their in-class experience could be shed by the students' assessment of different modes of interaction throughout classes. The participants were asked if they enjoyed the following modes of in-class interaction: (1) *individual work*; (2) *pair work*; (3) *small group work*; (4) *work in teams of 5 or more participants*; (5) *as a whole class*; (6) *working tet-a-tet with the teacher*. The attitude could be expressed through the options *Do not enjoy at all / Sometimes / I love it*.

The students' answers revealed that pair work and work in small groups were the most popular and the most enjoyable for the students while whole group interaction and work in teams were the least favoured. Working individually was supported and opposed by an equal number of learners; working tet-a-tet with the teacher received a slightly lower level of approval than working individually.

Further analysis of the participants' answers demonstrated that the learners' overall satisfaction with the school experience had a stronger correlation with the contents of studies (PCC=0.59) than with the engagement in studies (PCC=0.38).

**Questionnaire 2: New educational Setting.** To get a better understanding of students' attitudes, the second questionnaire was designed. One of the questions was about their attitude to the fact that in their school in Germany they did not study the whole range of subjects they had in Ukraine. The results are presented in Fig. 6.

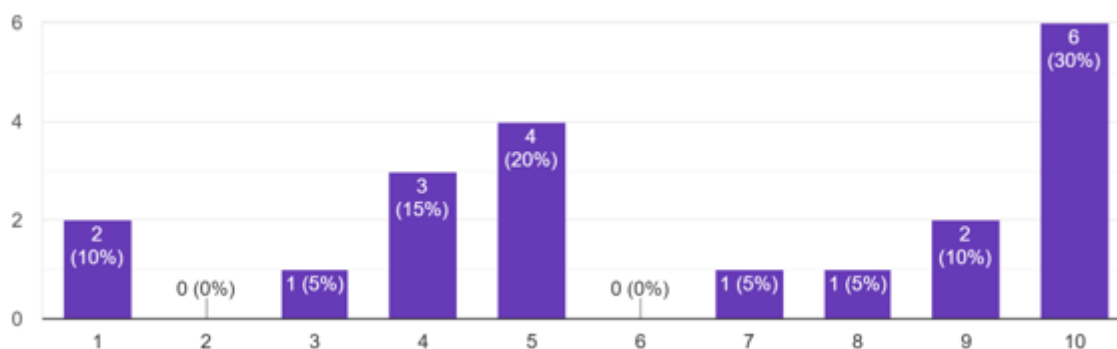


Figure 6. What is your attitude to lack of some school subjects you had in Ukraine (1 – utterly negative; 10 – absolutely positive)

Developed by authors

As we can see, the right and the left sides of the scale received about the same number of votes with two distinctive peaks in the answer distribution.

The same distribution of opinions was demonstrated by the next question, *Did you feel the lack of lessons in any subjects?* Fifty percent of the respondents answered positively: Yes, permanently – 15%; Yes, sometimes – 35%, and the same number of the participants opted for

the negative answers: Almost never –30%; No, never – 20%. The pie-chart in Figure 11 demonstrates the results.

When asked an open-ended question, *What lessons did you lack in your school in Germany?* ten learners listed from one up to six subjects, while the other ten either claimed they had everything they needed or failed to provide any answer. The subject the students mentioned most frequently was mathematics with eight students putting it on their lists. The other subjects mentioned more than once were biology (three students), chemistry, and physics (two students each); geography, computer science, and the history of Germany were mentioned just once. Some students wanted to have more language classes in addition to those they already had: Ukrainian and English were mentioned twice and one learner wanted more German.

The next open-ended question about their wishes for the next year confirmed the diversity of attitudes: eight students wrote about specific school subjects they want to learn, five students just stated their wish to continue studying without specifying the contents, and six students provided suggestions to focus on something other than studies, for example, to have more fun, to skip lunch breaks or go home.

**Questionnaire 2: Feedback and Assessment.** Another essential part of any academic process is feedback and assessment. As it has been mentioned, in the German school Ukrainian children were not assessed and evaluated through traditional grades. Thus we decided to find out about the students' reaction to it. The distribution of the answers to the question is presented in Fig. 7.

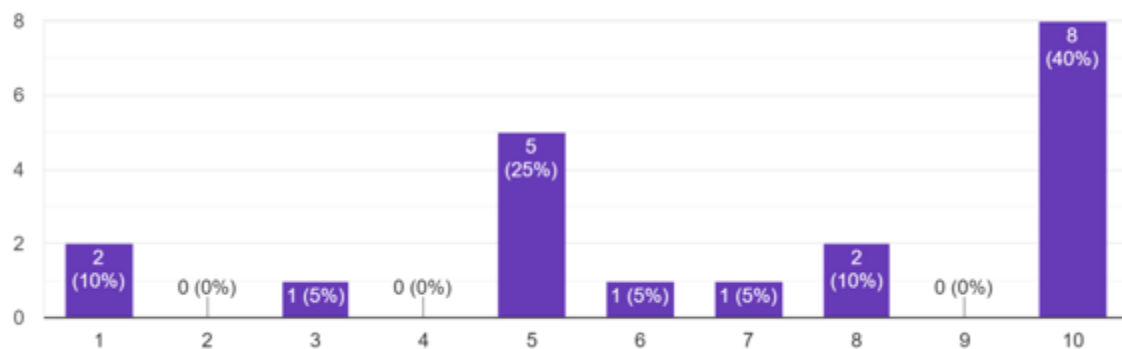


Figure 7. **You were not given any grades at your school in Germany. What is your attitude to the arrangement? (1 – utterly negative; 10 – absolutely positive)**

Developed by authors

As demonstrated by the bar chart, students seemed to be rather willing to demonstrate their enthusiasm: 40% of the participants (eight students) provided absolute support to the approach, the other four having placed their responses on the right-hand side of the scale demonstrated moderate enthusiasm about the arrangement. The eight students who chose the left side of the scale indicated either their negative or almost neutral attitude. The mean value for this set of data is 6.95 (out of 10), the standard deviation equals 3.10 and the standard error is 0.69.

A better understanding of the learners' attitude to the lack of grades can be obtained through the answers to the next question. When asked if the information they were provided about their progress was sufficient (1 – not at all; 10 – absolutely sufficient), the participants provided the distribution of opinions presented in Fig. 8.

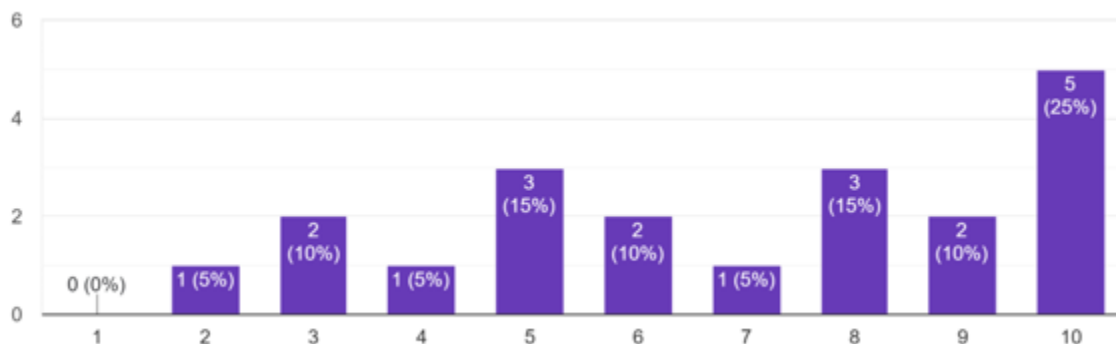


Figure 8. **Was the information on your academic results sufficient?**

Developed by authors

The majority of respondents (13) believed they received a satisfactory amount of information of different degrees while seven students admitted to experiencing the lack of information. For this set of data, the mean is 6.90 (out of 10), the standard deviation is 2.67 and the standard error is 0.60. Thus we can see that this set of data has less dispersion than the previous one, and the value for the standard error is lower. Therefore, we can conclude that while the attitudes to the lack of grades varied, students were aware of receiving feedback on their academic performance through other means.

To find out which forms of feedback and what content of feedback were received by the learners most positively, the learners were presented with a list of variations of forms and content of teacher's feedback: grade, oral praise given privately, oral praise in front of other students, oral praise in front of the parents, oral negative feedback given privately, oral negative feedback in front of other students, oral negative feedback in front of parents, written praise, written negative feedback, teacher's facial expression and gestures that signal approval, teacher's facial expression and gestures that signal a mistake. The students had five options to express their attitude: very negative, rather negative, neutral, rather positive, and highly positive.

For statistical analysis of these data, the verbal answers were presented as numeric values. The mean, standard deviation, standard error, and the ranking of the answers are shown in Table 3.

Statistical analysis of the obtained data demonstrates that oral praise in a private talk with a teacher is the most popular form of feedback with 75% of the respondents giving it a rather positive and highly positive evaluation. There were no "very negative" and only one "rather negative" response, as a result, the mean for this form of feedback is 4.26 (out of 5).

Oral praise given privately is closely followed by written praise with an average score of 4.10 drawn from nine "highly positive", five "rather positive", five "neutral" and just one "rather negative" responses.

Oral negative feedback given privately ranked third with an equal number of "rather positive" and "highly positive" choices, comprising a total of 70% of the answers. It turned out to be more popular than positive feedback provided through non-verbal means, which ranked fourth in the learners' preferences.

Written negative feedback ended up the fifth. Here 50% of the respondents identified a neutral attitude, while 25% and 15% stated a rather positive and highly positive attitude respectively, and one student opted for a rather negative attitude. It should be noted that this set of data has the lowest values for the standard deviation (0.76) and the standard error, thus we might assume that the respondents are rather unanimous in their neutral attitude to the written information on their mistakes and take it as a necessary part of learning. The next in popularity comes formal assessment in the form of grades with an average score of 3.47 (out of 5).

Table 3

**Learners' attitude to forms and content of teacher's feedback  
(very negative – 1; highly positive – 5)**

Forms and content of teacher's feedback	grades	oral praise given privately	oral praise in front of other students	oral praise in front of the parents	oral negative feedback given privately	oral negative feedback in front of other students	oral negative feedback in front of parents	written praise	written negative feedback	teacher's facial expression and gestures that signal approval	teacher's facial expression and gestures that signal a mistake
Mean	3.47	<b>4.26</b>	3.15	3.15	<b>4.00</b>	2.95	2.70	<b>4.10</b>	3.63	3.80	3.15
SD	1.17	0.93	1.31	1.35	0.92	1.32	1.22	0.97	<b>0.76</b>	1.20	1.09
Standard error	0.26	0.21	0.29	0.30	0.21	0.29	0.27	0.22	<b>0.17</b>	0.27	0.24
Rank	6	<b>1</b>	7/8/9	7/8/9	<b>3</b>	10	11	<b>2</b>	5	4	7/8/9

Developed by authors

To get another perspective of students' opinion of their academic progress, the participants were asked to provide self-assessments for their achievements in six school subjects: Literature studies, History, Ukrainian, English, German, and PE. The highest possible grade was 12. Overall results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

**The average self-assessment grade for progress in six subjects**

Subject	Literature	History	Ukrainian	English	German	PE
Average score	7.75	6.98	7.03	7.18	7.43	7.25

Developed by authors

As can be seen from Table 4, learners provided the highest self-assessment grades for their progress in Literature studies (7.75), which is rather closely followed by the German language (7.43) and PE (7.25). The learners' perception of their achievements in the English and Ukrainian languages are reflected in the average self-assessment scores of 7.18 and 7.03 respectively, while the overall progress in History is viewed as the least successful (6.98).

To sum up the questionnaire, the learners were asked the question: *What could help you to succeed in studies at the school in Germany next year?* To answer it, the learners were provided with nine options connected with learning process organization and sources of instruction: 1. *to study with the same classmates*; 2. *to be enrolled in a class with my local peers*; 3. *to proceed studying the same subjects as this year*; 4. *to study the same subjects as my local peers*; 5. *to proceed studying online with my school in Ukraine*; 6. *to have individual online classes with tutors from Ukraine*; 7. *to have individual classes with tutors in Germany*; 8. *to be assessed for my studies*; 9. *to have clearer and more comprehensible requirements as*



for my studies in Germany. The participants could tick off as many choices as they wished, and the number of ticks from students varied from zero (two learners did not select any options) to six from one learner.

The largest number of votes (8) was given to Option 9 *To have clearer and more comprehensible requirements for my studies in Germany*. Options 1 (*to study with the same classmates*), 3 (*to proceed studying the same subjects as this year*), and 4 (*to study the same subjects as my local peers*) received the same level of support (7 votes). About one-third of the respondents selected the option *To receive marks for my work* (Option 8). The idea of having individual classes with tutors from Ukraine or Germany was not strongly supported by the participants who received only six and three votes respectively. Only four students voiced their wish to continue online studies with their school in the home country while five students expressed their readiness to be enrolled in classes with their local peers.

The results of the present study partially correspond with previous research (Potochnick, 2014; Transitional Education Plan Preparation, 2016; Mendenhall, et al., 2018; Temporary Protection Scheme, 2022) examining the adaptation of displaced children in educational settings. Similar characteristics emphasize the significance of involving these children in social and educational activities, facilitating their improved adjustment to a new environment. This is evident in the high ratings given by students regarding their voluntary commitment to attending school, aiding them in regaining a sense of stability and confidence in themselves. The distinction lies in the fact that Ukrainian displaced children when compared to their counterparts, demonstrate higher motivation for studies and possess a more robust educational background. Additionally, the teacher under study was Ukrainian, instructing the children in their native language through the unplugged teaching methodology.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study shows that the four-month teaching and learning experience of young Ukrainian asylum seekers and their teacher fits into the concept of the transition period. The strategic aim to get refugee children into the classroom as a part of integration into the new community was achieved. The children were provided with conditions to overcome the shock and were involved in academic routines that correspond to their needs. Having a teacher who comes from the same cultural background and who has had a similar traumatic experience of escaping the war zone helped the refugee children feel at home at a new school.

The relationship with the teacher was one of the most important factors for providing the learners satisfaction with their experience at school and for getting students engaged in the learning process. The teacher's training and qualifications in Literature and Linguistics, and the teacher's choice of subjects were most helpful as the contents of the class provided material for discussion and opinion sharing without touching upon personal topics which might have been painful for the learners. Under the circumstances, the choice of teaching contents and materials was satisfactory and yielded positive results. Now the learners are ready to continue studying and integrate into the learning community.

The students appreciate the positive feedback the teachers provide verbally and through non-verbal means. It should be noted that in many cases they prefer to keep their success private; public praise, either in front of other students or their family members, is much less popular than privately given feedback. The students view error correction as a necessary part of the academic activities and, quite predictably, they also prefer to receive it privately. The fact that the students regard information about their mistakes as something necessary can testify to their readiness to face setbacks, make efforts, and proceed with their studies.

The mixed-aged class was problematic. Individual competition and competition between fixed teams did not promote positive group dynamics. Younger and older teenagers, due to the difference in their motivation, demonstrated different priorities and different purposes for

attending school. While younger teenagers viewed school as a place to socialize, the older teenagers, despite the recent stressful experience, were ready to focus on academic activities.

The fact that at least some of them express the desire for a bigger variety of classes and a change in the routines indicates the satisfactory level of meeting their basic needs, including the need for safety. They are ready to engage more actively in the learning process. The new academic year is seen as a new starting point with some necessary changes: clear-cut requirements should be set for the academic activities and procedures, the children should not be treated as “very special”, which can lead to wrong expectations; more attention should be paid to the children’s integration into society.

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## АКАДЕМІЧНА АДАПТАЦІЯ ВИМУШЕНО ПЕРЕМІЩЕНИХ ДІТЕЙ: КЕЙС-СТАДІ ЗМІШАНОГО РІЗНОВІКОВОГО КЛАСУ В НІМЕЧЧИНІ

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*У статті досліджується досвід української вчительки, яка була залучена для роботи з групою українських дітей в одній зі шкіл Німеччини. Для оцінки ефективності перших чотирьох місяців перехідного періоду та визначення рекомендацій для подальших кроків у навчанні українських біженців застосовано змішаний метод дослідження, включаючи кількісний та якісний аналізи. Для збору даних щодо проміжних результатів перехідного періоду використовувались інтерв'ю з діючою українською вчителькою, її рефлексивний аналіз спостережень за групою з 26 українських дітей, непрямий зворотний зв'язок від місцевих вчителів, які брали участь у роботі з учнями, а також відповіді на два змішані анонімні опитування, проведені з двадцятьма учнями, які погодились взяти участь в анкетуванні. Найбільш значущими факторами у сприянні позитивним враженням та залученню дітей у школі виявилися взаємодія та комунікація у класі, а також бажання соціалізуватися та встановлювати нові міжособистісні зв'язки. Учні зазначили до шести предметів, які були відсутні у гімназії, але які б вони хотіли вивчати, причому математика зазначалася найчастіше. Деякі учні бажали додаткових уроків мов, зокрема української, англійської та німецької. Організація початкового чотирьохмісячного етапу перехідного періоду служила меті надання молодим біженцям достатньої психологічної підтримки та можливості повернутися до звичайного життя. У наступному навчальному році є нагальна потреба в установленні чітких академічних оцінювань, униканні ставлення до дітей як надто особливих і швидшому їхньому інтегруванню у суспільство.*

**Ключові слова:** *непідключена освіта, переміщена особа, перехідний період, потреби учнів, різновіковий клас.*