Secondary Publication



Mohamed, Sarah Ali; Lüken-Klaßen, Doris

The Importance of Being Understood : Intercultural Communication in Social Professions as a Tightrope Walking

Date of secondary publication: 12.01.2026

Version of Record (Published Version), Article

Persistent identifier: urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-irb-112507x

Primary publication

Mohamed, Sarah Ali; Lüken-Klaßen, Doris (2025): The Importance of Being Understood : Intercultural Communication in Social Professions as a Tightrope Walking, in: Journal of Intercultural Communication, Borås: International Collaboration for Research and Publications, Vol. 25, Nr. 4, pp. 110–120, doi: 10.36923/jicc.v25i4.1264.

Legal Notice

This work is protected by copyright and/or the indication of a licence. You are free to use this work in any way permitted by the copyright and/or the licence that applies to your usage. For other uses, you must obtain permission from the rights-holders.

This document is made available under a Creative Commons license.



The license information is available online:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode

Open Access | *Original Research*
Journal of Intercultural Communication, 25(4), 2025 | PP: 110– 120
https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v25i4.1264

The Importance of Being Understood: Intercultural Communication in Social Professions as a Tightrope Walking

Sarah Ali Mohamed[1], Doris Lüken-Klaßen[2]

Article History:

Received: 31-07-2025
Revision: 19-09-2025
Accepted: 23-09-2025
Publication: 01-12-2025

Cite this article as:

Mohamed, S. A., & Lüken-Klaßen, D. (2025). The Importance of Being Understood: Intercultural Communication in Social Professions as a Tightrope Walking. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, *25*(4), 110-120. doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v25i4.1264

©2025 by author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License.

Corresponding Author:

Sarah Ali Mohamed

State Institute For Family Research, University of Bamberg, Germany.
Email: Sarah.ali-mohamed@uni-bamberg.de

Abstract: Global migration continues to reshape demographic and societal landscapes, requiring close attention to refugee integration and the intercultural communication it demands. This study aims to understand how social professionals navigate intercultural encounters with refugee families in the context of family education and counselling. Using a qualitative longitudinal design, we conducted repeated expert interviews with professionals from 33 institutions in 2016 and 2019 to examine communication patterns, challenges, and evolving dynamics over time. The findings show that limited language proficiency initially posed the greatest barrier, hindering effective communication and leading to misunderstandings and frustration; however, this challenge diminished as refugees' language skills and mutual intercultural empathy improved. Nonverbal communication also played a significant role, with differences in chronemics, kinesics, and proxemics contributing to cultural disfluency and heightened uncertainty. Sudden cultural heterogeneity and information overload further intensified stress and communicative apprehension among professionals. Overall, intercultural encounters were experienced as both enriching and demanding. The study concludes that verbal and nonverbal competencies, awareness of cultural display rules, and reflexive engagement are central to effective communication across cultures. These insights hold practical implications for social professions supporting vulnerable groups and offer guidance for policymakers seeking to strengthen institutional responsiveness to evolving intercultural settings.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Migration, Refugees, Diversity, Social Work, Qualitative Longitudinal Research

1. Introduction

International migration has become a defining feature of contemporary globalized societies. Its consequences are multifaceted and exert profound impacts on institutions, communities, families, and individuals. Demographic shifts, rising diversity, new social negotiations, and evolving integration processes accompany large-scale population movements. These developments are particularly salient in countries of immigration, often termed post-migrant, super-diverse, or transnational societies, where longstanding binaries between migrants and non-migrants are increasingly blurred. Such conceptualizations highlight the growing heterogeneity of populations and the need to continually reassess the assumptions and structures that shape societal transformation (De Haas et al., 2020; Kosyakova & Kulic, 2022; Lüken-Klaßen & Heckmann, 2010; IOM, 2023; Vertovec, 2023). Within this context, migrant families navigate integration by repositioning their cultural practices, relational dynamics, and social roles, while the receiving society simultaneously adapts to new forms of diversity. Given the non-linear and multi-directional nature of integration, sustained dialogue on these processes, particularly on intercultural communication, remains crucial.

Productive intercultural communication in super-diverse settings requires both newcomers and residents to move toward mutual linguistic and cultural understanding. Yet, interactions between refugees and host communities often occur under conditions of significant cultural distance, heightened uncertainty, and limited shared codes, making grounded intercultural competencies essential (Bennett, 1986; Berry, 1997, 2005; Gudykunst, 2005). The development of intercultural sensitivity, perspective-taking, and communicative adaptation thus becomes a central pathway toward more effective social adjustment. For migrants, these competencies shape how cultural adaptation unfolds, reinforcing or mitigating the challenges inherent in settlement processes (Kim, 2001).

Despite increasing scholarly attention to intercultural encounters, the communication that occurs between social professionals and refugees remains understudied. This domain is particularly important because professionals in family education and counselling often serve as key intermediaries in refugees' early integration experiences, yet they operate in highly diverse environments marked by linguistic barriers, nonverbal ambiguities, and emotionally complex situations. Understanding these interactions requires a longitudinal perspective that captures how communication challenges and competencies evolve over time.

Against this backdrop, our qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) scrutinizes the intercultural encounters that arise in family education and counselling settings. Specifically, we examine how professionals navigate verbal and nonverbal communication with refugee clients, and how the interpersonal dynamics of these intercultural interactions develop across two

[1] State Institute For Family Research, University of Bamberg, Germany
[2] State Institute For Family Research, University of Bamberg, Germany

critical time points. Accordingly, this paper addresses the following questions: *How do professionals navigate intercultural communication with refugees in diverse workplace settings of family education and counselling? What role do language, nonverbal cues, and interpersonal dynamics play in these encounters?* By answering these questions, the study advances scholarly understanding of communication practices in frontline social services. It also contributes to broader debates in migration, communication, and social work research by offering empirical insights into interactional processes with refugees, a group whose communicative needs and vulnerabilities require particular attention.

2. Theoretical Framework

Scholarly interest in intercultural encounters has intensified over recent decades as societies become increasingly diverse due to global migration and displacement. Within this landscape, social professionals who work directly with refugees must navigate a complex interplay of linguistic challenges, divergent worldviews, and clients' potentially traumatic experiences. Understanding these encounters requires engagement with key theoretical traditions in intercultural communication, alongside empirical insights related to the integration of refugee families. The following subsections outline the main theoretical lenses that inform this study, with particular attention to how they illuminate communication dynamics in professional–refugee interactions.

2.1. Intercultural Communication Theories

2.1.1. Cultural Dimensions And Contexts: Hall And Hofstede's Foundational Contributions

Intercultural communication theory offers analytical tools for examining how people from different cultural backgrounds interpret messages, codes, and behaviours. A core distinction introduced by Hall (1959, 1966, 1976) differentiates low-context and high-context communication styles. In low-context cultures, meaning is conveyed explicitly through words, whereas in high-context cultures, meaning is inferred from contextual cues and shared understandings. Hall's notion of the "silent language," encompassing chronemics, kinesics, proxemics, olfactics, and paralanguage, underscores how subtle nonverbal elements can be easily misread during intercultural exchanges. This is highly relevant in settings where refugees may rely on nonverbal communication due to limited host-language proficiency.

Hofstede's large-scale studies (1980, 1991, 2001) complement Hall by identifying cultural value dimensions that shape behavioural tendencies, including power distance, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence–restraint. These dimensions help explain why communicative expectations differ across cultural groups and why misunderstandings often arise in professional encounters with refugee families.

Although both models have been critiqued for dualisms (Cardon, 2008), methodological limitations (Gerhart & Fang, 2005; McSweeney, 2002), and assumptions of national uniformity (D'Iribarne, 2009), they remain central reference points in intercultural communication research. Studies continue to apply Hall's framework to analyse culturally patterned communication styles and nonverbal misunderstandings (Kim et al., 1998; Manusov & Patterson, 2006; Sussman & Rosenfeld, 1982). Similarly, Hofstede's dimensions have been revisited and recalibrated in newer empirical datasets, confirming their enduring explanatory value (Beugelsdijk et al., 2018). For the present study, these classic approaches help illuminate how professionals interpret refugee clients' verbal and nonverbal behaviours and how divergent cultural expectations shape communicative friction.

2.1.2. From Cultural Dimensions To Contextual Dynamics: Theoretical Extensions In Intercultural Communication

Neuliep's (2016) contextual model integrates and extends Hall's and Hofstede's frameworks by emphasising how communication emerges from multiple interlinked contexts, cultural, micro-cultural, environmental, perceptual, and socio-relational. This perspective is especially pertinent for interactions between social workers and refugees, where communication is embedded in institutional structures, emotional dynamics, and asymmetries of power.

Within the perceptual context, two processes, social positioning and social decentring, are particularly relevant. Social positioning involves interpreting others' behaviour through one's own cultural lens (Oyserman & Lee, 2007), which may lead professionals to misread refugee families' actions based on assumptions rooted in their own cultural norms. In contrast, social decentring entails perspective-taking and empathetic interpretation (Redmond, 1985), which aligns more closely with the intercultural competence required in social work practice.

Further contributions to intercultural theory help explain why communicative misunderstandings occur even in the absence of linguistic barriers. Expectancy violation theory (Burgoon & Hale, 1988) highlights the emotional and cognitive impact when individuals behave contrary to culturally grounded expectations, such as differences in eye contact, touching, turn-taking, or proximity. Research on proxemics (Baldassare & Feller, 2009; Smith & Faig, 2014; Sundstrom & Altman, 1976) and personal space preferences underscores how culturally conditioned practices may be interpreted as disrespectful or inappropriate.

Conflict styles also correlate with cultural patterns, as demonstrated in comparative studies showing variation between avoiding, integrating, and dominating approaches across cultural contexts (Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). As Croucher et al. (2012) show, conflict behaviours, including tendencies such as conflict avoidance, differ widely between high-context and low-context cultures, a finding relevant for understanding how disagreements or tensions arise in social work encounters.

Together, these theoretical strands provide a conceptual foundation for analysing the intercultural communication challenges experienced by professionals working with refugee families. They help explain why nonverbal cues, communication expectations, and broader sociocultural norms can facilitate or hinder mutual understanding in these highly sensitive settings.

2.2. Intercultural Communication And Social Integration

2.2.1. Relevance Of Intercultural Communication Competencies In Integration

Intercultural communication is not only central to international cooperation and culturally diverse workplaces but also plays a crucial role in the broader social and cultural integration of immigrants. The relationship is reciprocal: effective intercultural communication supports integration processes, while ongoing integration efforts reinforce migrants' communicative adaptation. At both individual and institutional levels, adopting new communication styles and culturally responsive strategies significantly enhances integration outcomes (Bourhis et al., 1997; Peng & Wu, 2019). Acquiring intercultural communication competencies is therefore a key aspect of the acculturation process, enabling newcomers to participate in more meaningful interactions and achieve more positive social experiences (Fantini, 2020).

Kim's integrative communication theory (1988, 2001) conceptualises cross-cultural adaptation as a dynamic, interaction-driven process in which individuals gradually develop communicative competence through sustained engagement with the host culture. Over time, convergence in communication patterns, alongside the cultivation of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986; Coupland & Coupland, 1991; Kincaid, 1979), supports more effective cross-cultural exchanges. In particular, migrants' proficiency in the host-country language has been consistently linked to higher levels of social integration and psychological adjustment (Sam & Berry, 2010; Swami et al., 2010). These insights highlight why frontline professionals who interact with refugees routinely encounter communication-related challenges that directly shape integration trajectories.

2.2.2. Communication And Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Processes of cultural adaptation are not linear. Scholars have long emphasized that individuals navigating cultural transitions experience periods of fluctuation marked by adjustment, setbacks, and gradual readjustment. Classic models describe this through U-curve or W-curve trajectories (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Oberg, 1960), while others conceptualize adaptation as cycles of stress–adaptation–growth (Kim, 2001) or situate it within Berry's (1997, 2005) acculturation framework, integrating, assimilating, separating, or marginalizing, each accompanied by varying degrees of acculturative stress. Such processes unfold across extended periods and often across generations (Heckmann, 2015).

These dynamics are particularly salient for refugee families, who frequently face compounded stressors including exposure to violence, loss of family members, precarious living conditions, and profound uncertainty about the future (Kohlenberger, 2022). Their communicative adaptation is therefore shaped not only by linguistic or cultural differences but also by emotional vulnerability and disrupted social networks, making intercultural communication in support and counselling settings especially sensitive.

2.3. Interculturally Sensitive Family Education And Counselling

2.3.1. Parenting Support Through Family Education And Counselling

Family education and counselling initiatives form a central component of social work services across many Western welfare systems. These programmes aim to prevent or reduce stress, strengthen family resilience, and support healthy family life. Preventive services, including antenatal classes, general counselling, and low-threshold parent activities, are usually open to all families, while more targeted interventions, such as educational guidance, parenting programmes, or home visiting services, support parents with heightened vulnerabilities. Collectively, these services provide opportunities for information sharing, reflection, social exchange, and community building, thereby strengthening families' daily resources (Arnold & Macsenaere, 2018; Caplan, 1964; Kane et al., 2007; Munoz et al., 1996; Schneewind & Berkič, 2007; Weiss et al., 2015).

Because these services explicitly engage with values, parenting norms, and family-related expectations (Rupp et al., 2010), they are especially relevant for refugee families whose support systems are often fragile. Access to such programmes can facilitate emotional stability, reduce isolation, and promote social inclusion (Cambridge & Williams, 2004).

2.3.2. Family Education And Counselling For Migrants

Ongoing immigration has increased the emphasis on diversity within social work, prompting organisations to adapt services in more culturally responsive ways (Auernheimer, 2013; Mecheril, 2013; Reisenauer & Lüring, 2022). Recent migration movements, particularly the arrival of large numbers of refugees, have intensified this shift, leading to the development of specific services that may have positive effects on children's and parents' wellbeing, family life, and integration (Bujard et al., 2019; Bunn et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2020; Ponguta et al., 2020). Despite these advances, migrant and refugee families often remain less informed about available services and participate less frequently (Eickhorst et al., 2016; Fischer, 2019; Lüken-Klaßen & Neumann, 2019; Thiessen & Michels, 2008). In parallel, increasing diversity has also been accompanied by new discriminatory attitudes, prejudices, and forms of exclusion (Gallegos Torres, 2022; Gesthuizen et al., 2021).

These conditions make intercultural encounters in family education and counselling settings particularly complex. The likelihood of misinterpretations, hesitations, and communication breakdowns is high, especially when linguistic limitations intersect with culturally distinct norms around parenting, gender roles, emotional expression, and nonverbal communication. Professionals, therefore, require not only linguistic resources but also heightened awareness of nonverbal dynamics, cultural display rules, and empathetic engagement. Drawing on intercultural communication theories (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Kim, 2001; Neuliep, 2016), this study builds upon existing scholarship to examine how social professionals respond to cultural diversity in their daily work with refugee families in Bavaria.

3. Methodology

To examine the main challenges and dynamics of intercultural encounters in family education and counselling settings, and to understand how social work professionals navigate communication with refugee parents, we designed a qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) study based on repeated expert interviews. Interviews were conducted with professionals from 33 institutions in Germany in two waves, first in 2016 and again in 2019. This longitudinal design enabled us to capture not only the immediate complexities of intercultural communication during a period of heightened migration but also how these dynamics evolved over time as both professionals and refugee clients adapted to changing circumstances. QLR offers access to deep, context-rich

insights into communication practices in intercultural workplaces and goes beyond numerical trends by foregrounding personal perceptions and meaning-making processes. The approach allows for a temporally sensitive analysis, producing panel data that illuminate shifting experiences, institutional responses, and communicative practices across a three-year period.

3.1. Data Collection

The study took place in Bavaria, one of Germany's most populous states, with approximately 13 million residents. In 2016, we conducted interviews with professionals from 33 state-recognised institutions providing services related to partnership, pregnancy, parenting, and family education. To capture a comprehensive picture of intercultural encounters across the sector, we included diverse organisations, such as mothers' associations, neighbourhood centres, family education institutions, counselling agencies, and municipal services, varying in size, funding structures, and geographical location (urban and rural).

Our interview strategy combined two established qualitative approaches. First, we drew on systematising expert interviews, appropriate for participants who hold specialised knowledge and leadership responsibilities within social work (Bogner et al., 2014; Helfferich, 2014; Kaiser, 2014). These interviews allowed experts to structure relevant fields of practice in action-guiding ways. Second, we integrated techniques from problem-centred interviewing (Witzel, 2000), rooted in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1998), enabling us to capture individual perspectives, experiential narratives, and the subtleties of both speech and silence (Lareau, 2021).

A semi-structured guideline provided consistency across interviews while allowing space for reflection, narration, and elaboration. Questions addressed the professional setting and roles, service structures, client groups, challenges in intercultural work, team resources and training, and personal motivation. The guideline was pre-tested with three professionals, and minor adjustments were made after early interviews to enhance clarity and flow.

In total, 32 interviews were conducted in 2016 with representatives from 33 institutions; two institutions opted for joint interviews. Interviewees included social workers, educators, and advisors, many of whom held coordination or leadership roles, with academic backgrounds primarily in social work, pedagogy, psychology, or sociology. Participants ranged in age from their mid-twenties to mid-sixties, though most were middle-aged or older. Notably, the vast majority of interviewees were women and did not have a migration background themselves.

To explore changes in intercultural communication after the initial influx of refugees, we conducted follow-up interviews in 2019. The panel design enabled us to revisit the same institutions, allowing for a longitudinal comparison (Holland et al., 2006; Winiarska, 2017). Following QLR principles, which emphasise lived change and the evolving relationship between context and subjectivity (Neale, 2020; Calman et al., 2013; Vogl et al., 2018), we aimed to interview the same individuals whenever possible. In 27 of the 33 institutions (82%), the original interviewees were still in position; in the remaining six, we interviewed their successors. Therefore, we achieved full institutional panel stability and high individual continuity.

3.2. Data Analysis

Across both waves, interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes in 2016 and 60 minutes in 2019, resulting in roughly 50 hours of audio material. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using MAXQDA to support computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDA). Our analytical strategy drew on discourse and content analytical principles (Fairclough, 2013; Mayring, 2015; Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2019).

Initial coding began deductively, guided by the interview framework, to provide a structured overview of the dataset. In line with Saldaña (2021) and Braun and Clarke (2022), we approached coding as an iterative and interpretive process rather than a purely preparatory step. Thus, multiple coding cycles were conducted, combining different inductive coding strategies, allowing the coding scheme to evolve as new categories and themes emerged, particularly concerning nonverbal communication issues, and communicative disruptions.

Given the longitudinal design, intercoder reliability across waves was essential for ensuring analytical stability and reproducibility (Campbell et al., 2013; Krippendorff, 2004). At the same time, we acknowledged that complete neutrality in qualitative interpretation is neither possible nor desirable, especially in intercultural research, since researcher positionality shapes analytical lenses (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Sobočan et al., 2019). To address this, we adopted a decentred analytical approach, intentionally incorporating diverse disciplinary, cultural, and religious perspectives within the research team.

All coding and analyses were double-checked by a second researcher, and discrepancies were discussed collectively to enhance reliability while encouraging reflexive awareness of interpretive differences. We also remained attentive to potential power dynamics between interviewers and interviewees, and within the research team itself. Although this approach was time-intensive, it supported a more robust and nuanced interpretive process and contributed to a broad yet coherent understanding of the data. The resulting dataset supports several research strands, including studies on social inclusion (Lüken-Klaßen & Baumtrog, 2023), resilience, and institutional responses to migration. The present article focuses specifically on intercultural communication.

4. Findings And Discussion

The central research question guiding this study is how professionals navigate intercultural communication with refugees in family education and counselling. To address this, we analyse the role of language skills, nonverbal cues, and interpersonal dynamics within these settings. Before doing so, it is necessary to outline the types of intercultural encounters the interviewees described.

4.1. The Professional Setting: Interculturality In Family Education And Counselling

All experts interviewed reported interactions with migrant families, and in most institutions, this included refugees. However, the proportion of refugee clients varied significantly. While some professionals mentioned having only a few refugee families, others estimated that up to 90% of their clients were migrants, half of whom were refugees. This uneven distribution did not correspond to specific institutional types but rather to geographical location: institutions in medium-sized towns and larger cities typically served more migrants and refugees than those in rural areas.

The interviewed professionals encountered refugees from a broad range of countries. Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan were most frequently mentioned, aligning with national patterns during this period. However, professionals also reported working with families from African, Southeast European, and Southern European countries. While women tended to be more represented in many settings, intercultural encounters involved both male and female clients, sometimes accompanied by children and sometimes attending alone.

The frequency and depth of interaction varied according to institutional functions and refugees' needs. Some contacts were limited to one-time counselling sessions, such as assistance with pregnancy-related financial aid. Other settings created regular and ongoing interactions, for example, through group classes, parent meetings, or long-term advisory relationships. Thus, the study captures both brief, task-oriented interactions and more enduring relationships. This diversity shows that intercultural encounters in family education and counselling are not uniform but occur across multiple formats and intensities.

4.2. The Relative Need of Language Skills

For intercultural communication, a common language is crucial, and the lack of this common language is identified as a primary difficulty in intercultural encounters in the fields of family education and counselling. In *2016*, experts from all types of professional settings explicitly stressed this difficulty as the main challenge, as can be illustrated by the following typical quote: "The first thing that comes to mind is language. […] if the language is not there, then it is simply difficult for us. Language is our tool" (I_2016_32). At that time, most refugees spoke no German and often no English either, and the utilisation of artificial intelligence tools was not yet as prevalent, so that communication had to take place mainly through gestures and facial expressions: "Then language is always a problem, um, although we solve that wonderfully here with hands and feet and friendliness, it should be much clearer and much better that I can call somewhere and say: 'I need an Afghan translator right now'" (I_2016_13).

Institutions find the language challenge difficult to varying degrees, depending on the diversity and intercultural competence of staff and the kind of work. While some facilities were severely overburdened, others were more relaxed. Moreover, while a few lucky ones already had staff who spoke Arabic, for example, and were thus able to facilitate communication, most had to manage the intercultural communication without a common language. Thereby, some professionals, as the one quoted above, could periodically rely on external (professional or volunteer) translators, which was regarded as highly beneficial. The analysis of social professionals' narratives reveals a significant need for a sufficient language level to communicate effectively in family and counselling centres, as communicating in intercultural settings requires a navigation process, by which the interactants in low-context cultures, as in the German culture, tend to prefer clear and direct statements to understand the conversation. Verbally communicating in intercultural interactions with refugees was for most of the professionals first and foremost *the be-all and end-all* (in German: *das A und O*), as expressed several times. This holds particularly true for professionals specialised in counselling who have always considered language issues to be a predominant problem in their daily work, negatively affecting empathic counselling:

> *I think the biggest difficulty […] in counselling is that […] we'd like to get much closer […] and to understand much more about them, and we'd like to offer more. But we often remain … on the surface, because we don't have the linguistic resources to go deeper, because we sometimes perhaps don't know the cultural needs so well to go deeper, and […]it doesn't become what you imagine psychosocial counselling to be: dealing with your feelings, with the situation you are in, with the stresses and strains, with your visions and so on (I_2016_07).*

By *2019*, many immigrants had gained language skills and confidence. Children in particular have less difficulty expressing themselves, as noted by several experts. Nevertheless, the language skills were not considered sufficient to understand complex issues, and language still is seen as a frequent cause of misunderstandings: "The problem is that many of our visitors can't speak German properly, or don't understand everything, or sometimes they answer and then we don't understand them, and that's how misunderstandings arise" (I_2019_23). Over time, however, the meaning of verbal communication in encounters has changed for many social professionals. Many professionals described language difficulties as less urgent, with a quarter of the interviews not mentioning language at all. Accordingly, the focus frequently shifted directly towards other issues and challenges.

In the event of mentioning the language challenge, several professionals classified it as a challenge for refugees alone, as opposed to the professional setting or the professionals themselves, which is a notable difference to 2016: In 2019, they frequently reflected upon the fact that refugees experience a challenging journey of asylum-seeking, rooting themselves in a new culture and navigating the temporalities of their (still limited) integration. Acquiring sufficient language skills in the new society is considered a vital factor for various daily life situations, as well as an inevitable step for the long-term integration of their families into society. In particular, the language is seen as a tool for educational attainment and entering the job market. In accordance with this, professionals frequently call for more accessible and low-threshold language courses for refugees.

To conclude, after a few years of communicating with refugees, a better language level of the refugees, the inclusion of mediators, and the reported increase in contact led to a noticeable shift in perceptions, with refugees and professionals being culturally more fluent and refugees less novel to the professionals. The repeated visits of refugees to the centres as clients for the offered service made the anticipations less vague, the contact easier to anticipate, and thus increased communication confidence and reduced the uncertainty in the interaction as a whole.

4.3. Cultural Variations In Interpreting Nonverbal Codes And Communicating Behaviours

4.3.1. Different Impacts of Nonverbal Cues' Displacements And Violations

In the analysis, we defined nonverbal communication codes as part of the socio-relational context that influences the dynamics of intercultural relationships between social professionals and refugee families. The detailed examinations in this regard show that within non-literal and non-linguistic communication codes, there was a more substantial influence of three codes in both waves, namely, *chronemics, kinesics*, and *proxemics*, respectively.

The first concept, *chronemics*, refers to perceptions of time and related orientation, distinguishing between monochronic and polychronic cultures. The data demonstrated that behavioural expressions of *chronemics* were the most influential in communication with the refugee families, and in most cases, they were negatively connoted: many of the social workers expressed negative experiences with the refugees' punctuality, and reported that they often arrived late or failed to show up without notice. This resulted in additional work, time loss, or time spent on other appointments. A professional made a clear example of that saying, "Yes, punctuality and reliability are another thing. It's really difficult for some families. If the weather is bad, they don't come, or the children are often sick" (I_2019_19).

Secondly, *kinesics* played an influential role in the reported encounters, defined as communicating by using body parts such as hands, arms, legs, and face, i.e., body movements, gestures, and expressions. Typical examples of conflict and misunderstanding, and the most striking narrated situations, are handshakes and eye contact. In this regard, several experts perceived inappropriate behaviours in 2016, such as: "I wanted to shake his hand, but he didn't shake my hand [...] He kind of stuck his elbow out at me again and then said, 'Oh yeah, I know that one', but I somehow knew that it was weird" (I_2016_10). While both the handshake and the eye contact, however, represent explicit cultural norms related to mutual respect, their cultural meanings vary significantly, with opposite connotations in different countries. While in Western cultures, a handshake is a sign of respect for the other interactant, in other cultures, for instance, conservative Arabic cultures, the handshake is considered to be a disrespectful attitude. This can lead to awkward situations between people from different cultures, in which both sides feel uncomfortable: "So I asked him why he didn't want to shake my hand, and then he, he was a bit embarrassed, and he talked his way out of it, saying that's not common with them, he doesn't do that, no. And I realised that, that, yes, that offends me. I found him very unpleasant after that" (I_2019_10).

The third impactful factor in intercultural interactions was *proxemics*, i.e., the use of space. This was, more implicitly, stated by many professionals, who noted the differences in parenting styles and how children from various backgrounds utilized space in distinct ways. It was consistently narrated as well that migrants let their kids play around freely or have a gendered parenting style. In some families, only girls were restricted from moving around. The same premise applies to how the space, or the room, is used. One interviewee exemplified how to regulate the body spacing and structure the utilisation of the facilities: "That's often what it's about, to say, 'Okay, be careful, you just don't do that. You don't change the child's diaper at the breakfast table; you go here and there.' And that's where helpers often have a hard time establishing clear structures and rules" (I_2019_26).

The two nonverbal cues *olfactics*, i.e., communicative functions related to the sense of smell, and *paralanguage*, i.e., the use of voice characteristics, such as volume, pitch, and tone, have a less pronounced effect. Both have been mentioned in both waves, but not as significant factors. In 2019, these issues were articulated even less often and were perceived as less problematic.

To conclude, nonverbal cues and their related behavioural attitudes, as identified by the analysis, disrupted intercultural communication and hindered mutual understanding in professional settings. There are discrepancies between expectations and actual behaviours by professionals and migrant families in both waves. In 2016, however, the professionals reported more on the related challenges and fears, while in 2019, they reported slightly more on the ways how to manage these and seemed to be more reflective. This is illustrated by the quotations on handshakes. Confirming the *nonverbal expectancy violation theory*, our findings reveal that nonverbal patterns' violation regarding all three factors, but especially *kinesics*, were perceived and linked to respect versus disrespect.

4.3.2. Evolving Stressors: Uncertainty (Avoidance) And Communication Gaps

In the pre-communication phase, many powerful assumptions and worries existed, affecting the planning and preparation of the upcoming interaction. Firstly, there were concerns about the mental status of refugees, having their traumatic experiences, and the uncertain possible consequences on the proximal contact and communication. Secondly, there were narrations and assumptions related to the refugees' demands for family services, especially with the limited personal resources and time capacities. A third issue was the discrepancies in cultural norms and display rules, and in expressing the self and emotions, for instance, a veiled Muslim woman refused the dancing classes with music, as one of the interviewees stated, "she leaves when there is singing and dancing. Difficult, that's very difficult" (I_2016_01).

The investigation, more predominantly in the first wave, reveals a high level of expressed vagueness and uncertainty in multiple facets among social work professionals, which they sought to clarify as much as possible. Many interviewees' articulations included open questions and *what-if* statements about future intercultural encounters. Conveying German culture and the boundaries of transmitting cultural values and norms were unclear to most professionals, impacting the environmental context of communicating with refugees. Many felt exposed to the new situation of massive immigration, as if they were facing a natural disaster: "But simply with this, yes, flood of multifactorial problems, language barriers, I don't know, the diverse dialects, where you need a special translator, etc., etc., it is, I think an avalanche that has now hit us quite hard, and we simply don't know exactly how to deal with it" (I_2016_22).

As a result of the aforementioned concerns, in the following wave in 2019, some of the social professionals' narratives demonstrated the need to communicate what is expected, what needs to be done, and what could (not) be acceptable. This impactful intercultural communication apprehension stressed the need for explicit and verbal encoding even more, in order to avoid this uncertainty in long-term intercultural dialogues. This was evident in numerous statements emphasizing the importance of language skills in achieving greater certainty in communication. Uncertainty was also an issue in short-term collaborations and appointments, as indicated above in the context of *chronemics*, and is linked to the cultural norm of *reliability*. The different importance of this value, combined with a lack of language skills and culturally different communication styles, also proved some misunderstandings and frustrations, as can be illustrated by the following quote:

> *Language is always a big issue. We also notice this with the women who work here. One of them speaks well, the other speaks badly. This also pushes us to our limits. They always tend to say 'yes, yes' and then do something else. We are often simply overwhelmed because we don't have that much time to always be by their side (I_2019_14).*

4.4. Intercultural Encounters' Dynamics In Times of Flux

To understand the navigation of intercultural communication, the dynamics of the intercultural encounters must be considered as well: how professionals perceive the rising diversity in their professional setting, how they interpret cultural differences, and their intercultural sensitivity.

4.4.1. Ambivalent Articulations About Diversity As A Resource And A Challenge

In 2016, the new diversity within professional settings was seen as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the professionals accepted the new situation and sought to include refugee families in their services. Their expressions have been noticeable for their curiosity as well as their openness towards the new target group. In almost every interview, the professionals depicted empathic articulations with a low level of conformity pressure towards refugees, such as living situations, learning a new language, and caring for families. On the other hand, however, there were concerns about how to cope with all these new cultures, with challenges such as traumatized women, changing regulations, and so on, and doubts about their capacity to support all these families in need.

This ambivalence could be detected within most interviews. One professional, for instance, stated, "My job now is to do positive public relations work, to correct people's image […] to convey this, yes, this positive image" (I_2016_22), and also expressed her concern that there are "so many little things that add up and are often so energy-consuming, so many things fall by the wayside because none of us know what to do" (I_2016_22).

Moving on to the subsequent wave in 2019, similar patterns continued to appear, albeit with different focuses and topics. Professionals reported having new and more solid connections with people from other cultural backgrounds and experienced less cultural distance and greater cultural proximity. Conversely, there were multiple challenges, e.g., related to reliability or feeling helpless, not being able to help a refugee in need. As one interviewee expressed her pride: "I'm always there wholeheartedly, I always support them. I'm also proud of these fathers" (I_2019_14), while also expressing helplessness, as shown by the quotations below.

4.4.2. Making Meanings of Observations: Social Decentring And Social Positioning

Regarding the perceptual context of communication, we can categorize observations of cognitive processes navigating interculturality into two distinct processes: *social positioning* and *social decentring*. *Social positioning* involves interpreting information, observations, and situations through cultural lenses. A striking example in the data is when a professional said, "…It's often difficult... when they come and unpack their breakfast, it's just different than with us… They smell differently, they perceive things differently, they do things differently than we do" (I_2019_26).

The *social decentring* means that a person from one culture adopts the perspective of a person from another. By doing so, individuals engage in perspective-taking, considering the backgrounds of other individuals, expressing more empathetic statements about refugees' status, and showing flexibility towards anticipated behaviours. This was frequently shown in our analysis as almost all professionals expressed empathy towards refugees, e.g., by acknowledging their challenging living situation: "That's absolutely outrageous. The families' housing situation is an incredible challenge… then they're completely overwhelmed when they have to search for a kindergarten spot in the daycare finder… These families are overburdened with the registration process" (I_2019_01). Additionally, various norms were considered and incorporated into the development of family services, including advertising in multiple languages and utilizing cultural mediators.

4.4.3. Intercultural Sensitivity And Relationships Towards A More Proximity

Social professionals are aware of the complexity and novelty of migration trajectories, the hierarchy of family needs, and the challenges of making a cross-cultural transition. In that sense, they recognize cultural distance and novelty, perceive emotions, and acknowledge uncertainty. Second, many professionals emphasized refugee families' acculturation as a process of gradual cultural adaptation. Therefore, offering a non-polarized atmosphere, communicating with intercultural sensitivity, and providing more interculturally sensitive services were relevant for the professionals, as reflected in one interview: "So, if you have good conversations about it, it definitely increases your sensitivity for any kind of advice, because you simply learn more about what can happen […], and you simply realize: the more background I have, the more sensitive I become" (I_2019_30).

Regarding the intercultural competence in family education and counselling, the analysis reveals that the cognitive dimension had increased over time, via, for instance, attending workshops, gaining experience with different cultural groups, and exchanging information. In addition, many interviewees organised mediators, or even employed people with a migration background who speak foreign languages. Integrating other migrants with strong language skills played a vital role, especially in the initial phases of welcoming the families to the centres and introducing them to the German system, as well as for translating their needs: "I assigned a really good woman from the refugee initiative […], she speaks German really well, has been here herself for pregnancy counselling, and can explain things to the women in a completely different way" (I_2016_08).

5. Conclusion

To achieve an interdisciplinary understanding of how professionals navigate intercultural communication with refugees in diverse workplace settings of family education and counselling, this study analysed the role of language skills, cultural variations in interpreting nonverbal codes and communicative behaviours, and the interpersonal dynamics shaping intercultural encounters. By conducting repeated expert interviews with professionals from the same 33 institutions, the qualitative longitudinal design allowed us to identify multiple anchor points in professionals' narratives and perceptions, thereby deepening our understanding of institutional diversity practices over time.

5.1. Influence of Environmental And Perceptual Dimensions on Interpersonal Dynamics And Communication

Our QLR analysis shows that intercultural communication between professionals and refugees is shaped not only by cultural components and differences but also by the perceptual and environmental contexts, as outlined by Neuliep (2016). The environmental context emerged as a crucial sphere: the sudden influx of information, the heterogeneity of clients, and the pressures associated with increased caseloads influenced professionals' expectations, emotions, and preparedness, particularly

in the pre-communication phase. This contributed to heightened ambiguity and intercultural communication apprehension. In response, professionals strongly emphasised the need for clear verbal encoding and the acquisition of German language skills and norms as key conditions for effective communication, which aligns with Hofstede's (1980) concept of uncertainty avoidance.

With respect to the perceptual context, the data reveal a combination of curiosity about diverse cultural backgrounds, openness to learning, and a self-imposed commitment to provide interculturally sensitive services and counselling. At the same time, unexpected or unexplained communicative behaviours were often experienced as "cultural disfluency," perceived as stressful, demanding, and time-consuming. Overall, communication with refugee families appears as a non-linear process characterised by fluctuations, setbacks, and progress. In this sense, communicating across cultures can be experienced both as an enriching learning opportunity and as a challenging, sometimes daunting, task for all parties involved.

5.2. When Speaking The Same Language Is Not Enough: The Importance Of Both Verbal And Nonverbal Communication

As is typical for low-context communication cultures, verbal communication skills were considered highly important in the professional settings examined. Limited language proficiency frequently hindered effective communication and led to misunderstandings and frustration, thereby confirming Hall's (1959) cultural theory. Over time, however, as the migration situation stabilised and refugees' language skills and intercultural empathy improved on both sides, language-related difficulties became somewhat less dominant in professionals' accounts.

Beyond verbal communication, our analysis underlines that nonverbal communication is equally essential, albeit more implicit and subtle. Three nonverbal codes in particular, chronemics, kinesics, and proxemics, were found to negatively affect communication with refugees when expectations were not met. Our investigation adopted the perspective that cultural frameworks shape expectations regarding appropriate communicative behaviour and enable individuals to detect deviations from these expectations. While such expectancy violations can sometimes have positive outcomes, such as generating openness or cultural awareness, they were often associated with cultural disfluency attributed to refugee families. Nonverbal cues and cultural display rules thus strongly influenced professionals' perceptions, interpretations, and responses.

Making meaning of both the verbal and nonverbal dimensions of intercultural interaction is, in this understanding, closely tied to the level of awareness and empathy that professionals develop. The greater the awareness of cultural disfluency and fluency in communication, the safer and more supportive the spaces that can be created. By recognising different cultural meanings and norms, many misunderstandings can be prevented or mitigated. In line with Berry (1997), our findings suggest that developing a two-way intercultural engagement strategy, where both sides adapt and learn, yields considerable benefits, fostering empathy among all parties and expanding the space for better communication and healthier communities.

5.3. Practical Implications

Longitudinal research requires identifying key temporal anchor points and tracing their transformation. In this study, 2016 functioned as such a pivotal year, marked by the escalation of the Syrian war and the resulting influx of refugees to Europe. Against this backdrop, our qualitative findings illuminate the realities of social work with refugees during a period of heightened uncertainty and change, offering insights that extend beyond the immediate context.

Although the study is situated in institutions in Bavaria, its findings are transferable to similar cultural and institutional settings. The aim was not statistical representativeness but rather the identification of typical challenges and examples of "good practice" in addressing communication issues during times of rapid influx and structural transformation. The results are particularly relevant for social professions dealing with diversity and interculturality, as they point to concrete implications for workplaces that support vulnerable groups under adverse conditions. At the same time, they highlight intercultural workplace dynamics of interest to both practitioners and policymakers, providing impulses for adapting existing structures and practices to evolving intercultural realities.

5.4. Reflexivity In Research, Limitations, And Further Research

Finally, research involving vulnerable groups such as refugees calls for particular attention to the researcher's positionality and reflexivity. A comprehensive understanding of one's own situatedness, epistemologically and ontologically, is essential. In this study, adopting a decentred approach at each stage, from research design through data collection to analysis, and systematically reflecting on our perspectives and assumptions, proved crucial for achieving more nuanced interpretations.

The temporal and spatial constraints of research and social work meant that this investigation focused on professionals' perspectives. While this offers valuable insights into institutional practices and professional experiences, it also constitutes a limitation. It remains essential to incorporate the viewpoints of refugees themselves. Therefore, a subsequent study is planned, involving narrative interviews with refugees to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on communication and social integration. Moreover, future research could benefit from incorporating participant observation and ethnographic writing to capture interactional dynamics in situ. In this respect, sociological, migration, and communication research should draw on multiple methods and focal points, both qualitative and quantitative, to further enhance and complement the insights generated in this study.

Acknowledgement Statement: We express our sincere gratitude to all the committed social professionals who participated in our longitudinal study for their time and valuable involvement, and to Anastasia Baumtrog for her wonderful cooperation and the precious discussions at different stages throughout this project. Additionally, gratitude is extended to the reviewers for their constructive contributions and feedback, and for the journal's proof-reading team for their assistance in improving the clarity and readability of the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Authors' contribution statements: DLK conceived the initial idea for the research project and conducted the interviews. SAM developed the theory for this paper. Both authors carried out the analyses, discussed the results, and contributed to the final manuscript.

Funding statements: We acknowledge the financial support provided by the Bavarian State Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Affairs within the yearly working programme of the State Institute for Family Research at the University of Bamberg, as well as the financial support from the Bavarian State Ministry of Science and the Arts within the Research Association ForFamily, of which our research project is part of. The publication of this article was supported by the Open Access publication fund of the University of Bamberg.

Data availability statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available for reasons of sensitivity.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect JICC's or editors' official policy or position. All liability for harm done to individuals or property as a result of any ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content is expressly disclaimed.

References

Arnold, J., & Macsenaere, M. (2018). Ergebnisse der bundesweiten „Wirkungsevaluation in der Erziehungsberatung“ (Wir.EB) und deren Relevanz für die Beratungspraxis. In S. Rietmann & M. Sawatzki (Eds.), *Zukunft der Beratung. Soziale Arbeit als Wohlfahrtsproduktion* (Vol. 11, pp. 193–210). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-18009-6_12

Auernheimer, G. (2013). Interkulturelle Kommunikation, mehrdimensional betrachtet, mit Konsequenzen für das Verständnis von interkultureller Kompetenz. In G. Auernheimer (Ed.), *Interkulturelle Kompetenz und pädagogische Professionalität* (4th ed., pp. 37–70). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19930-6_3

Baldassare, M., & Feller, S. (2009). Cultural variations in personal space: Theory, methods, and evidence. *Ethos, 3*(4), 481–503. https://doi.org/10.1525/eth.1975.3.4.02a00020

Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10*(2), 179–196. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2

Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 46*(1), 5–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x

Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*(6), 697–712. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013

Beugelsdijk, S., Ambos, B., & Nell, P. C. (2018). Conceptualizing and measuring distance in international business research: Recurring questions and best practice guidelines. *Journal of International Business Studies, 49*(9), 1113–1137. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-018-0182-4

Bogner, A., Littig, B., & Menz, W. (2014). *Interviews mit Experten. Eine praxisorientierte Einführung*(1st ed.). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19416-5

Bourhis, R. Y., Moïse, L. C., Perreault, S., & Senécal, S. (1997). Towards an interactive acculturation model: A social psychological approach. *International Journal of Psychology, 32*(6), 369–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/002075997400629

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.

Bujard, M., Diehl, C., Kreyenfeld, M., & Spieß, C. K. (2019). *Familien mit Fluchthintergrund: Aktuelle Fakten zu Familienstruktur, Arbeitsmarktbeteiligung und Wohlbefinden*. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend.

Bunn, M., Zolman, N., Smith, C. P., Khanna, D., Hanneke, R., Betancourt, T. S., & Weine, S. (2022). Family-based mental health interventions for refugees across the migration continuum: A systematic review. *SSM - Mental Health, 2*, 100153. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmmh.2022.100153

Burgoon, J. K., & Hale, J. L. (1988). Nonverbal expectancy violations: Model elaboration and application to immediacy behaviors. *Communication Monographs, 55*(1), 58–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758809376158

Calman, L., Brunton, L., & Molassiotis, A. (2013). Developing longitudinal qualitative designs: Lessons learned and recommendations for health services research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 13*(14), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-13-14

Cambridge, P., & Williams, L. (2004). Approaches to advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers: A development case study for a local support and advice service. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 17*(1), 97–113. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/17.1.97

Campbell, J. L., Quincy, C., Osserman, J., & Pedersen, O. K. (2013). Coding in-depth semistructured interviews: Problems of unitization and intercoder reliability and agreement. *Sociological Methods & Research, 42*(3), 294–320. https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124113500475

Caplan, G. (1964). *Principles of preventive psychiatry*. Basic Books.

Cardon, P. (2008). A critique of Hall's contexting model: A meta-analysis of literature on intercultural business and technical communication. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 22*(4), 399–428. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651908320361

Chua, E. G., & Gudykunst, W. B. (1987). Conflict resolution style in low- and high-context cultures. *Communication Research Reports, 4*(1), 32–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824098709359842

Coupland, J., & Coupland, N. (1991). *Contexts of accommodation: Developments in applied sociolinguistics*. Cambridge University Press.

Croucher, S. M., Bruno, F., & Weisshaar, K. (2012). Conflict styles and high-low context cultures: A cross-cultural extension. *Communication Research Reports, 29*(1), 64–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2011.640093

De Haas, H., Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (2020). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world* (6th ed.). Red Globe Press.

D'Iribarne, P. (2009). National cultures and organisations in search of a theory. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Management, 9*(3), 309–321. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595809346601

Eickhorst, A., Schreier, A., Brand, C., Lang, K., Liel, C., Renner, I., Neumann, A., & Sann, A. (2016). Inanspruchnahme von Angeboten der Frühen Hilfen und darüber hinaus durch psychosozial belastete Eltern. *Bundesgesundheitsblatt - Gesundheitsforschung - Gesundheitsschutz, 59*(10), 1271–1280. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00103-016-2422-8

Fairclough, N. (2013). *The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
Fantini, A. E. (2020). Reconceptualizing intercultural communicative competence: A multinational perspective. In D. K. Deardorff & H. L. Arasaratnam-Smith (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of intercultural communication* (pp. 139–152). Routledge.
Fischer, V. (2019). Leitlinien einer diversitätsbewussten Familienbildung im Kontext von Migration. Zur wissenschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mit migrationsbedingter Vielfalt in der Familienbildung. In T. Geisen, C. Iller, S. Kleint, & F. Schirrmacher (Eds.), *Familienbildung in der Migrationsgesellschaft: Interdisziplinäre Praxisforschung* (Vol. 4, pp. 33–52). Waxmann.
Gallegos Torres, K. (2022). The 2015 refugee inflow and concerns over immigration. *European Journal of Political Economy, 75*, 102323. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2022.102323
Gerhart, B., & Fang, M. (2005). National culture and human resource management: Assumptions and evidence. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 16*(6), 971–986. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190500120772
Gesthuizen, M., Savelkoul, M., & Scheepers, P. (2021). Patterns of exclusion of ethno-religious minorities: The ethno-religious hierarchy across European countries and social categories within these countries. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 82*, 12–24. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.03.001
Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1998). *Grounded Theory. Strategien qualitativer Forschung* (1st ed.). Huber.
Gudykunst, W. B. (2005). *Theorizing about intercultural communication*. SAGE Publications.
Gullahorn, J. T., & Gullahorn, J. E. (1963). An extension of the U-curve hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues, 19*(3), 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1963.tb00447.x
Hall, E. T. (1959). *The silent language*. Doubleday.
Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. Doubleday.
Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Anchor Books.
Heckmann, F. (2015). *Integration von Migranten. Einwanderung und neue Nationenbildung*. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-06980-3_2
Helfferich, C. (2014). Leitfaden- und Experteninterviews. In N. Baur & J. Blasius (Eds.), *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung* (pp. 559–574). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-18939-0_39
Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. SAGE Publications.
Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. McGraw-Hill.
Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
Holland, J., Thomson, R., & Henderson, S. (2006). *Qualitative longitudinal research: A discussion paper*. London South Bank University.
International Organization for Migration. (2023). *World Migration Report 2023*.
Kaiser, R. (2014). *Qualitative Experteninterviews. Konzeptionelle Grundlagen und praktische Durchführung*. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-02479-6
Kane, G. A., Wood, V. A., & Barlow, J. (2007). Parenting programmes: A systematic review and synthesis of qualitative research. *Child: Care, Health and Development, 33*(6), 784–793. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2007.00750.x
Kim, D. H., Pan, Y., & Park, H. S. (1998). High-versus low-context culture: A comparison of Chinese, Korean, and American cultures. *Psychology and Marketing, 15*(6), 507–521. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6793(199809)15:6<507::AID-MAR2>3.0.CO;2-A
Kim, Y. Y. (1988). *Communication and cross-cultural adaptation: An integrative theory*. Multilingual Matters.
Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233253
Kincaid, D. L. (1979). *The convergence model of communication* (East-West Communication Institute Paper No. 18). East-West Center.
Kohlenberger, J. (2022). *Das Fluchtparadox. Über unseren widersprüchlichen Umgang mit Vertreibung und Vertriebenen*. Kremayr & Scheriau.
Kosyakova, Y., & Kulic, N. (2022). Kinship, inter- and intraethnic social networks, and refugees' division of housework. *Journal of Family Research, 34*(2), 802–822. https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-783
Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
Lareau, A. (2021). *Listening to people: A practical guide to interviewing, participant observation, data analysis, and writing it all up*. University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226806600.001.0001
Lüken-Klaßen, D. & Baumtrog, A. (2023). Social inclusion of refugees via family centres? A qualitative longitudinal research study on challenges in social work. *European Social Work Research, 1*(2), 147-164. https://doi.org/10.1332/TPDJ2051
Lüken-Klaßen, D., & Heckmann, F. (2010). *Intercultural Policies in European Cities*. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). https://www.coe.int/t/democracy/migration/source/migration/congress_public_1.pdf
Lüken-Klaßen, D., & Neumann, R. (2019). Familienbildung mit Geflüchteten. Barrieren erkennen und überwinden. In T. Geisen, C. Iller, K. Steffen, & Freimut (Eds.), *Familienbildung in der Migrationsgesellschaft. Interdisziplinäre Praxisforschung* (Vol. 4, pp. 191–204). Münster: Waxmann. https://elibrary.utb.de/doi/book/10.31244/9783830986881
Manusov, V., & Patterson, M. L. (Eds.). (2006). *The SAGE handbook of nonverbal communication*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412976152
Mayring, P. (2015). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken* (12th ed.). Beltz.
McSweeney, B. (2002). Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and their consequences: A triumph of faith, a failure of analysis. *Human Relations, 55*(1), 89–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726702551004
Mecheril, P. (2013). "Kompetenzlosigkeitskompetenz". Pädagogisches Handeln unter Einwanderungsbedingungen. In G. Auernheimer (Ed.), *Interkulturelle Kompetenz und pädagogische Professionalität* (4th ed., pp. 15–35). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19930-6_2
Miller, K. E., Koppenol-Gonzalez, G. V., Arnous, M., Tossyeh, F., Chen, A., Nahas, N., & Jordans, M. J. D. (2020). Supporting Syrian families displaced by armed conflict: A pilot randomized controlled trial of the Caregiver Support Intervention. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 106*, 104512. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104512

Munoz, R. F., Mrazek, P. J., & Haggarty, R. J. (1996). Institute of Medicine report on prevention of mental disorders. *American Psychologist, 51*(11), 1116–1122. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.51.11.1116

Neale, B. (2020). *Qualitative longitudinal research*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Neuliep, J. W. (2016). *Intercultural communication: A contextual approach* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology, 7*(4), 177–182. https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405

Oyserman, D., & Lee, S. W. S. (2007). Priming "culture": Culture as situated cognition. In S. Kitayama & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural psychology* (pp. 255–284). Guilford Press.

Peng, R.-Z., & Wu, W.-P. (2019). Measuring communication patterns and intercultural transformation of international students in cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 70*, 78–88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.03.004

Ponguta, L. A., Issa, G., Aoudeh, L., Maalouf, C., Hein, S. D., Zonderman, A. L., Katsovich, L., Khoshnood, K., Bick, J., Awar, A., Nourallah, S., Householder, S., Moore, C. C., Salah, R., Britto, P. R., & Leckman, J. F. (2020). Effects of the Mother-Child Education Program on parenting stress and disciplinary practices among refugee and other marginalized communities in Lebanon: A pilot randomized controlled trial. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 59*(6), 727–738. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2019.12.010

Rädiker, S., & Kuckartz, U. (2019). *Analyse qualitativer Daten mit MAXQDA. Text, Audio, und Video*. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-22095-2

Redmond, M. V. (1985). The relationship between perceived communication competence and perceived empathy. *Communication Monographs, 52*(4), 377–382. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758509376119

Reisenauer, E., & Lüring, K. (2022). Adressierungen von Migrationsfamilien in Elternmaterialien: Migration aus der Perspektive der Eltern- und Familienbildung. In M. Stock, N. Hodaie, S. Immerfall, & M. Menz (Eds.), *Arbeitstitel: Migrationsgesellschaft* (pp. 67–83). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-34087-2_4

Rupp, M., Mengel, M., & Smolka, A. (2010). *Handbuch zur Familienbildung im Rahmen der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in Bayern* (ifb-Materialien No. 07-2010). Staatsinstitut für Familienforschung an der Universität Bamberg.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Sam, D. L., & Berry, J. W. (2010). Acculturation: When individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds meet. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 5*(4), 472–481. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691610373075

Schneewind, K. A., & Berkič, J. (2007). Stärkung von Elternkompetenzen durch primäre Prävention: Eine Unze Prävention wiegt mehr als ein Pfund Therapie. *Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie, 56*(8), 643–659. https://doi.org/10.13109/prkk.2007.56.8.643

Smith, K. E., & Faig, K. E. (2014). The role of flexibility in personal space preferences. *The Journal of Neuroscience, 34*(31), 10135–10136. https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.1997-14.2014

Sobočan, A. M., Bertotti, T., & Strom-Gottfried, K. (2019). Ethical considerations in social work research. *European Journal of Social Work, 22*(5), 805–818. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1544117

Sundstrom, E., & Altman, I. (1976). Interpersonal relationships and personal space: Research review and theoretical model. *Human Ecology, 4*(1), 47–67. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01531456

Sussman, N. M., & Rosenfeld, H. M. (1982). Influence of culture, language, and sex on conversational distance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 42*(1), 66–74. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.42.1.66

Swami, V., Arteche, A., Chamorro-Premuzic, T., Furnham, A., & Stieger, S. (2010). Sociocultural adjustment among sojourning Malaysian students in Britain: A replication and path analytic extension. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 45*(1), 57–65. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-009-0042-4

Thiessen, B., & Michels, I. (2008). *Wie erreicht Familienbildung und -beratung muslimische Familien? Eine Handreichung*. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend.

Ting-Toomey, S., Oetzel, J. G., Chew Sanchez, M. I., Wilcox, R., & Harris, R. (1991). Culture, face maintenance, and styles of handling interpersonal conflict: A study in five cultures. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 2*(3), 275–296. https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022784

Vertovec, S. (2023). *Superdiversity: Migration and social complexity*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203503577

Vogl, S., Zartler, U., Schmidt, E.-M., & Rieder, I. (2018). Developing an analytical framework for multiple perspectives, qualitative longitudinal interviews (MPQLI). *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 21*(2), 177–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2017.1345149

Weiss, M., Schmucker, M., & Lösel, F. (2015). Meta-Analyse zur Wirkung familienbezogener Präventionsmaßnahmen in Deutschland. *Zeitschrift für Klinische Psychologie und Psychotherapie, 44*(1), 27–44. https://doi.org/10.1026/1616-3443/a000298

Winiarska, A. (2017). *Qualitative longitudinal research: Application, potentials and challenges in the context of migration research* (CMR Working Papers No. 103/161). University of Warsaw, Centre of Migration Research.

Witzel, A. (2000). Das problemzentrierte Interview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 1*(1), Article 22.

About the Author(s).

Sarah Ali Mohamed is a political scientist and migration researcher with a research focus on the interrelationship between transformation processes, political and social challenges, socio-cultural dynamics, and interculturality in post-migrant societies.

Doris Lüken-Klaßen is a sociologist whose empirical research focuses on migration, integration, and family education. Her work involves investigating the relationship between familial, organizational, and societal transformations and how social cohesion can be promoted.