

1 The theoretical framework and relevant literature

"The population with a migration background differs significantly from those without a migration background" (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2008, p. 18). The German national social statistical report reached this conclusion by assessing, among other things, socio-economic characteristics and risks linked to low educational achievement. Student assessment studies for Germany such as PISA¹ 2003 and 2006 have denoted acute social disparities in formal education indicators, one of which is immigrant background (Esser, 2006; Walter, 2008). These student assessment studies, however, assess primarily mathematical and scientific literacy. The data currently available on political education of migrants is insufficient (Reiter & Wolf, 2006, p. 6). So far we lack empirically reliable comparisons of the political competency of student with and without migration background. Considering that almost a third of all children born in Germany in 2006 have foreign-born parents (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2008, p. 18), possible differences between these social groups become quite relevant for the teaching politics in school in the coming years.

As a dimension of competency, in-depth knowledge contributes to the acquirement of *civic literacy* (Weißeno, Goetzmann & Eck, 2008), which, in turn, is a pre-requisite for active participation in society, and thus signifies integration into that society. Does the political knowledge of students with and without foreign-born parents differ? This question cannot be answered at present. While there are numerous studies on political attitudes of young people (e.g. Gille & Krueger, 2002; Abold & Juhász, 2006), on their voting behavior (Schoen, 2006) and their interest in politics (Diehl, Urban & Esser 1998; Kroh, 2006; Westle, 2006), studies which assess their political knowledge are still rare. The International Civic Education studies, for example, examined the political knowledge of 14-year-olds in 27 countries. The second-to-last study in this series, in which Germany also partook, was completed in 1999; German students' political knowledge was gauged average (e.g. Torney-Purta, et al., 2001, p. 62; Oesterreich, 2002). In this study, for the first time, it was not factual knowledge that was assessed but rather conceptual knowledge; that is to say, "an adequate understanding political contexts" (Oesterreich, 2002, p. 34). The focus was placed on issues of democracy. In the 1999 study, the German ninth-graders demonstrated particular strengths in civic knowledge the areas of fundamental rights, elections and campaigning, and deficiencies in their knowledge of the representation of interests (*ibid.*, p. 53). The study differentiated its findings on the basis of gender, as well as the new and old German federal states; however, differences pertaining to immigrant background were not considered.

Other studies examining students' knowledge usually focus on factual knowledge (Rothe, 1993), considering the additional factors of just gender and age. Thus, there are, on the one hand, political science studies, which nevertheless rarely supply any valid results (Galston, 2001). Westle also tested factual knowledge, but simply as one area in conjunction with others and used only 13 items (Westle, 2006). On the other hand, there is a long tradition of assessment, particularly in the U.S. (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). The National Assessment of Educational Progress Test (NAEP) as well as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) have tested the competency of students at different grade levels on a fairly regular basis since the 1970s. The knowledge measured is differentiated in scales for *democracy and government structure* and *citizenship*. However, these assessment instruments

¹ The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

encompass questions dealing with specific facts (cf.: www.ecs.org/QnA). In addition, there are some older, large-scaled studies on the political knowledge of selected groups of pupils, for example, children in elementary schools (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Connell, 1971; Moore, Lare, & Wagner, 1985) as well as more recent, small-scaled studies for this same cohort (Berti & Andriolo, 2001; Götzmann, 2008). A handful of more elaborate studies can be found in which knowledge has been measured in conjunction with classroom-based interventions (Manzel, 2007; Eck & Weißeno, 2009), in addition to older pilot studies dealing with the design of test questions on conceptual knowledge (Massing & Schattschneider, 2005; Weißeno, 2005). In Germany, test booklets designed for the IEA study, which have been standardized many times over (Oesterreich, 2002), and the Naturalization Test (Institute for Quality Management in Education, Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen (IQB), 2009), a simple standardized to European Union of the TEESAEC study (Eck & Weisseno, 2009) are available to be used. They all provide useful starting points for the design of political knowledge tests. Only the evaluation research on naturalization test and the TEESAEC study have yet to collect data on the immigrant background. Although the importance of students' concepts for teaching and educational research has been repeatedly pointed out (e.g. Grammes & Wicke, 1991), is still generally and internationally holds true that:

»One particular area of research where civic education lags far behind science and math, for example, is in developing a body of work about students' prior knowledge of ideas and concepts important to citizenship. [...] To be effective, civic education programs have to be developed with some attention to the conceptions students already have of important civic ideas« (Chareka & Sears, 2006, S. 523).

Only a recent valid knowledge test can be used as a relevant comparative benchmark for varying study groups and issues. In order for the test described here to be able to draw conclusions about expertise as a dimension of competency, it must be able to evaluate conceptual knowledge. Conceptual knowledge is knowledge which has been abstracted from the tangible phenomena and is widely applicable; hence, teaching processes need to bear this knowledge in mind when considering both learning baselines (prior knowledge) and the learning progress (Detjen et al., 2009). The focus here is thus placed on the assimilated concepts (concepts) and their linkages (conceptual knowledge) (Byrnes & Wasik, 1991, p. 777; Rittle-Johnson, Siegler & Alibali, 2001). Consequently, the method of mapping can be considered a suitable form of testing. However, thus far only pilot studies on specific concepts have been carried out in the field of political learning (Richter, 2009). Consequently, we chose to use multiple choice responses for this case study on conceptual knowledge using a sufficient number of items for the statistical analysis. The wording of the questions for this knowledge test was oriented on the theoretical model of competence developed by Weißeno, Detjen, Juchler, Massing and Richter (2010). This theory of competency describes key ideas and specialized concepts as the maximum and minimum education standards for teaching politics.

2 Requirements of students' political knowledge

Regarding the test construction, factors of influence (predictors and criterion variables) are theoretically derived from the knowledge displayed. The objective is to investigate whether there are factors with which it is possible to predict, to what extent the student possess conceptual knowledge. Suggestions can be found scattered throughout the literature discussed above. International studies on political knowledge show correlations between gender, socio-economic and place of origin (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). In addition, interests, expectations, and many others, influence the subjective requirements for successful learning (Stern, 2004). The latter factors,

however, require extensive surveys of their own; for that reason, we will focus in this study on gender, cultural capital, place of origin and languages spoken at home.

Generally, in the empirical studies in the field of educational research gender differences in performance are often indicated, although they can even vary in different content areas of any particular school subject (Johnson, 1996). In Germany, it has been repeatedly determined that women are less interested in politics (among others, cf. Westle, 2006), and also participate less often in politics than men; although, these numbers do change significantly when the fields of politics and the forms of participation are varied (Geißel & Penrose, 2003). Reasons for the differing forms of participation have been perceived in institutional and socio-economic factors as well as in political culture and socialization (Westle & Schoen 2002). These factors, according to a rather controversial explanation, appear to have led to a different understanding of politics (Uehlinger, 1988, p. 165; Gabriel, 1997, p. 472). It is hence uncertain, whether women and men truly possess quantitatively and qualitatively different political knowledge. Since studies on in-depth political knowledge at the elementary school level so far have disclosed no such correlations to gender, it is possible that age plays the more relevant role and that gender differences change in the course of the school attendance. Furthermore, differences in political knowledge appear to be dependent on cultural background (Stanat & Bergann, 2009; Blossfeld et al., 2009).

Correlations between attributes of socio-economic status and school performance have been observed at length (e.g. Peisert, 1967). In recent years, international student assessment studies (PISA, PIRLS, IEA) have also shown that the socio-economic and cultural milieu influences the development of pupils' skills (Baumert & Maaz, 2006; Bonsen, Frey & Bos, 2008). A distinctive connection between social origin and subject knowledge has become evident particularly in Germany (OECD, 2004; Ehmke & Baumert, 2007), which can lead to a "cumulative preferential treatment or discrimination" depending on the composition of the student body in different classes (Baumert, Stanat & Waterman, 2006, p. 97). Therefore, the social origin must be examined individually as well as in the context of the class composition.

There are variables that have been introduced to depict social, economic and cultural capital; however, some of these require questioning parents and/or the school administration. In school performance studies, the question of the number of books at home serves as an indicator of cultural capital. This is based on Bourdieu's assumption that the cultural capital becomes visible in the form of capital goods, i.e. among other things through the number of books owned (Bourdieu, 1983), and --despite much criticism -- this has proven to be quite effective in these surveys (Rössl & Beckert Zieglschmid, 2002). The aforementioned studies indicate that the more books to be found at home, the better the performance of students in different subjects. Since the cultural capital often correlates to the socio-economic environment (Bonsen, Frey & Bos, 2008, p. 150), we have restricted our analysis in this survey to cultural capital.

Students with a "migrant background" are disadvantaged in the German education system (Ramm, Prenzel, Heidemeier & Walter, 2004). In international student assessment studies, it was established in Germany that students with foreign-born parents or grandparents demonstrate lower skills in math, science and reading than students without a migrant background (Baumert, Stanat & Waterman, 2006; Walter, 2008). However, these findings do vary, when the group with immigrant backgrounds is further differentiated. In large-scale comparative studies corresponding questions dealing with nationality, country of birth and language spoken have proven to work well. Consequently, by polling the birthplace of the parents, the migrants can be differentiated according to country of origin and immigration generation (Glick & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). In this study, the immigration status of students also will be determined by the parents' country of birth: differentiating between both parents being born in Germany, one parent born in Germany and the other foreign-born, and both parents foreign-born. Furthermore, the students' birthplace will be

polled. Although, the question as to whether the language spoken at home and the capability to speak German, which is often associated with that, represents an important factor linked to students' school performance is currently being discussed controversially (Diefenbach, 2007, p. 139ff; Hopf, 2005; Stanat & Christensen, 2006), it remains to be a potential factor of influence that must be checked. The students in this study were asked which language they speak at home: only German, German and another language, or only foreign language(s). In addition to this statement, two sections of a German language test were utilized (Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen: "Tiger Man" and "Job Application").

By combining the data on gender, cultural capital, migration status and languages spoken at home with the German language proficiency test, differences in the social worlds and socialization processes of the student will become evident (Wippermann & Flaig, 2009), and in the course of the analysis they can be compared and modeled. Finally, the class composition appears to play a role in the pupils' development of competency (Stanat, 2006), therefore all possible evaluations will be made at the individual and class levels. Like the international achievement tests, these knowledge assessments have been designed for the 9th grade, thus permitting the use of templates from other tests. In addition, we planned to implement the assessment test at *Realschulen* (secondary middle schools)², because this school form promised to offer a good average level of school performance and a sufficient number of students with an migrant background.

3 The POWIS Study Design

As a part of the project "Political Knowledge of Students (*Politisches Wissen von Schüler/-innen -- POWIS*)" data was collected on the knowledge of students' who have been taught in multi-ethnic learning groups. The survey was restricted to students in the 9th grade at secondary middle schools (*Realschulen*). The project was implemented in collaboration with the Technical University of Brunswick, the School of Education in Karlsruhe and the University of Dortmund and was funded by the Federal Agency for Civic Education.³

A standardized questionnaire was developed for the data collection. The questionnaire focused on three areas: social statistical data, political knowledge and language aptitude. The social statistical data encompassed age, gender, country of birth of the respondents as well as their fathers and mothers, the languages spoken at home and the numbers of books at home (excluding magazines, school textbooks, etc.).

The three key research questions were:

1. What knowledge do 9th graders at *Realschulen* have in the field of politics?
2. To what extent do the individual and class-specific learning environments influence students' performance?
3. What influence does the language proficiency have on students' political knowledge?

The structure of questionnaire was as followed:

² *Realschulen* in Germany encompass the 5th to 10th grades and finish with a secondary middle school diploma.

³ The authors would like to first thank the many students who participated in the survey. They also thank Holger Follmer, Patrick Krug, Katrin Hahn Laudenberg, Peter Massing and Monica Oberle for their support in framing the items. A special thanks also to Olaf Köller, and William Oliver for their valuable support. A large team of committed student research assistants ensured that the data collection was implemented quickly and successfully. The responsibility for possible errors in the data analysis will be assumed by School of Education in Karlsruhe.

- Introduction
- Gender, number of books, migration background
- Language proficiency test (filling in blanks)
- Civil rights, (content area: freedom, equality, human dignity, basic rights)
- Elections – (content area; elections)
- Parliamentary democracy – (content area: democracy)
- The relationship between national and state governments – (content area: government)
- (language) comprehension test

The middle-school students were presented with multiple-choice questions each with four options including the correct answer. The questions on political knowledge had a uniform format. They included items on the four different aspects of the German political system (modules) with varying levels of difficulty (political competence). Three questions were taken from the IEA survey. In three pretests preceding the survey, comprehensibility and solvability were evaluated. Students were given 25 minutes to answer the 43 questions.

Examples of the questions:

In a German newspaper, the president of another country was depicted in a cartoon as a potato. He was insulted by this and therefore demanded that the responsible person be punished. In Germany,

- The cartoonist would be punished with a jail sentence.
- The newspaper would have to pay a heavy fine.
- ✓ Neither the cartoonist nor the newspaper would be punished.
- The cartoonist would be suspended from work for two months.

Government leaders meet for an economic summit. A previously registered demonstration against the meeting can be broken up...

- ✓ if the protesters throw stones.
- if there is a traffic jam.
- if the government does not wish the demonstration.
- if neighbors complain about the noise.

In addition, two standardized tests on language proficiency provided by the Institute for Quality in Education (*Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen*, Humboldt-University Berlin) were implemented. The German language proficiency tests were used to establish as to whether the students' performance on the political knowledge assessments were dependent on their language proficiency. Tests with 20 questions with blanks to fill in and a reading comprehension test with 10 items for measuring linguistic skills were used.

In the spring of 2008, students from the three participating universities procured school officials and teachers in the three designated *Bundesländer* for collaboration. The students distributed letters from their respective universities which described the objectives, scope, content, the time needed (45 minutes) as well as the expected organizational effort for the survey. Approximately, half of the schools addressed were willing to participate and obtained the needed parental consents. 18 specially trained test administrators carried out the survey. They implemented the tests and were responsible for establishing a controlled test situation. The tests were carried out in strict accordance with the test administrator scripts, in which the exact time allowed to complete the two parts of the test was documented (25 minutes for the knowledge tests and 15 minutes for the language proficiency tests). The students completed a protocol for each test session, in which abnormalities or any unusual happenstance were documented.

In order to depict the competency level of secondary school education and avoid ceiling or baseline effects, tests were conducted in total in 82 *Realschule* classes. A total of 2028 students participated in the survey.

Table 1: Composition of sample according to location, schools, classes and students

	No. of Schools	No. of classes	No. of students	Per class
Braunschweig	11	30	696	23.2
Dortmund	12	33	890	26.9
Karlsruhe	7	19	442	23.2
Total	30	82	2029	

51.0% of the respondents were male and 49.0% female (for comparison: German population overall: 51.6% male/ 48.4% female). 68.4% of the respondents were native language learners and 31.6% second language learners (the percentage of second language learners in the German population overall: 29.7%). The relative percentage of pupils participating in the survey corresponds approximately to the relative percentage of the national average of middle-school students. In addition, other attributes such as languages spoken at home, the parents' country of birth and the cultural capital were determined.

4 Factor Analysis of Political Knowledge of Democracy

The primary aim of the following analysis is to create a rating scale, upon which the range of students' political knowledge can be positioned. It should be set in relation to language proficiency, since the particular focus of the survey, in addition to the creation of a test booklet, has been placed on the consideration of students with an immigrant background. The rating scale should fulfill certain quality requirements for reliability and validity. The scaling of items was based on the Rasch Model (Rasch, 1960), a strict probabilistic assessment model (item response theory). When designing the test questions, it was assumed that all questions measured political knowledge and were thus attributable to a common factor. Probabilistic measurement models distinguish between observable manifest variables and non-observable, so-called latent variables. Hence, the test performance is measured by evaluating the response patterns to all questions. Afterwards, the probability of a correct answer is dependent on the ability of the responding individual (person parameters) as well as on the difficulty of the question (item parameters). The solution probability is thus a function of item and person parameters.

While constructing test questions, it was basically assumed that all questions measured political knowledge, and so had a common denominator. However, this one-dimensionality of the scale must first be tested, because the volunteers' responses could be influenced by other factors such as attitudes or cultural background that interact with knowledge. A further stipulation of the scale is that the answers be independent of the relevant 'group association'. It is necessary to determine whether the students with language deficiencies cognitively comprehend and process certain German political issues differently than their classmates who have no such difficulties, and therefore, solely for this reason give a different response. Likewise, it is conceivable that differences between girls and boys could be the result of the different socialization in the political arena and in society. Consequently, the question as to whether these different groups actually have a uniform cognitive perception of the test items must be answered before the various test results can be looked at more closely.

In order to test the assumption of one-dimensionality, in which all items have a common denominator, the data was calculated using the 2.0 statistical program ConQuest (Wu, Adams, Wilson & Haldane, 2007), a general factor model. The general factor is calculated in that it explains the correlation between the items explored as completely as possible. This is done by using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The person parameters were determined using (Warm's) weighted maximum likelihood estimates (WLE). Infit values (standardized mean square) are established for each item, which indicate how much an item function deviates in its real course from the model's predicted course. An infit of 1.15 was set as the cut-off. Items that exceed this value were excluded. In this case, there was only one test item that exceeded the above mentioned cutoff value.

The second assumption that the measurement model is not dependent on the groups was examined using differential item functions. The parameters for young boys and girls as well as for adolescents with above-average and below-average language proficiency were calculated and evaluated separately in order to determine whether there was a significant interaction effect between group association and test parameters. More specifically, we tried to determine, for example, whether the probability that a boy and a girl with the comparable personal skills would answer a particular question correctly was equivalent. If this is not the case, the question does not satisfy the quality criterion. One item was excluded because the item parameters gap between the groups was more than 20 percent of a standard deviation.

Table 2: Quality of model data fit for subject-based test performance from the cognitive perspective

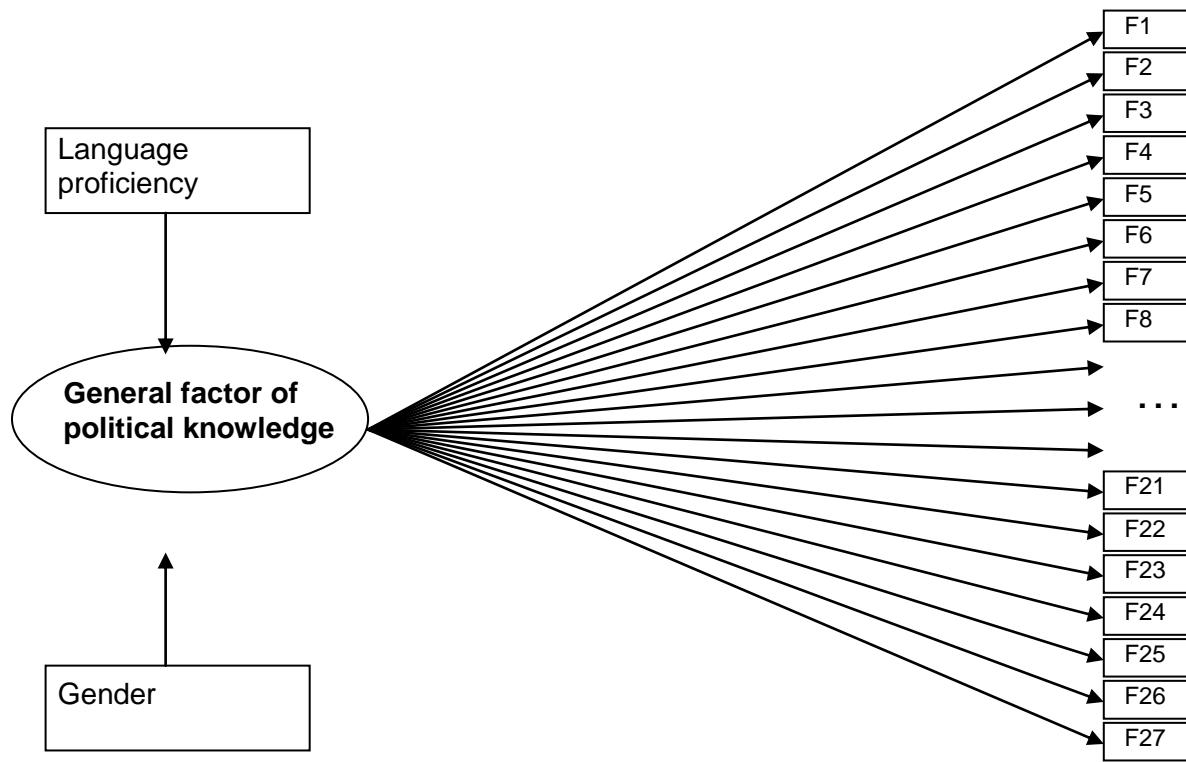
One-dimensional model

Final deviance:	64255.16809
df :	26
WLE reliability:	.740

Initially, adolescents whose scores in both German language proficiency tasks were above-average were compared with those with below-average scores. There were considerable differences between these two groups in item parameters in regard to many questions about political knowledge. This suggests that pupils with low or no language proficiency cognized some items in a different way. Conversely, the comparison of boys and girls only showed significant discrepancies in a small number of questions. A total of 17 questions had to be excluded, in order to use a measurement model consisting of 27 questions (Cronbach's- α = .7613). The default cases incorporated ambiguous linguistic expressions.

In the final measurement model, a general factor with 27 indicators was created, which also took language proficiency and gender as binary-coded background variables into account. The model only contains the most important effects of background variables. It encompasses an adequate number of items to determine the students' proficiency. Interactions between these variables (e.g., the effect of young men with below-average language proficiency) had no effect on the general factor. The corresponding competitive model showed a larger value of deviance but did not differ otherwise significantly from the model used here. The test booklet was designed to fulfill psychometric criterion-related validity. A single ability factor determines the pattern of answers. Thus, students' knowledge designates certain aspects by its cognitive specifications.

Figure 1: Measurement Model with Background Variables



In order to assess the content validity of the political knowledge test an expert review was conducted. The questions were intended be curriculum-sensitive, and so they could be reproduced in all German *Bundesländer*. For this reason, the test questions were submitted to 16 experts to be assessed as to their curricular validity. Two appraisals were requested for each question:

4. The percentage of respondents who solved the question correctly. The average deviation of the expert assessment from the actual proportion of correct answers is nine (9) percentage points.
5. The importance of the question for basic civic education at the end of the 10th grade: The experts maintained that 72% of the questions were important or even very important for basic civic education at the end of the 10th grade.

Due to this high level of compliance, the curricular validity of the test can be considered confirmed. The questions apply to scholastic content. In short, we succeeded in developing a theory-based and empirically viable compilation of students' political competency.

5 Empirical Analysis

In the previous section, we discussed our findings on the psychometric quality of the chosen items and their content validity. We succeeded in producing an item pool of 27 items with good model fit. Measurement model describes the internal structure of a question set. In the following section, the results of the analysis will be discussed. In this process, the emphasis will be placed on the analysis of the task difficulty and the calculation of regression models.

First of all, the task difficulty was determined. In order to do this, using the WLE estimates each person was assigned a certain scale value which describes political knowledge. The scale has been adjusted by means of standardization so that it has a mean of 500 points and a standard deviation of 200 data points. The test results have approximately a normal distribution.

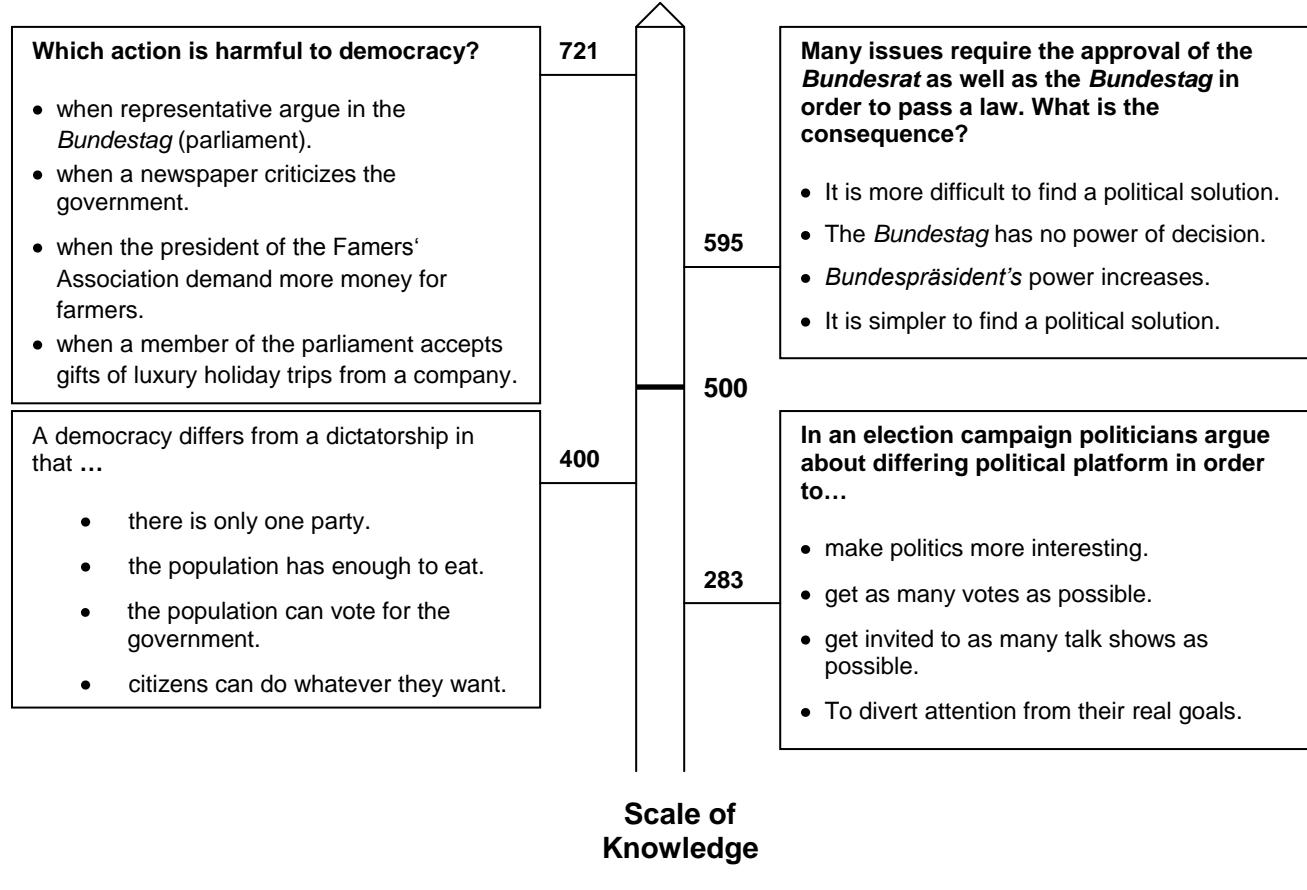
Table 3 demonstrates with selected examples of questions their placement according to varying difficulty. A task difficulty of 500 means that people with a proficiency of 500, can solve this particular task with a probability of $p = .50$. The item difficulty within the measurement model also represents the minimum score that a person must have in order to provide the correct answer. The scale values indicate which capability a person must at least have in order to answer a question correctly with more than 60% probability.

Table 3: Histogram of the Scale Readings

Item	Skalenpunkte
Harbor Street	705
Reporter (IEA)	130
Discrimination (IEA)	303
Violation of Freedom (IEA)	556
Police Law	077
Mosque	380
City Council	253
Electoral functions	649
Election platforms	283
Federal parliamentary elections (<i>Bundestag</i>)	533
Electoral district candidate	750
Imperative mandate	511
Early ballot	890
Two votes	451
Campaign objective	308
The main task of the parliament	420
Threat to democracy	721
Characteristics of a dictatorship	400
Concept of democracy	423
State access to internet	592
Undemocratic country	428
Federalism	637
Cultural sovereignty (of countries)	594
Members of the <i>Bundesrat</i>	837
competing legislature	595
Bicycle paths	504
Police powers	570

The mean values of the three locations were compared; Karlsruhe achieved 523 points, Brunswick 499 and Dortmund 490 points. The difference between Karlsruhe and Dortmund is slightly significant. It should be noted, however, that conclusions cannot be made on the basis of this data in regards to the respective *Bundeslaender*, and that the schools and classes in these cities were not selected randomly.

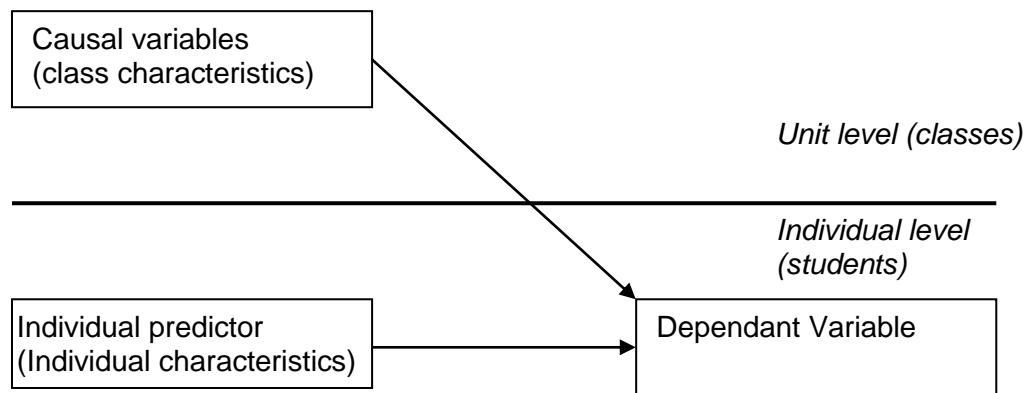
Figure 3: Scale of Item Difficulty Using Four Sample Questions



In the following analysis, we asked, to what extent the variables compiled in the questionnaire contribute to an explanation of the political knowledge. We used the HLM6 statistic software program (Raudenbusch, Byrk, Cheong, Congdon & du Toit, 2004) to calculate hierarchical regression models which allowed us to determine the influence of several independent variables at various hierarchical levels. Multi-level analyses do not assume that a sample is made up of independent individuals, but also take aggregate units into account. In this case, the knowledge test was conducted in different classes. An individual can thus be regarded as part of a class. Certain conceivable factors of influence are located at the class level (e.g. teacher's characteristics, instruction, class composition). Simple linear models can therefore lead to distortions in the assessment of individual student's performance.

In calculating the models, all variables were standardized using z-scores and centered on the grand mean. This central moment was chosen due to certain interesting contextual effects; that is, the question as to whether the class composition (context) would continue to cultivate its own effect, even if students' personal characteristics were controlled (Lüdtke et al., 2009). At the class level, individual knowledge, for example, could be influenced by the native German language as well as by the percentage of those for whom German is their second language.

Figure 4: Classes and individual characteristics



Factors influencing aspects of knowledge at the individual level include:

- Gender
- Cultural capital of the parents measured in terms of the number of books at home (PISA 2006)
- Parents' country of origin: both born in Germany, one parent foreign-born, both born foreign-born.
- Language (s) spoken at home: Turkish, Italian, Eastern European language, other language
- German language test ("Tiger Man" and "Application" designed by *the Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen*): determined by means of two metric scales as well as by means of two binary variables: "in both German language proficiency tasks below-average" versus in both "above-average".

Factors influencing aspects of knowledge at the class level:

- Class size
- Aggregate individual-level variable centered around the grand average;
- Gender percentages;
- Number of books
- Parents' country of origin
- Languages spoken at home

Before the regression models can be estimated, it must be checked as to whether the indicators of the variables used correspond to certain quality criteria. Table 4 shows the intra-class correlation coefficient ICC (1), whose portion of the total variance is to be found at the class level. The intra-class correlation coefficient differs greatly between the variables; however, overall it can be assessed as low. The ICC (2) indicates the reliability of class-level mean values and should attain at least .70 (Lüdtke et al., 2009). Some of the binary-coded variables do not reach this threshold value. However, since these variables belong to a set of categories, it does not make any sense to exclude them from the model without excluding the whole set.

Table 4: Results of the Variance Analysis

	Intra-class correlation coefficient ICC (1)	Reliability of Class Level ICC(2)
Gender	.057	.597
Parents' country of origin		
- One parent is foreign-born	.031	.441
- Both parents are foreign-born	.102	.738
Languages spoken at home		
- Turkish	.077	.673
- Italian	.242	.888
- East European language	.084	.694
- Other languages	.056	.596
Language proficiency in German		
- in both tests above-average	.182	.847
- in both tests below-average	.187	.851
Number of Books at home	.160	.825

Table 5: Results of the Regression Analysis at the Individual und Class Levels

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Individual Level (n = 2028)				
Constant	504.06	504.00	504.82	504.00
Gender: female	-4.33	-3.88	-10.68*	-10.35*
Parents' country of origin (reference category: both Germany)				
- One parent foreign-born	-12.64**	-7.02	-6.08	-5.56
- Both parents foreign-born	-34.43***	-21.11**	-16.69*	-13.94*
Languages spoken at home (reference category: only German)				
- Turkish		-15.59**	-13.25**	-12.55**
- Italian		-17.34***	-15.37***	-12.05***
- East European language		-7.85	-5.74	-4.62
- Other languages		-4.39	-2.48	-2.06
Language proficiency in German				
- in both tests above-average			38.53***	38.23***
- in both tests below-average			-24.40***	-21.88***
Number of Books at home				29.22***
Class Level (n = 82)				
Class Size	-4.17*	-3.51	-5.85*	-1.63
Gender: female	95.77**	93.64*	42.62	23.77
Parents' country of origin (reference category: both Germany)				
- One parent foreign-born	-57.89	-0.94	26.91	45.87
- Both parents foreign-born	-103.47**	59.20	84.30	151.20**
Languages spoken at home (reference category: only German)				
- Turkish		-139.42*	-94.97*	-95.78*
- Italian		-47.40*	-27.86	-41.03*
- East European language		-108.88	-91.30	-108.66*
- Other languages		-64.78	-89.82*	-104.53**
Language proficiency in German				
- in both tests above-average			1.48	-12.35
- in both tests below-average			-75.55**	-50.17*
Number of Books at home				92.39***
ICC	0.178	0.168	0.121	0.077
Pseudo-R ² (Snijders & Bosker. 1999)	0.109	0.115	0.226	0.282

Model 1

In the following hierarchical regression models, independent variables are added to the model by stages. Model 1 contains only gender and the parents' country of origin at both hierarchical levels; at the class level class size was also taken into account. The test scores of the ninth grade students with at least one foreign-born parent are significantly lower than their peers, whose parents were both born in Germany. If both parents were foreign-born, the difference is nearly three times as great. In addition, the parents' country of origin also appears to have a negative effect at the class level: students in classes with an above-average percentage of foreign-born parents show lower test scores. An above-average class size also appears to have a weak negative effect on test performance. Interesting enough, students in classes with a particularly high percentage of girls seem to have a slight advantage over other class constellations. However, at the individual level, gender has no significant influence on test performance: the test scores of the girls and boys were similar.

Model 2

In regression model 2, the languages spoken at home were included in the regression model; the possibilities encompassed Turkish, Italian, Eastern European languages and others. The variables combine households, in which either in addition to German another relevant native language is spoken, or in which a non-German native language is used exclusively. (A combination of the different linguistic categories was not found in the control sample.) The regression analysis of the Model 2 reveals a weakening of the effect of parental country of origin at both levels, while at the same time show a significant influence of the language variables. Only at the individual level, does the variable "both parents foreign-born," retain a certain effect. Consequently, the "language(s) spoken at home" are significantly more relevant to knowledge test performance than the "parents' country of origin". Students who speak Turkish or Italian at home have a disadvantage in the test, even after cognitively difficult tasks were excluded from the measurement scale. This does not apply to students who speak an Eastern European language however. While controlling the individual effects, contextual effects were also found at the class level: students in classes with an above-average number of Italian or Turkish-speaking members attain a slightly lower test score overall, regardless what their own native language is. On the other hand, Eastern European languages as well as those languages falling under the category "other languages" have no significant effect on test scores.

Model 3

The regression model 3 includes two binary-coded variables that deal with the students' German language proficiency performance. They examine individuals who have achieved either above-average or below-average scores in both of the German language proficiency tests. The objective is to clarify whether the discrimination of students who speak a foreign language reflected in the regression model 2 is caused by low language proficiency in general, which could be found among German students as well. The results, however, point in a different direction: general language proficiency in German has a strong positive effect on performance in the knowledge test; the lower language proficiency showed a corresponding negative effect, even though many questions with in a misleading semantics were sorted out beforehand. Even when controlling language proficiency, Turkish and Italian-speaking teenagers did not perform as well as other students tested.

In addition, the influence of gender becomes slightly significant in the models 3 and 4, when controlling German language proficiency. If the language proficiency is held constant, boys on the average achieve slightly better scores in the knowledge test than girls. This can be seen as an indication that girls are possibly able to compensate a slight disadvantage in political knowledge through better language proficiency. At the class level, the influence of second-language weakens. This can be seen as an indication of a greater negative effect of a general low language proficiency in

the classroom: A person who attends a class with below average language proficiency will be at an disadvantage in the political knowledge test when competing against others with the same language proficiency.

Model 4

In a final step, the number of books in the household, which serves as a proxy for parents' cultural capital, was also taken into account in regression model 4. This variable is a key determinant in the explanation of political knowledge. The more books that parents have at home, the better score children perform in the knowledge test. Students not only profit from their own parents in this regard, but also from the class composition: The performance a single person will be affected positively, if a particularly large number of parents in the class own a large number of books, regardless how many books are to be found in their particular home. The influence of the second languages Turkish and Italian continues to be significant at both levels. This is possibly indicates that the discrimination of second language students is due, in part, to the - in Germany - less "utilizable" cultural capital of the parents.

The ICC determines in this case the portion of total variance at the class level. The more variables that are inserted into the model, the smaller it will be. Generalized coefficient of determination R^2 serves as a substitute for the standard measure for the particular proportion of the variation explained by the model. It is calculated by comparing the errors of an unconstrained "null model" containing only one constant with the errors the analysis model.

6. Discussion of Results

Considering the on-going debate about educational standards for core subjects and the natural sciences as well as the increased emphasis being placed on achieved competency levels, the studies concerning political competency have drawn the attention of experts in the field of civic education. Thus far, there is little information to be found about the political knowledge learned at school. The state ministries of education are not continuing the IEA Civic Education studies in Germany. The test booklets of the naturalization tests, created by the IQB, are designed for adults and target a lower level of the civic literacy (basic political education) and language proficiency. Nevertheless, the interpretation of these large-scaled studies' results should also be taken in account. This is particularly true for the evaluation research on the school classes carried out by the IQB (cf. William, Hülür, Köller & Radalewski 2010).

This study represents only a minor contribution to research on political competency in the field of knowledge learning. The knowledge test, verified as reliable and valid in certain areas, shows the mean performance level of 9th grade students. Overall the evaluation of the POWIS study gives evidence of a positive trend. On the average, the students have acquired the knowledge that is taught in the classroom. However, since there was no control group, it must be pointed out that the knowledge tested could also have been acquired through the media or at home though the parents. Even though no assertions can be made about knowledge gained through class instruction in politics nor a comparison of grade levels and school types, it can be noted that this 'snapshot' does show substantial school knowledge of politics that would not most likely be conveyed in this form through the media. The politics test covers a broad spectrum of questions about various specialized concepts discussed above, which were first verified empirically. This is where replication studies could begin their investigations.

In both areas of performance where data was collected, the results reflect findings already established in large-scaled surveys in other fields of study. In this study, gender had no major effect on the political knowledge at the individual level. Teenager girls and boys have on an average close

to the same amount of political knowledge. The girls', only negligible significant, lesser amount of knowledge found in two of the four regression models is not reliably interpretable. In principle, this also applies to the effect at the class level, even though there are possible implications of a positive influence to be found in classes of only girls, which however must be tested further. Due to the limited data available in this study, this particular aspect needs to be investigated in more detail with appropriate research questions. The findings on the influence of gender are inconsistent in other fields of study as well; sometimes boys appear to have an advantage, other times the girls. Thus, some educational researchers question whether gender even has an effect on the state of knowledge.

It was not possible to assess the effect of small class size on the state of knowledge in this study. The PISA studies also came to the same conclusions. In any case, class size does not necessarily influence the amount of students' knowledge. The performance level, however, is influenced by the class composition. Here, it would be important to compensate for the varying levels of language proficiency. In addition, a large number of second language learners in a class is not conducive to acquiring knowledge. The training programs to support children with German as a second language that can be found in some areas do not seem to help much.

The assumption expressed by Baumert & Schümer (2001) that language deficits affect test performance in school subjects cumulatively appears to be verified for politics instruction. First of all, poor language skills help explain the existing performance gap. This may have to do with the linguistic characteristics of communication in German as the common language at school. Good or poor German language skills have a corresponding effect in school performance which calls for early intervention in the schools and also supportive measures from the politics teacher. This applies to students with and without immigrant background alike. Writing and reading skills are important for instruction in politics. Politics are communicated through language and require corresponding comprehension skills.

Second language learners seem to accumulate these effects in a different way. In particular, students from Turkish and Italian-speaking families scored lower on the test than students from families that speak an Eastern European language at home. This also reflects the findings of other studies. However, this study is unable to make any assertions as to what exactly these particular obstacles for political competency consist of. More than the verification of these deficiencies is not to be deduced from our findings. Possible influencing factors could be the parental participation in the children's' education, school factors, cultural influences as well as other influences such self-concept, motivation, interest in politics etc. In order to assess these factors, however, a much more extensive testing is needed, or many more detailed case studies. The TEESAC study on knowledge about the European Union did not confirm the influence of languages spoken at home; it only called attention to a negative effect of parents of Turkish origin. However, there was no indication of migration background having an influence on the increase in knowledge on European Union. On the other hand, studies carried out in other fields of study did determine negative effects of Turkish or Italian immigrant background. In the PISA studies, the reading performance of students with and without foreign-born parents did not differ. These numerous, and partially contradictory findings do not give us a single cohesive picture of the relationship between language proficiency and competency development in different fields of study.

The influence of the cultural capital of the parental home is also very high at all levels in the study. School performance is influenced by (parental) level of education. The large-scale assessment studies also validate these findings. It appears that influence of homes with less cultural capital cannot be compensated for in politics class.

Conclusion: The results of this study suggest a need for action. Successful learning in politics courses in school also depends on the general learning conditions. This could be the class composition; however, there are substantial differences between individual classes. In this study factual knowledge was not investigated, but rather the competency in sense of a basic political education. On average, the study showed positive results in regard to the students' existing political expertise. This may be an indication that the politics courses in school succeed in influencing individual knowledge base. Although this study examined only very few background variables, it is clear that the politics courses in school must pay more attention to language proficiency and keep a particular eye on students with foreign-born parents from Turkey or Italy. These results are not satisfactory. We can only guess about the causes of these differences. The influence of political education should be a factor, although the directions of action courses at school may be one factor, even though the direction of influence as well as the correlations with other variables must be analyzed in subsequent studies.

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