

Ambivalent Recognition in Higher Education: Institutional Gatekeeping and Epistemic Justice in Higher Education in Migration Societies

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Abstract

Universities in *Western-European* migration societies are increasingly challenged to address historical and structural forms of inequality, colonial continuities, and institutional discrimination. While higher education institutions promote diversity and internationalization in their strategic rhetoric, minoritized students and international scholars—particularly Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and scholars with foreign qualifications—continue to face systemic barriers, administrative gatekeeping, and symbolic devaluation. This conceptual paper examines the ambivalences of recognition and empowerment within higher education. “Using the Bachelor’s program ‘Pedagogy and Social Work in the Migration Society’ (PHM) at Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg as an illustrative institutional case, we develop a conceptual analysis of how competency-based recognition practices can challenge deficit-oriented approaches to foreign qualifications.” We argue that institutional recognition is inherently ambivalent: while it can enable academic and professional access, it may simultaneously reproduce nationally coded and Eurocentric hierarchies of legitimate knowledge. Furthermore, we outline a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) framework as a transformative epistemological intervention to deconstruct power asymmetries and foster collective agency. We conclude with multi-level policy and structural recommendations for higher education transformation.

1 Introduction

Universities are institutions where racist discriminatory practices take place in everyday processes of interaction and where the continuities of *Western* colonial-racist histories remain insufficiently addressed (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Antirassismus, 2023, p. 55; Heitzmann & Houda, 2020). As traditional centers of knowledge production, higher education institutions continue to function as predominantly “white spaces”—spaces where foundational concepts of racial hierarchy were historically articulated by scholars such as Blumenbach, Meiners, and Kant (Kelly, 2021) and where structural power dynamics persist (Laufenberg, 2016). For Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), entering the university often means navigating what Ahmed (2012) conceptualizes as a “sea of whiteness”. Institutional racism was integral to the emergence of the modern Western university in the 19th century and continues to shape contemporary academic structures (Laufenberg, 2016).

This Conceptual Paper addresses the central research question: How do recognition practices in higher education simultaneously enable access and reproduce structural and epistemic inequalities for minoritized students and scholars with foreign qualifications? By positioning this inquiry within the international state of research, this manuscript clearly formulates the argument that administrative recognition frameworks must move beyond deficit-oriented national containers to embrace relational and participatory epistemologies.

In the context of European migration societies, structural imbalances are clearly mirrored in higher education attainment rates (Auernheimer, 2013). Empirical evidence from Germany highlights persistent disparities tied to socio-economic background, citizenship status, and ‘migration background’[1]. Using

the contested German statistical category of 'migration background', existing studies indicate students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with a 'migration background' remain significantly underrepresented in higher education (Middendorff et al., 2017). Furthermore, students with a 'migration background' are statistically less likely to transition into Master's degree programs compared to their peers without a 'migration background' (Lörz et al., 2019).

These disparities are particularly pronounced regarding university retention and completion rates among international students and non-nationals. Similarly, *students who obtained their higher education entrance qualification outside Germany, administratively categorized in Germany as Bildungsausländerinnen*[2] face high drop-out risks compared to students holding German citizenship (Heublein et al., 2022).

While comprehensive empirical investigations into the causes of these differential completion rates remain limited, survey data indicates severe structural challenges. Nearly half of international students express a critical need for financial advising and academic support (Middendorff et al., 2017). Furthermore, a significant proportion of students with a 'migration background' report needing support regarding learning difficulties and exam-related anxiety compared to their peers without a 'migration background' (Middendorff et al., 2017).

Examining these educational inequities requires a critical analysis of admission criteria, institutional study conditions, and power and hierarchical relations within universities (Karakaşoğlu et al., 2013). Scholars must analyze both the institutional mechanisms of disadvantage and the agency, resistance, and self-advocacy strategies deployed by marginalized groups within higher education (Karakaşoğlu et al., 2013). Beyond student body demographics, attention must also be given to the employment and working conditions of academic and non-academic staff with international or minoritized backgrounds, an area that remains under-researched in Western European academia.

The paper proceeds in five steps. First, it reviews research on inequality, discrimination, and institutional gatekeeping in higher education. Second, it introduces the PHM program as an illustrative institutional case of competency-based recognition. Third, it develops a theoretical framework of ambivalent recognition drawing on migration pedagogy, critical race, and decolonial perspectives. Fourth, it discusses CBPR as a potential epistemological response to unequal academic knowledge production. Finally, the paper derives implications for migration research, higher education policy, and institutional practice.

2 Relations of Inequality and Discrimination in Higher Education

While institutional discrimination in primary and secondary schooling has been extensively researched (e.g., Arslan & Bozay, 2016; Gomolla, 2023; Gomolla & Radtke, 2003; Karakayali, 2026), studies examining racialized addressing, epistemic exclusion, and devaluation practices in higher education remain comparatively sparse (Fereidooni et al., 2026; Tate & Bagguley, 2017). Existing scholarship in Germany is largely dominated by quantitative sociological surveys focusing on representation, living conditions, and drop-out metrics (Lörz et al., 2019; Middendorff et al., 2017).

Data from the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) demonstrates the heavy emotional and psychological burden that discrimination imposes on minoritized students (Meyer et al., 2022): direct personal experiences of discrimination and witnessing discrimination on campus severely affect student well-being. Regional institutional studies confirm these patterns; surveys conducted at Kiel University of Applied Sciences revealed that a significant portion of respondents personally experienced or witnessed discrimination, with racism, sexism, and religious discrimination cited as the primary forms (Klein & Rebitzer, 2012). Such experiences lead directly to reduced academic motivation, psychological distress, and an altered perception of the academic environment (Meyer et al., 2022). In addition to structural gatekeeping, racialized students experience subtle forms of everyday racism (*Alltagsrassismus*) that permeate both academic and administrative settings (Ngubia Kuria, 2015; Polat & Joseph-Magwood, 2024; Sekkali, 2025). These practices of Othering significantly impact educational pathways and demand anti-discriminatory reform processes within university workflows (Joseph-Magwood & Polat, 2025; Thompson & Vorbrugg, 2018).

Qualitative studies highlight Eurocentric curricula, the lack of representation among faculty of color, and the systemic devaluation of non-Western academic knowledge (Aytekin & Mansouri, 2022; Hall, 2021). Discrimination manifests both through interpersonal microaggressions (e.g., violent language or everyday exclusion) and structural gatekeeping (e.g., bias during application processes; Aytekin & Mansouri, 2022). Furthermore, higher education institutions frequently enforce a "monolingual habitus" (Gogolin, 1994), treating German language dominance as an unexamined norm (Kalpaka, 2005) while treating multilingualism as a deficit rather than an asset. This deficit orientation is evident in debates surrounding institutional accommodations or "disadvantage compensation" (*Nachteilsausgleich*) for students navigating academic German as a second or third language. Rather than recognizing systemic linguistic barriers, institutions often shift the problem onto students, framing them as academically deficient or unsuited for higher education (Kalpaka, 2005).

Framed by static notions of the nation-state ("national containers"; Kraemer, 2018; Schiller, 2009), universities struggle to accommodate the linguistic and cultural realities of post-migrant societies. This nation-centric framework impedes postcolonial critique and prevents higher education from realizing its potential as a space for critical self-reflection and epistemic reform (Mecheril & Klingler, 2010). Concurrently, internationalization strategies often treat international students as competitive assets while systematically ignoring everyday racism and institutional barriers (Laufenberg, 2016). Legal and administrative frameworks—such as tying student residence permits directly to academic performance and rapid labor market integration—create structural vulnerability for refugee and national students from the Global South (Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018; Kalocsányiová et al., 2024). These policy intersections create an institutional hierarchy of immigration status, origins, and credential legitimacy.

To address these intersecting barriers, university diversity strategies must move beyond superficial inclusion rhetoric. Institutions must establish structural countermeasures, including independent anti-discrimination reporting offices, binding institutional policies, and participatory reform processes (Fereidooni et al., 2026; Klingler & Mecheril, 2024).

This paper addresses these dynamics by focusing on a key marginalized group in higher education: social pedagogical professionals and educators who acquired their primary academic degrees abroad. In the European labor market, these professionals are frequently underemployed in low-wage or precarious roles (e.g., language mediators, night watch staff in youth welfare, educational assistants, or long-term volunteers) despite holding rigorous academic qualifications from their home countries (BMBF, 2024; Brücker et al., 2021). Navigating these exclusionary structures often requires persistent self-advocacy and struggle by minoritized students to gain access to academic institutions (Wojciechowicz, 2018). Specialized bridging frameworks, such as targeted support programs for international and refugee educators, illustrate both the potential and remaining structural hurdles in transferring foreign qualifications into national systems (Wojciechowicz & Vock, 2025). Their attempts to gain formal recognition as qualified educational professionals in host countries often fail due to structural gatekeeping, institutional non-recognition, and symbolic devaluation along "nation-ethno-culturally coded" boundaries (Karakaşoğlu et al., 2021). As persistent non-recognition inflicts symbolic and material harm, it undermines individuals' self-esteem, professional identities, and sense of security (Brücker et al., 2021; Karakaşoğlu et al., 2021).

Taken together, the state of the research demonstrates that inequalities in higher education cannot be reduced to individual educational deficits or insufficient adaptation. Rather, access, recognition, and academic participation are structured through intersecting institutional, racialized, linguistic, and epistemic hierarchies. What remains less developed in the literature, however, is an account of recognition itself as an ambivalent institutional practice: one that can facilitate access while simultaneously reaffirming the standards through which particular biographies, qualifications, and forms of knowledge are rendered deficient. It is this conceptual gap that the present paper addresses.

3 Reflective Spaces of Recognition: The "Pedagogy and Social Work in the Migration Society" (PHM) Model

To illustrate how alternative recognition practices may challenge these structural barriers, the following section discusses the Bachelor's program 'Pedagogy and Social Work in the Migration Society' (PHM) at Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg. The program is used here as an illustrative institutional case rather than as the object of an empirical case study.

3.1 Recognition as Relational Practice

Recognition is not merely a bureaucratic procedure; it is a relational social practice through which individuals are negotiated and validated as legitimate academic subjects (Butler, 2005). However, historical hierarchies of knowledge structured around "national containers" (Kraemer, 2018; Schiller, 2009) mean that qualifications acquired in the Global South or non-Western states are frequently devalued. Gatekeeping agencies exercise significant symbolic power over applicants' professional futures (Karakaşoğlu et al., 2021). This institutional non-recognition constitutes a form of "epistemic violence" (Rettig & Brunner, 2020), generating systemic insecurity and reinforcing social exclusion.

By focusing strictly on linear, domestic educational trajectories, the standard recognition apparatus operates on a deficit logic as a system principle that ignores transnational pedagogical expertise (Doğmuş et al., 2016). This produces a double invisibility: foreign pedagogical qualifications are formally denied equivalence, while the unique competencies stemming from migration-related educational trajectories remain unrecognized (Hertlein & Leiprecht, 2020).

We therefore conceptualize recognition as inherently ambivalent. Institutional recognition is necessary because access to higher education, professional status, and academic legitimacy depends on institutional validation. At the same time, recognition procedures define the standards against which subjects, qualifications, and forms of knowledge become intelligible and legitimate. Recognition can thus simultaneously enable participation and reproduce epistemic hierarchies.

3.2 Program Architecture and Institutional Impact

The PHM program directly counters these exclusionary dynamics through a specialized competency-based admissions model:

- **Target Group:** Individuals holding foreign university entrance qualifications and prior academic backgrounds in social pedagogy, education, psychology, or related social sciences.
- **Credit Transfer:** Through a specialized evaluation of prior academic achievements or completion of preparatory continuing education ("Kontaktstudium"), applicants receive advanced standing (60 ECTS credits), entering directly into the third semester (Hertlein & Leiprecht, 2020).
- **Language Requirements:** Fluency at the native-speaker level (C2) in a primary language relevant to global migration contexts (e.g., Arabic, Turkish, Dari, Kurdish) is recognized as an explicit admission asset. German language proficiency is required at the B2 level upon entry, with C1 level required after the first academic year.
- **Retention Metrics:** According to internal program records approximately 171 students have graduated from the PHM program, while the reported dropout rate has been around 10%.[3] This figure is substantially lower than national dropout estimates reported for international students in Germany (Heublein et al., 2022).

3.3 Potentials and Ambivalences

By framing transnational life experiences and multilingualism as professional assets, the PHM model creates a reflexive space where marginalized educational identities can be reconstructed (Wolter, 2022). However, institutional ambiguities persist. Designating a specialized program for foreign-qualified scholars can unintentionally create a "special status" or marginalize participants as exceptions to the rule (Hertlein & Leiprecht, 2020). Furthermore, students continue to encounter structural discrimination when attending cross-departmental lectures alongside the broader student body (Karakaşoğlu et al., 2021). The PHM model therefore illustrates rather than resolves the ambivalence of institutional recognition. Creating alternative pathways can counter exclusionary standards, yet the very existence of specialized pathways may leave dominant institutional norms intact. Recognition through exceptional

structures can consequently coexist with continued non-recognition within the wider university. At the administrative level, centralized third-party credential evaluations present significant barriers, characterized by extended processing times, late defect notifications, incorrect evaluations, high financial burdens, and diffuse institutional responsibilities between external review bodies and internal university departments.

4 Framework of Ambivalent Recognition and Relational Empowerment

4.1 Theoretical Foundations

From a theoretical-conceptual standpoint, analyzing the ambivalences of recognition and structural exclusion in higher education necessitates an epistemological shift. Standard empirical methodologies in migration and higher education research frequently risk reproducing the very power asymmetries they aim to analyze by treating minoritized subjects primarily as objects of research or passive carriers of structural deficits (Bernardino-Costa et al., 2018; Kraemer, 2018). To interrogate how institutionalized power relations, epistemic violence (Rettig & Brunner, 2020), and symbolic devaluations operate within academic spaces, research methodologies themselves must be conceptualized as sites of power, struggle, and potential transformation.

4.2 Ambivalent Recognition

The theoretical framework anchors this paper within Intersectional Critical Race Theory, Migration Pedagogy (*Migrationspädagogik*), and Decolonial Approaches (Bernardino-Costa et al., 2018; Hall, 2021; Mecheril & Klingler, 2010). Grounded in postcolonial critique (Attia & Popal, 2018; Bernardino-Costa et al., 2018; Varela & Dhawan, 2020), this synthesis articulates the paper's distinct contribution to migration and integration research: it shifts the focus from integration as a one-sided assimilation process within "national containers" (Kraemer, 2018) to an interrogation of the structural, institutional conditions of academia itself. These perspectives perform distinct but complementary analytical functions. Critical race perspectives foreground the institutional production and normalization of racialized inequalities; migration pedagogy interrogates nation-ethno-cultural constructions of belonging and difference; and decolonial approaches expose epistemic hierarchies through which Western knowledge traditions are universalized while other forms of knowledge are marginalized. Their combination enables recognition to be analyzed simultaneously as an institutional, subjectifying, and epistemic process. From this synthesis, we derive four analytically connected dimensions of ambivalent recognition:

1. **The Epistemology of Institutional Recognition and Exclusion:** How structural gatekeeping, administrative mechanisms (e.g., third-party credential assessments), and racialized addressings shape the institutional trajectory of foreign-qualified and BIPOC scholars.
2. **Subjectivity and Structural Reproduction:** The processes through which minoritized scholars navigate, resist, or internalize systemic deficit logics and symbolic violence within hegemonic academic structures.

3. **Collective Empowerment and Transnational Agency:** The theoretical formulation of empowerment not merely as individual resilience, but as a relational, collective practice of solidarity that emerges within counter-hegemonic academic sub-spaces.
4. **Methodological Transformation and Epistemic Justice:** The pathways through which participatory research designs can destabilize traditional academic hierarchies and transform non-Western, transnational knowledge into recognized academic expertise.

These dimensions are mutually constitutive rather than discrete. Institutional recognition practices shape subject positions; these subject positions can become sites of resistance and collective agency; and participatory epistemologies can make visible the assumptions through which particular forms of knowledge are recognized or devalued. The theoretical contribution of the framework therefore lies in linking institutional recognition, subjectification, collective empowerment, and epistemic justice within a single analytical model.

4.3 Relational Empowerment

To operationalize this theoretical critique, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is conceptualized as a robust epistemological counter-model to traditional academic knowledge extraction (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Methodologically, CBPR draws upon established frameworks of participatory research in Germany and internationally (Von Unger, 2013; Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2022). While classical action research models historically focused on organizational optimization (Lewin, 1946), modern CBPR approaches within critical migration research function as explicitly anti-racist, community-grounded frameworks (Fleming et al., 2023).

When implemented through transparent procedures, explicit reflexivity, and shared decision-making, CBPR can support methodological accountability while reframing knowledge generation as a collaborative process (Neumann, 2011). In this paradigm, participants—specifically scholars and students navigating migration trajectories—are positioned as co-researchers who hold critical epistemic authority. Methodologically, CBPR directly challenges the "epistemic violence" inherent in standard academic research by democratizing the research process across three critical phases:

- **Co-Design and Epistemic Alignment:** Formulating research focus areas collaboratively to reflect the lived realities and structural hurdles faced by marginalized academic groups.
- **Dialogical Safe(r) and Braver Spaces:** Participatory dialogical formats that enable collective reflection on experiences of recognition, exclusion, and institutional power. These environments foster mutual trust, vulnerability, and collective critical consciousness.
- **Shared Interpretation and Policy Translation:** Analyzing empirical and qualitative findings jointly to ensure that theoretical abstraction does not erase lived experience, thereby directly informing institutional anti-discrimination policies (Fleming et al., 2023).

Since a complete analysis of the interviews conducted as part of the study was not yet available at the time this article was written, we will refer here to CBPR as a methodological and epistemological

framework that follows from the preceding critique of institutional recognition. Its relevance to the argument lies not in providing the empirical method of this article, but in illustrating how migration and higher education research itself might respond to the epistemic hierarchies identified above.

4.4 Participatory Epistemologies and CBPR

A rigorous theoretical treatment of CBPR must critically address its inherent contradictions. Participatory designs cannot magically dissolve institutional power differentials, particularly those tied to the primary researcher's formal academic position, citizenship status, or institutional funding structures (Neumann, 2011). However, conducting participatory work with marginalized groups requires careful reflection on power asymmetries, epistemic ethics, and structural barriers like ableism and linguistic hierarchies (Heyrock et al., 2025). From a conceptual perspective, these power asymmetries necessitate continuous and systematic reflexivity regarding researcher positionality and institutional power. Key ethical and methodological tension fields include:

- **The Paradox of Institutional Embedding:** Conducting emancipatory, anti-racist research within bureaucratic university structures that are themselves sites of institutional racism and gatekeeping.
- **Delineation of Epistemic Responsibility:** Negotiating which analytical decisions and ethical burdens can be shared collectively with co-researchers and which must remain the responsibility of the lead researcher.
- **Resisting Co-Optation:** Ensuring that concepts of "empowerment" and "participation" are not instrumentalized by university administrations as superficial, cosmetic diversity metrics (performative diversity).

Rather than viewing these ethical tensions as methodological flaws, a critical CBPR framework understands them as productive, theoretical contradictions. Navigating these friction points illuminates the precise boundaries where hegemonic institutional logic meets transformative agency.

4.5 Power, Positionality and the Limits of Participation

Conceptualizing inquiry through this participatory framework yields vital theoretical insights into the nature of recognition in post-migrant higher education:

- **The Ambivalence of Affirmation:** Institutional recognition is simultaneously enabling and normalizing: it can provide access while requiring transnational biographies and qualifications to become legible within nationally and eurocentrically structured categories (Karakaşoğlu et al., 2021).
- **Empowerment as Relational Counter-Space:** Empowerment is relational rather than merely individual: it emerges through collective practices in which marginalized actors reinterpret experiences of non-recognition as structural rather than personal deficits.
- **Epistemic Reconstruction:** Recognition becomes transformative only when institutions not only include previously marginalized actors but also make dominant standards of legitimate knowledge

themselves open to contestation and revision.

5 Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

To foster a transformative recognition practice within higher education, universities must move beyond administrative credential auditing to adopt flexible, competency-based recognition frameworks. Broadening recognition policies to take transnational pedagogical expertise into account may reduce institutional barriers to professional participation and contribute to greater educational equity (Brücker et al., 2021). Evaluative standards must move away from Eurocentric benchmarks and adapt to the realities of post-migrant societies.

Relating these findings to the broader international literature on higher education equity, the implications extend across research, policy, and practice:

1. *Policy Reform*: National and European higher education policies must dismantle bureaucratic barriers tied to credential evaluation and residence permits, ensuring that legal frameworks support rather than penalize non-traditional academic trajectories.
2. *Academic Practice*: Faculty members and university administrators must engage comprehensively with critical scholarly literature to audit their own evaluation metrics and teaching practices.
3. *Future Research*: Should further connect migration studies, critical higher education research, recognition theory, and participatory methodologies. Comparative research across different national recognition regimes would be particularly valuable for identifying which forms of institutional gatekeeping are context-specific and which operate across migration societies.

Multi-Level Action for Higher Education Transformation

Institutional Level	Key Action Items & Reform Strategies	Supporting Literature
Governance & Leadership	Embed anti-discrimination standards into university mission statements; establish independent anti-discrimination offices with binding authority.	Fereidooni et al. (2026); Joseph-Magwood & Polat (2025); Klingler & Mecheril (2024)
Administrative Gatekeeping	Streamline credential evaluation processes; audit third-party evaluators (<i>uni-assist</i> e.V.) for structural bias; establish direct advisory services.	Karakaşoğlu et al. (2021); Kraemer (2018)
Curriculum & Teaching	Challenge the "monolingual habitus"; integrate postcolonial and discrimination-critical frameworks into standard curricula; institute structural language accommodations.	Gogolin (1994); Kalpaka (2005); Klingler & Mecheril (2024)
Research & Methodology	Institutionalize participatory and community-based research approaches (CBPR) to democratize academic knowledge production.	Bergold & Thomas (2012); Fleming et al. (2023)

Universities must bridge the gap between diversity rhetoric and structural reality (Ahmed, 2012; Klingler & Mecheril, 2024). By embracing critical recognition practices and participatory research, higher education institutions can transition from spaces of reproduction to drivers of social justice and epistemic reform.

6 Conclusion and Future Research

This paper has argued that recognition in higher education should not be understood as a straightforward movement from exclusion to inclusion. Recognition is institutionally ambivalent: it can create access to academic and professional spaces while simultaneously reproducing the categories and hierarchies through which particular qualifications, biographies, and forms of knowledge are rendered legitimate. The PHM program illustrates this ambivalence. Its competency-based recognition of transnational educational trajectories and multilingual expertise demonstrates possibilities for challenging deficit-oriented admissions structures. At the same time, specialized recognition pathways cannot by themselves transform the wider institutional norms within which students continue to encounter racialized, linguistic, and epistemic inequalities. The paper therefore proposes a relational understanding of empowerment and links institutional recognition to questions of epistemic justice. From this perspective, empowerment cannot be reduced to individual resilience or successful adaptation; it depends on collective capacities to identify, contest, and transform the institutional standards through which recognition is distributed.

CBPR offers one possible framework for making such institutional and epistemic power relations visible within research itself. Its transformative potential, however, depends on continuous attention to positionality, institutional constraints, and the risk of participatory language being incorporated into performative diversity agendas. Future comparative and empirical research should examine how different recognition regimes enable or constrain these processes across migration societies.

The conceptual argument developed here has several limitations. First, the PHM program serves as an illustrative institutional case and does not provide an empirical basis for causal claims regarding educational outcomes. Second, the discussion is primarily grounded in the German and Western European higher education context, limiting the transferability of institutional observations to other national recognition regimes. Third, while CBPR is proposed as a promising epistemological framework, participatory approaches themselves remain embedded in unequal institutional and funding structures. These limitations point to the need for comparative and participatory empirical research testing and refining the conceptual framework developed here.

Declarations

Author Contribution

A. P. wrote the chapter 1. and 2. , G. K. wrote the chapter 3. and 4. , chapters 5 and 6 were co-authored by both authors. We affirm that both authors have made substantial contributions to the conception, analysis, and preparation of this manuscript. Both authors reviewed the manuscript, agree to take responsibility for all aspects of the work and to ensure that any questions regarding the accuracy or integrity of the work are properly investigated and resolved. Furthermore, both authors expressly consent to the submission and publication of this manuscript.

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Footnotes

1. Migration background' is used here when referring to German statistical categories employed in the cited studies. The term is contested because it can homogenize heterogeneous migration experiences and reproduce categorical distinctions between supposedly migrant and non-migrant populations.
2. The administrative term *Bildungsausländer*innen* refers to foreign national students who obtained their higher education entrance qualification outside Germany.
3. Internal administrative records, PHM program, University of Oldenburg, 2026.