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MentUwell

Sprachcafé (AT) @ VOBIS Klagenfurt

The ***Sprachcafé*** [*Language café*] is an afternoon workshop open to everyone where visitors can improve their own German skills, especially speaking freely, in a friendly atmosphere. There is also space for learning a variety of things, but also for playing, drinking tea, cultivating friendships and much more. The service is open not only for 'registered' migrants but for any person simply looking for free of charge opportunities to improve their German language skills, despite their migrant status. The visitors receive also individual assistance and information about the country.

Brief description / scope

Language competence significantly enhances the quality of life for migrants and refugees by facilitating their integration, increasing their participation in society, and empowering them to navigate their new environment more effectively.

Being able to speak the local language facilitates everyday communication, making it easier to navigate daily tasks such as shopping, accessing healthcare, and interacting with neighbors and authorities. In addition, language is a key factor in integration. By speaking the language, migrants can better understand the culture, customs, and societal norms of their host country, which aids in their integration into the community.

Proficiency in the local language opens-up more job opportunities: where not specifically required by the national norms on immigrant inclusion, many employers require fluency in the local language, and being able to communicate effectively can enhance a migrant's chances of finding employment.

Language competence facilitates social interactions and helps in forming relationships with locals and other migrants; this can reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, providing a support network in the new environment.

Last but not least, learning the language demonstrates respect for the host culture and fosters mutual understanding between migrants and locals, promoting social cohesion and harmony.

Resources

Fundamental assets in setting-up a language café are:

- Volunteers: the commitment and dedication of volunteers who contribute their time, expertise, and enthusiasm to facilitate language learning sessions are invaluable assets to the language cafe.
- Community support: building strong partnerships and alliances with local community organizations, schools, religious institutions, businesses, and government agencies can provide support, resources, and networking opportunities for the language cafe.
- Donated space: securing a free or discounted venue through partnerships with community centres, libraries, churches, or other organizations can significantly reduce venue rental costs.
- In-kind donations: seek donations of learning materials, furniture, equipment, and refreshments from individuals, businesses, and organizations in the community to offset expenses and ensure the smooth operation of the language cafe.
- Participant engagement: active participation and engagement from language cafe participants contribute to the success and vibrancy of the program: their willingness to learn, practice, and support each other fosters a dynamic and inclusive learning environment.
- Language proficiency diversity: embrace the linguistic diversity of volunteers and participants as a valuable asset: a diverse pool of language speakers can offer a wide range of perspectives, cultural insights, and language learning opportunities within the language cafe community.

Plan and schedule
At VOBIS the *Sprachcafé* is run every Wednesday from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and every Friday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the center of the town.
Methodology
Setting up a free language cafe for migrants to learn the local language does not require a particular effort. Anyway, several steps should be considered, such as: ▪ Identify a suitable location such as a community center, library, church hall, or any other accessible and welcoming space that can accommodate the language cafe sessions, making sure the location is easily reachable for migrants and refugees. ▪ Recruit volunteers who are proficient in the local language and willing to dedicate their time to teaching and facilitating language learning sessions; these volunteers could be language enthusiasts, teachers, students, or community members passionate about helping migrants integrate. ▪ Create a regular schedule for the language cafe sessions, considering the availability of both volunteers and participants: weekly or bi-weekly sessions are usually effective, making sure the timing is convenient for migrants, possibly in the evenings or weekends. ▪ Promote the *Sprachcafé* through community centers, refugee support organizations, local schools, religious institutions, social media, and word of mouth, creating flyers, posters, and online announcements to attract participants. ▪ Plan session activities by designing engaging and interactive language learning activities suitable for participants at different proficiency levels: activities can include conversation practice, vocabulary games, cultural exchanges, role-playing scenarios, and group discussions on various topics. ▪ Provide learning resources by gathering or creating learning materials such as language textbooks, worksheets, online resources, and multimedia tools to support the language learning process. It is important to ensure these resources are easily accessible during the sessions. ▪ Facilitate a welcoming environment and inclusive atmosphere where participants feel comfortable practicing the language without fear of judgment, by encouraging mutual respect, cultural exchange, and collaboration among attendees. ▪ Offer light refreshments such as tea, coffee, and snacks during the language cafe sessions: this can create a relaxed and social atmosphere conducive to language learning and networking. ▪ Regularly solicit feedback from participants and volunteers to assess the effectiveness of the language cafe and identify areas for improvement. Then regularly adjust the format, activities, and schedule based on feedback received. ▪ Ensure the long-term sustainability of the language cafe by securing ongoing funding, recruiting new volunteers, and nurturing partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders invested in migrant integration and language education.
Budget
Setting up a language cafe involves various costs to consider, such as: ▪ Venue rental: if the language cafe is not hosted in a free community space, there may be costs associated with renting a venue: this could include hourly or daily rental fees. ▪ Learning materials and resources such as textbooks, workbooks, dictionaries, language learning software, and teaching aids. These resources help facilitate language learning activities during the sessions.

- Refreshments: providing refreshments such as tea, coffee, snacks, and water can create a welcoming and comfortable environment for participants. Budget for the purchase of refreshments or seek sponsorship from local businesses.
- Promotional materials: designing and printing promotional materials such as flyers, posters, banners, and business cards to advertise the language cafe may incur printing costs.
- Volunteer training and support: while volunteers offer their time for free, there may be costs associated with training and supporting them: this could include organizing orientation sessions, providing teaching materials, and offering ongoing guidance and supervision.
- Transportation: If volunteers or participants need to travel to the venue, transportation costs such as bus fares or fuel expenses may need to be considered.
- Administration and miscellaneous expenses: budget for administrative expenses such as stationery, office supplies, phone calls, internet access, and any unforeseen miscellaneous costs that may arise during the setup and operation of the language cafe.

Success criteria

Assessing the effectiveness of a language cafe in promoting language skills in participants is essential for ensuring that the program meets its goals and objectives. Here are several ways to assess the effectiveness of a language cafe:

- Pre- and post-assessments: conduct pre- and post-assessments to measure participants' language proficiency levels before they join the language cafe and after they have attended sessions for a certain period. This can be done through standardized language tests, oral interviews, or self-assessment questionnaires.
- Attendance and participation rates: monitor attendance and participation rates to gauge the level of engagement and commitment among participants. Higher attendance and active participation often indicate a positive impact on language learning.
- Observational assessments: observe participants during language cafe sessions to evaluate their language use, communication skills, and interaction with others. Note improvements in fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence over time.
- Feedback surveys: administer regular feedback surveys to participants to gather their opinions, experiences, and satisfaction with the language cafe. Ask specific questions about the usefulness of activities, perceived progress in language skills, and suggestions for improvement.
- Qualitative interviews: conduct qualitative interviews with participants to delve deeper into their experiences, motivations, challenges, and perceived benefits of attending the language cafe. Explore how they apply newly acquired language skills in real-life situations.
- Language proficiency assessments: use standardized language proficiency assessments, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) or the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, to evaluate participants' language skills objectively and determine their proficiency levels.
- Peer and volunteer feedback: seek feedback from volunteers and peers who interact with participants regularly: they can provide valuable insights into participants' progress, strengths, areas for improvement, and overall engagement in language learning activities.
- Longitudinal studies: conduct longitudinal studies to track participants' language development and integration outcomes over an extended period. Follow up with participants after they complete the language cafe program to assess the long-term impact on their language skills and integration into society.

- Comparative analysis: compare the language skills and integration outcomes of participants who attended the language cafe with those who did not participate. This can help determine the added value of the language cafe in promoting language acquisition and integration.
- Community impact assessment: evaluate the broader impact of the language cafe on the community, including changes in attitudes towards migrants, increased social cohesion, and enhanced cultural exchange. Engage with stakeholders and partners to assess the program's contribution to community development.

By employing a combination of these assessment methods, organizers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the language cafe in promoting language skills and fostering integration among participants. Adjustments and improvements can then be made based on the findings to optimize the impact of the program.

Discussion topics

Here are some discussion topics that can be engaging and relevant:

Practical Everyday Topics

1. Introductions & Personal Backgrounds: sharing names, where they are from, and their journey
2. Daily Routines: talking about their typical day and common activities
3. Shopping & Money: how to ask for prices, make purchases, and deal with different currencies
4. Health & Well-being: talking about symptoms, visiting doctors, and understanding health services
5. Housing & Living Situations: renting, finding accommodation, and household vocabulary
6. Transportation: using buses, trains, and asking for directions
7. Food & Cooking: sharing recipes, discussing favorite dishes, and learning food-related vocabulary.

Cultural Exchange & Social Topics

8. Festivals & Traditions: sharing holidays and celebrations from different cultures
9. Customs & Etiquette: discussing cultural differences in communication and behavior
10. Family & Relationships: talking about family structures and important traditions
11. Hobbies & Leisure Activities: talking about sports, music, and entertainment
12. Work & Professions: discussing different jobs, work experiences, and career aspirations

Community & Integration Topics

13. Local Services & Resources: learning about community centers, libraries, and helpful organizations
14. Rights & Responsibilities: understanding legal rights and civic duties in the new country
15. Emergency Situations: what to do in case of fire, medical emergencies, or other crises
16. Education & Learning: opportunities for studying, learning new skills, or attending language courses
17. Making Friends & Social Life: how to meet new people and build connections

Fun & Engaging Topics

18. Funny & Interesting Idioms: learning and sharing idiomatic expressions
19. Storytelling & Personal Experiences: encouraging participants to share anecdotes
20. Dreams & Future Plans: talking about hopes, goals, and aspirations

References

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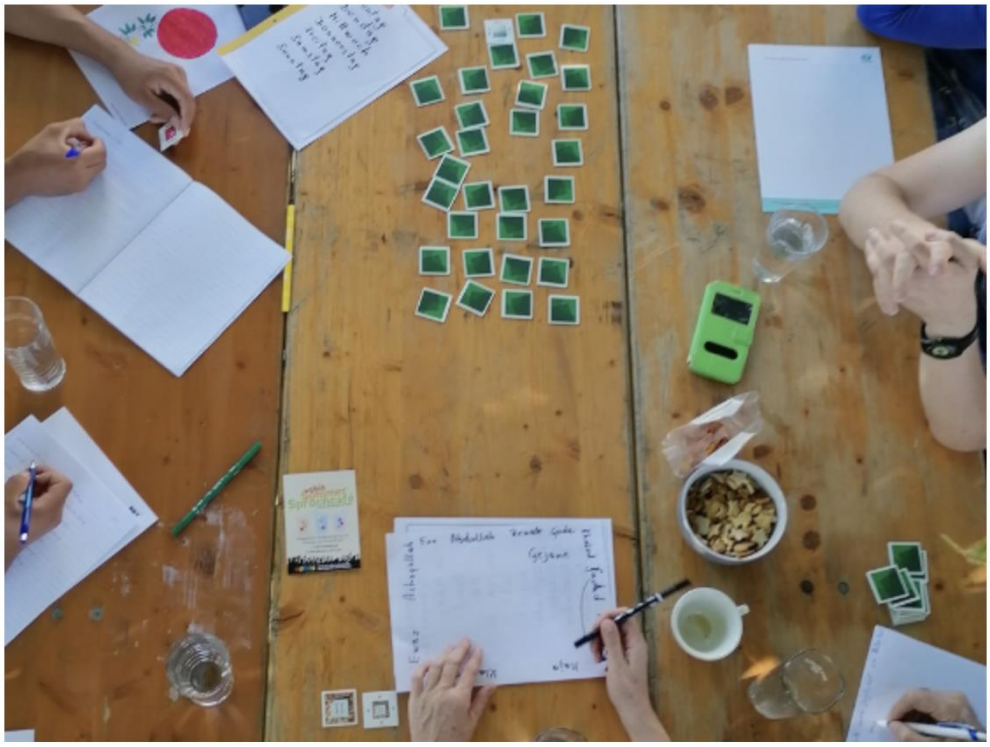
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