sciendo

Land Forces Academy Review
Vol. XXVIII, No. 3(111), 2023

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER MILITARY EDUCATION

Andreas ALEXA
University of Applied Military Sciences, Vienna, Austria
andreas.alexa@bmlv.gv.at

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the need of diversity management in higher military education. Due to various professional and private backgrounds of the students taking part in the Master's degree programme in Military Leadership, the following four diversity dimensions have to be taken into account: personality, internal, external and organizational dimension. Considering these dimensions during preparation and implementation of the formal education leads to better results. However, this also requires appropriate further training for teachers.

KEYWORDS: diversity management, education, teaching, military science

1. Introduction

Diversity management in a military Master's programme may not seem necessary from an external point of view, as the participants all come from the armed forces and therefore appear to be a homogeneous group. However, a closer look at the students shows that nevertheless all participants wear uniform, there are differences between them and this fact creates a considerable diversity.

Therefore the topics of diversity and diversity management are taken into account in the Master degree programme of the University of Applied Military Sciences. In this context the baseline document is the *Guideline on Diversity Management within the Framework of the Master's degree programme in Military Leadership*. This guideline was elaborated *ex novo*, approved by the head of the Master's degree programme in September 2022 and made accessible to the relevant stakeholders on the Master's degree programme website. At the core of this publication, one finds five essential fields of action in diversity management linked with respective goals to be observed by higher education institutions.

This research paper will show to what extent diversity management is currently considered in the mind-set and actions of teachers. The primary objective of this research work is to determine the opportunities and risks that arise from diversity in higher education teaching. As a secondary objective, potential recommendations shall be made to the head of the Institute for Higher Military Education in order to heighten the sensitivity and visibility of the subject.

The following research question therefore guides the research work: *Why is it necessary to take diversity into account in teaching at the Master's degree programme in Military Leadership?*

2. Research Methods

The methods used for data collection were document analysis on the one hand and interviews on the other. While the former served to narrow down the broad

DOI: 10.2478/raft-2023-0026

© 2023 Andreas Alexa. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 3.0 License.

field of available literature to the usable ones, the survey of teachers in the form of a guided interview collected their knowledge as well as their perceptions. Due to Hussy, Schreier and Echterhoff (2013), the personal perspective of the interviewees and their experiences with the phenomenon under investigation are of interest. The guided interviews were conducted in January 2023. Three teachers belonging to different groups were interviewed.

In the area of data evaluation, the methods of text analysis and content analysis were used. The first method was used to understand, interpret and reflect on the selected literature. These findings were processed in the theory section. Through the application of content analysis, the information gained through the survey was processed and used in a purpose-oriented manner. For this purpose, coding categories were developed in a deductive coding approach and the theory was tested with the existing interview data.

3. Theoretical Foundation

In this chapter, the most important theoretical foundations, which were obtained from the specialist literature, are presented. The primary focus is on explaining the topic of diversity management and its implications for higher education. However, since diversity management is only a sub-area of the topic of equality and in order to grasp the overall context, this aspect is also briefly explained.

3.1. Equality

Equality means that all people who make up a society have equal rights and therefore equal participation in working and social life must be ensured. According to Mathes and Gruber (2019) four different strategies are used to achieve this goal: advancement of women, anti-discrimination, gender mainstreaming and diversity management.

While the advancement of women aims at eliminating the underrepresentation of women and the existing disadvantages of women, anti-discrimination aims at eliminating all forms of discrimination against people on the basis of gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, origin or ethnicity, skin colour, religion or belief. Gender mainstreaming, on the other hand, aims to include the different concerns and needs of people in all measures through a gender-related perspective and thus to prevent structural disadvantages (Hochschulkonferenz, 2018). Finally, diversity management aims at a holistic-systemic development of organisational structures and cultures, which promotes a conscious and constructive approach to diversity (Institut für Höhere Militärische Führung, 2022).

3.2. Diversity Management

In the literature, the so-called 4-layer model according to Gardenswartz and Rowe (2002) is used to visualise the diversity of persons or groups of persons, which clusters the overall area of diversity into (1) the personality, (2) the internal dimension, (3) the external dimension and (4) the organizational dimension (Franken, 2015). This classification (see Figure no. 1) serves as a basis for the research work, as all these dimensions apply to both teachers and students.



Figure no. 1: *Four Layers of Diversity*
(Source: https://www.gardenswartzrowe.com/why-g-r)

These individual dimensions lead to different life and professional experiences and ultimately to different perspectives and abilities of students as well as teachers. At the centre of the model is the personality with its unique combination of individual characteristics. The inner as well as the outer dimension are strongly shaped by a person's socialisation, but can be changed in part by conscious decisions (Manchen Spörri, 2017). The organisational dimension is considered to be the differentiation criteria within an organisation and is the most changeable compared to the other dimensions.

On the one hand, different perspectives, knowledge and skills of teachers and students can serve as a starting point for new innovative teaching methods. On the other hand, misunderstandings often arise precisely because of different backgrounds and prerequisites, which can lead to problems in university cooperation. Gutting (2013) therefore pleads being aware of differences and their consequences in order to actively counteract them and thus avoid disadvantages in the study process.

3.3. Diversity Management at the Master's Programme

The *Guideline on Diversity Management within the Framework of the Master's degree programme in Military Leadership* from the year 2022 describes five essential fields of action of a university: programme management, personnel development, teaching, research and infrastructure. Due to the scope of this research work, the field of action *teaching* has been selected for closer examination. In order to enable an inclusive study, the diversity resulting from the diverse composition of teachers and students must be made visible. It is also necessary to take the diversity dimensions into account in the study environment as well as in study operations.

Referring to the teachers and students of the Master's degree programme in Military Leadership some areas will be explained in more detail. For instance, in the sense of the internal dimension, international students, currently from Switzerland and Germany, participate in the programme, and teachers also come from Switzerland, Germany or Ireland. Furthermore, one of the 21 students is

female. Regarding the external dimension, students as well as the teachers have different levels of professional experience (both civil and military) or academic training, as well as different marital statuses.

These examples clearly show that diversity in the sense of the theoretical model is present at the Master's Programme in Military Leadership. Therefore, in order to meet these different needs of the students, various aspects have to be taken into account in the preparation, implementation and follow-up when designing a diversity-appropriate teaching. These are: (1) diversity aspects at the content level, (2) diversity-sensitive design of teaching and teaching materials, (3) inclusion as a design principle for the structure and organisation of teaching, and (4) living diversity competence (Alexa, 2018).

4. Presentation of the Research Results

In this chapter, the information obtained from the guided interviews is presented in an edited form. Three teachers of the Master's degree programme in Military Leadership were interviewed, representing different groups of people with various backgrounds of experience.

Considering the research question to be answered, the following categories were formed: (1) knowledge of the policy on diversity management in the context of the Master's degree programme in Military Leadership, (2) relevance of the topic to teaching, (3) diversity-appropriate teaching design, (4) further training of teachers.

The evaluation of the three interviews conducted yielded the following results.

4.1. Knowledge of the Policy on Diversity Management in the Context of the Master's Degree Programme in Military Leadership

All three interviewees stated that they were aware of the policy on diversity management within the framework of the Master's degree programme in Military Leadership. However, with a varying degree of depth. This ranges from *"I have seen it"* to *"I have read it and made notes"*. Interesting, however, is the statement that *"simply making it available is not effective"*. From this, it can be concluded that making the guideline available only electronically, without providing the appropriate information, does not achieve the goal. Rather, additional training or a kind of instruction would be more appropriate. However, it was unanimously stated that a written description of the topic with recommendations for action is necessary, as *"there is a framework and one can orientate oneself by it"*.

4.2. Relevance of the Topic to Teaching

Diversity at the Master's programme is a reality. This can be seen in the different composition of the students in relation to the four layers according to Gardenswartz and Rowe. This makes the learning group more heterogeneous. One way of making diversity visible is to "*conduct a target group analysis"* in advance of the course. Based on this result, the different needs or individual learning abilities can be addressed and the existing knowledge, skills and abilities of the students can be used in a target-orientated way. This results in added value for all and *"will certainly contribute to the success of the course"*. However, it seems crucial that *"the teacher maintains his or her integrity at all times"*.

4.3. Diversity-Appropriate Teaching Design

The interviewed teachers stated that they take into account the aspects of diversity-appropriate teaching design briefly described in chapter 3.3 to varying degrees.

For example, integrating diversity aspects into the course enables learners to acquire interdisciplinary key competences

in this area. From the discussions, the importance of a wide range of teaching methods emerged, which have to be oriented towards the needs of the individual learners as well as the group dynamic process. In this way, different learning types and target audiences can be addressed and *"weaknesses in learning fields can be counteracted or individual stresses can be controlled"*.

The language and expression of the teachers as well as the use of images must be oriented towards the principles of equal treatment and the representation of all the diversity dimensions. To counteract the reproduction of discriminatory as well as sexist stereotypes, the use of unambiguous, representative, anti-discriminatory and visible media is necessary. However, it was also noted that *"there are limits in writing using gender neutral language"*. Thus, the content could become unnecessarily complicated and potentially unreadable. With regard to the use of German language, it was also mentioned that the teacher must ask herself or himself whether *"his or her German word is identical with the Swiss understanding?"*

Through didactic inclusion, all participants should be able to participate in and shape the learning process, regardless of their gender, age, skin colour, ethnicity/ nationality, social background, experiences, sexual orientations religion or worldview. The existing diversity must also be consciously incorporated into educational planning and taken into account in the details of the curriculum. In particular, the expertise gained so far in the course of vocational training should and must be used. Through the *"interaction that then takes place, better results are also achieved"*; e.g. *"teaching units could be held by students if they have the necessary expertise*".

4.4. Further Training of Teachers

In diversity-sensitive and inclusive didactics, teachers face particular challenges as role models. They are the ones who can convey and exemplify a diversity-sensitive culture. Teachers must therefore be able to self-reflect to meet the demands as role models. They must also be *"particularly committed"*. Continuous training in the form of *"interactive seminars with personal contact"* is therefore indispensable in order to internalise and live diversity competence.

5. Interpretation and Evaluation of the Research Results

On the basis of the previous explanations, the research question guiding the project work, *Why is it necessary to take diversity into account in teaching at the FH Master's Programme in Military Leadership?*, can be answered as follows:

In order to achieve the learning outcomes and the associated competence development, the diversity of the students of the Master's degree programme, which is evident on various levels, must be taken into account. Be it the personal experience, educational background or the individual environment. On the one hand, this shows the participants a corresponding appreciation and on the other hand, better results are achieved. It has also been shown that the active involvement of students in the teaching process has positive effects on the learning process.

Consciously making diversity visible creates opportunities, but also risks if it is negated. The greatest opportunity is that the student is perceived as a person with his or her existing diversity and is accompanied and taken along in the learning process. This creates an open and honest but also challenging learning climate. Possible risks are discrimination or a lack of recognition of previous experience or expertise. This in turn can lead to retirement from social interaction within the learning environment, as the student does not feel valued, accepted or addressed.

6. Conclusions

Good teaching is characterised, among other things, by taking into account the diversity of the participants, which is a reality in the Master's degree programme in Military Leadership. However, in order to generate a deeper understanding of the interrelationships that constitute diversity in the first place, different levels need to be addressed.

One level involves raising awareness of the topic among teachers. It can be stated that the mere provision of guidelines, materials or instructions is not enough. Rather, the topic must be the content of training courses or seminars.

A second level is a conscious analysis of the target audience or participants at the beginning of a training project. Only then can the teacher get an overview of the diversity of the students.

In any case, the aim of all efforts by the teachers is to impart competences that the students will need after graduation in their further professional life. In this light, consideration of diversity is inevitable.

REFERENCES

Alexa, A. (2018). Gender-und diversitygerechte Unterrichtsgestaltung beim Fachhochschul-Masterstudiengang Militärische Führung des Österreichischen Bundesheeres. In Ebner, G., & Lechner, J. (Eds), *Interkulturalität und Diversity 2017*, 493-505. Wien: ReproZ.

Auferkorte-Michaelis, N., & Linde, F. (2016). Diversity Management an Hochschulen. In Genkova, P., & Ringeisen, T. (Eds), *Handbuch Diversity Kompetenz*, 803-817. Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler Verlag.

Franken, S. (2015). *Personal: Diversity Management.* Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler Verlag.

Gardenswartz, L., & Rowe, A. (2002). *Diverse Teams at Work: Capitalizing on the Power of Diversity.* Alexandria: Society for Human Resource Management. Available at: https://www.gardenswartzrowe.com/why-g-r

Gutting, D. (2015). *Diversity Management als Führungsaufgabe.* Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler Verlag.

Hochschulkonferenz. (2018). *Verbreiterung von Genderkompetenz in hochschulischen Prozessen.* Wien: Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung im Auftrag der Hochschulkonferenz.

Hussy, W., Schreier, M., & Echterhoff, G. (2013). *Forschungsmethoden*. Heidelberg: Springer.

Institut für Höhere Militärische Führung. (2022). *Richtlinie zum Diversity Management im Rahmen des FH-Masterstudiengang Militärische Führung*. Wien: Eigenverlag.

Manchen Spörri, S. (2017). Innovationspotenziale an Hochschulen durch Diversity-kompetente Führung freisetzen. In Truniger, L. (Ed), *Führen in Hochschulen*, 229-252. Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler.

Mathes, R., & Gruber, N. (2019). *Gleichstellung.* Wien: ReproZ.