

Research Visit at IEA Hamburg

Mafalda Leal Campos

During the first year of my Ph.D. program, I had a statistics subject with a professor who would often mention the importance of large assessment studies to explore phenomena in education. At the time, I was not acquainted with studies such as TIMSS and PIRLS... Little did I know that I would soon spend two months working with such data as well as with the people who were behind the development of these studies. Being highly influenced by my statistics professor at the time, Dr. João Marôco, I quickly started to follow IEA on social media (e.g., LinkedIn), where I saw the open call for the WERA Visiting Researcher Award 2023. Thankfully, my Ph.D. advisor, Dr. Francisco Peixoto, allowed me to spend some time working on a proposal to submit, although my Ph.D. topic was not 100% aligned with the research proposal I was suggesting.

Also, the likelihood of winning was not very high, so why not?

Fast forward to May 2023, I got an acceptance e-mail, and after the initial shock, I started to prepare for what would become an amazing and enriching experience. In October 2023 I left Lisbon and flew to Hamburg. I was supported by the University of Hamburg with finding housing in the city, which is quite expensive, and accommodation is highly competitive. To have this support was truly important. In previous meetings with Dr. Ingrid Gogolin, from the University of Hamburg (UH), and Dr. Rolf Strietholt, from RandA (Research and Analysis Unit) at IEA, it was arranged that I would spend a total of eight weeks in Hamburg and that I would spend half of the week in each institution. It was also decided that I would work on an additional project at UH using data from [MEZ – Multilingual Development](#), and work with the initial proposal at IEA using data from TIMSS 2019.

While I was at IEA, I worked closely with Dr. Nurullah Eryilmaz and Dr. Rolf Strietholt, who welcomed me kindly. At our first meeting, we aligned with the same goal: To make our time effective and to work toward future publication in an international journal. Some decisions and changes to the initial project were made. All in all, we can sum up our work as a cross-national analysis of TIMSS 2019 data in which we explored socio-affective gaps among students according to their gender, SES, and immigration status. This idea came from the well-known phenomenon of the achievement gap and was influenced by my educational psychology background, in which affective components of learning are highly valued and relevant for the assessment and understanding of achievement. We also decided to focus on the math domain, both as a way to simplify an already complex analysis, but also because I am involved in an international project studying math motivation ([MATHMot Project](#)).

Another one of my main research interests (and the one I focus on in my Ph.D.) is the existing educational inequalities among ethnic and migrant minorities, and being able to work with affective gaps with migrant and non-migrant youth. This ended up being useful for my doctorate program. At the end of the eight weeks, we were glad to have completed our analysis, and are currently working on a draft for submission in an international peer-reviewed journal. The exchanged words of affirmation and encouragement among the team established by me, Dr. Nurullah, and Dr. Rolf were essential for the positive and productive relationship that was established during my time at IEA.

Working at IEA was a great experience with a lot of learning involved. One of my favorite things was to be involved in an environment other than academics, but in which research is still valued and appreciated. The team at RandA is clearly very competent in what it does and made me feel comfortable and accepted. Even though I was there for a short time, I was involved in several meetings and social activities, which speaks loudly to their sense of care and inclusion. I was, at the same time, given freedom in the way I conducted my work, which I highly appreciated and tried to retribute with aiming to achieve our initial proposed goals the best way I could.

If you are reading this testimonial and wondering whether you should apply, don't think twice. Do it. You will be challenged—you will be asked to present and discuss your work, to be original and critical in your research, and to look for solutions for the challenges you face—and that's exactly what any young researcher needs in order to grow and learn. The benefits of taking part in this visit easily outweigh any negatives (e.g., getting out of your comfort zone!). Besides any material outcomes—such as our future joined publication—other equally important outcomes were achieved, such as personal and professional relationships with great researchers and analysts which might lead to future collaborations and professional opportunities.

I would like to thank every single person at RandA for making me feel so welcome and helping me throughout my time there, with a special appreciation for Nurullah and Rolf. I would also like to thank everyone at the University of Hamburg and everyone back home, including my very patient advisor who allowed me to “disappear” for 2 months. To my colleagues at the Center for Research in Education at Ispa who supported me in the data collection for my pilot study (Teresa, Patrícia, and Francisca) even though I was in another country. And to everyone who at some point somehow listened to my fears and anxieties about this experience and helped me cope with stepping out of my comfort zone. Everything was worth it, and I feel very lucky to have had such an opportunity and such people in my life.

To anyone thinking about applying, feel free to contact me on [LinkedIn](#) with any doubts or concerns. I will be very happy to help.



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