



## Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education

Theories, Concepts and Practical Approaches of Virtual, Blended and Physical Mobility

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Schlagworte: mobility of future teachers; individual barriers; institutional and structural obstacles; good practice  
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## How to Internationalize Teacher Training: Overview of Barriers and Approaches to Solutions

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# How to Internationalize Teacher Training: Overview of Barriers and Approaches to Solutions

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## Abstract

The internationalization of teacher training will enable future teachers to assess global developments and their impact on society against the background of their own experience and to communicate in an authentic manner. This is of great importance since they will then be able to prepare their future students in the best possible way for working, acting and living in global contexts. However, there are barriers and obstacles associated with the international orientation of teacher training. These are reduced in target group-specific programs such as “Lehramt.International” with measures at the individual, institutional and structural levels.

Keywords: mobility of future teachers, individual barriers, institutional and structural obstacles, good practice

## Outline

1. Introduction
2. Barriers to Internationalization and Mobility in Teacher Training
3. Approaches Using the Example of Lehramt.International

## 1 Introduction

In German schools, linguistic and cultural diversity has increased in recent years: In the 2022/2023 school year, 14.4 percent of students at schools in Germany did not have German citizenship (Destatis, 2023), compared to 11.7 percent in the 2020/2021 school year (Destatis, 2022).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in the 2018 PISA survey, over 75 percent of teachers in Germany reported that teaching in a multicultural or multilingual environment was not included in their teacher training (Mang et al., 2021, p. 207). More than 50 % of the respondents saw a medium or high need for further training in this area (*ibid.*, p. 226). Therefore, schools need teachers who can deal with cultural and linguistic diversity in such a way that all students can learn and develop in the best possible way.

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<sup>1</sup> The figures refer exclusively to students who hold only foreign citizenship and no German citizenship.

During their time at school, young people should be prepared for the globally operating labor market and learn to act responsibly in global contexts. In addition, they should develop into capable and cosmopolitan global citizens. Therefore, teachers must be able to arrange global developments and their effects on society against the background of their own experience and to convey that authentically. Here, the intercultural and international orientation of teacher training can make a major contribution.

This article provides an overview of the barriers and obstacles associated with international and intercultural learning experiences in teacher training. Based on this, it will be shown how these target group-specific needs and barriers are met and reduced on an individual, institutional and structural level within the framework of the program "Lehramt.International".

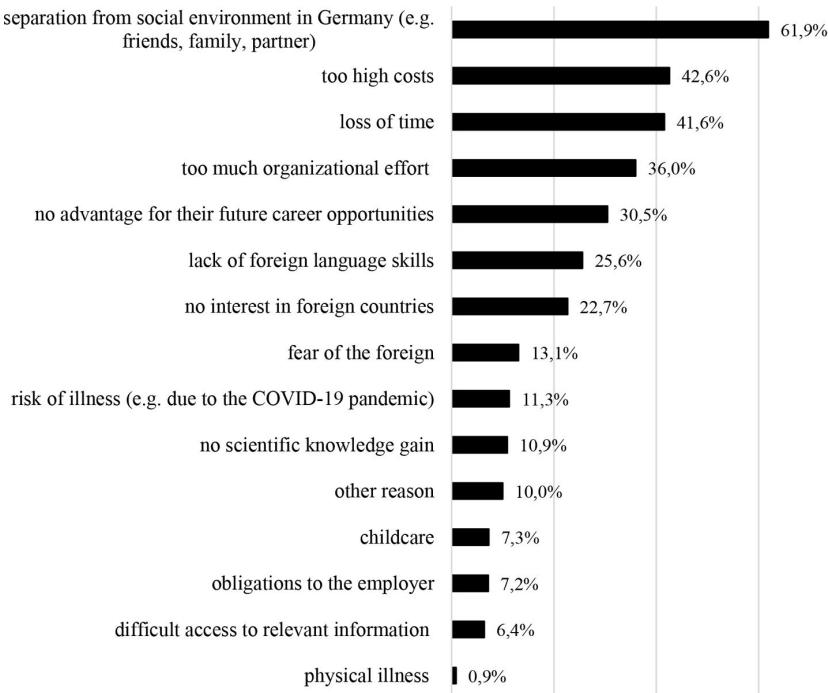
## **2 Barriers to Internationalization and Mobility in Teacher Training**

The answers to the question "Why do student teachers decide against a study-related stay abroad?" provide a good starting point for addressing the difficulties and hurdles regarding the internationalization of teacher training. The teacher education-specific analysis of more than 10,000 data records from the 2020/2021 survey of the DAAD project "International University Benchmark" (BintHo) revealed that about 19 percent of the surveyed student teachers decided against a stay abroad.<sup>2</sup> Among the non-mobile student teachers surveyed, separation from the social environment in Germany was the most frequently cited reason for deciding against a study-related stay abroad (62 %), followed by too high costs (43 %), loss of time (42 %), too much organizational effort (36 %), and no advantage for their future career opportunities (31%) (DAAD, 2023, pp. 29–30).

Whereas for 62 % of non-mobile student teachers the separation from family, friends and partner is the main reason for deciding against a stay abroad, only slightly more than half (51%) of non-mobile university students without a teaching degree cite this as a reason (ibid., p. 31). There is also a significant difference between student teachers and other university students for the motivations of "lack of foreign language skills" (26 % to 18 %) and "childcare" (7 % to 4%) (ibid.). These results make it clear that prospective teachers represent a student group with special needs on an individual level due to, among other things, special circumstances (childcare during their studies), characteristics or skills (low foreign language skills), values and attitudes (separation from social environment or no interest in foreign countries/fear of the foreign). However, the obstacles to mobility are not only rooted in the special nature of the target group, but also have their causes at the institutional and structural level.

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<sup>2</sup> A further 19 % of respondents had already completed a stay abroad, 18 % had definite plans to do so, 30 % would probably or possibly do so and 13 % had planned to do so but had abandoned their plans. A further 5 % of the student teachers surveyed had not yet considered it (DAAD, 2023, p. 11).



**Figure 1:** Reasons why non-mobile student teachers decided not to study abroad (multiple answers possible, n = 6,030)

Loss of time, which more non-mobile student teachers (42 %) than non-mobile other university students (36 %) also see as a reason for deciding against a stay abroad (*ibid.*), can be attributed to a combination of structural and institutional circumstances. The career path for teachers at public schools is one of the most highly regulated in Germany. This is why teacher training at HEIs is also characterized by many rules and guidelines, including those for the recognition of practical phases (abroad). As a result, existing structures in teacher training programs at HEIs make it difficult to integrate periods of study abroad into the curriculum, and the recognition of international experience is often difficult due to very specific and high requirements.

In Germany, teacher training requires students to study at least two subjects. In addition to the subject-specific sciences, the subject-specific didactics and educational sciences are also an integral part of teacher training – involving many different contacts and complex structures. These peculiarities of the German teacher training may also be reasons why there are not enough international teaching related cooperation partners and why there is a lack of information, counseling and support services for study abroad stays for student teachers.

The fact that neither incentives nor appreciation for gaining intercultural and international learning experiences for one's professional career exist on a structural level also has negative consequences. On the one hand, this has a negative impact on the

importance of the international dimension of teacher training in HEIs – teacher education is rarely mentioned in the internationalization strategies – and on the other hand, on the motivation of prospective teachers to gain study-related experiences abroad. 31% of the non-mobile student teachers justify their decision against a stay abroad, among other things, by the lack of the expected positive effect on their future career as a teacher, among the non-mobile other university students it is significantly less (12%) (*ibid.*).

### **3      Approaches Using the Example of Lehramt.International**

The DAAD launched the Lehramt.International program, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, in 2019 to prepare prospective teachers in Germany for successful teaching in culturally and linguistically heterogeneous classrooms (for an example in context of a Lehramt.International project see Nierste, 2024, in this anthology). The future teachers acquire the international and intercultural knowledge and competencies required for this by advancing the internationalization of teacher education within the framework of the program at the individual, institutional, and structural impact levels.

Student teachers and pre-service graduates from all HEIs in Germany can apply for a full scholarship to conduct 1- to 12-month self-organized school internships abroad – a program measure that primarily targets the individual impact level. Since 2019, 5,322 student teachers and pre-service graduates have applied for a Lehramt.International scholarship and 2,539 scholarships have been awarded for school placements in 92 different countries. The awarding of the individual scholarships is accompanied by a target group-specific information and marketing campaign. Experience reports of prospective teachers are published on the campaign website to further interest in a peer-approach, and relevant information is prepared in a way that is suitable for the target group.

At the institutional level, the program provides German HEIs with financial support for up to six years to implement model projects in teacher training to establish international cooperation and promote internationalization at home. Currently, 36 model projects are being funded in 15 different federal states. Within these model projects, German HEIs cooperate with 233 cooperation partners in 37 countries. The measures implemented in the model projects, such as the establishment of teacher-training-related partnerships with a focus on multidisciplinary cooperation, the integration of mobility-windows into existing teacher-training, and the development or establishment of curricula with an internationalization focus, lead to the systematic recognition of international experience. This issue is of great importance in the context of the loss of time that many student teachers cite as a reason for deciding not to study abroad (see Fig. 1). In addition, the model projects lead to more visibility of teacher education within HEIs, especially in the context of the internationalization efforts of individual universities. In this way, structures are also established within the German

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HEIs that ensure that teacher training is consistently involved in (future) internationalization measures.

In addition to the marketing campaign for prospective teachers, Lehramt International also includes studies and events on internationalization needs and opportunities to advise representatives from politics and HEIs. Thus, this package of measures refers primarily to changes at the structural level. To this end, knowledge on the internationalization of teacher training is generated and disseminated. These findings are in turn used as background information in events such as the Policy Dialogue on structural and legal frameworks for internationally oriented teacher training. The special feature of this event format is that all relevant stakeholders from politics, ministries and HEIs participate and focus exclusively on the internationalization of teacher training in one federal state. Therefore, it is possible to discuss in detail the structural and legal obstacles to the internationalization of teacher training and to jointly explore the scope for alternative solutions.

An analysis of the teacher training laws and ordinances for the first state examination of the individual federal states serves as a basis for discussion for the Policy Dialogues. This analysis examines which intercultural learning opportunities are mentioned or anchored in the laws and ordinances. It becomes clear that in some federal states individual intercultural learning opportunities are not taken into account or at least not further specified. However, this does not automatically mean that there are no regulations and/or concretizations in these federal states. In some cases, the regulations on intercultural learning opportunities or their concretizations are found in the study and examination regulations for the teacher training programs at the individual HEIs. While this approach recognizes the principle of academic freedom for the HEIs, it also makes the political support for the implementation of internationalization measures specific to teacher training at the HEIs less visible. Based on the analysis of the teacher training laws and regulations for the first state examination, the following recommendations can be made for the removal of structural hurdles or obstacles. Some federal states may serve as examples of good practice:

- Dealing with (cultural) diversity<sup>3</sup> should not be mentioned exclusively as a basic competence in educational sciences and/or subject didactics but should be an integral part for all school types and subjects, combined with incentives like credit points. This has already been implemented in Berlin<sup>4</sup> and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW)<sup>5</sup>.
- Dealing with multilingualism or the acquisition of knowledge and competencies in the area of German as a foreign and/or second language should be given greater relevance across all school types and subjects, for example through a fixed number of credit points. This is already done in North Rhine-Westphalia in the form of the Master's module "German for migrant pupils" with six credit points<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the majority of non-precise terms heterogeneity and inclusion in the laws or regulations, it remains unclear whether the cultural dimension is included without explicitly listing it.

<sup>4</sup> Senate Department for Justice and Consumer Protection Berlin, 2014, § 2 para. 3; § 3 para. 3; § 4 para. 3

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of the Interior of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2016, § 1 para. 2

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of the Interior of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2016, § 2 para. 1; § 3 para. 1; § 4 para. 1; § 5 para. 1; § 6 para. 1

- Study-related stays abroad with their importance in the professionalization process should be explicitly recommended and supported by incentives in the teacher training law or in the regulation for the first state examination. Mobility is mentioned as an option in almost all federal states, except for Bremen, Saxony-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein.
- The recognition of stays abroad in the form of credit points should be guaranteed regardless of school types and the subjects studied. In Hamburg, there is an individual study component in the Bachelor's program, which contributes, for example, to the better realization of a study abroad<sup>7</sup>.
- If there is a general obligation for student teachers in foreign languages to spend several months abroad, NRW<sup>8</sup> sets a good example of how to define exceptions. Good examples of softer formulations regarding to mobility are given by Brandenburg<sup>9</sup>, Rhineland-Palatinate<sup>10</sup> or Thuringia<sup>11</sup>. In this way, the disadvantage of certain groups due to severe mobility restrictions can be excluded.

Ultimately, the above illustrates that target group-specific programs such as Lehramt International, in which internationalization and mobility obstacles are addressed at the individual, institutional, and structural levels, are highly relevant to advancing the internationalization of teacher training in a long-term and sustainable manner. In general, internationalization should not be seen as another add-on in the catalog of requirements for teacher training. Rather, it is a quality feature of teacher training through which future-relevant topics such as digital teaching, inclusive learning, and democracy building can be addressed in an international context, thus enriching the discussion in Germany. Furthermore, internationally and interculturally oriented teacher education can also contribute to the current debate on education by making teacher training more attractive.

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7 Hamburg Parliament, 2018, p. 6

8 Ministry of Schools and Education of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2009, § 11 para. 10

9 Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the State of Brandenburg, 2013, § 5 para. 4

10 Ministry of Justice of Rhineland-Palatinate, 2007, § 5 para. 14

11 Thuringian Ministry of Finance, 1994, Anlage B Gewählte Prüfungsfächer

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