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Schlagworte: internationalization strategy; intercultural competences; internationalization of higher education
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Pedagogical University Development Using the Example of the Giessen GloPEG Project

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A Step-by-step Model for Internationalization of Elementary School Teacher Education

Pedagogical University Development Using the Example of the Giessen GloPEG Project

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Abstract

Internationalization in the context of higher education can be seen as a gradual process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into higher education. Giessen's elementary¹ school teacher education meets the challenges of internationalization in teacher education with a step-by-step internationalization strategy. The goal of this strategy is to sustainably implement international components into the elementary school teacher education program and to enable students to gain international experience at a self-determined intensity and frequency. In the context of this conceptual contribution, the necessity of a multi-level, sequential, and gentle internationalization strategy is outlined, followed by the presentation and explanation of the step-by-step model.

Keywords: internationalization strategy, intercultural competences, internationalization of higher education

Outline

1. Need for Internationalization in Elementary School Teacher Education
2. Step-by-step Model for Internationalization
3. Discussion

1 The Need for Internationalization in Elementary School Teacher Education

Internationalization in the context of higher education can be defined as a “process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education” (Knight, 2008, p. 21). Accordingly, it is a gradual process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into higher education. Internationally oriented higher education pursues the goal of improving

¹ Elementary school in Giessen in the federal state of Hesse in Germany encompasses classes 1 to 4, which is obligatory for children to visit, starting at the age of 6.

teaching and making a contribution to society, for example, through an intercultural exchange (cf. de Wit et al., 2015, p. 29). In an internationally oriented teacher education, “dealing with diversity” becomes the guiding motive for action (cf. Barsch & Dziak-Mahler, 2015, p. 10). Elementary school, with its founding promise to be a “school for all” (Götz, 2019), is particularly committed to this motive for action. Accordingly, elementary school teacher education should also have an international orientation, since the university also has an international character. Compared to other disciplines, however, the teacher education program is considered to be separate in the higher education landscape (cf. Hedtke, 2020, p. 94). Consequently, it can be stated that elementary school teacher education is not very internationalized compared to other degree programs (see also Seifert, 2024, in this anthology). According to Brahm, Jennert, and Euler, disciplinary cultures have an impact on the design of teaching (cf. 2016, p. 6). This is visible in teacher education for elementary schools, where there are only few institutionally anchored, internationally oriented courses (Radhoff & Ruberg, 2020, p. 57). Above all, the study environment in the teaching education, apart from foreign language subjects, is perceived as having little international appeal (cf. Wernisch, 2017, p. 8).

In addition to the founding promise of the elementary school, the action motive “dealing with diversity” is activated by the demand of the German Rectors’ Conference to qualify future teachers for the perception of “global citizenship” (HRK, 2014, p. 94). Giessen’s elementary school teacher education meets these challenges with a step-by-step internationalization strategy. All measures that serve the internationalization of the Giessen elementary school teaching profession are combined under the umbrella of GloPEG. This stands for “Global Primary School Education Giessen” (cf. GloPEG, 2023). The goal of this strategy is to sustainably implement international components into the elementary school teacher education program and to enable teacher students to gain international experience at a self-determined intensity and frequency.

The group of elementary school teacher education students are predominantly first-generation students (cf. Miethé, 2014) who were the first in their family to take up higher education. First-generation students perceive their studies – even without international components – as challenging (cf. e. g. Lange-Vester, 2014). In order not to further complicate the already challenging studies by integrating international components, our step-by-step strategy, which is self-determined in scope and frequency, seems particularly appropriate for this special target group.

2 Step-by-step Model for Internationalization

In order to internationalize the study of elementary school teacher education in a target group-specific or diversity-sensitive way, Giessen’s elementary school teacher education pursues six (internationalization) stages, which are meant to be interdependent. This means that the stages can and should exist side by side and build on each other only to a limited extent. Accordingly, the model is metaphorically based on a Penrose staircase (always continuing staircase), not in that internationalization is impossible, but rather as interconnected steps that can be taken one after the other but do not have

to be. At first, we differentiate the model into two levels: “Internationalization abroad” and “Internationalization at home” (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 45). “Internationalization abroad” refers to all forms of mobility, e. g. stays abroad via Erasmus+. “Internationalization at home” refers to development processes on site that affect the curriculum – for example, through the integration of international comparative perspectives (cf. de Wit et al., 2015, p. 50).

Table 1: A step-by-step model for internationalization in elementary school teacher education

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
International learning situations	International seminar	Certificate	Internship	Semester abroad	International elementary school teacher training program
Internationalization at home			Internationalization abroad		

We classify the first three stages as measures of an “internationalization at home”, since the individual stages concern domestic seminar offers, which are to be assigned to the individual curriculum development. Step 1 “international learning situations” involves the curricular implementation of individual learning situations (English-language inputs, films, ...) or individual English-language sessions of the course in elementary school pedagogy courses. Step 2 “international seminar” is an English-language course (for an example see Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024, in this anthology). All learning situations here are offered in English and are designed to promote “global citizenship” (HRK, 2014, p. 94)². The third step comprises an elementary school education module or a certificate course within the framework of the elementary school teacher education program, which is designed to promote intercultural perspectives and “global citizenship”. Several courses with interrelated content are planned, the successful completion of which can either be credited to the elementary school teacher training program or honored with a certificate.

Steps 4 to 6 are measures of an “internationalization abroad”. Step 4 provides for an internship abroad. Here, different variants of the design are conceivable, e. g. internships abroad that are more research-related or teaching-related. Step 5 comprises a “classic” semester abroad, which is already common in some foreign-language-oriented degree programs. The sixth step provides for the implementation of an independent international elementary school teacher education program as a long-term perspective. Depending on the design, step 6 naturally contains both parts of an “internationalization abroad” and “internationalization at home”, since parts in the sense of the first three steps and mobility phases in the sense of steps 4 and 5 are integrated locally.

All in all, the goal is to sustainably implement international components in the national elementary school teacher education and to enable students to gain international experience in each case at a self-determined intensity and frequency.

² A step 1 course was conducted in Giessen from summer term 2021 to winter term 2022 (four semesters; Müller, Seifert, Kopp & Basedow 2023; Kopp et al. 2024) and step 2 courses have been conducted in Giessen since summer term 2023 (see Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al. 2024, in this anthology).

In order to implement these strategic goals sustainably, various levels of the university must be taken into account (cf. Brahm, Jenert & Euler, 2016, p. 11). In the following, these levels are briefly unfolded and then discussed with regard to our strategy.

3 Discussion

In order to lead to the intended goal for such an internationalization strategy in the long term, it is necessary to go beyond changes in higher education didactics and also to pursue organizational development (cf. Brahm, Jenert and Euler 2016, p. 8). Overall, a change process according to the model of “pedagogical university development” takes place on three levels, which are oriented to overarching strategic goals for academic affairs. This includes the level of the learning environment, in which changes in higher education didactics are in the foreground. This is followed by the level of the study programs, where organizational decisions are made that need to be appropriately coordinated with the teaching staff. At the level of the organization, structural decisions are made, for example, about the personnel infrastructure that is provided to achieve the goals (cf. Brahm, Jenert & Euler, 2016, p.13 ff.).

The step-by-step model for the internationalization of elementary school teacher education in Giessen is based on strategic goals for studies and teaching at Giessen University. In particular, to the university’s development plan, which envisions a “further internationalization of teacher education” (Der Präsident der Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen, 2020, p. 22). Our model is predominantly on the operational levels of the learning environment and the study programs. The first two steps can clearly be assigned to the level of learning environments, since they involve highly didactic changes of varying intensity of individual courses. The steps 3 to 5 comprise changes at the level of the study programs, since modules or certificate courses, internships abroad and semesters abroad are to be integrated into the curriculum here. Step 6 – the introduction of an international elementary school teacher education program – is also to be assigned to the level of study organization, but due to state legal requirements, an introduction would also affect the level of organization.

According to the model of “pedagogical university development”, change processes are always successful if they keep all three levels in view (cf. Brahm, Jenert & Euler, 2016, p.11). This can be exemplified by the developments in higher education didactics at Step 1 (cf. Müller et al., 2023), which also keeps an eye on the level of the study programs. Thus, after successful piloting of Step 1, international elements were integrated into the curriculum of the elementary school teacher education program in Giessen. The coordination and communication processes with the teachers, which represent an integral guarantee of success for Step 1, should also be emphasized here (cf. Müller et al., 2023, p. 417). With reference to Level 3, it can be seen that the Human Resource (HR) infrastructure is mainly financed by second- and third-party funds. Due to the volatility of these funds, the continued operation of the first step is always at risk. With regard to the inclusion of university development goals, which our step-by-step model

has translated into the practice of elementary school teacher education, there is thus no optimal correspondence between the levels of pedagogical university development. What is desirable here, for example, is stable staffing for a sustainable and successful implementation of the graduated model.

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