

Internationalization efforts at a German university: A case study on how international students are engaged in a meaningful way as cultural resources

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Abstract: This study used a single-case study design and a qualitative research strategy to examine the manner in which international students were being engaged as contributors towards internationalization efforts at a German research university in a global city. The data suggests that international students are marginally being engaged as cultural resources mainly through mentoring programs and that several contextual barriers were hindering the interaction between international and German students. The study identified that opportunities for meaningful engagement between international and German students should be expanded to reach a wider audience while programs that are designed for international students should include the integration of more German students to avoid reinforcing student bubbles. This study proposes a framework to overcome contextual barriers that allows for internationalization for all through the meaningful integration of students and to motivate the university to recognize the benefits of utilizing international students as contributors towards internationalization efforts.

Introduction

Our society has become increasingly more connected, mobile, and interdependent which has been highlighted further by the recent global pandemic. This has led to a rapid expansion of internationalization within higher education as it fights to respond to impacts from globalization. With the rise in worldwide immigration and growing cultural diversity within societies, there is a need for increased intercultural understanding and the preparation of students who are global citizens ready to engage with our rapidly changing world (Ward, Masgoret, and Gexentsvey 2009). The global demand for international higher education is projected to increase from 3.3 million students travelling across the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) area for study purposes in 2015 (OECD 2017) to 7.2 million international students in 2025 (Bohm, Davis, Mearns, and Pearce 2002) and therefore universities need to be prepared to engage these students. Often times international students that come to campus are placed in classes or programs specifically designed for only them. While some of these programs can be a great way to provide international students with the support that they need to manage through the challenging transition, it can lead to reinforcing international student friendship bubbles. Rarely however do these students contribute to the international integration university websites often speak so lofty about (Noorda 2014). Good questions to ask about programs and activities for international students are: do they promote mutual intercultural learning and respect between international and domestic students (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, and Nelson 1999) and is there an opportunity for meaningful reciprocal cultural exchange?

There are increased concerns that students who do not participate in study abroad miss out on opportunities to gain valuable global, international, and intercultural (GII) competencies as opposed to their peers who do go abroad (Soria and Trosis 2014). For students who are unable to go abroad, interacting with international students and having intercultural elements integrated into their curriculum could be a substitution for study abroad experiences and could provide an alternative setting for ways to develop global, international, and intercultural competencies. There are many studies that highlight internationalization at home activities outside of the classroom but for universities that do not have a campus culture, they face significantly higher difficulty in creating opportunities for students to meaningfully integrate and engage with one another. This means that internationalization at home efforts need to start in the classroom because “within an internationalized curriculum, international students are valuable contributors of diverse cultural perspectives and experiences, who have the potential to transform the campus and the classroom into a vibrant microcosm of the world” (Leask 2009, 206).

The presence of international students on campus does not mean internationalization nor does it mean reciprocal cultural exchange is occurring. There are many potential benefits which can be fostered by intercultural interactions through internationalization of higher education and intergroup group contact (Dunne 2013) which is why it is important that opportunities for these interactions occur. Intergroup contact has the potential to positively affect both international and German students in a manner that enhances their educational experience and makes a meaningful contribution to society. The German higher education culture presents a unique environment where there are no tuition fees, the universities are underfunded, there are multiple players at various levels, study schedules are packed tightly which leaves students credit points minded, and there is a lack of faculty due to the large increase in students and cuts to budgets over the years. A research university within a global city presents further challenges due to its lack of campus culture. All of these factors are barriers when it comes to providing international and German students opportunities to integrate with one another.

A considerable amount of research has been devoted to the relationship between contact and prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). This study considers that relationship in the context of contact between international and German students at a German research university in a global city. Very little research exists on the manner in which international students are engaged as valued contributors to the internationalization of university campuses (Urban and Palmer 2014). This study examined how international students at a German university are currently being engaged as contributors towards internationalization efforts through opportunities to integrate with German students in a meaningful way.

Conceptual and Contextual Framework

Globalization vs Internationalization

There has been confusion over the relationship between internationalization and globalization and whether or not the two are the same (Robson 2011). While there is no clear definition, Roberts, Chou, and Ching (2010) state that it is agreed among scholars that the process of globalization is unalterable and therefore beyond institutional control “in lei of the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, and ideas across borders” (p. 152) but that internationalization remains alterable at the institutional level. Wing Ng (2012) echoes this by saying that in certain ways, internationalization is an interactive response to the multiple impacts of globaliza-

tion. Therefore, we can see internationalization in higher education as an institution's response to globalization. While the impact of globalization on higher education has been profound, it is necessary to be aware of the reciprocity that exists between the two (Foskett and Maringe 2012). The interconnectedness and interdependency of businesses and economies between nation states have led many universities to strive to produce global citizens who are capable of entering the global workforce. This in turn leads to the increased mobility of graduates into global labor markets which continues to fuel globalization. Globalization accelerates internationalization in higher education but as institutions answer with strategic responses, it reinforces the acceleration of globalization (Foskett and Maringe 2012).

With the interdependency of economies and societies and the increased importance of knowledge, Altbach and Knight (2007) note that the emergence of the knowledge-based society has come about through globalization and with this comes the need for highly educated personnel. A common outcome for internationalization of higher education is producing globally ready students or "global citizens" (Hunter, White, and Godbey 2006) because it holds the potential to prepare domestic and international students for a global workforce and foster intercultural competency (Bennett, Volet, and Fozdar 2013; Dearnorff 2006; Knight and de Wit 1995; Parsons 2010). Knight's internationalization definition was updated in 2015 by a Delphi Panel exercise among key experts around the world (de Wit and Hunter 2015) and now describes internationalization as "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (de Wit et al. 2015, 29). This new definition is a response to creating a more inclusive internationalization experience for all in the context of the recent backlash and previous inequalities created by globalization.

Higher Education Internationalization Rationales

The rationales for internationalization of higher education help provide the 'why' universities internationalize. Originally developed by de Wit and Knight in 1995, de Wit's (2002) updated rationale framework consists of four categories: political, economic, social and cultural, and academic. Where internationalization is the response to the impacts of globalization, the "rationales can be described as motivations for integrating an international dimension into higher education" (de Wit 2001, 78). There are multiple stakeholders, and they include: governments at the international, national, and regional level, the private sector, institutions, faculty, as well as students (Knight and de Wit 1995). Political rationales are closely linked with foreign policy, peace and mutual understanding, along with national and regional identity and they are starting to play larger roles because of the influences of globalization.

Economic rationales are seen as the number one driver for institutional internationalization as there is a direct link with the globalization of economies. The increase in technological developments have led national governments and the private sector to invest in internationalization efforts to promote economic growth and restore economic competitiveness. Globalization has brought about a global labor market in which graduates compete with people from other countries and need to be able to work in an international environment (de Wit 2002). Graduates not only need their professional qualifications but they also need other attributes such as soft skills and global competencies so they can increase their employability in the knowledge society (UNESCO 1998). The challenge of funding is being experienced everywhere as university budgets are being cut and there is limited funding through the government or third parties available. The international

student market is already seen as a lucrative opportunity and there has been an increased competitiveness to attract new forms of income and gain a piece of the pie.

Creating an environment of intercultural understanding and competence for the students, staff, and faculty through research and education are the basis for cultural rationales (de Wit 2010). Social rationales emphasize the significance of internationalization for the individual (de Wit 2002). It's the idea that by creating an international environment the individual, in particular the student, will become less provincial (de Wit 2010). Therefore, the focus is more on personal development and, "it stresses the importance of the individual development of the student and the academic through a confrontation with other cultures, but also, and perhaps even more, with the home culture" (de Wit 2001, 87). Students that never leave their country are still affected by the impacts of the globalized economy and society and therefore internationalization of higher education has the responsibility and opportunity to increase awareness and understanding of those through strategies that impact their student experience (de Wit 2002). Academic rationales get considerable attention as universities seek to brand themselves as world-class universities by obtaining international rankings. In light of the competition inside and outside of national borders to achieve high academic standings and an international profile, international cooperation has increased due to universities linking up with strategic partners to further research, student and staff exchange, and to build their international profile.

Internationalization Abroad and at Home

Internationalization at home and internationalization abroad are two concepts of internationalization of higher education that traditionally were viewed as independent but have increasingly become more intertwined (Knight 2008). An international experience at home has the ability to promote study abroad and enhance the quality of a study-related stay abroad while also preparing students with the necessary skills to make more of a study abroad experience (Beelen and Leask 2011). For those students who are not mobile or don't have the option for mobility, internationalization at home provides them with the opportunity to still gain the skills necessary to live and work in the globalized world (Beelen and Leask 2011). With a large majority of students not participating in study abroad activities, there are concerns that those who do not participate in study abroad may not reap the same benefits in the development of GII competencies as their peers who do participate in study abroad activities (Soria and Trosis 2014). Often students who have studied abroad return and look for opportunities to participate in international activities and efforts at their home institution to continue their cultural engagement.

In their 2014 study, Soria and Trosis noted that although study abroad is traditionally perceived to be a primary way in which students can gain GII competencies, they found that internationalization at home activities can also promote students' development of GII competencies just as effectively as formal study abroad. Knight (2005) details more generic components of internationalization at home to allow relevancy for the diversity at the national and institutional level. The curriculum and programs, the teaching/learning process, extracurricular activities, liaison with local cultural and ethnic groups, and research and scholarly activities are all opportunities where international students can be engaged as cultural resources and contributors towards internationalization efforts. GII competencies can be broadly defined to include, "knowledge about several dimensions of global and international culture; appreciation of cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity; understanding of the complexities of issues in a global context; and comfort in working with people from other cultures" (Soria and Troisi 2014, 262).

Intercontact Group Theory

Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis proposes that frequent and in-depth contact in certain settings with individuals from different outgroups can lead to reduced prejudice and improved attitudes toward the outgroup. For positive effects of intergroup contact to occur there should be four conditions present: equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and authority support (Pettigrew 1998). Allport (1954) specified the criteria as: equal group status, where both groups experience the same status instead of one that enhances the differential statuses between groups because it can reinforce stereotypes and prejudices; common goals, suggests that superficial contact is not sufficient because the contact needs to reach below the surface and that doing something together is more likely to yield greater results; intergroup cooperation, suggests common interests and interaction that does not lead to competition but cooperation amongst groups leads to more positive outcomes; authority support, greater effect occurs when contact is supported by institutions because it shows value and acceptance.

Building on Allport's contact hypothesis, Pettigrew's (1998) intergroup contact theory addendum proposes that another condition is needed for optimal contact, it needs to have "friendship potential" (p. 80). This type of contact needs to be high quality and sustained over a long period of time (Tawagi and Mak 2015). Pettigrew (1998) shares that Allport's conditions provide the setting that encourages intergroup friendship and that long-term close relationships are more constructive than initial acquaintanceships. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis of hundreds of empirical studies found that intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice even without the presence of all four of Allport's conditions, although effects were stronger when all of the conditions were present. Allport's contact theory and Pettigrew's addendum can be used to understand the means through which domestic students might gain GII competencies by interacting with international students on campus (Soria and Trosis 2014).

Research done by Thomas, Pflanzl, and Volkl (2016) concluded that international student exchange provides opportunities for intergroup contact and facilitates long-lasting prejudice reduction. Within the higher education environment, engagement with international students can be an effective way for students to acquire knowledge about other cultures to enhance their international competences (Deardorff and Jones 2012). Geelhoed, Abe, and Talbot's (2003) peer program found that the exposure to different cultural values, languages, and practices, allowed domestic students the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of different cultures and gain new cultural perspectives, challenge their stereotypical assumptions and biases about people from different backgrounds, influence their family and friend's attitudes towards international students, and became more competent with intercultural interactions. Campbell's (2012) "buddy project" showed that the experience enhanced domestic student's theory learning, challenged their stereotypes, and helped improve their self-perceived intercultural communication competence. During a time of increased migration and hostility towards outgroups, the experiences and skills gained from these interactions are necessary. For students that are unable to study abroad, meaningful engagement with international students on campus can be a source for opportunities for cross-cultural communication and the enhancement of international and intercultural skills (Geelhoed, Abe, and Talbot 2003).

Multiple studies have shown however that international students are not being extensively engaged as cultural resources (Urban and Palmer 2014) and that the friendship potential arising from international student exchange often remains untapped so the effects of intergroup contact are limited (Thomas, Pflanzl, and Volkl 2016). Ward et al. (2009) found that domestic student's

voluntary contact with international students occurred rarely. “Foreigners are a strain” (Allport 1954, 18) and therefore domestic students often do not engage socially with international students if there is no program context requiring them to do so. Resulting from the lack of interaction with domestic students, international students stick together and “create a kind of multi-national sub-campus among themselves rather than contribute to the culture of the campus as a whole” (Noorda 2014, 9). This separateness of groups creates a visual ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality that does not enhance equal group status. This interaction cannot be left up to chance as it typically will not happen if students are left to their own devices. For universities who have a mission of global engagement, international students must be integrated with domestic students both inside and outside of the classroom through meaningful collaborations to add to internationalization efforts (de Wit 2011).

German Higher Education Culture

Historical politics from World War II to reunification in 1990 have helped shape the landscape of the current university culture in Germany. With 16 federal states, each with their own Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science, German universities are decentralized and therefore function independently based on the jurisdiction of the state in which they reside. Most modern German universities are underfunded and therefore face a significant lack of financing (Morgan 2016). They also are affected by the lack of effective governance structures, an extremely high student/faculty ratio, outdated facilities, and an impeding hierarchical system between tenured and adjunct/assistant professors (Litta 2010). Other challenges are evident such as: ensuring standards for quality research, instruction, and study are maintained in the face of increased competition; ensuring opportunities for internationalized curriculum and learning experiences for students who are not mobile; and adjusting the higher education admissions process to accommodate the diverse incoming students (Streitwieser et al. 2015). These combined challenges shape the environment in which German universities operate while also trying to attract top international talent, increase their international student body, meet objectives set by regional, national, and state players, along with trying to gain positions as world-class universities.

The supranational initiative, the Bologna Process of 1999 brought about major transformations within the German higher education system. Germany joined with other European nations to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that was designed to foster further mobility of European students and staff through the transparency and compatibility of study structures, networked quality assurance systems, and the mutual recognition of degrees and academic qualifications (NIAD-UE 2014). For Germany, Streitwieser and Klabunde (2015) state that the Bologna Process “is arguably the most significant reform to higher education since Wilhelm von Humboldt’s 1810 fusion of teaching and research in the university mission” (p. 108). One of the core objectives of the Bologna Process was to introduce the three-tier structure of the bachelor, master, and doctoral qualifications to produce a higher degree of compatibility and comparability of higher education systems within EHEA (Hensen 2010). With greater transparency about what students have learned, the assumption was that students could be much more mobile if they could easily carry their credentials with them throughout the EHEA (Huisman et al. 2012).

Due to the close coupling of education and employment, German higher education prior to the Bologna process did not lack practical relevance (Munch 2013) as their diplom and magister degrees prepared students with the qualifications necessary for a profession. Munch (2013) feels that since the pairing of education and profession have been abandoned, now students need to invest in their personal development to become more attractive by gaining credits abroad, obtain-

ing competencies through internships, and that other social capital is needed to compensate for the loss of the educational title to improve the students' chances in the labor market. Others have argued that the three-tier structure has both helped and inhibited students as they are completing their degrees faster and entering the global labor market earlier than before but this fast-paced degree schedule leaves little room for further student development such as studying abroad.

As a federal higher education system, Germany faces definite financial challenges in order to sustain its internationalization efforts because of unstable and non-permanent funding for internationalization activities (Streitwieser and Klabunde 2015). National initiatives have greatly advanced the pace of internationalization in Germany which is clear with its position as a major receiver of international students. Germany is the world's fifth most attractive host country for international students and the population of foreign students is rapidly expanding (Streitwieser et al. 2015) largely in part due to its lack of tuition fees. In other countries, universities benefit economically from the influx of international students because of the tuition fees they pay. These universities often focus their internationalization efforts on economic rationales and the recruitment of more international students to bring in an income. German universities typically do not charge international students tuition fees and therefore international students in Germany are not seen as a source of funding but rather as a financial burden as the workload increases but the funding does not.

Internationalization of German Higher Education

Programs that are created to further internationalization abroad and at home operate based only on the level of funding they receive not knowing if their operations will continue after their funding is set to expire. This can jeopardize long-term internationalization activities and even basic funding by federal states is often insufficient to have a significant impact on institutional internationalization efforts (Streitwieser et al. 2015). High rates of third-party funding try to fill in the gaps but often come up short or still leave uncertainty for the future success of programs and internationalization efforts. The German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD) is probably the most significant supporter of German higher education internationalization through various funding and support programs (Streitwieser and Klabunde 2015). One of the most well-known organizations in the world in the international education field, DAAD provides funding to not only institutions but to students as well through a variety of scholarships. The funds are used to support students, researchers, graduates and artist mobility, while also funding and promoting various internationalization abroad and at home objectives to further the internationalization of German higher education institutions (DAAD 2016).

The German Excellence Initiative is an example of performance-based funding and it's one of Germany's most visible efforts to further internationalization of German higher education. The multi-billion-euro initiative focuses on strengthening top-level research universities and improving their quality as they strive to enhance their international profiles and achieve world-class recognition in the face of global competition, including the challenges posed by global university rankings, and the global race to attract academic talent and research production (Streitwieser and Klabunde 2015). The large amount of funding allocated to Excellence winners have given them an advantage on the international playing field while adding prestige to the university's name. Traditionally, the German higher education system was rather homogeneous regarding institutional quality and reputation and therefore it was challenging for students to differentiate themselves by attending elite institutions (Netz and Finger 2016). Now-a-days, it is clear that the prestige of the university where the student gained their degree has become a crucial factor

(Munch 2013).

The Erasmus Student Mobility Program that began in 1988 is another supranational initiative that has significantly impacted German higher education (Streitwieser and Klabunde 2015). Altbach and Teichler (2001) shared that some experts claim the Erasmus program “has been the single most successful component of EU policy” (p. 10). Over time the program has continued to grow and expand to become one of Europe’s most iconic programs. The recent Erasmus+ program encompasses the previous Erasmus program and other EU initiatives into one. Since 2015, the EU has been funding academic mobility beyond the borders of Europe and supporting cooperation in projects with higher education institutions around the world through Erasmus+ (DAAD 2016). This program is important for German higher education institutions because it sends German students out into the world while also bringing students to Germany. Building skills, employability, and intercultural awareness of students was the first Key Action in the Erasmus+ plan and speaks to the growing interest in preparing students to enter the global workforce. About one third of Germany’s students study abroad each year, although this number has remained somewhat stagnant over the past decade, there are hopes that it will increase under the Erasmus+ program (Streitwieser et al. 2015). Strategies that have a strong internationalization at home focus have led to major changes at German universities in the form of English-language courses, numerous double degree programs, strategic partnerships, and even bi-national universities (Ruland 2015). While the intention is to increase study abroad and provide more opportunities for those who may previously not have been able to participate, there is also an increased focus on ensuring that everyone else has an opportunity for internationalization elements.

A record 341,000 international students were enrolled at German higher education institutions in 2016 which almost hit the target set by the federal government of 350,000 by the year 2020 (DAAD 2016). Germany is attractive for many international students due to the tuition free higher education and incentives by the federal government to stay for employment after graduation. Wahlers (2018) explains that providing an education to a large number of international students at the cost of German taxpayers is regarded as Germany’s contribution to international exchange and global development. International students that opt to stay and work in Germany after graduation offer economic benefits in the sense that they’ll contribute to the economy. With Germany’s aging population and need for workers, international students have a lot more than cultural perspectives and diversity to offer. There is plenty of evidence that not only universities, but also the economy and society, reap the long-term benefits of welcoming international students to German institutions (Wahlers 2018). The drop-out rate of international students before graduation has been a huge concern at the national, state, and institutional level. Currently, there is a 41% drop-out rate before graduation in undergraduate courses; in master’s level courses it is much lower, at only 9% (Streitwieser et al. 2015). There has been a push by DAAD and individual universities to improve services and support for international students in order to improve retention and completion rates (Streitwieser and Klabunde 2015). Streitwieser et al. (2015) point out that retaining this talent pool is needed for the future especially because over the coming decade international students may add 4.3 billion euros to the economy. The fact that international students are not staying reveals a weakness in the internationalization strategies being carried out.

Methodology

The environment in which international students are being engaged as contributors to internationalization efforts within the higher education setting is dauntingly broad and therefore a German

research university located in a global city was chosen as the unit of analysis due to the researcher's ability to gain access to the participants and its unique cultural position outside of the more commonly studied U.S. based institutions. A single-case study design was chosen to answer the research questions using a qualitative research strategy. The data collection for this qualitative study employed research methods of purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. Those who worked directly with university internationalization efforts, international students, and study abroad students were considered for interviews because of the likelihood that they would generate useful data. A total of 14 prospective participants were contacted to inquire about their willingness to participate in the study. Of the 14 prospective participants contacted there were 10 that agreed to an interview. This sample selection was not intended to be representative of the entire university staff and faculty community as those who operate outside of this field may not be knowledgeable about this subject matter. The participants positions ranged from senior administrators, faculty members, and staff members.

All 10 interviews were conducted in person at the university. A semi-structured interview was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience in the international field at the university, knowledge of the opportunities for engagement, meaningful contact, and interaction among students at the university, as well as perceptions on university encouragement, mutual intercultural learning exchange, and student bubbles. A majority of open-ended questions were employed on the interview guide to allow the participants to explain their understanding, knowledge, and perceptions. The interviews were coded with broad categories and a thematic approach was employed while analyzing the data. This approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to look across the data collected to find common reoccurring issues and identify salient themes (Brikci and Green 2007). The data was collected during the month of June 2017.

Results

It is important to point out that within the university, there are two groups of international students. There are international exchange students that come through a program like Erasmus for a semester or yearlong exchange and there are degree-seeking students. Degree-seeking students come to the university with the intent to obtain a degree and are matriculated as regular students and not exchange students. The following findings will reference both types of international students and although their needs vary, they both still bring unique perspectives to the university. This study does not take into account foreign students that have been living in Germany and obtained their university entrance qualifications there. There were seven key themes that emerged from the empirical data set collected during the interviews.

Manner of Engaging International Students

Upon completion of the coding and thematic analysis, the thematic pattern 'there is a mentoring program' was discovered to answer research question 1: 'in what manner are international students being engaged as contributors to internationalization efforts and what does this look like?'. When asked about opportunities for international students to engage with German students, opportunities for students to build cross-cultural skills, or opportunities that promote mutual intercultural learning where international students can be used as contributors to internationalization efforts, each participant mentioned one or various mentoring programs that are offered throughout the university. Through the interviews, it was discovered that there are mentoring programs offered separately for international exchange students and international matriculated students. Additionally, there are also mentoring programs offered through the faculties. It became clear that each

mentoring program differs in what it offers and operates independently from one another. For instance, the mentoring program for the exchange students was described as:

The main idea is that they can find somebody that helps them at the beginning of the semester because some of them come from a very different system, if they come from China for example. That is why our primary requirement is they have to already know the university and how to find their way around here. And the exchange students are only coming here maybe one week or two weeks before the semester starts and they are a little bit puzzled so the mentor should be able to help them. Sometimes some mentors have more than one mentee, so some of them have two or three. It depends on the mentor and mentee what kind of relationship they develop, some of them become very good friends, some only exchange one email at the beginning of the semester or two emails, or some never answer so it is very different (Interview 6)².

This explanation shows that engagement is left up to chance depending on the mentor and mentee relationship. The basis for the mentoring program is to offer support the first few weeks which are typically the hardest for exchange students in terms of adjustment. Students are paired up depending on voluntary participation and for those students that end up having a connection, there is a chance for further engagement through the semester. The mentoring program for the international matriculated students was described as the response to the high drop-out rate and was designed specifically for these students to offer extended support and attempts at university integration. One participant explained it as:

We've got a product that helps us mentor students who come for a degree and it makes sure that they don't drop out in the first semester. We put a social and an academic mentor at their side so that when problems occur and they have questions, they have someone they can go to and ask. And that has proved to be extremely internationalizing in a sense because it allows international students to integrate very rapidly into the main student body (Interview 1)³.

These students are paired up with a student who is in their field of study and an academic mentor to deepen the level of support. This allows the student to already have a common shared interest and common goal of working towards the same degree with their student mentor. A key component that set this mentoring program apart from the previously mentioned program is the level of involvement assisting the students in the beginning of their mentoring time together. In addition to thoughtful mentor pairing this program also prepares students for how to navigate their cultural relationship and provides them with a cultural training. For domestic students who have no previous international relationships, this type of knowledge and these skills are crucial for successfully managing conflict due to intercultural misunderstandings or expectations. The beginning of an intercultural relationship is the most intimidating and it is easier to avoid it if there is not sufficient support to help guide through the initial process of establishing the relationship.

Meaningful Engagement

In attempting to answer research question 2: 'what does it mean to engage international students meaningfully?' the following thematic patterns were identified: 'it makes an impression, it goes deeper, it goes beyond' and 'it's the university but it's the students too'. Meaningful interactions are considered part of the criteria for intergroup contact theory and a meaningful interaction is considered to be contact that is not superficial in nature but contact that leads to more frequent and intense integration (Soria and Troisi 2014). This contact should also have friendship potential

because that opportunity implies that interaction on this level would mean that self-disclosure and other friendship-developing mechanisms are possible (Petteigrew 1998). During the participants responses, it was unanimous that meaningful contact was contact that was not of the superficial nature. This echoed meaningful contact criteria for intergroup contact theory as the contact needs to be of high quality over time and not just chance encounters occasionally.

One participant explained what meaningful contact might look like, “I think a meaningful contact in general is when I interact with another person and after that interaction perhaps I understand a little bit better, what this person is about and in return I understand myself better, why I am the way I am. It’s understanding the other so that I can understand myself better” (Interview 5)⁴. This idea that meaningful contact affects you on certain levels was carried throughout most of the participants explanations. Another participant shared their thoughts on meaningful contact and made a connection between meaningful contact and the potential to build GII skills for the students. For students that are unable to go abroad, experiencing this type of contact with an international student may be able to help them develop the skills others gain from their study abroad experience:

I guess for the domestic student meaningful contact with an international student would possibly mean the same thing but the other way around, to gain insight into the perspective of somebody that is coming from abroad to a context that is very familiar to me but seeing the same context through another person’s eyes and understanding what makes it hard to integrate into a new context or what challenges there could be. Something like that and maybe also opening your eyes to what is out there and learning about studying in a different country, with other circumstances and ways of life (Interview 4)⁵.

The role the city plays in hindering this type of contact became clear as a participant pointed out that, “the city is big so you will not automatically interact with your fellow students in a different context. I think it’s more anonymous and it’s harder for people to build meaningful connections no matter if they are from abroad or from other parts of Germany” (Interview 4)⁶. The vastness of the city allows for group separateness and unless it is sought out, people are not forced to interact with different outgroups. Another point shared was that the city offers so many opportunities that it doesn’t make sense for the university to plan anything. The university cannot compete with the city’s multitude of opportunities for entertainment and cultural activities and yet the chance that different groups of students will attend these and interact with one another in a meaningful way are highly unlikely.

When asked whose responsibility it is to create opportunities for these meaningful connections, it was agreed by most participants that the university needed to provide an opportunity for these interactions to occur but that it was also up to the student as well to assume some responsibility. It was agreed that while there may be some opportunities for this type of engagement, there simply just wasn’t enough. One participant expressed. “I think there is a lot of potential for the exchange and the benefit to go both ways. I don’t think that either the institution nor the students are making enough of it” (Interview 4)⁷. The extent as to how much the university should be involved was disputed as some participants felt the university needed to be very involved while another participant felt strongly that it was not the university’s place or task to do this at all. While this opinion is in line with the culture of the German university as a place for teaching and learning not providing socializing activities, it was not shared by the other participants. This was visible in the following statement, “I don’t know if it is an obligation but if we will be a good

university, a good international university we should care about it and give incentives so Germans are aware of the situation and so it is both" (Interview 7)⁸.

What's Working and Not Working

While trying to answer research question 3: 'what works and what doesn't work in the view of staff and faculty members' the following thematic patterns were discovered: 'German university culture is not a campus culture', 'we don't have funding, we don't have the faculty', 'they don't have the time', and 'it depends on the personality of the professor'. Interestingly, when asked this question each participant stated that what they were working on was in fact working. It would closely be followed by something similar to 'but we could do more'. When considering how international students are engaged are contributors towards internationalization efforts, it appeared through the interviews that there were in fact more things working against them than in favor of them.

A university campus climate varies country to country and city to city. One participant explained that "the German university culture is not a campus culture. So, you are not living in or at the university. You stay inside for a certain period, for a certain purpose, and then you leave" (Interview 9)⁹. The statement made by the participant who felt the university should not take part in arranging opportunities for student engagement reiterates this, "engagement with each other is something that is up to the students. We don't engage in that. We teach. You need to remember this is a university. They're learning, they're not learning how to be international. They're learning for a profession" (Interview 1)¹⁰. While this thinking does fit the traditional German university culture where in the university education was closely coupled with profession, the Bologna Process changed this and thus university internationalization strategies and missions have advanced beyond just preparing students for a profession. Now they also prepare students to compete in a globalized market in order to be successful working in a global workforce.

The lack of resources in terms of funding, faculty, and staff was referenced frequently during the interviews. Since the university does not charge tuition, bringing in international students ends up costing money and time instead of producing money. The increase in the number of German students and the increase in international students each year means the faculty is stretched thinner and thinner. One participant asked, "how can you save 8%, cutting spending and faculty, and at the same time, welcome and support international students with their marvelous world changing ideas?" (Interview 9)¹¹. When considering the university internationalization strategy, the question remains how do you implement internationalization goals which require time, money, and staff or faculty when you are faced with the lack of money and faculty to begin with? A participant explained the unlikelihood of the success of an internationalization strategy by saying, "I think from the beginning it was unlikely that we would have the means and the personnel to put all of this into place" (Interview 9)¹².

Programs designed for international students are often times supported through third-party funding that requires applications and approval. If granted, this type of funding is typically limited and is not stable or permanent. A participant shared the uncertainty of what happens when their funding ends, "we are third-party funded, so I'm not funded by the university. So, in four years it is going to be interesting what happens. Time is ticking...with this program until the funding runs out." (Interview 5)¹³. While the competitiveness regarding the financing for third-party funding was discussed, it did not seem to bother too many participants as they felt it was something that was quite normal. A participant outlined their current state as,

we have two wonderful students who are helping us. I think without them we would just collapse. But still it is overwhelming in a positive way that we see people wanting this help, needing this help, and we can help and they are really asking for this. So, we have no problem to expand the program probably within the next semester but we just see that we have limits concerning money. What is possible without collapsing? (Interview 8)¹⁴.

The lack of money and resources is a monumental obstacle when it comes to internationalization efforts. This clearly is not working and that was reiterated by each participant. This problem is not solely unique to Germany as even tuition-based universities are suffering from decreased budgets and lack of funding.

Given the nature of the German university culture not being a campus culture, it would then seem that the classroom would be the optimal place for integration and meaningful contact to occur. Findings from the interviews proved though that what happens in the classroom is largely left up to the personality of the professor. One participant explains,

I think you might find faculty who feel students are burdening them. I think that most will interpret the presence of international students as some kind of enrichment but if we accept more international students, those who have to work with them pay a price in terms of time. You have less time and you spend more. Now, take the other perspective and you see you have a different potential of intellectuals arriving here, more enthusiastic, more energetic, whatever and maybe you can collect fruit in life later but that makes a huge difference" (Interview 9)¹⁵.

Another participant echoed that what happens in the classroom in terms of engagement and interaction depends on the professor's level of interest in international students. It was pointed out that it's up to the professor to create an environment where interaction can occur but that faculty do not respond well to top-down approaches and therefore a bottom-up approach where they are included would be necessary. A response to international students struggling to integrate into the classroom because of their language level and the overwhelmed faculty led to the creation of an international classroom for international student to have a learning environment where they felt safer and more supported. This means that interaction between international and German students in this classroom is rare and therefore this model reinforces the already existing international student bubble and highlights a one-way exchange that benefits the international student.

While discussing engagement and interaction between students, most participants discussed the fact that German students are pressed for time due to the new structure of the degrees because of the reforms from the Bologna Process. A participant explains, "now-a-days studies are so densely packed and the students are on such a tight schedule, that they are looking very carefully at where they can get credit points and whatever services them in their career trajectory" (Interview 5)¹⁶. Another participant confirmed the difficulty in terms of time and credit points by saying, "the BA system and the MA system after Bologna is actually forcing us to keep timelines. If you move outside the timeline, you lose time. Now getting students together with international students in an environment which doesn't pay off in terms of credit points, it's even worse. People are credit points minded" (Interview 9)¹⁷. The challenge then lies in showing the value and importance of these skills and how they can benefit the students in their futures while finding a creative way to fit them into an already tightly structured degree. One participant suggested a way of implementing intercultural skills into the compulsory curriculum at the faculties level,

if you are a bachelor in social sciences, there could be a compulsory module that deals with social sciences in an international context. It would invite international students to come there and German students, and they all have to do it because it is part of their BA degree and they need the credit points. Then we could perhaps devise a study program built on that encounter across languages and cultures with the subject study” (Interview 5)¹⁸.

This would be an excellent way to bring students together in the classroom and create an environment for cultural exchange. It would be important to ensure that the contact is meaningful and the students are engaging in a non-superficial way. It would also require support from the faculties and faculty, which are already strapped for money and pressed for time. The investment would mean creating a true international classroom that has the potential to engage all students in a meaningful way. Bringing international, cultural, and global themes into the classroom is an example of internationalization at home through the curriculum.

Discussion

Given the empirical data from this study, it can be concluded that international students are marginally being used as contributors towards internationalization efforts mainly through mentoring programs. The mentoring program for international matriculated students is the best equipped for creating an environment for meaningful engagement and reciprocal cultural learning between international and German students but it only reaches a few hundred students out of thousands. With the large number of international students matriculated at the university, all German students, even those who do not study abroad, should be afforded opportunities for contact with international students. Mentoring programs that pair domestic and international students and that contain a cross-cultural training program often help students become more successful and effective with their relationship because it provides them with the guidance and support to make it through the initial phase of establishing a relationship which is often the hardest part (Geelhoed, Abe, and Talbot 2003). While the mentoring program for international matriculated students did contain this joint training program, the mentoring program for the international exchange students did not. The interaction resulting from the mentoring program for international exchange students did not meet the idea of meaningful contact presented by the participants. Simply bringing German students and international students together inside and outside of class does not necessarily result in meaningful interaction between them or the development of valuable intercultural skills or international perspectives (Leask 2009).

While the student and the university both need to take some responsibility in creating opportunities for engagement, intervention by the university is needed to increase cultural contact and provide a mentoring program that is designed for meaningful contact to occur over an extended period of time to ensure this contact occurs (Campbell 2012). For German students, the lack of interaction with their international peers is a missed opportunity to develop an international perspective through more profound social contact (Montgomery and McDowell 2009). Expanding the mentoring program designed for the international matriculated students would not only provide more international students with the support needed to assist them with their adjustment to the university and culture but it would also provide more German students with the opportunity for cultural learning experiences. Meaningful interaction between domestic and international students requires planning and programs (Peterson et al. 1999) and where the German university culture is not a campus culture, a mentoring program allows students the flexibility to get together on or off campus. A university that stresses the importance of the positive values of cultural diversity

and provides students with opportunities to learn from one another (Hanassab and Tidwell 2002) creates an environment of authority support which promotes further intercultural engagement.

Separateness among groups is not a new thing and can be easily seen everywhere you look. Allport (1954) explains, “with plenty of people at hand to choose from, why create for ourselves the trouble of adjusting to new languages, new foods, new cultures, or to people of a different education level? It requires less effort to deal with people who have similar presuppositions” (p. 17). It is commonly known throughout universities that international students stick together in an international student bubble. This division of students does not provide a setting for equal group status. Even German students have their own bubbles and “it is evident that domestic students need a strong motivation to engage” (Campbell 2012, 222). Findings from the interviews showed that the majority of programs being offered by the university for international students are mainly directed towards international students with little involvement of German students. These programs therefore are not providing students the opportunity to engage and integrate with German students or the university and consequently reinforce their international student bubble.

It is important to understand the context of German high education when considering how to provide an environment for international student engagement. The university needs to take active measures to engage these students inside and outside of the classroom. While culturally this is not something that is typical, the Bologna Process has shown that change can occur within the education system. Although it is clear that time constraints are an issue, it means that creativity and a collective approach needs to be taken. Meaningful contact in a university that does not have a campus culture is difficult outside of the classroom and therefore the interaction needs to mainly occur in the classroom. Programs or classes for international students that separate them from German students, class sizes that are too big to allow for interaction, classroom interaction that does not extend past the superficial aspect, or the professor not having the time or energy to create an environment for international interactions, all pose a threat to the success of meaningful engagement in the classroom.

Dunne (2013) says that, “the curriculum represents a major opportunity to educators and policy makers in higher education to create opportunities which can facilitate intercultural contact and the development of sustainable intercultural friendships” (p. 575). Given the context of this study, it seems that change needs to start in the classroom and it will require faculty buy-in. The effectiveness found for both curriculum internationalization and friendship with international students can reach a wider audience than study abroad because they do not exclude students who are unable to study abroad (Parsons 2010). With tightly packed study schedules and students who do not have time to engage in anything that they do not see value in, international elements need to be injected into the program requirements. “Diversity has the potential to drive and contribute to curriculum change if there is a systematic and integrated institutional approach that openly and actively values cultural diversity in policy and practice” (Leask 2009). Taking actions to add these elements indicates that there is value in intercultural competences and supporting intergroup contact can stimulate further intergroup relations.

Societal and institutional context are embedded in the contact that occurs between students. German higher education culture and institutional context are severely limiting intergroup contact on a meaningful level. Within the context of the study, a framework is presented to facilitate intergroup contact and produce global citizens. It draws a connection between intergroup contact, GII competencies, and the role the university can play in providing an environment for positive conditions. By connecting these theories and concepts with the context that this study

was conducted in, this framework hopes to offer motivation to justify the importance of creating opportunities for meaningful contact and engagement of international students.

Contact that contains the four optimal conditions presented by Allport and the fifth condition provided by Pettigrew leads to the reduction of prejudice. Although not all conditions are necessary to reduce intergroup prejudices, the effects are stronger when all criteria are present. The intergroup contact should therefore include some if not all of the following: equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, authority support, and friendship potential. This then creates positive attitudes such as openness, respect, curiosity, and discovery because students can acknowledge and understand the perspectives of others. These attitudes are the beginning process of Deardroff's process model of intercultural competence. These attitudes are fundamental to intercultural competence and help the student move into the development stage of knowledge and comprehension (Deardroff 2006). Here the student builds deeper cultural knowledge and becomes more culturally self-aware which leads to internal outcomes such as being more flexible and adaptable which in turn leads to external outcomes. These external outcomes are where the student is likely to behave and communicate appropriately in intercultural situations because of their learned knowledge and experience. The combination of intergroup contact, reduced prejudice, and the development of GII competences can create students that are globally ready citizens to enter the global labor market.

This can be further expanded to include the contextual elements and how intergroup contact has the potential to positively affect both international and German students. Starting with international students, an on-going process can be seen as intergroup contact creates a sense of belonging for international students because they feel more supported and integrated within the university. Social integration plays a role in helping provide a supportive and inclusive environment for international students which then results in less risk of harm from the challenges of transitions to a new country and academic culture. This has the potential to help reduce the drop-out rate for international students and further increase the amount of incoming international students through positive word of mouth. International students who remain in the country and feel integrated into the university and therefore society are more likely to stay after they have completed their degree. These students are then more likely to integrate into the domestic labor market, contribute to knowledge creation, innovation, and economic performance (OECD 2017). The educational cost of the international students then can be seen as a wise investment with a pretty high return quote and not an investment for nothing (Noorda 2014). With these students staying within the county, it increases further intergroup contact with other Germans in society.

German students that engage in intergroup contact can gain knowledge seeking-behavior due to their openness and curiosity which has the potential to increase their interest in study abroad. Students who spend time with international students have their assumptions and stereotypes about international students challenged (Geelhoed, Abe, and Talbot 2003) or students who become international students themselves have an understanding of the challenges that are faced by international students at their home institution. They are more inclined to have a connection to cultural interactions and engagement when they return which furthers their involvement and integration with other international students. This is seen in German students who have previously studied abroad and have returned and wanted to take part in international activities and programs at the university. German students that have an appreciation for cultural diversity and know how to communicate and behave appropriately in intercultural situations are more prepared to compete, cooperate, and collaborate in the global labor market.

Conclusion

This study examined how international students are being engaged as contributors towards internationalization efforts at a German research university in a global city. An investigation was merited in order to understand if meaningful interaction between German and international students is occurring. The results of this study found that international students are marginally being used as contributors towards internationalization efforts mainly through mentoring programs. The participants' perceptions of meaningful contact were in line with intergroup contact theory as contact that was not superficial and affected you on certain levels that could help develop intercultural competencies and perspectives. Engagement with international students can be an effective way for students to acquire knowledge about other cultures to enhance their international competences (Deardorff and Jones 2012) and prepare them to live and work in a globalized world.

While international students provide opportunities for intergroup contact that can facilitate long-lasting prejudice reduction, not all intergroup contact leads to the reduction of prejudice. Superficial interaction can increase and reinforce stereotypes (Allport 1954) and prejudice people avoid intergroup contact (Pettigrew 1998). When international students are not integrated into the university because programs, classes, or activities reinforce their international student bubbles, it is a missed opportunity for intercultural learning. This study found that while the university has a variety of programs available for international students through the international office or special programs in English, these programs lack the inclusion of German students and therefore enhance group separateness. Coupled with past research, the findings from this study presented a framework to highlight the importance of creating opportunities for meaningful contact and engagement to benefit both international and German students, the university, while also contributing meaningfully to society.

This study found that the context of German higher education presents many barriers to meaningful interaction: the non-campus culture, the lack of funding, faculty, and staff, the personality of the professor, and the lack of time students have with their strict study schedules. "If barriers are removed and the enablers activated, a European higher education will emerge whose graduates will be able to contribute meaningfully as global citizens and global professionals in a Europe that is better placed not only to compete but also to cooperate" (de Wit and Hunter 2015, 3). A creative and collective approach towards motivating German students, integrating intercultural elements into the classroom and study structure, gaining faculty buy-in, integrating and supporting international students, creating opportunities for meaningful engagement, and establishing all-around university support are required to effectively engage international students as valued contributors to the internationalization of the university campus. For those students unable to study abroad, the effectiveness found for both curriculum internationalization and friendship with international students can reach a wider audience opposed to study abroad only reaching the mobile few (Parsons 2010).

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Notes

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²Grammatically edited and edited for anonymity

³Grammatically edited and edited for anonymity

⁴Grammatically edited

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⁶Grammatically edited and edited for anonymity

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