Diversity-Management Strategies of Universities and Technical Colleges in Germany

Theoretical Reflections and Empirical Findings

Prof. Dr. Elke Wild, Pia Brocke und Markus Rump
Bielefeld University
Diversity as a concept that covers multiple sub-groups

Female students  Students from migrant families  Students as parents

International students

Mature students  disabled students

first generation students

Students from working class families

Students with care-dependent relatives  Students without A-levels

etc.
Diversity in German higher education

- Rapidly growing number of students
- Increasing attention to diversity-related issues
- Growing differences in initial competence and attitudes
- Most universities and technical colleges have developed programs to reduce dropouts by addressing these differences
Measures within the QPL

- most frequent measures to reduce differences in initial attitudes and competence (Wild & Esdar, 2014):
  - Improvements in the supervision relationship in teaching (e.g. tutorials)
  - Pre-courses and “bridging courses” in preparation for the study program (particularly in MINT subjects)
  - Counselling for students experiencing academic difficulties on their course
  - Mentoring to promote social integration of “non-traditional” students (e.g. first generation, international students)
  - Further training and qualifications for teaching staff
Theoretical approach
Offer-adoption model (Wild & Esdar, 2014)

- builds on the Learning Opportunities Model (Helmke & Schrader, 1999) used in empirical school research
- Adapted for a higher education teaching and learning context
- Accounts for the high degree of freedom that students have
  - in the regularity and level of active attendance of curricular courses
  - in the utilization of extra-curricular support offers
**Context**: regional environment, legal requirements, type of higher education institute, subject, composition of student body…

**Institutionally shapeable Offer conditions**
- Strategy concept
- Management
- Organizational structures and incentive schemes
- Teaching facilities
- Support centers in the area of teaching
- Personnel development / professionalization
- management philosophy

**Features of the offer / intended curriculum**
- Availability of pre-courses, mentoring programs and counseling services in MINT subjects

**Offer implementation**
- Voluntary basis of the offer
- Process quality: Adequacy of
  - the contents/material
  - the methods used (instruction)
  - testing/feedback…
- Teaching related coordination and cooperation structures
- Formative teaching evaluation
- …

**Professionals / Teachers**
- Institutional incorporation and work-related factors

**Users**
- Age, Gender, (school) biography, living circumstances
- Learning potential (intelligence, previous knowledge, learning strategies, subject interest, learning orientation…)

**Relevant others** (Peers, mentors etc.)

**Adoption**
- Depth of learning

**Utilization**
- Regular and additional offers

**Outputs**
- Faster and more adequate career entry
- Career professionalism expectations
- Job satisfaction
- Life-long striving for further qualification.
- Societal commitment
- …

**Outcomes**
- Performance (Subject knowledge and competencies (subject-based and overreaching).
- Attitudes (epistemological beliefs, orientation towards further qualifications, position towards and engagement in a multicultural society.
- Success in studies
- …

**Adoption**
- Depth of learning
Issues and design in HeLGA
Central research questions in HeLGA

- Does the provision of ‘additional’ measures (i.e. pre-courses, student consultation offers, mentoring-programmes) lead to a reduction to “atypical” study paths (dropout, changing of subject, exceedance of regular number of semesters)?
- If not: which underlying circumstances may undermine beneficial effects of such additional measures?
- Which characteristics of learners ("user") may explain differences in utilization as well as in academic success/attainment?
Design

- Content analysis of QPL-proposals to identify 3 universities and 6 technical colleges from across the federal states with diversity-oriented goals in MINT subjects
- Recruitment of MINT-students through internal mailing lists
- Followed throughout their Bachelor degrees (original sample of app. 1000 student participants)
- Standardized online-data collection with three rounds of data collection: directly before the winter semester 2015/16, one year later (winter semester 2016/17) and finally at the end of their Bachelor degrees (winter semester 2018/19).
- 26 interviews with QPL-lecturers, data analysis using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as well as the documentary analysis method of Bohnsack (2006).
Results in HeLGA
Utilization of additional (extra-curricular) offers

- Pre-courses are often utilized, student consultation services and mentoring programs rather seldom
- Hardly any difference in utilization between university and college students
- After controlling for the type of institution, it was found that additional offers to support “at-risk-students” tended to be utilized by more academically capable students
  - Empirical evidence of the prevention dilemma in the context of higher education.
Effects of the utilization of extra-curricular offers?

- Utilization of pre-courses reduced the risk of dropout and of changing subjects, however the effects are weak.
- Participation in pre-courses didn’t increase the probability of completing one’s studies within the regular number of semesters.
- Mentoring and student consultation/advice programs had no effect on the observed outcomes.
Which factors are most likely to lead to a “typical” path through a Bachelors degree course?

- Frequent attendance and participation in regular lectures
- Courses and modules which:
  - implement “inclusive didactics”
  - maintain interests, foster self-determined motivation and reduce heteronomous motivation
Occupational situation of professionals within the “Quality Pact for Teaching”

- High levels of identification with teaching-related tasks, however often also with research-related career ambitions
- Little support in coping with goal conflicts
- Experience little guidance/support in dealing with job-related demands
- The successful pursuit of scientific ambitions is most likely if lectures are connected to an institute / a research group. Informal cooperation between colleagues is perceived as helpful to propagate the “mission” of the Quality Pact for Teaching.
Optimization suggestions

- Inclusive higher education didactics
- Professional development of teachers/lecturers
- Further training / guidance / supervision of university professionals
- Regular performance evaluation
- Establishment of an early warning system with compulsory controlling
- Student consultation anchored within the curriculum
- Low-threshold support offers
- Monitoring attendance
Thank you for your attention!

Kontakt:
elke.wild@uni-bielefeld.de