

THE CHALLENGES FACING GERMAN STUDIES PROGRAMMES IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

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The German Studies (GS) programme has been offered since 1981 at the University of Nairobi (UoN), 1986 at Kenyatta University (KU), and 2009 at Moi University. By now, the programme should have come of age and be producing enough language experts and teachers to supply the growing number of schools (currently 82) offering German. Available data show that GS students are so marketable that they are often offered employment before they have completed their university studies. So, the question that arises is why student enrolments for the subject are not rising accordingly, in particular at the University of Nairobi. This paper discusses answers to this question and proposes strategies that should be undertaken to increase student enrolments.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A brief history of the teaching of German in Kenya

Although the history of the German Studies programmes in different countries in sub-Saharan Africa varies with countries, the problems that plague those programmes seem to be consistent. According to Augart & Ikobwa (2013: 9), they all lack an adequate number of qualified new generations of teachers, they all have small and dwindling student numbers, and they all need some justification for their existence. Yet the German language has been taught in Kenya from as early as 1968. The first High School Certificate Examination in German was done in 1971 at the Kenya High School in Nairobi (Agoya-Wotsuna 2012: 109). The year 1985 saw an increased interest in the subject with the German government bringing in teachers under the BVA¹ programme to teach at secondary school level. The

¹ The BVA is the Federal Office of Administration, an authority mainly handling administrative tasks for the German Federal Ministry of the Interior and the entire

programme was then offered at 24 schools. Currently, German is being offered at 82 schools. The teaching is completely in Kenyan hands, with German mother tongue teachers having been withdrawn completely in 1993 (Agoya-Wotsuna, 2012: 99). At university level, the German Studies programme has been offered since 1981, as a minor subject at the University of Nairobi (UoN). It was introduced at Kenyatta University (KU) in 1989; their first class of Bachelor of Education in German graduated in 1993. The Master of Arts in German course at the UoN began in 1993; to date, approximately 80 students have graduated from it. In December 2010, the first student to do a PhD course in German studies in East Africa enrolled at the UoN and is expected to graduate in December 2014.

1.2 The current status of German Studies at the University of Nairobi

The situation at all three public universities currently offering German Studies programmes in Kenya is not the same: while the numbers have been rising at Moi University and Kenyatta University, they have been dwindling for the last ten years at the University of Nairobi; they currently stand at below 50 students in total. Although such a situation renders the student-lecturer ratio ideal for teaching, it is not sustainable in the long run. There is therefore a need to see how these numbers can be increased without necessarily increasing the teaching staff employed on a permanent basis. The number of students pursuing courses in German Studies at the UoN can be increased if the subject is opened up to interfaculty combinations.

Quite a number of subjects can currently be combined with German at the UoN: Sociology, History, Political Science, French, Chinese, Communication, Philosophy, Geography, Mathematics, Psychology, Linguistics, Kiswahili, Economics, Tourism, etc. Most students studying German in any of these subject combinations up to September 2012 had German as a minor subject. However, with the UoN Senate's passing of the new syllabus in Intercultural German Studies in October 2012, students are now able to

federal administration. It was charged with providing German teachers for Kenyan secondary schools before Kenyan Universities started training local teachers.

pursue German as a major, either as a “double major” in combination with any of the above mentioned subjects, or as a “single major”.² It is hoped that with the introduction of German as a major, students will have more contact hours in the subject and become more proficient, which in turn is likely to attract more students to the programme.

The reviewed curriculum was designed to help increase the numbers of students by offering courses that are market-oriented and teaching skills needed by the German institutions present in Kenya. This new curriculum has enabled the Intercultural German Studies Programme to be listed among subjects offered as a major in the Faculty of Arts at the UoN. Future students will thus be able to make the decision to study German while still in high school.

2. THE NEW PROGRAMME IN INTERCULTURAL GERMAN STUDIES³

The Department of Linguistics and Languages at the UoN (through its German Studies section) designed the Intercultural German Studies (IGS) programme because it had seen the necessity to reform the curriculum so as to keep in tandem with recent developments in the world. The IGS programme aims at bringing students in close and interactive contact with the German culture, the German language and its varieties, as well as with the cultures represented by these varieties.

The programme enables the students to become proficient enough in German to live and work effectively in a German-speaking environment. Core language courses at levels I and II of study are complemented by a variety of other subject areas ranging from contemporary literature, translation into and out of German, essay writing, to oral work involving discussion of literary and non-literary texts. At levels III and IV the programme equips students

² A “double major” at the University of Nairobi means that a student can specialize in two subjects, rather than specializing in one or having one major and two minor subjects.

³ The content of this section is a summary of the “Regulations and Syllabus for the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Intercultural German Studies”, a document produced by the Department of Linguistics and Languages and approved by the UoN Senate in 2012.

with a range of academic skills: linguistic analysis, the ability to read and analyse written material, presentational skills, and group work as well as self-study skills. Students are not only trained in modern spoken and written German but they are also taught about German-speaking countries: their geography, politics, culture and society. Further, they are given opportunities to compare how issues such as the environment, education, unemployment, and racism are viewed in Germany and Kenya. Not unrelated to this, students are offered opportunities to communicate and to collaborate with partners in Austria, Germany and Switzerland through direct interaction, e.g. in the form of internships with German organizations and companies in Kenya, and through partnerships and exchange programmes with German universities. This is because our students are expected to acquire intercultural knowledge and communicative skills necessary to act productively and successfully in social and professional environments defined by the cultures of the German-speaking world and in multicultural settings in general.

In addition, the programme introduces students to the fundamental techniques of research and presentation of research results. It also provides students with the skills necessary for professional activities such as translation, text editing, technical writing, with the aim of turning our students into a valuable resource base for experts in tourism, international administration, culture or media management, theory and administration of language and cultural institutions in the German-speaking world and beyond

3. THE CHALLENGES OF AND STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING STUDENT ENROLMENTS

3.1 The challenges of and strategies related to teaching methods

Available data show that German Studies students are very marketable and are often offered employment even before they have completed their university studies. Despite this, the numbers have been dwindling at the UoN. There are two main reasons for this dwindling: first, no sufficient information was available to students when joining the university because the German Studies Programme at the UoN was, until 2013, not listed on the Joint Admissions Board (JAB) lists that are sent to schools to facilitate the

prospective students' choice of the courses they would like to pursue at university level. As a result, the high school students interested in doing German enrolled at the two universities that were directly named in the lists as offering it, namely Moi University and Kenyatta University.

The second reason is that students are normally not aware of what career opportunities will be available to them once they have done German at university level.

In view of those reasons, one strategy employed by the German Studies section at the UoN has been to develop a new programme, on the assumption that the students joining the University would be aware of what career opportunities they would have when they have studied German at university level. The content of the programme is summarized in the preceding section.

3.2 The challenges related to limited contact hours

Another factor that negatively influences the students' choice of German as an academic subject is the limited number of contact hours. A student taking German as a minor at the UoN is taught six hours a week, corresponding to just two courses per semester, and for the entire four years. Yet, according to the provisions of the new programme in Intercultural German Studies, a student majoring in German is expected to have a minimum of twenty-four contact hours per week. So, with just six contact hours per week, students taking German are expected to do a lot of work on their own if the language proficiency is to improve over a period of four years. Once they have enrolled for German studies at the UoN, the students thus have to rely on a considerable amount of self-teaching, something they are not used to and do not have the skills for.

Closely related to the lack of self-teaching skills is the student's unfamiliarity with scientific working methods. Because their language skills are still only basic, they will find it extremely difficult to present term papers that meet the basic requirements of a scientific paper. This in turn means that at the end of their studies, they produce projects and theses which, even at M.A. level, are quite below standard (Odero, 2012).

Furthermore, students enrolling for a B.A. degree in Intercultural German Studies at the UoN are required to have obtained a K.C.S.E Grade B- in German or a K.C.S.E Grade C in German plus certificates of German language courses leading to at least the *Zertifikat* (B1) of the Common European Framework. But due to the current two-year delay in joining university after completing high school, many students join university-level German Studies programmes with an A2 language proficiency, which is not enough yet to allow them to pursue university degrees in German effectively. Students are encouraged to pursue courses at the Goethe Institute to improve their language skills by attending at least one course per semester. But as these courses have financial implications (even though the Goethe Institute offers a 50% discount to all university students enrolled in German Studies programmes), it is very difficult to enforce attendance with any measure of success. As a result, on completion many students have not improved their language proficiency in any significant way and, at the end of the four years of study, they are expected to at best ~~will~~ remain at the same level they had at the beginning of the course (i.e. level A2/B1), and, at worst, to regress to a lower proficiency level (Augart & Ikobwa, 2013, p. 26). Very few UoN students attain the C1 level, which they would attain only if they continued to pursue language enhancement classes at the Goethe Institute.

3.3 Introducing new programmes as a strategy for increasing student enrolments

Although as of now very few students enrol for the German studies programme at the UoN, the programme has the potential to attract a completely different group of students, those who hitherto have failed to be captured by the currently available programmes. One strategy for enrolling a large number of students is to introduce a Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree in German Studies. Currently, there is no M.Ed. degree programme being offered at any of the Kenyan universities, despite the fact that both Kenyatta University and Moi University offer a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree in German. All students pursuing an M.A. degree in Kenya are forced

to pursue an Master of Arts degree, in spite of the fact that the vast majority of them pursued a B.Ed. degree at undergraduate level. Clearly, an M.Ed. programme is needed as soon as is practicably possible.

A further strategy would be to introduce self-sponsored student programmes (commonly referred to as “Module II” programmes at the UoN, and, initially, as “Parallel programmes”) in Intercultural German Studies in the other two large towns of Kenya (Mombasa and Kisumu) in order to capture the high student population doing German at middle level colleges in both towns, where the UoN already runs programmes in other subjects.

3.4 Strategies related to the marketability of German Studies in Kenya

A survey carried out at the Kenyatta University amongst 65 students who completed their B.Ed./B.A. or M.A. studies between 2004 and 2008 indicated that 77% of those with an M.A. degree found their studying German to have been useful to their future careers (Augart & Ikobwa, 2013, p. 18). At the UoN itself, the German Studies section has since 2009 been engaging with potential students before they join the university to better inform them on their career choices. The teaching staff from this section has visited secondary schools which offer German to talk directly to students. The same staff has regularly run an information desk during open days held at the Goethe Institute in Nairobi, in addition to regularly updating the UoN German studies website. Providing information regularly and at all available fora is a marketing strategy that can be extended to include open days at the UoN as well.

Another strategy to increase student enrolments would be to introduce German as a beginner’s course to all students of the University of Nairobi and offer it up to the B1 level.⁴ Knowledge of German for students from all UoN faculties would not only enable them to acquire basic foreign language skills

⁴ The **Goethe-Zertifikat B1** is a German test for young people and adults. It confirms that one has an independent grasp of the German language, and corresponds to the third level (B1) of the six-level competency scale of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. <http://www.goethe.de/lrn/prj/pba/bes/gzb/enindex.html> (Accessed on 20.07.2014 at 20:46 hrs)

but also to gain access to the numerous scholarships offered by the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD), the Catholic Academic Exchange Services (KAAD), and other German institutions, to pursue Master's degree and PhD programmes in Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

Following the Bologna Process⁵, most international programmes at German universities do not require a language level beyond B2⁶, since most courses are taught in English. Thus, foreign students are only required to have a language competency that enables them to survive in a German-speaking environment. In any case, many of those students who are offered scholarships by DAAD to pursue their PhDs at German universities must first attend a language course at the Goethe Institute before going to Germany. It would therefore be very useful, and a big advantage, if students from the UoN received German language courses as part of their Bachelor's and Master's programmes. This would mean that the students would have German classes in all the four years of BA/BSc and could also continue with them at MA/MSc level if they so choose to. For Tourism and Hospitality students at the UoN and elsewhere in Kenya, German should be the first foreign language of choice due to the large number of tourists who visit the country each year from Germany; they represent 60% of all international arrivals.⁷

3.5 Inadequate institutional support and strategies for overcoming it

Despite the job opportunities that German Studies programmes in Kenya would offer, there is visibly inadequate institutional support for them, as has been witnessed at the UoN in the recent past. For instance, the new programme described above took over two years to go through the relevant

⁵ The Bologna Process is a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries designed to ensure comparability of the standards and quality of higher education qualifications.

⁶ The **Goethe-Zertifikat B2** requires advanced language skills. The examination corresponds to level four (B2) on the six-level scale of competence laid down in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. <http://www.goethe.de/lrn/prj/pba/bes/gb2/enindex.html> (Accessed on 20.07.2014 at 20:51 hrs)

⁷ This information can be obtained online at: <http://213.198.57.244/Geographical-Origin-of-Tourist.62.0.html?&L> (Accessed on 7.09.2012 at 10:39 hrs.).

institutional steps. Such insufficient institutional support is not experienced at the UoN only; it goes beyond, as evidenced by the fact that students who pursue German Studies do not get the necessary support to further their studies at German universities. Most of them are encouraged to pursue an M.A. degree in German Studies in Kenya. And for those not wishing to become teachers the chances of pursuing a PhD have been quite limited due to the limited number of qualified supervisors. In order to qualify as a supervisor for a PhD in principle one must have attained the level of senior lecturer, but currently there is only one such qualified person in German Studies at the UoN.

Even when they acquire excellent German language skills at university and/or the Goethe Institute, students from the so-called developing countries are not particularly encouraged to pursue university studies in Germany, if they do not have sponsorship from the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD), the Catholic Academic Exchange Services (KAAD) and other German, Austrian and Swiss institutions. For someone not sponsored by these institutions to be given a chance to do a first degree is a very rare occurrence. This is an unspoken German foreign policy, which only applies to those seeking to study at a German university on self-sponsorship. A frequent explanation given for refusing them a visa is that they have chosen a course with no relevance to a developing country. A student who wants to pursue a course such as medicine or agricultural economics, for instance, stands a better chance of getting a visa than one wishing to study linguistics or computer sciences. In their opinion, medicine and agricultural economics are more relevant to a developing country (because, they tend to argue, they would benefit the country as a whole and not an individual), than, say, linguistics or computer science.

The lack of institutional support also applies to the provision of scholarships for PhD courses in German Studies. As mentioned earlier, German was first offered at the UoN in 1981. However, to date, 34 years down the line, and with approximately 80 students having already graduated with an M.A. degree in German Studies, only five of the latter have attained a PhD in the subject, and only another four are expected to complete their

PhD course in the near future. Of the latter pending PhDs, only two are being pursued at the UoN. The biggest challenge for students pursuing a PhD in German Studies locally is the lack of funding and library materials. This situation is compounded by the fact that DAAD and the other German institutions do not offer an in-country scholarship to any applicant who completed his/her MA degree more than six years before the application date. Such a policy directly, albeit inadvertently, discriminates against women wishing to do their PhD studies and who tend to start their families before or immediately after their MA studies (to beat the biological clock!).

Another big challenge stems from insufficient cooperation between the UoN and other universities within and outside the region. The UoN works closely with Kenyatta University (KU), but only in as far as the KU-based DAAD lecturer supports the UoN German studies programme by teaching a couple of courses on it. Beyond that, the two universities do not have any close collaboration in research or publication in German. Yet, research and publications are an area that has a lot of potential, especially in liaison with a forum like the German African Network for Alumni and Alumnae (GANAA), which offers opportunities for networking.

In the same vein, other forms of cooperation are possible:

- cooperation with Makerere University (in Uganda) by having joint publications and joint research projects;
- partnerships with universities in Germany through student and staff exchange programmes;
- interdisciplinary collaboration (with the School of Medicine, Institute of African studies, School of Diplomacy, etc.); and
- internships at German, Austrian and Swiss companies and organizations.

The University of Nairobi has the potential to engage in all these forms of cooperation because it is developing into a centre of excellence in the field of intercultural German studies, especially at its Master's degree level. In this connection, in 2012 the UoN German Studies Programme opened up its courses to students from all over Africa, with the support of DAAD, which has offered postgraduate scholarships to students from the region and beyond. In

addition, the University of Nairobi has close ties with the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. Both universities collaborate on the African Doctoral Academy.⁸ Currently, one Kenyan student is pursuing a PhD in German Studies at Stellenbosch, while another recently completed a PhD at the same university.

It must be admitted, though, that inter-university cooperation is a new phenomenon at the UoN with specific reference to the Intercultural German Studies programme. Two Memoranda of Understanding have been signed with two institutions from Germany: the Technical University of Dresden (TUD) and the University of Bayreuth. This has enabled the exchange of both undergraduate and post-graduate students. TUD students come to the UoN for a period of between six and twelve months, they attend courses with their Kenyan counterparts and also assist in holding tutorials, while University of Nairobi M.A. students travel to Germany to carry out research for their projects from the two universities for a period of between three and six months.

In the meantime, possibilities of research on joint projects around specific field and thematic areas, as well as joint publications, are being explored with universities in West Africa and more universities in Germany. The year 2013 saw the UoN host an international German Studies conference (26-28 May) and an international workshop (on 12th November) on how to optimize the supervision of postgraduate projects and theses.

Collaboration with Kenyan industries is also a viable option for the UoN's German Studies programme. The strategic location of the University in the centre of the city should really help in increasing student enrolments. The presence of a large number of companies and institutions in Kenya means

⁸ The African Doctoral Academy provides current and prospective doctoral students in all fields of sciences with high quality research training and support. It assists prospective doctoral students with the necessary intellectual and academic tools to become successful scholars in their respective fields; inter alia by arranging seminars and dialogues with established and experienced scholars. It also equips academics with skills for managing and supervising post-graduate students by offering a range of one- and two-day seminars. The program invites scholars in higher education from across the continent in all fields of science and scholarship to participate in the program. <http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Arts/ADA/about> (Accessed on 22.07.2014 at 11.30 a.m.)

that there is a demand for graduates with more than basic skills in German. The German Business Association (GBA) in Kenya was founded in 1987 and comprises either branches of German companies, institutions and foundations, or Kenyan companies and individuals with commercial links with Germany.⁹ Such institutions and organizations deal in a wide range of products and services: the companies Achelis, Bayer, for instance, deal in medical equipment; the Heinrich Böll, Konrad Adenauer and Friedrich Ebert foundations are concerned with political development programmes; the Bavaria Auto Company is an automotive industry, while BASF deals in chemicals. And then there are also development aid organizations and relief agencies, such as GiZ, Caritas; educational institutions, such as DAAD, GI, and the German School; shipping companies, such as DHL; and many more focusing on various issues such as advertising, IT, health, telecommunications, tourism and hospitality, legal and social development, agriculture, etc.

Networking and cooperation with those companies and organizations could take the form of the German Studies Program being more involved in their activities, e.g. by not only participating actively in the literature forums at the Goethe Institute, in talks and workshops held by the political foundations (like the Heinrich Böll Foundation), but also by organizing internships for the students at these companies and institutions. To begin with, the German Studies Department has established cooperation through internships for students with some of the sectors mentioned above, especially during the five-month break after the second year of study at the UoN. Another unexplored avenue is to introduce interfaculty teaching of German, thus expanding the scope of these internships to include those companies and institutions (such as those such as those in the medical, chemical and automotive sectors) that would traditionally not have anything to do with a language department. This means for instance, that a student studying pharmacy and also doing German would be able to do an internship at Bayer, one studying political science and German can do an internship at

⁹ Available online at: <http://www.directorykenya.com/business/major-companies/german-business-association-gba-kenya>. (Accessed on 30.12.2013 at 14:18)

the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, while one studying medicine and German can do an internship at Achelis. Most German companies and institutions in Kenya do not require a high proficiency level in the German language but rather some knowledge of the culture of the German-speaking world, which would enable the student trainees to work effectively in an intercultural environment.

4. CONCLUSION

The number of students enrolling to study German at the University of Nairobi has been steadily declining over the last ten years and hence the need arose for a revised new curriculum that would take into consideration the needs of the Kenyan job market in a globalized economy. This paper has shown the reasons behind the declining numbers and has suggested possible strategies that can be employed not only to increase student enrolments but also to make German language learning a viable option for all the UoN students irrespective of their subject combinations.

This paper has also shown that the future of German Studies at the UoN is at stake if student numbers do not increase. There has been talk in the Kenyan parliament of reducing funding for Humanities and Social Sciences and channelling more funding into the Natural Sciences¹⁰ Although this has been shelved for the time being, it is due to come up again in the near future. So, those in charge of the German Studies programme needs to be prepared to counter the trend by enrolling more students, for whom German language learning would lead to other careers than just the traditional one of just teaching German at school.

Institutional support can be enhanced if new programmes are approved faster as developing and updating existing programmes at university level is a process that must be undertaken every five years, if programmes are to remain relevant to the ever changing job market.

¹⁰ Kweya, Dishon (2013) "Moi University Conference Reviews Kenyan Literature since Independence" <http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/gazette/archive/?id=128&t=int>. (Accessed on 30.12.2013 at 14:33)

Access to online library materials is within reach of all universities in this internet age. The University of Nairobi must subscribe to journals and electronic books that are published in German as well. In addition students must be made aware of and encouraged to take up the excellent study opportunities offered by the African Doctoral Academy at the University of Stellenbosch as well as at the partner Universities in Bayreuth, and Dresden.

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