

Innovative, Dynamic and Cooperative – 10 years of the International Deans' Course Africa/Southeast Asia

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Within the framework of the programme “Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies” (DIES), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) have jointly designed the International Deans' Course (IDC), a training for newly elected deans and vice-deans from Africa and Southeast Asia. The course has been developed in close collaboration with the University of Applied Sciences (UAS) Osnabrück, the Centre for Higher Education Management (CHE), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH) and selected partner universities in Asia and Africa. After ten years of implementation, an external evaluation has been carried out in order to independently assess the relevance and impact of the course and to identify areas for further improvement and learning. Based on the evaluation's positive results DAAD and HRK have renewed their commitment to support this commendable initiative which can be considered as one of the DIES flagship projects. In addition, the partners of the IDC have received valuable inputs and recommendations which will help them to further adjust the course to the needs of the target group and to stay tuned with current changes and developments in higher education management.

Process and results of the evaluation are at the centre of this article, at the same time it provides answers to the following questions:

- What is the mission of the DAAD and what were the driving factors that have led to establishing DIES?
- What does the current DIES training course portfolio look like, and what are common features?
- What makes the IDC special and what are its factors of success?
- What are the most important results of the IDC evaluation, and which consequences can be derived?
- What are perspectives of further developing the DIES programme?

Background and driving forces

The DAAD is a joint organisation of German institutions of higher education and their student bodies, devoted to internationalising the academic and scientific research system. With its broad range of scholarship programmes, the DAAD enables

students, researchers and university lecturers to take advantage of the best study and research opportunities. Since it was founded in 1925, around two million scholars in Germany and abroad have received DAAD funding. Yet, its activities go far beyond simply awarding grants and scholarships. The DAAD supports the internationalisation of German universities, promotes German studies and the German language abroad, advises decision makers on matters of cultural, education and development policy and assists developing countries in establishing effective universities by means of special programmes

One of these programmes in the area of development cooperation is the DIES programme which has been jointly developed and coordinated by the DAAD and the HRK since 2001. The aim of DIES is strengthening capacities in higher education management, both on individual and institutional level. It offers a wide range of tailored activities – training courses, dialogue events and university partnerships – that foster the competences of academic staff and contribute to the enhancement of institutional management at universities in developing countries. DIES focuses on three key partner regions: Africa, Spanish-speaking Latin America and Southeast Asia.

Although the following factors take sometimes different forms in different regions, massification, limited public resources and increased competition can be seen as main driving forces that affect universities and require institutional response. To effectively address the challenges stated above strategic management has become increasingly important – not only for the university as a whole but also for its departments and faculties. Against this backdrop the DIES programme has been developed with the idea of providing up-to-date knowledge and training in the field of higher education management. Funding is provided by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Portfolio and common features of DIES training courses

Apart from the International Deans' Course (IDC), DIES currently offers the following training opportunities for different target groups of higher education professionals and university managers from developing countries:

Proposal Writing for Research Grants (ProGRANT): This training course targets young and upcoming researchers and aims at improving their proposal writing skills in order to design, write and budget competitive proposals for national and international research funding.

UNILEAD: The cross-regional University Leadership and Management Training Programme addresses young management-level professionals of central university management departments and imparts generic skills such as project management and human resources management.

Management of Internationalisation: This training course supports university managers from Africa, Asia and Latin America in professionalising the management of the central tasks of their international offices.

Doctoral Supervisor Course: This recently developed course consists of various modules that foster the competencies of doctoral supervisors to enhance the quality of doctoral education in African universities. It is the only DIES course which is offered purely online.

There are some key characteristics DIES courses have in common: They offer modular, practice-oriented training opportunities and in general make use of blended-learning methodology. They bring together participants from different countries, thus follow the principle of intercultural dialogue. They facilitate professional exchange among peers and with international trainers on eye-level and rely on an atmosphere of openness and trust. All this also applies to the IDC – a special intense training course designed for newly elected deans' and vice-deans dealing with the various aspects of faculty management.

In 2007, the IDC was established as a joint endeavour by the DAAD and the HRK, UAS Osnabrück, the CHE, AvH and with counterparts in Africa and Asia. The partners believed that opportunities for professional training in the field of faculty management were rare and that the role of deans has increasingly become important. In view of the fact that in many countries decentralisation has not only taken place between the state and the universities but furthermore trickled down within the governance systems of universities, deans and heads of department had gained more power. In consequence, skills on how to run a faculty in an entrepreneurial manner became more important as well, not only in order to keep pace with other universities but also to allow competing with neighbouring faculties in the same institution. Despite this overall trend, it was also found that deans have to deal with quite different challenges in different regions.

Against this backdrop the IDC is conducted on an annual basis, alternately in Africa and Southeast Asia. Due to the success of the IDC and the high demand for such a training opportunity in Latin America, a similar course was launched some years later in 2012. The so called "International Deans' Course Latin America" is jointly coordinated by the University of the Saarland, Germany, and the University of Alicante (Spain).

Irrespective of its regional variations, the main focus of the IDC is to deliver up-to-date theoretical knowledge in various areas of faculty management: strategic management, financial management, quality assurance, internationalisation, research management and human resources management. Furthermore, the participants take part in soft-skills workshops on change management, conflict management and leadership. It is important to note that the IDC is designed as a programme which aims at turning theory into practice: All participants develop Individual Reform Projects (the so-called Project Action Plans or PAP's) which are implemented in between the three phases of presence of the course. This key didactical concept is meant to stimulate reforms at the various universities where participants come from and to increase the impact of the course at institutional level.

IDC evaluation – methodology and key results

The year 2017 marked the tenth anniversary of the IDC Africa/Southeast Asia. Over these ten years nearly 300 deans and vice-deans from Africa and from Southeast Asia have been equipped with new skills and competencies and all of them have initiated change projects at their universities. Many of the alumni are still in contact with each other, and many of them have committed themselves to passing on their knowledge and sharing experiences with their colleagues on site.

As the first regularly implemented and longest running DIES training course the IDC can rightfully be considered as a DIES flagship project. After ten IDC cohorts have successfully completed the course DAAD and HRK decided to commission an evaluation to get deeper insights into the results of the IDC and a better understanding of its strengths and potential areas of improvement. The evaluation was conducted from February to September 2017 by SYSPONS – a German agency with vast international experiences in evaluating development cooperation projects in the field of higher education.

The evaluation results are based on different sources:

- Data analysis (including the participants' surveys carried out by CHE for each cohort),
- In-depth interviews with representatives of DAAD, HRK, the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück and the CHE
- Online survey of the IDC alumni and
- Case studies.

The online survey was open to all 286 IDC alumni of which 119 participated, translating into a comparatively high response rate of 42%. Two case studies were conducted in Kenya and in Indonesia where a total of 46 semi-structured interviews with different IDC stakeholders were carried out. The results of these various surveys were pooled together ("triangulation") and analysed through two different analytical approaches.

Furthermore, the theory of change of the DIES programme was used as a point of reference. It differentiates five levels on which the IDC operates:

1. Inputs (material and immaterial resources used for the implementation of the course)
2. Activities (measures implemented by using the Inputs)
3. Outputs (created technical capacities and personal competences and skills)
4. Outcomes (direct short- and medium-term intended effects)
5. Impacts (Indirect long-term-effects)

The theory of change was developed as part of the impact-oriented monitoring system which was implemented for all DAAD projects funded by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) including the DIES programme. Impact-oriented monitoring is one of the key instruments used for assessing the on-

going progress of DAAD programmes, thus focussing on the output- and outcome level. However, an even more comprehensive approach is needed in order to gain a deeper understanding on the long-term effects of a project during an evaluation.

Thus, the evaluators of the IDC taking the theory of change as a point of departure looked at the IDC from different angles assessing different key factors like relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

The overall results of the evaluation were of a very positive nature. The IDC is apparently a relevant and effective training course that addresses the different needs of both target regions (Africa and Southeast Asia) and successfully equips the participating deans and vice-deans with relevant competences and soft-skills. The results of the online survey show that 99% of the surveyed alumni believe that university managers from their region need to be trained in the fields of strategic faculty management and university governance. Furthermore, the IDC succeeds in initiating sustainable organisational changes in the participants' faculties and departments.

The evaluation also highlighted the well-functioning and effective processes of the IDC by means of an organisational model of shared-responsibilities. The application procedure is well-established and the course design and the group size (30 participants) are viewed as adequate. The IDC applies innovative and varied didactical methods such as the PAP and peer consulting. The survey showed that 86% of IDC alumni have implemented their individual reform projects successfully, thus the PAP is instrumental for initiating change processes at the participants' home universities. These changes are most pronounced at the faculty and department level. Depending on the scope of the projects they sometime effect on policies or processes of the whole institution as well. In one of the case studies the evaluators even found evidence that changes can be achieved at the higher education system level, too. For example, in Indonesia one alumnus after having obtained a decision-making position at the ministry of higher education used the PAP approach to implement a reform project which addressed all public Indonesian universities.

The crucial role of local trainers which are helpful in contextualising and adapting the taught contents to the participants needs has been highlighted as well. They received excellent ratings from the surveyed alumni, highlighting their professional expertise and competence (5.4 from 6) and their responsiveness to the different settings of the participants' home environments (5.28 from 6). Participants in the case studies also emphasised the high motivation and commitment to the IDC as the key ingredient differentiating average trainers from particularly good trainers.

Nonetheless, the evaluation also identified some areas of improvement and threats. It was noted that the IDC mainly reaches deans from target countries with more developed higher education systems who are located in the capitals. This could be interpreted as catering for a rather privileged target group. It was phrased as an open question whether the IDC should continue to mainly reach participants from countries with more developed higher education systems or whether the communication strategy and selection process should be adapted to focus more on universities

in least developed countries or in remote areas with challenging conditions of managing an institution.

Besides that, even if a large number of women have been reached through the IDC, the results of the evaluation indicate that their particular needs as female deans were not being specifically addressed by the modules of the course. Concerning the career development after completion of the IDC, women tend to more often stay in the same positions or occupy positions on a lower hierarchical level than male participants. This difference, in the opinion of the evaluators, shows that women would need specific soft skills to cope with structural barriers at higher education institutions that prevent them from getting access to leadership positions.

Furthermore, although the trainers have received excellent ratings in the survey, their guidance and mentoring for implementing the participants' change projects could be processed in a more structured way. Besides that, the evaluators concluded that even though the multiplication of knowledge through IDC alumni works quite well, more incentives could be offered in that respect to further increase the impact of the course.

After receiving the final evaluation report the IDC Steering Committee consisting of representatives of DAAD, HRK, University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück and CHE met to discuss the recommendations and possible consequences for the IDC. To follow-up the evaluation the following decisions were taken:

- Not to change the recruitment process in favour of candidates from less developed countries or rural areas but to keep on inviting participants based on the quality of applications. Nevertheless, the selection committee must pay attention that for each cohort a good mix of different countries, institutional profiles and fair gender representation is ensured.
- To integrate a new module on diversity management into the course design to better address the needs of female IDC participants.
- To organise a workshop on didactics for key regional and European trainers of DIES training courses to discuss how the mentoring process of participants with regards to the implementation of their reform projects can be improved.

Recent trends – digitalisation, upscaling and multiplication

Over its ten years of duration the International Deans' Course has steadily evolved. In a dynamic process, new modules have been developed such as the conflict management or the diversity module, new didactical approaches have been applied and further innovations will follow with each new edition.

The "Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies" programme is innovative by nature as it keeps abreast of recent developments and facilitates cross-regional dialogue on higher education reform topics on a regular basis. Some recent topics that are important in the context of capacity development and development cooperation are related to digitalisation in higher education and to the question of how

impact of projects can be increased. (Cf. State of Play: Higher Education Management Training Schemes in the Field of Development Cooperation, CIHE Perspectives No. 7). Identifying mechanisms which allow creating effects beyond the increase of individual competences has been a key concern of DAAD and HRK right from the beginning. Backed up by the results of different evaluations, the PAP approach has been very instrumental in view of stimulating reforms and organisational change at university level. Yet, due to the limited number of one cohort and the (cross-) regional format of DIES courses the impact at national level remains relatively low. Therefore, DIES came up with a complementary scheme which offers to alumni of DIES courses the opportunity to conduct multiplication workshops in their home countries. The National Multiplication Training (NMT) programme enables alumni to take responsibility and share their knowledge and competences with peers in their countries. Overwhelming numbers of applicants show the huge demand for NMTs and underline that they play a crucial role for increasing the impact and outreach of DIES training courses.

Talking about one specific aspect of digitalisation making use of online learning can be seen as another mechanism to reach larger target groups. In the context of the DIES programme digital tools are considered as a means to an end. Digital elements like webinars or online-based learning platforms are already part of most DIES training courses. The provision of webinars, learning videos or online assignments might enhance the learning experience but need to be adapted carefully to the respective target groups in developing countries. Nonetheless, for specific topics and reasons even completely online-based courses might be adequate. Hence, in 2018 – responding to the high demand for quality doctoral education in Africa – DIES has launched its first training which is offered fully online. Coordinated by the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) at University of Stellenbosch, South Africa this course offers to (especially novice) doctoral supervisors at African Universities the opportunity to participate in a two-month training consisting of six modules dealing with the standards of a doctoral degree, roles and responsibilities of a supervisor, or supervisory models and styles. The number of applicants and the results of the first cohorts prove that demand is high and that the drop-out rate is encouragingly low. 81% of the participants successfully completed the course. Yet, these results are only possible due to professional support structures, technical guidance and a well elaborated and resource intensive mentoring system.

Upscaling of training courses through digitalisation is possible and can increase the impact without investing in mobility. Yet, the philosophy behind the “regular” DIES training courses to transfer knowledge and competences through a practice-oriented approach based on intercultural dialogue is still valid. The evaluation of the IDC and personal experience show that digital elements, especially during the intermediate phases, can be valuable additions to the course, but that personal contact and exchange among the participants, trainers and experts during the presence phases is key to create an open atmosphere for discussions. Telling from own experiences, sharing success stories or admitting mistakes which turned out to be critical

incidents in one's career as university manager are powerful tools for effective learning but require trust, personal relationships and situations where informal communication can take place.

References

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