

## EXPERIENCES AT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GERMAN COURSES IN THE ISF PROGRAM: LANGUAGE POLICIES, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

**Experiências na implementação de cursos de alemão no âmbito do programa IsF: Políticas linguísticas, desafios e estratégias**

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**ABSTRACT:** Due to the investment undertaken since 2015, German institutions have become one of the main partners in the program *Language without borders* (IsF). This article contextualizes the growth of the German language IsF program and the increased academic cooperation between Germany and Brazil as a consequence of intentional Foreign Language Policy. After discussing the policy basics, the article presents the results of the two year trial period for German in the IsF program. Based on official documents and questionnaires answered by the learners, data is shown about the participation and engagement in the language learning process. At the end, a brief discussion is made about the German – Brazil plans for further academic cooperation in the field of IsF.

**KEYWORDS:** Language without borders (IsF); German; Language Policy

**RESUMO:** Desde 2015 houve a participação de várias instituições alemãs na integração da língua alemã no programa Idiomas sem fronteiras (IsF). O presente artigo parte da ideia de que tanto o crescimento da língua alemã dentro do programa IsF, quanto o aumento da cooperação acadêmica entre Alemanha e Brasil têm um pano de fundo mais abrangente, que é a implementação consciente de uma política externa de fomento de línguas durante as últimas décadas. O artigo apresenta dados básicos dessa política e das relações acadêmicas entre Brasil e Alemanha, para em seguida focar na fase piloto do IsF-Alemão e apresentar os dados colecionados através de análise de documentos e questionários respondidos pelos alunos, assim como conclusões e futuras cooperações do programa.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Idioma sem Fronteiras (IsF); Alemão; Políticas linguísticas

### 1 INTRODUCTION

For the last few years, important changes can be observed in the entire world: these changes concern areas like the economy and politics, as well as the way academic action and innovation is perceived and performed (SCHÜTTE, 2015, p. 135). One of the main topics of transformation belongs to the way to deal with knowledge, and lately more and more scholars use the term of “societies of knowledge” to describe the strategies adopted by some countries to face the growing challenges of a globalized world (HALLET, 2006; SCHÜTTE, 2015). In other words, “societies of knowledge” value knowledge and its management as a means to preserve a quality living standard for all of its members. These societies usually focus on international

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cooperation and are increasingly investing in education as a means to secure a more prosperous future (SCHÜTTE, 2015, p. 137; STALLIVERI, 2017, p. 50).

Education issues are prevalent in emerging economies, especially in countries referred to as the 'BRIC' countries – Brazil, Russia, India, and China (SCHÜTTE, 2015, p. 142; STALLIVERI, 2017, p. 95). These countries undertook, among other measures for development, high investments in the educational sector since the beginning of the new millennium. In 2011, Brazil created a program called *Science without Borders* (in Portuguese: *Ciência sem Fronteiras – CsF*) in response to the increasing speed and availability of new scientific information discovered across the globe. The CsF program was designed to offer 101,000 university students an opportunity to study and research abroad. Students enrolled in the program were supported by a scholarship awarded by the public agency CAPES (STALLIVERI, 2017, p. 131; VOERKEL, 2017, p. 218). Although CsF was terminated in 2016, as many as 92,880 participants benefited from the program and thus were exposed to the benefits of foreign exchange studies and travel<sup>1</sup> (STALLIVERI, 2017: p. 127).

Despite this achievement, the CsF program faced criticism in different aspects, being one of the points the low language level of students, professors and academic staff. Although the students sent abroad on CsF scholarships were qualified in their respective fields, they often lacked the required language skills to succeed in their courses<sup>2</sup> (STALLIVERI, 2017, p. 132). In response, the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) launched the *Language without Borders* program (in Portuguese: *Idiomas sem Fronteiras – IsF*) to better equip students with basic foreign language skills prior to their study abroad experience (ABREU E LIMA et al., 2016, p. 20; STALLIVERI, 2017, p. 133). Additionally, the program was designed to support professional teacher development and encourage international cooperation (SARMENTO et al., 2016, p. 11; ABREU E LIMA; MORAES; BARBOSA; BLUM, 2016, p. 40).

Although the high reputation of the American universities has put the United States in 1<sup>st</sup> position for CsF scholarship holders, it was noted that the degree of language difficulty often correlated with the choice of their study location. Portugal, the 2<sup>nd</sup> destination to be chosen in the program, has almost no language barrier for Brazilian students, and Italy and

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<sup>1</sup> As one result of the CsF program, the number of outgoing students from Brazil rose about 500% between 2005 and 2014, amounting to 230,000 people (STALLIVERI, 2017, p. 126).

<sup>2</sup> About  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the scholarship holders did not have a command of German at level B2 (or more), usually the minimum level required to study in Germany (VOERKEL, 2017, p. 219).

Spain speak languages similar to Portuguese. For these reasons, students and academic scholars often chose to study in these countries (EBC 2012).

The situation is different when Germany is concerned. People there speak a language that has historically been considered more difficult for students with no prior knowledge of the language to learn in a short period abroad (VOERKEL, 2018, p. 176). However, Brazil has a long history with the German language and culture. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, many German speaking immigrants arrived to Brazil, making it today the country with the highest number of German speakers outside of Europe (AMMON, 2015a, p. 1038; AMMON, 2015b, p. 372; VOERKEL, 2017, p. 26). Despite this historical connection and the significant language funding provided by the German government, the number of German language learners remains relatively small within Brazil. Out of the almost 50,000,000 students enrolled in Brazilian schools and universities, only about 100,000, or 0.2%, are learning German (AUSWÄRTIGES AMT, 2015, p. 8). As a result, in 2015 Germany decided to officially join the IsF program, giving thus continuity to its efforts for Internationalization<sup>3</sup>.

## 2 GERMANY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

A reputation stemming partly from the twelve years of Nazi dictatorship, Germany and its citizens are often regarded as cold, hostile, and humorless by neighboring countries and partners worldwide (KÖRBER, 2015, p. 166). What usually is not reflected in these stereotypes: Germany has changed drastically within the last three generations, especially following the “Reunification” of Eastern and Western Germany in 1990. Most notably, Germany has seen an increase in population heterogeneity and in the presence of foreigners in the country. With an overall population of about 83,000,000 people, there are approximately 8,700,000 people without German passport living in the country<sup>4</sup>. When adding foreigners and Germans born outside of the country (or with at least one parent not born in Germany), this number jumps to approximately 17,000,000, which means that more than 20% of the

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<sup>3</sup> The term “Internationalization” is used in the sense of the Brazilian concept of “internacionalização”, which means the efforts of universities and (public) exchange organizations to support academic exchange and international research projects.

<sup>4</sup> Interesting fact: In the media, the focus usually is set on the undocumented illegal persons and the refugees coming from African and Asian countries. Still, more than two thirds of the foreign population comes from EU-member countries, with the right to live in any EU-member country, and the percentage of people with no legal status is very low.

German population has a “migration background”<sup>5</sup> (DESTATIS, 2018). People travelling throughout Germany may be surprised to encounter foreigners, especially in bigger cities, but the history of Germany suggests this is to be expected.

After 1945, migration was significant. Depending on the region, the percentage of displaced people as a consequence of World War II was almost 25% of the total population (OLTMER, 2017, p. 154). In the 1950s and especially the 1960s, Western Germany experienced important economic growth which led to increased labor demands. Initially, this demand was met by people from rural areas moving into the city, but by the 1960s, Germany was contracting foreign workers (OLTMER, 2017, p. 158). Formal immigration contracts between Germany and other countries lasted from 1955 to 1973<sup>6</sup> (OLTMER, 2013, p. 39; OLTMER, 2017, p. 160). The main spots of origin were Italy, Spain, Greece and Turkey, and the population coming to Western Germany from all foreign countries rose between 1961 and 1973 from 0.5 to 2.6 million (OLTMER, 2013, p. 39; OLTMER, 2017, p. 190). Eastern Germany as well received international migrants, but in far lower numbers than Western Germany, and most migrants were from the so-called “Socialist Brother Countries”<sup>7</sup> (WEISS, 2013, p. 42). In addition, Germany has long received immigrants seeking asylum. After a dramatic rise in asylum seekers through the early 1990s, Germany passed an immigration law in 1993 to ebb the flow, however, the number of people seeking asylum rose again in 2015 and 2016, exceeding 500,000 per year (OLTMER, 2017, p. 231, p. 234). In other words: for the last 50 years, Germany has experienced consistent migration, and will continue to be an important destination for immigration.

The end of WWII changed more than the ethnic makeup of Germany. Because of its landscape and limited raw materials, Germany strategically developed its export sector and international contacts (SCHÜTTE, 2015, p. 147), and up from the 1960s, the economy became increasingly reliant on these international trade relations. During the first years of the new millennium, Germany was considered the “world leader of exportation”, until China

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<sup>5</sup> In comparison to the two other mainly German speaking countries in Central Europe: Austria reaches about 22%, Switzerland almost 37% of people with “migration background” (STATISTIK AUSTRIA 2017, p. 9; SCHWEIZERISCHE EIDGENOSSENSCHAFT, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Migration movements were even higher: Between the late 1950s and 1973, there were about 14 million foreign workers coming to Western Germany, whereas 11 million went back to their country of origin (OLTMER 2013, p. 39).

<sup>7</sup> Even more than 28 years after the “Reunification”, these migration patterns persist, with Eastern Germany presenting lower number of foreign population and particular characteristics concerning countries of origin and working activities (WEISS 2013, 43, 44).

claimed that title in 2013. However, Germany still exports more goods than countries like Japan, France, and Russia (STATISTA, 2018).

As a consequence, close relationship with international partners have been a priority in government strategies and decisions for a long time, including in the areas of culture and education. In the 1970s, Chancellor Willy Brandt and his center-left government officially adopted the “Foreign Cultural Policy”<sup>8</sup>, which has since become a staple in Germany’s international political strategy (KÖRBER, 2015, p. 160). In the new millennium, an enlargement of the agenda was set, and the latest revisions of the now called “Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy” focused, among other measures, significant attention on two key areas influencing the IsF program: language policy and the university agenda. The policy has been responsible for shifts in government policy towards education and culture and has strengthened overall academic exchange and cooperation (SCHÜTTE, 2015, p. 137).

For the last decades, universities were receiving increasing numbers of foreign students, and today foreign students made up more than 12% of the overall student enrolment. In addition, universities are attracting foreign visiting professors, and about 10% of professors are not German (SCHÜTTE, 2015, p. 144). The following table shows the number of international students enrolled at German universities.

	All Higher Education Institutions		Universities		Universities of Applied Sciences	
	Number	in %	Number	in %	Number	in %
<b>German students</b>	2,417,494	87.7	1,552,163	86.6	865,331	89.6
<b>Foreign students</b>	340,305	12.3	239,825	13.4	100,480	10.4

Table 1: German and foreign students by type of higher education institution 2016 (Source: Wissenschaft Weltoffen)

In Germany, measures of Internationalization do not focus only on incoming students, as the majority of English speaking countries that receive international students do, such as the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Instead, there is about the same number of incoming and outgoing students.

On the other hand, language policy is an important issue in Germany. Adapting to the European foreign language policy, any member of the European Union should be able to communicate in at least two languages, in addition to his / her mother tongue(s) (VOERKEL, 2018, p. 176–180). As a result, students enrolled in German schools are required to take at

<sup>8</sup> Introduced first by the historian Karl Lamprecht in 1912, the term describes the use of cultural activities to strengthen international relations, instead of relying solely on diplomacy and economic ties (DÜWELL 2015, p. 57, p. 62)

least two foreign language courses, for the minimum time of four years and dedicate almost 20% of instructional time to language learning (VOERKEL, 2018, p. 182). Educators and school administrators have long regarded language learning as a basic skill, and language learning is an essential part of the official political agenda.

### 3 GERMAN-GRAZILIAN RELATIONS IN TERMS OF EDUCATION

Since its discovery and conquest in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Brazil has fascinated the Europeans (VOERKEL, 2017, p. 15). For 300 years, the Portuguese exerted influence over the land in terms of economy, language and culture. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the country gained its independence, and began seeking its own trade partners as a way to solidify its independence. The first Brazilian Emperor, Dom Pedro I, who was married to the Austrian princess Leopoldina, supported large scale campaigns encouraging foreign settlement to secure the borders and spur commercial and economic growth (PRUTSCH; RODRIGUES-MOURA, 2014, p. 58; 67–70).

As a result, Brazil became an attractive destination for Europeans willing to leave their own countries in search of better opportunities. The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a large migration flow from Europe to the Americas: The number of people emigrating from Europe between 1815 and 1930 is estimated to be close to 60 million, from which more than 10 million settled in South America, including several hundred thousand Germans<sup>9</sup> (OLTMER, 2017, p. 55).

An estimated 350,000 German speaking immigrants arrived to Brazil during this period<sup>10</sup>. They mostly came from the south-western part of Germany and were quite heterogeneous in profession, age, status, and religion (KUSCHEL; MANN; SOETHE, 2009, p. 14; OLTMER; 2017, p. 60; 62). During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German culture gained visibility in many cities that began as German settlements, such as Blumenau, Joinville, and Petrópolis. In fact, the Brazilian army was organized by a German officer who drew from the German army's organization and constitution (PRUTSCH; RODRIGUES-MOURA, 2014, p. 68; VOERKEL, 2016, p. 16). The settlers were even able to influence the

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<sup>9</sup> Germany as a political unit and sovereign country was founded in 1871, so “German emigration” is understood in this context as the settling of German speaking people stemming from Central Europe and including origins from Switzerland, Austria, and even parts of Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania or Russia (VOERKEL 2017, p. 17).

<sup>10</sup> This number is about ten times less than German migration to the United States (OLTMER 2017, p. 57). Still, as a consequence, about 5 million Brazilians are considered to have German ancestors (KUSCHEL, MANN, SOETHE 2009, p. 14; SOETHE 2010, p. 1624; VOERKEL 2017, p. 19).

educational system in Brazil: by 1930, there were more than 1,000 schools run in German, 2,000 German associations operating, and about 500 newspapers published in the language (KUSCHEL et al., 2009, p. 15; VOERKEL, 2017, p. 20–23). The institute of German teacher training, situated in a German speaking area of Southern Brazil, was opened in 1909, more than 30 years before the first department of German Studies was founded at a public university (VOERKEL, 2017, p. 77). On the other hand, some of the most influential Brazilian scientists and artists lived for some time in Germany, such as the sociologist Sérgio Buarque de Holanda or the author João Guimarães Rosa, and several intellectuals were in exile in Germany during the last Brazilian dictatorship (1964–1985).

The cultural and scientific relationships between Brazil and Germany were strengthened in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1950, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) awarded the first scholarships to Brazilians to study in Germany, and by 1972, the DAAD head office for Brazil and South America opened in Rio de Janeiro (VOERKEL, 2017, p. 33; DAAD, 2018, p. 48). The relationship was solidified after a cultural agreement was signed in 1969, which has been enlarged by an additional scientific cooperation and exchange agreement in 2015, giving increased commitment to language and cultural exchange between the two countries (VOERKEL, 2017, p. 449–451). Currently, there are nine DAAD visiting professors and 16 language assistant teachers working in Brazilian universities, mainly supporting language teaching throughout the whole country. Brazil is unequivocally Germany's strongest academic exchange partner in Latin America (DAAD, 2015, p. 4; DAAD, 2018, p. 57).

#### **4 INTRODUCING THE ISF GERMAN PROGRAM**

The idea for the *Language without Borders* (IsF) program was suggested shortly after the CsF scholarship program was launched in 2011 (ABREU E LIMA e al. , 2016, p. 30). A significant percentage of the initial CsF scholarship grantees had faced difficulty meeting satisfactory foreign language assessments, so the Ministry of Education (MEC) began working on a way to close the language gap (STALLIVERI, 2017, p. 133). A group of engaged language teaching specialists, mainly English language and Virtual Learning university professors, were invited to develop a language teaching program that was to be implemented at Brazilian universities with CsF participation. At the time, the only foreign language offered was English, and its accompanying language learning program English

without Borders (*InglêssemFronteiras* – IsF) was launched in December of 2012. Its primary purpose was to provide better language skill's development to students prior to their CsF scholarship period abroad, by offering English courses and testing opportunities for free<sup>11</sup> (SARMENTO et al, 2016, p. 11).

CsF students started to participate in exchange activities with German universities as soon as the scholarship program was launched in 2011, and by 2015, more than 6,000 scholarship holders had participated in the program (DAAD, 2015, p. 5). Pre-departure language development was critical for students heading to Germany because only a minority of the participants had previous knowledge of the language<sup>12</sup>. As students participating in the program were immediately expected to take courses in German, IsF administrators began to consider expanding the courses offers and to include German, starting with 10 universities.

By that time, the language learning program was undergoing substantial changes. Because CsF scholarship holders increasingly chose exchange activities with non-English speaking countries, the MEC decided to expand the program to include all languages under the new program term *Idiomas sem fronteiras*. Several new languages and a multilingual setting was adopted: The first newcomer was French, with the first courses starting toward the end of 2014 (ABREU E LIMA; BARROS, 2016, p. 305).

The year 2015 was a milestone for German participation in the IsF program. In August of that year, the German and Brazilian governments officially signed an agreement to support the learning of the German language in Brazil (VOERKEL, 2017, p. 449–451). Shortly after, a memorandum of understanding was laid out between MEC and DAAD to establish German language courses in the IsF program. A year later, a more detailed agreement was signed that decided on implementation strategy and measures. It was phased in as a two-year trial period, starting in the second half of 2016.

The partners decided that the IsF German language courses would cover the basics, from beginning levels (A1.1) to intermediate levels (B1). They were to be offered as online-courses, each course lasting for three months with a 90-hours-workload and online tuition. Because of the complexity of virtual learning, the partners agreed to include face-to-face

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<sup>11</sup> A more complete insight in the goals of the IsF program can be found in the article published by ABREU E LIMA, MORAES, BARBOSA and BLUM in 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Referring to Peuschel (2014, p. 654), less than one third of the students had a command of German language at level B2 or above.



tuition for the beginner levels, to be decided upon and organized by each university where the German courses were hosted.

Due to the didactic implications and the structure, several partners are involved with the IsF German program. During the implementation phase, the Brazilian government set priority on strengthening its international academic contacts and the MEC focused on the roll-out of the exchange and language learning programs. Currently, the IsF program is managed by the Secretary of Higher Education (*Secretaria de Educação Superior – SeSu*) where decisions are made by the members of the Language Council<sup>13</sup> (ABREU E LIMA; BARROS, 2016, p. 293; 299–305). CAPES funds a part of the program, but the majority of financial support is provided by the German government via the DAAD. For this reason, DAAD is the official MEC partner for the IsF German program. Because DAAD itself does not offer language courses, a German-based academic research organization (the *Deutsch Uni Online – DUO*) administers the virtual German courses (DAAD, 2018, p. 54). Each university offering German courses has a coordinator managing the day-to-day of the German IsF-program and supervising the local face-to-face tutor.

## 5 THE TRIAL PERIOD

The two-year trial period began in October of 2016 with a total of 389 participants from ten different universities throughout Brazil. Subsequently, German courses were offered to the academic community between the second semester of 2016 and the first semester of 2018, with a total number of 1,461 participants.

Semester	Nr. of registrations	Places available	Demand covered
2016-2	6,877	389	5.7%
2017-1	5,902	446	7.6%
2017-2	8,747	446	5.1%
<b>Total number</b>	<b>21,526</b>	<b>1,281</b>	<b>5.9%</b>

Table 2: Demand for the IsF German courses (Source: MEC/DAAD)

The data shows plainly: there is significant demand for German courses at Brazilian universities (DAAD 2018, p. 54). At one point, the program had to turn away students who wanted to participate because the trial period offered only a limited number of spots. This offer to demand mismatch resulted in less than 6% of students who applied to the program being accepted.

<sup>13</sup> The creation and work of this advisory council, called *Nucleo Gestor* in Portuguese, is explained in the article presented by ABREU E LIMA and BARROS, 2016.

When regarding the overall numbers of the IsF program, the demand for German language courses was only 2<sup>nd</sup> to English.

Language	Offer <sup>14</sup> 2016	Registrations <sup>15</sup> 2016	Offer 2017	Registrations 2017
English	47,705	102,697	28,006	47,583
German	389	6,877	892	14,649
French	235	1,983	919	7,802
Spanish	345	1,421	1,328	6,154
Italian	314	4,762	629	5,398
Japanese	246	2,320	788	4,357
Portuguese <sup>16</sup>			548	655

Table 3: Number of offer and demand on IsF courses 2016 and 2017 (Source: MEC)

Each IsF language program has its own set of operating guidelines, making it difficult to compare demand data. However, considering the difficulty of German over other Romance languages such as French, Italian or Spanish that Brazilian students may be more familiar with, the German enrolment numbers are noteworthy. One theory explaining the demand is that the courses are offered free of charge<sup>17</sup>, although other language courses are also free. Other reasons may be the excellent German university systems reputation, job prospects, or even the rarity of free German language courses.

The demand for courses and the number of universities that enrolled in the IsF trial period highlighted the demand for IsF German courses. The trial period opened 14 slots for universities to participate, which were filled by the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester<sup>18</sup> (DAAD, 2018, p. 54).

University	State	German Studies <sup>19</sup>	Participation in			
			2016-2	2017-1	2017-2	2018-1
UFBA	BA	X	X	X	X	X
UFC	CE	X	X	X	X	X
UFCG	PB		X	X	X	X
UFF	RJ	X	X	X		

<sup>14</sup> “Offer” is the number of students enrolled in the language program.

<sup>15</sup> “Registrations” reflects the number of people who registered on the MEC website with the intent to participate in a language course.

<sup>16</sup> Portuguese is offered under a course called “Portuguese as a Foreign Language” and was only offered beginning in 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Considering that the average price for private German lessons in Rio de Janeiro is about 120 R\$ per hour, each course place is an equivalent of more than 10,000 R\$.

<sup>18</sup> The number of participating universities was fixed in 14. As one university desisted after one year and was replaced by another, the list includes the overall number of 15 institutions.

<sup>19</sup> In this case, “German Studies” means that the university runs an independent study program for students studying to be German teachers.

UFMG	MG	X	X	X	X	X
UFPA	PA	X			X	X
UFPeI	RS	X			X	X
UFPR	PR	X	X	X	X	X
UFRGS	RS	X		X	X	X
UFRN	RN		X	X	X	X
UFSC	SC	X		X	X	X
UFSM	RS		X	X	X	X
UNESP	SP	X	X	X	X	X
UNILA	PR				X	X
USP	SP	X	X	X	X	X

Table 4: Universities participating in the trial period of IsF German (Source: MEC / DAAD)

The table shows that during the trial period the number of universities that participated in the IsF German program rose from ten to 14<sup>20</sup>. Twelve institutions offer an independent study program for German teacher training and/or a BA-grade in German studies; three of them do not. The universities are situated in different parts of the country: one in the North, four in the Northeast, four in the Southeast, six in the South, and none in the Central-Western region of Brazil.

During the trial period, several measures were taken to track student progress and to assure the quality of the IsF German program. Each time students concluded a course, they responded to a questionnaire collecting data on their learning process and their experience with the program. In addition, during annual meetings and web conferences, local program coordinators were invited to speak on their work and to provide recommendations and opinions about the IsF activities. Challenges in terms of organization and content were discussed, such as the progression of learning and motivation strategies to attach the learners to the program. This feedback was measured against the learner data (participation, results) and reviewed by the organizational IsF German board. In addition, at the end of the fourth semester, a program-wide evaluation was organized by a team of university professors from Brazil and Germany, all experts in online learning and German teacher training.

Although the high enrolment and participation data suggests that the IsF German program is a success story, there are several challenges that affect the overall results of the German language courses. By analysing the content of the official documents, course data, the coordinator's feedback and the results of the learner's questionnaires, it is possible to determine some main areas of improvement for the IsF German program:

<sup>20</sup>The following numbers refer to all the 15 universities that had participated in the program.

- Online learning: Brazilian students spend a lot of time on mobile devices. Internet and social media are very present in their lives, but that does not mean that they are familiar with online learning processes or strategies. Frequently, the challenges of learning a language online are underestimated, and learners face difficulties leveraging the advantages of online tools for their own learning process.
- Content management and didactics: IsF German courses are mostly taught online and offered for a three-month period twice a year. To reinforce the content covered, the courses offer additional face-to-face tutoring sessions at the university. It is a challenge to coordinate the material covered with tutoring sessions.
- Dropout rate: In the first course offered, at the second semester of 2016, the percentage of learners that did not finish the course was nearly 50%. When asked why students missed lectures, students responded that the workload – an average of 8 hours per week – was too demanding, considering the responsibilities they already have to their primary studies. In addition, students mentioned difficulty relating to the online tutors, who usually did not speak Portuguese.
- Continuity: The German courses have an average progression, which means that beginners need at least four courses to reach intermediate level. During the trial period, the average transition rate from one course to the next was below 50%, and few students that started German courses in 2016 enrolled in the 2018 courses. One explanation for this drop is that CsF was cancelled in 2016 and public scholarships were cut drastically.
- Communication: Concerning both internal and external communication, it was challenging to find an efficient way to exchange information between the partners in the program. The MEC, DAAD, and DUO partners had to agree on both content and organizational issues. In addition, the communications flow with the students had to be established and continuously revisited.

The identification of the challenges was a crucial point for quality control. Some of these challenges are difficult to address, for example, fewer students have the opportunity to participate in an exchange program sponsored by public agencies<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, the partners

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<sup>21</sup>The fact that Brazilian public agencies have cut their scholarships affects directly the motivation of the students to keep on learning languages.

identified several areas for improvement to ensure the continuity of the learning process and the ongoing of the program as a whole. Below are some of the improvement measures that were taken during the trial period:

- Communication between all involved parties, including the MEC, DAAD, DUO, Coordinators, online- and face-to-face tutors and students was streamlined.
- Online training programs led by DUO experts were implemented for local coordinators and tutors.
- Mandatory informational meetings with the IsF coordinator at the local university were institutionalized.
- Information for students concerning the relevance of language command, the language learning process, and exchange possibilities was increasingly distributed.
- Communication between online tutors and classroom tutors has been improved.
- Online and in-person learning was streamlined ensuring cohesion and follow-through.

These changes improved considerably supported language acquisition and participation for students. The courses offered in the 2018-1 semester saw a drastic reduction of the dropout rate (to less than 5%) and an approval rating that reached nearly 60%. Still, the IsF German program is continually exploring new ways to improve. Next, the program will focus on the learning process as a whole and an efficient combination of learning by virtual and blended-learning settings.

## **6 A SHORT PREVIEW**

Shortly before the IsF German trial period was officially over, MEC and DAAD decided to renew the program for four additional years (from 2019 to 2022). The main challenge now lies in integrating the trial period lessons to create a sustainable, long-term IsF German program. This program will continue to be an important tool to promote the general academic cooperation between Brazil and Germany and a milestone for internationalization efforts.

Still, there is a lot of work to do when thinking about Internationalization efforts. There are not only challenges found when outgoing study exchange is concerned, but as well in the reception of incomings. Despite increased enrolments, the Brazilian academic sector faces significant challenges to enrol international students: only 0.2% of the students in

Brazilian universities are foreigners, which means the number is more than 50 times lower than in German universities.

Brazilian universities often have no established infrastructure to receive foreign students and researchers, there are immense bureaucratic issues, and the overall importance given towards learning foreign languages is relatively low (STALLIVERI, 2017, p. 135–139).

Despite the low numbers up to now, Internationalization is gaining weight at Brazilian universities. Language policy becomes an increasingly important tool to promote academic exchange, and with regards on the dynamic Master's and PhD programs and research activities, Brazil has the potential to once again be one of the top-20 producers of new scientific knowledge. It thus can be confirmed that in the context of current age of academic globalization and international cooperation, the IsF German program remains an important instrument to strengthen German and Brazilian relations (ROCHE; SUÑER, 2017, p. 11).

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