Historical Origin, Practical Approach, and Enlightenment of Transcultural Education in German Universities

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzed the developmental history and specific practical approaches of transcultural education in German universities and summarized its experiences to provide meaningful suggestions for transcultural education in Chinese universities.

Design/Approach/Methods: This study systematically reviewed and analyzed the historical origins and practical approaches to transcultural education in German universities through policy interpretation and case analysis.

Findings: Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, German universities have effectively promoted integration and communication among communities with diverse cultural backgrounds through various forms and types of transcultural education. They launched curricula and lecture

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models characterized by university styles, fostering the integration and solidarity of individuals from multicultural backgrounds.

Originality/Value: It is of immediate significance for both the theoretical understanding and practical exploration of transcultural education with Chinese characteristics to conduct a systemic analysis of the specific practical approach of transcultural education in German universities.

Amid unprecedented global changes, China faces a complex and evolving set of international and domestic challenges. To overcome these challenges, China must strengthen its cultural confidence and pursue self-improvement. Simultaneously, China should use the excellent achievements of human civilization as a reference and actively engage in international multilateral dialogues to facilitate multicultural exchange and contribute to its prosperous development. In 2016, "international understanding" was listed as an essential point for developing Chinese students' key competencies (The Research Group of Key Competence Studies, 2016). In the contemporary era of interactive multiculturalism, gaining insight into the cultural essence of other communities occurs through communication with different nations and societies. In addition, a bridge of mutual respect and appreciation among multicultures could be created, provided that an international perspective of mutual respect and understanding is embraced. Therefore, transcultural education has emerged as a significant developmental focus worldwide. Transcultural competence is valued as a vital competency across nations, leading to the implementation of diverse forms of transcultural education. Efforts have been dedicated to enhancing communication skills with other countries, nations, and communities to enhance a country's overall international competitiveness.

Due to shifts in the industrial structure and the accelerating process of globalization, extensive international research has been conducted on transcultural education. Germany, which has been experiencing a significant influx of overseas immigrants, has gradually become a country with diverse cultures, giving rise to increased cultural conflicts and social contradictions. Since the 1960s, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany has dedicated itself to multicultural integration and social harmony. The approach of using transcultural education to achieve the social integration and adaptation of communities from foreign cultures emerged as a weighty topic discussed in society at that time. In the 1970s and 1980s, early related studies on transcultural education in Germany mainly focused on reflecting on its development process, along with its attitude and philosophy toward foreign cultures (Auernheimer, 2003). During that time, transcultural education discussed issues such as goal setting, content choice, and instructional design in school

education, with the aim of boosting social integration. Attention was paid to developing an effective integration approach for ethnic minorities (foreign workers and their children) through language and basic education, promoting cultural integration education. However, there is a lack of systematic studies on transcultural education theory and practice in universities (Roth, 2002). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, on the one hand, diversified forms and types of transcultural education in German universities have greatly advanced the integration and communication of communities from different cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, the construction of curricula and teaching models with university characteristics has effectively promoted integration and solidarity among multicultural groups. These experiences provide practical insight for organizing and implementing transcultural education in China in a new era. They also contribute to reinforcing national unity, deepening cultural understanding, and establishing awareness of the Chinese national community.

As a typical multi-ethnic country, Germany has many similarities to China in its ethnic structure. Education, one of the most obvious areas of multicultural differences, has aroused widespread concern in society. To deal with the increasingly prominent problem of educational heterogeneity, German universities actively play an important role in setting and developing hybrid courses and teaching modes and effectively coordinate with the government, enterprises, professional institutions, and organizations to carry out and organize transcultural education activities and projects. This has created a beneficial space for cultural integration and exchange in the field of higher education, deepening cultural understanding and further communication between different ethnic groups. The continuous promotion and strengthening of ethnic unity are important prerequisites for realizing the common prosperity of all ethnic groups and stable development in the country. Therefore, it is of great significance to promote higher education, ethnic unity, and common prosperity of all ethnic groups throughout society through education. Transcultural education in our universities not only conforms to the basic requirements of national policies but is also an important guarantee for the effective improvement of the transcultural communication ability of college students in the new period.

Concept definition

Interculturality, multiculturality, and transculturality in education

In 1992, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) introduced the concept of "intercultural education" (another term for "transcultural education") in the publication "The Contribution of Education to Cultural Development." This occurred during the *International Conference on Education: Recommendations* in the 43rd session of the International Conference on Education. There are detailed interpretations of concepts, such as "cultural education," "intercultural," and "multicultural education." "Intercultural education" is defined

as an educational approach that is student- and citizen-oriented, promotes mutual respect for cultural diversity, and allows for diverse understanding. Specifically, plans, curricula, and activities should be designed for all learners to encourage respect for cultural diversity and enhance the understanding of different cultures (Zhao, 1999). Early studies on transcultural education were conducted before UNESCO formally put forward this concept. In the 1970s, intercultural education based on interculturalism was founded in Europe, particularly Germany and France. Consequently, three concepts emerged: interculturalism, multiculturalism, and "the trans-national." Multiculturalism respects and promotes "diversity" as defined by race, ethnicity, or religion as well as nationality and aboriginality inside a territorialized polity to increase "tolerance" among varied groups. However, multiculturalism is challenged by the concept that culture drives human behavior and that cultural groups are essential. This can strengthen the cultural stereotypes of minority groups, generate division and social fragmentation, politicize cultural group identities, and ironically block minority inclusion (Levrau & Loobuyck, 2018). Beyond tolerance, interculturalism is a more action-oriented term (Bash & Gundara, 2012), denoting a "transformative process" leading to a cohesive society in which solidarity embraces both the majority and minority.

Scholars have been concerned with the theoretical study of transcultural education since the start of the 1960s. However, transcultural education has a vague definition and is viewed as a form of education in various cultures. It later evolved into the notion of equal and active understanding and communication among different cultures and individuals. It was believed that transcultural education could achieve peaceful multicultural coexistence (Portera, 2008). Furthermore, transcultural education presents distinct features in different regions and countries because different countries have particularities in political, economic, and cultural development (Catarci & Fiorucci, 2015). Later, similar concepts such as intercultural, multicultural, and transnational education were discussed. In terms of intercultural and multicultural education, the former distinguishes itself by targeting all students, not just those identified as being multicultural, and relates to knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (Holm & Zilliacus, 2009). Intercultural education encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Some scholars also compare three concepts: transcultural education refers to education regarding the common humanities, human rights, human ethics, and human needs, whereas multicultural education refers to education that acknowledges and respects other people and cultures. In addition to these benefits, intercultural education also offers the chance to interact through the "direct exchange of ideas, principles, and behaviors through the comparison of preconceptions" (Portera, 2010).

Overall, for intercultural and multicultural education, the two words have been used interchangeably as both support integration without assimilation. Different spatial referents have also emerged in multicultural and intercultural education (Catarci & Fiorucci, 2015; Levey, 2012; Portera, 2020). In Europe, the term "intercultural education" has largely replaced the term "multicultural

education," although in North America and Asia-Pacific, the term "multicultural education" remains prominent (Kim & Bash, forthcoming 2025). For instance, in some European countries, such as Germany, the influx of immigrants has caused prominent contradictions related to religion and nation in the fields of education and cultural exchange. This has led to multicultural phenomena, in which various cultures collide and interact with each other. Therefore, in response, Germany officially issued guidelines on transcultural education in 1996 through the joint meeting of German Ministers of Culture and Education (KMK), a joint meeting of the German Ministers of Culture and Education. This guideline stresses cultural interaction and prioritizes finding solutions to social, racial, and cultural heterogeneity as key educational tasks at a new stage (Banks, 2004). More importantly, affected by the third wave of democratization, European countries had to value and guarantee the needs and benefits of students from diverse backgrounds. Thus, transcultural education mirrors the value of its specific era and is constantly being popularized and developed (Xu, 2013).

Simultaneously, there are also scholars to explore the concept of transnational education and intercultural education: The concept of "the trans-national" expands the concept of cultural integration beyond territorial borders, challenging normative notions of multiculturalism that are connected to nation-states (Kastoryano, 2018). Consequently, transnational education is far from sufficient. Transnational education and intercultural education can be combined, that is, there is a need for "transnational intercultural education," in which diasporas and the concept of the "foreign" become essential and integrated aspects of intercultural studies (Kim & Bash, forthcoming 2025). Therefore, the intercultural methodology is vital because it emphasizes the "right to equality in difference" (Portera, 2010). Intercultural education is essential to every nation's educational system, as it involves education for human rights. With different histories, faiths, ideologies, and ethnicities (McCann et al., 2004; Phung et al., 2017), each German citizen can see and feel these differences. Intercultural education can help resolve intercultural confrontations and promote communication and interaction among the various communities of people living in Germany.

Status quo in China and the world

In comparison, transcultural education in China is still in chaos and lacks theoretical and practical studies. The systematic academic study of transcultural education was late in getting started. Because it has been attached to the university curriculum of English or foreign language acquisition, and there have been few systematic practical experiences in carrying out cultural education in universities, related research findings in China are deficient (Zhang, 2012). UNESCO has proposed new guidelines for conducting transcultural education, and there has been a new trend of thinking about international education in this new age. China needs to focus more on comprehensive transcultural education to make Chinese education adopt a global vision and meet new demands (Huang & Wei, 2007). There are various assumptions and disagreements among

international researchers regarding intercultural education. Some scholars argue that the concept of interculturality has been negatively influenced by Western-centric perspectives, politicized discourses, and idealistic postmodern ideology (Simpson & Dervin, 2019). They believe that interculturality places too much emphasis on nation-states even when alternative perspectives attempt to avoid this issue. Additionally, interculturality often relies on a Western geographical framework, such as using the term "Orient" to refer to China, despite the fact that the Chinese name for the country means "Middle Kingdom" (Zhōngguó).

In 2006, UNESCO presented three basic principles of intercultural education in its *UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education*. First, intercultural education should consider every learner's cultural identity and provide education within the boundaries of cultural sensitivity. Second, intercultural education should impart cultural knowledge and develop cultural attitudes and skills to enable every learner to take an active and full role in social life. Third, intercultural education could offer opportunities for all learners to acquire cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills so that they can respect, understand, and unite with each other when they are in different groups of nations, societies, cultures, and religions, as well as in various countries (UNESCO, 2006, pp. 33–37). Unlike similar concepts, such as international student education, immigrant education, and multicultural education, transcultural education mainly focuses on the interrelations and interactions among diverse cultures. Its main goal is to achieve equal cultural integration of different cultures and foster harmonious coexistence among various cultural communities in an effective manner (Chen & Qian, 2011). Therefore, there are initiatives and interactive features in transcultural education that require keeping an observant eye on cultural differences. This involves studying the impact of various cultures on students and fostering communication, understanding, and learning among students from different cultural backgrounds. In the context of a pluralistic society, transcultural education is learner-oriented and utilizes multilingual and multicultural interactions to promote mutual respect, understanding, and dialogue among countries, nations, and communities. The ultimate aim is to facilitate mutual understanding and respect among people, ultimately achieving the educational goal of harmonious coexistence (Huang & Wei, 2007). Transcultural education is required to accept and appreciate diverse cultures, respect the features of different cultures, and help learners reaffirm their self-identity when facing multicultural differences to conduct equal exchanges and interactions.

Development history of transcultural education in German universities

The development of transcultural education has a long historical standing. These enlightened thoughts can be traced back to the 1960s, the time of the immigration wave. Later, with the advent of the times, transcultural education gradually became an important factor that influenced

political, economic, and social development in Germany. Through transcultural education, college students greatly improved their transcultural communication levels, and the social integration of ethnic minorities was strengthened. Transcultural education is regarded as a crucial part of talent cultivation in German universities. The development history of transcultural education in German universities can be categorized into four important phases: bilingual education, cultural integration education, immigrant culture education, and transcultural education.

Phase of bilingual education in the 1960s

Following World War II, foreign workers from all over the world flocked to Germany during the reconstruction period. The children of these foreign workers began to enter the school system in Germany. To help them adapt quickly to school and daily life in society, foreigner-oriented German learning, tutoring, and training have become important features of basic education and pre-college courses.

However, traditional and systematic German tutoring has proven less effective for immigrant students who lack basic language knowledge. As a unique approach to promoting immigrants' integration into school society at all levels, schools have adopted the practice of carrying out teaching activities in the native language of immigrant students. This type of "bilingual education" became a common form of school education at that time. The purpose of this move was to alleviate learning difficulties for immigrant students in understanding the regular curriculum, and its effectiveness has been proven remarkable (Moosmüller, 2007, pp. 97–117). Nevertheless, such an educational mode was specifically targeted at immigrants, which went against the integration and development of diverse cultures. Transcultural education did not evolve into a specialized discipline or sub-discipline in the field of pedagogy until the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Phase of cultural integration education in the 1970s

In the early 1970s, a significant influx of immigrant children entered the German school system, highlighting increasing cultural diversity and school heterogeneity. However, school education in Germany faced various new challenges. The education for immigrants was often termed "special education" or "assimilation education" in the phase of bilingual education. However, this phenomenon was questioned and criticized in the 1970s (Dohse, 1982). This sparked heated discussion in German academia. The emphasis of this discussion was "whether Germany is a labor-importing country or a country of immigrants" (Dietz, 1987). During this time, the focus of transcultural education was transferred to youth and social education, leading to the emergence of cultural integration education (Hoff, 1995). With the increasing number of immigrant children, language training and tutoring conducted by universities can no longer solve the basic problems of cultural integration. A greater preference for vocational skill-oriented teaching content appeared to further the

cultural integration of individuals from various ethnic backgrounds. However, their practical effect-iveness is not ideal. There were still apparent cultural conflicts and ethnic group divisions, and pro-blems in the realm of transcultural communication became increasingly prominent (Hans-Joachim, 2002).

Cultural integrationists held the opinion that Germany was a country of immigrants who were willing to learn German culture and conventions to obtain German nationality. This perspective is supported by politicians from the Green Party, political scientists, and progressive factions of conservatism. Germany is viewed as a multicultural society, and the problems of transcultural com-munication in university education have become increasingly prominent. Against this background, more obvious problems and conflicts in transcultural communication need to be addressed. In response to these challenges, some scholars have proposed an intensified focus on vocational edu-cation to realize cultural integration among diverse communities. At the same time, studies on inter-national immigrants were conducted step-by-step, which, to a certain extent, propelled the organization and implementation of transcultural studies in universities.

As social diversity continued to evolve, the knowledge of immigrants in German society increased. Transcultural education and its related areas have gradually gained academic attention, leading to richer research findings. During this phase, transcultural education in universities has primar-ily demonstrated the function of cultural integration. It was designed to remove cultural contradictions and conflicts with the aim of unifying and integrating various ethnic groups (Chen & Wu, 2019).

Phase of immigrant culture education in the 1980s

In the 1980s, numerous immigrants from Eastern Europe became key components of the Federal Republic of Germany. Most were descendants of German-born immigrants who had moved to Eastern Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. Over time, these immigrants maintained the cultural mark of Germany. They generally identified strong links between mainstream social culture in Germany and their own culture. A shared language naturally serves as a connection in the process of national cultural integration.

Due to the urgent need for skilled workers in industrial production, a mass of immigrants expected to continue to stay in Germany and finally become new citizens through professional skills or short-term labor contracts. However, during that time, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany did not take the social integration of foreign laborers seriously. Nominal pol-icies regarding local integration were introduced but had little effect. In the 1980s, one of the his-torical stages with the most immigrants (refugees), "immigrants" and "lingual and cultural diversity" became a hot topic and major concern in society. This phenomenon also was "normal fall" influencing industrial production, economic and political development, population growth, and social life (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2020).

The gradual rise of transcultural education eventually convinced the German public that respect for immigrants' distinctive culture should be a new direction for development. Especially in the higher education stage, racism should be completely eliminated, and the comprehension of foreign cultures can be deepened through transcultural education. Consequently, this approach aims to motivate knowledge and communication among different nations and cultures, thereby improving individuals' ability to engage in transcultural communities. Consequently, final integration and solidarity with German characteristics can be achieved among various nations in Germany (Chen et al., 2021). An increasing number of producers with immigrant backgrounds have acquired vocational skills, completed higher education, and entered enterprises and factories in Germany.

With the increase in community members with diverse national and cultural backgrounds, important issues have emerged for government and public discussion: how to help them integrate into production labor and solve problems due to cultural differences; how to lead them to devote themselves to the establishment of social order; and how to have better communication and integration with other community residents. At the same time, higher education in Germany faces problems, such as heterogeneity. The noticeable situation of transcultural education has been a key educational issue that demanded a prompt solution, with the reinforcement of transcultural communication ability among different communities as the core content.

Phase of transcultural education in the 1990s and the twenty-first century

The acceleration of globalization and the internationalization process requires every modern state, to varying degrees, to face multicultural phenomena (Hoff, 1995). Because of the long-term split and the Cold War, East and West Germany developed different political systems and ideologies, which led to different political cultures. Finding an approach to building political identification was crucial for educational reform in the entire country and for the maintenance of national unity. This identification should meet the requirements of the Federal Republic of Germany regarding the original dominant areas of the German Democratic Republic. Therefore, political education played a crucial role in the transformation of the German Democratic Republic as well as in the internal unity of East and West Germany.

With the rapid surge in globalization, immigrants, and refugees, cultural diversity triggered social unrest, especially in the early 1990s, marked by violence from immigrants. Moreover, to address the increasing challenges of cultural heterogeneity in school education, KMK officially promulgated *Recommendations for Transcultural Education at School* in 1996. This was where the term "transcultural education" was used for the first time. A basic task was explicitly raised: All students should accept transcultural education at all levels of school development. Schools at different levels are expected to offer comprehensive and effective academic support and opportunities for children and teenagers from different cultural backgrounds and birthplaces. This would help

them integrate into German society, access a satisfactory and democratic living environment, and develop the necessary ability to behave responsibly in a world of globalization and cultural diversity (Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz, 2013).

In the twenty-first century, influenced by the refugee crisis in Europe in the 2010s, many Muslim and war refugees flocked to Germany. According to statistical data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Germany has hosted 2.1 million refugees, ranking fourth among countries that host refugees (UNHCR, 2023). Christianity is the largest religion in Germany, so the influx of Muslim refugees has brought religious and cultural differences and even conflicts to Germany. To cope with social unrest arising from multicultural conflicts, German universities were required to incorporate transcultural competence into their curricula, particularly in subject teaching. This involves effort to encourage communication among communities with diverse cultural backgrounds, including the promotion of multiple foreign languages and native language learning.

In addition, a wide variety of transcultural communication activities, both inside and outside school, were provided. Alliances with international sister schools were established to increase the overall level and quality of transcultural education in higher education systems. In August 2011, the KMK officially published *KMK's Recommendations for Strengthening the Foreign Language Proficiency at School* (Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz, 2011). This publication made it an indispensable and basic requirement for students to acquire transcultural communication abilities, enabling them to adapt to diverse, globalized, and informationalized social interactions. In general, considering the increasing social challenges related to immigrants and refugees, German universities and even the entire education system in Germany have attached full importance to the value of multicultural education. The practice and implementation conditions of transcultural education philosophy tend to be reasonable and stable. Regarding implementing a series of effective policies, students are fostered to be open to and tolerant toward different cultures that are expected to be understood and respected.

Practical approach of transcultural education in German universities

Throughout the developmental history of higher education, universities have set the important goal of cultivating talent with the ability to communicate transculturally. This is intended to deal with the problem of a constantly increasing number of immigrants and meet the era's need for cultural diversity. Students are required to respect and understand cultural diversity, transitioning from an understanding of their native culture to respect for foreign cultures. They are also expected to be able to achieve equal communication and dialogue. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has taken measures and launched a series

of programs in cooperation with universities in the Federal Republic of Germany. These actions greatly enhanced students' ability to conduct transcultural communication. Through comprehensive analysis, four practical approaches were identified.

Set transcultural modules and theme-based courses in general education curricula

To deal effectively with educational heterogeneity in the context of transcultural education, most universities offer transcultural education-themed courses or activities, often in the form of independent course modules. In general, transcultural education modules are for university students in the humanities and social sciences fields. However, with the increasing presence of foreign laborers, their children, and international students in universities, the problems and conflicts arising from diverse social cultures have become more apparent. Under these circumstances, transcultural education has become increasingly necessary in universities. The curriculum provision of transcultural education was extended to other disciplines, such as science, engineering, and medicine.

For instance, since 2002, Technical University of Berlin has offered specialized transcultural education courses to students majoring in engineering, business, and other fields. These courses, which focus on transcultural competence and international cooperation, aim to help students master related social skills in the information era (Chen & Qian, 2011). This course comprises two modules: a basic theory module and a practical-use module. In the basic theory module, students learn the basic concepts and skills of transcultural communication, covering topics such as culture, communication, and ability. Additionally, students are asked to engage in various practical activities, including group discussions, scenario simulations, role-play, and social investigations, to directly experience and develop their transcultural communication ability. In the practical-use module, students are tasked with transforming the theoretical knowledge acquired in the basic theory module into a flexible application. Moreover, through a school-level collaborative program platform, students can participate in study and program discussions with international students from partner colleges and universities overseas. This collaborative setting enables students to work on deeper integration in terms of research questions in specific disciplines to submit research reports (Morawski, 2010).

To help students acquire soft social power, many German universities have established theme-based curricula, workshops, and training camps for transcultural education. These initiatives are designed to aid students in developing transcultural competencies that conform to the needs of social development in addition to their major course study. In addition to foreign language competence, these programs incorporate professional practice abilities in transcultural contexts as well as social existence and communication abilities. Based on the overall curriculum provision, the University of Bremen offers a course titled "Transcultural Training," which includes six cultural

training classes. Each class consists of a 2-day workshop. This course not only imparts theoretical knowledge but also incorporates various activities aimed at improving students' ability to initiate active communication, thereby advancing the transcultural experience for individuals (Universität Bremen, 2022). Some universities, such as the University of Freiburg, the University of Jena, the University of Hamburg, and others, have specifically set the course of "The Globalization of Education" for students from different cultural backgrounds. This course aims to allow international students to gain a closer understanding of the cultural features and customs of Germany (Universität Jena, 2022). The specific course content includes an introduction to German culture and topics such as political system history, literature, and cultural customs in the Federal Republic of Germany. In addition to theoretical courses, this program offers various research and travel activities. Students are permitted short-term learning and exchanges in different cities in Germany, allowing for an immersive experience of local customs and cultures. Students can combine their transcultural experiences with professional academic activities, facilitate cultural interflow and communication, and effectively enhance their competence in transcultural communication.

In addition to the transcultural curriculum or modules, German universities place a strong emphasis on integrating transcultural knowledge into the curriculum system of students' majors. The teaching content is designed based on the current transcultural context. In particular, content such as culture, history, political systems, social backgrounds, and focus should be added to both basic specialty and general courses. Through relative activities designed by teachers, students can develop a comprehensive ability to analyze problems related to their majors in different dimensions of culture, politics, and economic systems. Consequently, students can develop a transcultural study perspective, enabling them to objectively understand the characteristics of world community development and cultural construction. Moreover, they can gain comprehensive knowledge of specific patterns of social development.

Integrate transcultural teaching into the teachers' educational curriculum system

The increasingly serious problems of European refugees, incompatible racial conflicts, and multicultural integration issues have made the heterogeneity of multicultural backgrounds an urgent issue in German school education. According to *Germany Teachers' Educational Standards: Educational Science* (*Lehrerbildung in Deutschland Standards: Builungswissenschaften*, short for *Teachers' Educational Standards*), a new round of education reform for teachers and curricula should attach importance to themes such as "school heterogeneity," "cultural heterogeneity," "racial heterogeneity," "the combination of the sustainable development and curriculum system," "the improvement of cultural competence," and "the guarantee of schools' further development." Additionally, subject construction requires teachers to develop a detailed awareness of sustainable

development and transcultural communication (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2015). In May 2016, KMK released clear demands: The pre-service system of teacher education at universities should establish goals to develop teachers' professional action abilities and involve sustainable development and transcultural education in curriculum provision. Sustainable development of education depends on the connection and integration of knowledge from different disciplines. Therefore, life-long learning abilities, transcultural knowledge, solutions to cultural heterogeneity, cultural diversity, and media education have been added to teachers' education and curriculum provision (Yu & Qu, 2015).

To put into practice the specific requirements of transcultural education and the sustainable development of education, many universities provide special transcultural learning modules to raise both awareness of sustainable development and the ability to transculturally teach pre-service teachers. For instance, the University of Osnabrück has set up many courses on society, religion, transcultural backgrounds, politics, and sustainable development. These courses run in parallel with other subject curricula integrated with interdisciplinary and transcultural content (Universität Osnabrück, 2018). To better meet the new requirements and challenges of a transcultural society, the University of Hamburg has developed and set comprehensive module courses for all undergraduate students in normal schools since 2014. These courses are designed within the plan framework of "The Behavior Development of Professional Teachers." Four learning actions are listed as setting focuses: "the integration of discipline and teaching," "dealing with lingual and cultural heterogeneity," "integration education," and "interdisciplinary collaboration" (Universität Hamburg, 2018).

To effectively practice the curriculum system's specific requirement for transcultural communication in universities and enhance the aim of promoting teachers' teaching in transcultural situations, the Free University of Berlin has newly established a curriculum system called "K2teach" (know how to teach). This university also offers specialized modules for transcultural learning, integrating transcultural education content from educational science, cultural sociology, specialized teaching theory, and move into teaching practice and interaction. There are courses that address the learning problems of immigrant students, teaching German as a second language, social education, communication skills in immigrant families, and the study of transcultural communication. These courses emphasize a solid foundation of basic knowledge about different cultural backgrounds and are used to train typical school students to master effective teaching strategies for coping with school, student, and teaching heterogeneity (Freie Universität Berlin, 2018). The University of Osnabrück cooperates with many universities abroad to attach the "Core Internship Program Overseas." This program provides pre-service teachers with overseas internships. Students can work as subject teachers in local primary and middle schools through partner universities abroad and complete their teaching internship on schedule (Universität Osnabrück, 2018).

During their overseas internship, students can be in real teaching situations in diverse cultures and exercise their transcultural communication ability. In addition, these students can acquire professional guidance from school mentors and record teaching solutions for cultural heterogeneity by regularly writing internship reports. Many German universities use learning modules with interdisciplinary cooperation to train teachers to gain the ability to solve key problems in many social spheres. These universities tend to handle heterogeneity in the teaching process in the context of teaching communication and transcultural environments by utilizing diverse languages, transcultural knowledge, and knowledge of multiple social cultures.

Set up professional institutions to step up overall planning for transcultural education

Many German universities have professional transcultural program organizations or teams in the Department of International Affairs or the Department of International Cooperation. These organizations or teams are responsible for implementing transcultural educational activities and fostering international communication and cooperation. Their tasks included organizing training courses in different languages and cultures; facilitating regular communication and fellowship activities among international students; and coordinating academic activities such as city (campus) tours, enterprise practices, and social practice activities. The purpose is to systematically advance communication and interaction between local and international students from different cultural backgrounds and promote the implementation of international communication and research programs. In addition, these organizations are responsible for the communication and cooperation of student fellowship among different regions and countries.

The Kompass team at the University of Bremen is an important example. As an important direct sector of the Department of International Affairs, the Kompass team is in charge of work in three areas. The first is academic guidance and job qualification training for international students. This involves vocational training, career guidance, transcultural ability training (certificate), overseas career planning programs for international students (mainly for students from Turkey, Russia, and Poland), and the family and cultural adaptation of international students. Professional mentors or specialized individuals address potential problems related to international students' learning and vocational skills in transcultural fields. They coordinate with related institutions to solve these problems. For example, a specialist will assist colleges at universities in offering students professional academic support and consultation. The second area is transcultural communication, which includes language partner programs, transcultural training, and literature databases. The third area includes diversified cultural experience activities such as compass parties, culture nights, happy hour, international cafés, internationalized campus open days, city tours, and exploitation activities (Kompass International, 2020). The Kompass team at the University of Bremen consistently organizes regular freshmen orientation meetings, open campus days, and the festival of

international customs. These initiatives aim to encourage better communication and interaction between native and international students and provide personalized support to help international students integrate into higher education, careers, and daily life in Germany.

There are organizations or teams with similar functions at most of the comprehensive universities in Germany, such as the "PIASTA" team (a team with a program promoting international students' integration). The origin of such a team could be traced back to programs such as "The Promotion Program of the Education on International Integration" at the University of Hamburg in 1988. Different from transcultural organizations in other universities, the "PIASTA" team offers regular "Transcultural Education Scholarship" and recruits German or international students who are interested in transcultural communication. These students are responsible for the design, organization, and arrangement of various activities, such as freshmen welcome parties, welcome weeks, transcultural communication nights, cultural and leisure activities, seminars, workshops, language cafés, and academic and vocational consultation lectures (Universität Hamburg, 2021). The aims of this team are as follows: first, to effectively deepen communication and interactions among college students from different cultures, traditions, and educational backgrounds; second, to promote the internationalization of talent cultivation and discipline development at universities; third, to actively foster students' international perspectives on different cultures; and fourth, to improve students' learning ability and sensitivity to transcultural communication (Yu & Qu, 2015). This team also needs to connect with student unions from other countries to provide guidance and assistance. This collaboration helps address cultural conflicts and issues arising from diverse cultural backgrounds, highlighting the team's unique role in promoting cultural understanding and harmony among students.

Governments' and institutions' collaborative involvement in the universities' programs

It is known that Germany is a classic immigrant country (BAMF, 2018). Data from the Federal Statistics Bureau indicate that 27% of the German population has immigrant backgrounds. In recent years, the constant influx of refugees has led to a more complex and diverse population structure of social groups. To address this complexity, government authorities implemented both macro- and micro-level strategies in transcultural education. These initiatives have been extended to various institutions, including schools, educational institutions, and social organizations. Specific moves involving German language learning, integration curricula, vocational skills training, and the learning and experience of mainstream culture have contributed significantly to the social integration and communication of minority immigrant communities. This has resulted in the formation and consciousness of a relatively harmonious and unified community. The federal government played a dual role. It has attached overall schemes of aims and plans for universities' internationalized development in the future and it actively participated in the implementation and management

of transcultural education programs at universities. This involvement aims to provide international students with professional and all-round services in their studies, lives, and cultural integration. On March 14, 2003, the German federal government issued a statement proposing *Agenda 2010* and a specific scheme for accepting international students (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2018). At the end of 2008, the BMBF provided 1.7 million euros to initiate the integration promotion plan of international students (PROFIN) program. This program was conducted in collaboration with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and unfolded into three different stages in the following 4 years (Universität Trier, 2018). The prime objective of this scheme was to enhance the comprehensive abilities and teamwork competence of international students from a transcultural background. Since then, over 4 years, more than 130 programs aimed at communication and cooperation among international students have been subsidized at universities. This move significantly elevated the working quality and service level of international affairs in Germany, contributing to an improved international image of German universities.

The program "Refugees' Integration into Professional Learning at Universities" (Integra), initiated by BMBF and DAAD at the end of 2015, aimed to relieve the problem in Germany that it is difficult for groups of refugees to integrate into society. Another aim of the program was to facilitate the entry of refugee students into German universities and start their major course studies (Sontag, 2019). Moreover, DAAD also launched a research program named "The Path of Refugees' Entrance Into German Universities" (WeGe) in April 2017. Since then, an increasing number of universities have established specialized sectors and institutions regarding entrance, schoolwork, and life to assist refugee students in integrating into the academic environment of German universities.

Through this program, students with refugee backgrounds could apply for suitable language courses and introductory major courses to meet the basic qualifications for studying at German universities. From 2016 to 2019, the DAAD cooperated with official language proficiency institutions as well as examination and evaluation organizations for schoolwork (SET, TestAS, Uni-assit) to strengthen efforts to review the language and qualifications of applicants. These efforts were made to advance the program's progress and ensure that international students adapted to the environment and requirements of German Universities quickly. The DAAD also offered more professional and personalized guidance and consultation to advance the process of international students' entrance into German universities and the social integration of students with different cultural backgrounds. According to statistics from 2019, BMBF invested almost 10 million euros in launching related programs in different states. The implementation of this program has greatly reduced social unrest caused by difficulties in entering school, integrating into society, and pursuing advanced studies. Significant results were obtained (DAAD, 2023).

Another major program, "College Students' Participation in Refugee Integration" (Welcome Program), was officially launched at nationwide universities on January 1, 2016. This program was designed to increase local students' participation in the integration of refugee students and cultivate their transcultural communication ability. This program supported the positioning of student assistants, mentors of international students and so on in student organizations and related institutions at universities. The Welcome Program also favored transcultural education activities on campus, such as campus open days, international student fellowships, mentor–student systems, information counseling days, language courses, and other types of services and activities. Based on colorful mutual aid and cultural communication activities, international students at German universities, even local students with learning and life experiences overseas, actively participated in related integration programs and played important roles. By the end of 2002, this program had subsidized and supported 162 activities related to "College Students' Participation to Refugee Integration" and had improved the organization and implementation of transcultural education at the level of universities for 7 years. Moreover, some social institutions were eager to participate in transcultural communication and research programs involving universities and major research institutions. These social institutions include the well-known German Academic Exchange Center and German Research Foundation (DFG) as well as some enterprises, NGOs, and science research institutions such as the Humboldt Foundation, Leibniz Association, Max Planck Institution, Hanns Seidel Foundation, and Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung Foundation.

Experience and enlightenment of transcultural education in German universities

Considering the increasingly complicated era and social structure of multicultural integration, Germany has chosen a unique path that is different from other European countries. This path is both a continuation of historical development after the German reunification and a realistic choice as a core member of the European Union. German universities recently adopted a series of practical policies and measures to advance transcultural education. These moves greatly promoted multicultural integration and value identification as well as made a significant contribution to transcultural talent cultivation, having scored remarkable effects.

Setting independent courses and creating a transcultural situation in major teaching

To improve students' transcultural communication skills, German universities provide related theme courses and activities, integrate related context into disciplinary teaching, and establish specific institutions and organizations responsible for the organization and implementation of transcultural education activities. There is no specific transcultural course among the general undergraduate courses in China. Therefore, there comes the suggestion of setting this type of course.

Specifically, different major requirements should be explored, and the knowledge and content within the disciplinary system should be considered. Consequently, transcultural courses could be developed with broad coverage, interdisciplinary features, and a combination of politics, economics, society, culture, and so on. In addition, teaching cases, activities, and social practice programs in transcultural institutions should be designed, and the teaching mode within the existing framework of disciplinary knowledge should be innovated. Related institutional teaching could help students possess a transcultural perspective of the discipline under unconscious influence and effectively improve their transcultural communication abilities. Universities should establish independent transcultural modules or course series that show school features. Systematic knowledge learning, method training, and case practice should be utilized to help students conduct a comprehensive analysis of questions about their majors from diverse cultural perspectives, social backgrounds, histories, ethnic groups, etc. Consequently, students' ability to engage in the transcultural community within their field can be fostered, and the overall effectiveness of transcultural education can be improved.

In response to increasingly complicated international relations and evolving times, Chinese universities should raise students' transcultural learning awareness using targeted and specialized characteristics. This should be based on specific features and should include the addition of related subject content. Various activities both inside and outside school should be campaigned to deepen the efforts of international education in universities to offer reliable support and guarantee the practice of transcultural education.

Set specialized institutions and organizations to the overall implementation of transcultural education

Most universities in Germany have specialized organizations, institutions, and teams for transcultural programs. These entities effectively manage all courses, activities, and international communication, and cooperation refers to transcultural education throughout the school. However, in China, university management has not paid close attention to transcultural education, resulting in a lack of specialized institutions and organizations, as well as a systematic structure at universities.

The feasible curriculum system in Chinese universities is homogeneous, as is the organization and arrangement of theme activities. Addressing the gap between macro policies on transcultural education and practical implementation, such as teaching arrangements, student cultural activities, and comprehensive skill training, is an urgent and important issue that needs to be addressed. To bridge this gap, the CPC Central Committee released important files, including *Suggestions on Strengthening and Improving Cultural Exchange With Other Countries*, *Suggestions From the Ministry of Education and Other 7 Ministries on Fastening and Expanding Open Education in a New Era*, *Advance International Communication, Display a Real, Three-Dimensional, and All-Sided China*. To thoroughly apply these files and the corresponding spirit of speeches, Chinese universities

should establish related institutions or organizations equipped with professional staff and teachers to offer specialized guidance and support. This approach ensures the planning and organization of diversely themed activities and promotes multinational integration and solidarity at universities. Moreover, it could facilitate initiatives such as open education in the new era. In addition, Chinese universities should establish commitment mechanisms in terms of the management institutions and organizations responsible for transcultural programs on campus. Thus, the implementation of course setting, credit calculations, skill training, and cultural communication activities can be guaranteed. In conclusion, transcultural education at Chinese universities and the new educational pattern of national unity that conforms to the national development strategy of the "Belt and Road Initiative" should be actively explored to enhance college students' transcultural communication competence.

Encourage government and other institutions and organizations to participate in curriculum design and practice

In German universities, on the one hand, organizations set up specialized institutions to coordinate international education and transcultural education. On the other hand, these organizations have established an effective education system through active collaboration with the federal government, local governments, and the foundation of science, education, and culture. The Ministry of Education in China offers all types of scholarships and sets scientific research foundations in different countries. There are also strong partnerships between China's Ministry of Education, international universities, and research institutions. All of these moves promote communication and cooperation between China and other countries.

However, compared with the participation and support of numerous cultural institutions, enterprises, and NGO foundations in Germany, the organizations and institutions involved in transcultural education in China are still homogeneous. The main development directions of multicultural communication in China should include mobilizing and encouraging the main bodies, organizations, and institutions to be involved in transcultural talent cultivation and creating an all-around social opinion and atmosphere for the transcultural communication training of college students. As an increasing number of Chinese enterprises take part in international competition in a direct or indirect way, the "Internationalized Talents Strategy" has become the theme of the times. Vocational training for college graduates and employees stationed abroad has also become increasingly necessary. Therefore, enterprises should actively participate in transcultural talent cultivation in universities and contribute to international trade in transcultural situations. Moreover, based on their corporate culture and the needs of the times, enterprises can provide college students with all-around, targeted, and diversified training to strengthen the overall transcultural ability of young people today. Moreover, associations or organizations involved in cultural communication, volunteer groups, and foundations should actively engage in international cooperation and

communication in China. Their participation can help build a more stereoscopic and diverse network of transcultural communication, promote integration and communication between Chinese and Western cultures, and make a due contribution to the giant target of jointly building a community with a shared future for humanity.

Discussion and conclusions

This study analyzes a large amount of first-hand materials and literature on transcultural education in Germany, systematically sorts out the developmental history and policy evolution of transcultural education in German universities, and summarizes the practice path and characteristics of transcultural education in universities through literature research.

With the acceleration of globalization and internationalization, transcultural education research has been widely studied by scholars. This study contributes to the literature for Chinese scholars on cross-cultural research in Germany to a certain extent. Germany, a typically diverse immigrant country, has a long history and rich experience in implementing transcultural education policies from a worldwide perspective. A systematic analysis of the development and implementation of transcultural education in German universities is of great significance for the development of transcultural education in Chinese universities, and it also provides a series of useful and important experiences.

With the rapid development of higher education integration, internationalization, and informatization, transcultural education in German universities faces new problems and challenges. As different types of universities, such as comprehensive universities, applied technology universities, and art universities, implement different transcultural education policies, relevant research should pay more attention to the practice mode and main characteristics of transcultural education in different types of universities to summarize the different types of transcultural education models. Both German and Chinese universities attach great importance to the cultivation of students' transcultural professional ability, especially their acquisition and application in professional disciplines. This deserves more attention and focus on how to develop and implement interdisciplinary courses that can highlight the disciplinary characteristics of different majors in universities and implement the corresponding teaching designs.

Limitations and implications

First, this study mainly focuses on the practice paths of transcultural education in German universities, which only lists some representative practice paths, failing to pay attention to the impact of differences in the types of universities, regions, and characteristics of schools on the implementation of transcultural education. Second, due to limited space, this study mainly focuses on the implementation of transcultural education policies in colleges and universities and fails to

conduct in-depth research on the implementation mode and teaching effects of specific courses in the subject field, which limits the extensibility of this study to a certain extent. Third, as there are significant differences between China and Germany in politics, economy, education, and other fields, the realization of localized transformation and implementation of the representative transcultural education model in German universities is worthy of in-depth study and reflection.

Authors' Note

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Contributorship

Chengjun Zheng was responsible for conceptualization, project administration, and supervision of the research. Zheng Chen was responsible for data collection and review writing and editing. Ping Ren was responsible for methodology, investigation, original draft writing, and review writing and editing. Zizhen Song was responsible for language polishing. All the authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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