

*Döring, Nicola; Lahmar, Kamel; Bouabdallah, Mohamed;
Bouafia, Mohamed; Bouzid, Djamel; Gobsch, Gerhard; Runge,
Erich:*

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Nicola Döring, Kamel Lahmar, Mohamed Bouabdallah, Mohamed Bouafia, Djamel Bouzid, Gerhard Gobsch and Erich Runge

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German–Algerian University Exchange from the Perspective of Students and Teachers

Results of an Intercultural Survey

Nicola Döring

Ilmenau University of Technology, Germany

Kamel Lahmar

Mohamed Bouabdallah

Mohamed Bouafia

Djamel Bouzid

Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif, Algeria

Gerhard Gobsch

Erich Runge

Ilmenau University of Technology, Germany

Academic exchange programs provide students and teachers with the opportunity to study or work temporarily at educational institutions abroad. For exchange programs to be successful in promoting intercultural education, they must be designed with their participants in mind. The present study constitutes an investigation of attitudes and expectations of students and teachers with respect to a German–Algerian university exchange program. Germany and Algeria belong to separate cultural spheres—the Western/European and the Arabic/Islamic—and almost no academic exchange has taken place between them to date. The survey’s four participant groups were German ($n = 270$) and Algerian students ($n = 214$), and German ($n = 24$) and Algerian teachers ($n = 43$). The study revealed large differences in the hopes and fears that German and Algerian university students and teachers attach to reciprocal academic exchange. The study’s ramifications for the future planning of a German–Algerian university exchange program are discussed.

Keywords: *German–Algerian university exchange; intercultural survey; participants’ expectations; design of exchange program*

In a globalized world, *intercultural education* seeks to promote understanding, communication, and cooperation between people of different cultural backgrounds (Calleja, 1995; Coulby, 2006; Cushner, 1998; Hayden, Levy & Thompson, 2007; O’Meara, Mehlinger & Newman, 2001). Therefore, academic institutions not only seek education “at home,” but also use *academic exchange programs* as an important internationalization strategy.

This study investigates the attitudes of students and teachers in connection with the establishment of a German–Algerian exchange program between the Ilmenau University of Technology in the former East Germany (www.tu-ilmenau.de) and the Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif in Algeria (www.univ-setif.dz). The program addresses both students and university teachers or researchers and was started in 2006 with the help of funding through the German Academic Exchange Service (www.daad.de). Little prior academic exchange has taken place between Germany and Algeria. In this regard, one speaks of *nontraditional partnership countries* (compare Woolf 2007).

The presentation and development of awareness for the historical, political, and cultural particularities and interrelationships between countries is important in the context of the establishment and evaluation of exchange activities. This ensures that the exchange program is not reduced to “educational tourism” or attractive simply for its “exotic” qualities. Furthermore, to ensure the future success of the new university exchange program, it is critical to understand the attitudes and expectations of the four participant groups (both students and teachers, German and Algerian) and to design the program accordingly. Proper regard for participant attitudes and expectations is key if the exchange program is on one hand to attract enough participants and on the other hand positive intercultural experiences and contacts are to result. A joint survey was conducted by German and Algerian researchers to obtain insights into the perspectives of the exchange program’s potential participants. It is the very first German–Algerian study to our knowledge that investigates intercultural education in the form of an academic exchange program. The following explores country-specific contexts, methods, and results of the survey, as well as the study’s ramifications on a practical level.

Germany and Algeria as Partners in Academic Exchange

The greatest numbers of international students in Germany originate from Turkey and China followed by Eastern European countries. Although students from Algeria and other Maghreb countries are rare in Germany, they comprise the largest group of international students in France (Kelo, Teichler & Wächter, 2006, p. 198). Conversely, virtually no German students study abroad at Algerian (or North African) universities. German exchange students instead favor Western European countries as well as the United States. With their initiative for greater dialogue between German and Algerian universities, the Ilmenau University of Technology

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and the Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif hope to take a step against this imbalance in academic exchange. To achieve this goal, the program will be designed with the inclusion of perspectives offered by potential participants so that both sides profit and negative experiences are avoided to the greatest extent possible.

The Course of German–Algerian Relations

Germany and Algeria have traditionally enjoyed good—albeit not particularly close—relations with one another. For example, East Germany hired foreign workers because of labor shortages in the postwar boom. The foreign workers emigrated to East Germany starting in the 1960s, amounting to approximately 90,000. These so-called contract workers (*Vertragsarbeiter*) originated from socialist countries such as Poland, Hungary, Mozambique, Vietnam—and Algeria (Riedel 2001).

Although German–Algerian relations were largely put on hold during the Algerian Civil War, dialogue between the two countries has strengthened in recent years and there have been a number of positive developments in their relationship since the beginning of the 21st century (Auswärtiges Amt der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2007). Notable developments include the first official visit by an Algerian president to Germany (President Bouteflika in 2001) and the first visit of a German chancellor to Algeria (Chancellor Schröder in 2004). Especially, since Algeria overcame its inner political crisis due to Islamic terrorist attacks in the 1990s, it has been strengthening its position as regional power in Africa and the Arabic region. Economic relations with Algeria have a huge potential for Germany. On the one hand, Algeria is on rank 11 as producer of crude oil and on rank 4 for natural gas worldwide therefore playing an important role as energy supplier. On the other hand, its need for modernization for industrial facilities and its infrastructure meets Germany’s range of export products. So, since 2004, the “coordinator for German–Algerian economic relations” (*Koordinator der Deutsch–Algerischen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen*) has been officially representing German economic interests in Algeria. In 2005 the “Association for the Advancement of German–Algerian Economic Relations” (APREAA) was founded by a consortium of companies in both countries, and in 2006 the German–Algerian Chamber of Commerce was officially inducted. With the further expansion of German–Algerian economic relations, the need for German and Algerian employees who demonstrate intercultural competencies is also on the rise. An academic exchange program is one way to equip potential employees with the skills requisite for success in intercultural working environments.

The Current Status of University Cooperation Between Ilmenau and Sétif

The history of relations between the former East Germany and Algeria includes an academic exchange program that was conducted in the early 1980s between a

number of German and Algerian universities. For example, 30 scientists from the Ilmenau University of Technology worked for 3 years at the University of Sétif and assisted in particular with the development of the University's Institute for Natural Sciences and its course of studies. Existing personal contacts from this period were instrumental in efforts to prepare and organize the university exchange program discussed herein. The program was started in 2006 with funding from the German Academic Exchange Service (www.daad.de).

Approximately 7,000 students are enrolled at the Ilmenau University of Technology in the former East Germany. The University is divided into five faculties: (a) electrical engineering and information technology; (b) computer science and automation; (c) mechanical engineering; (d) mathematics and natural sciences; and (e) economics. The engineering sciences figure prominently at the Ilmenau University of Technology. Media Studies (divided into the three branches, namely, media management, media technology, and media/communication science) are an additional focal area at the university, with more than 1,000 students.

The *Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif* (Algeria) consists of six faculties: (a) arts and social sciences; (b) engineering sciences; (c) natural sciences; (d) economics; (e) medicine; and (f) law. Approximately, 40,000 students are enrolled at the University. The University of Sétif is home to a broader range of academic fields compared to the University of Ilmenau and has, for example, all of the same branches of engineering sciences as the University of Ilmenau. The University of Sétif also offers some branches of applied media and communication studies that overlap with the course offerings at Ilmenau (e.g., linguistics and information sciences, including a journalism program).

Previous activities within the context of the German–Algerian cooperation program can be summarized as follows (for details see Table 1): Both students and scientists/university teachers have participated in the academic exchange program between the Ilmenau University of Technology and the University of Sétif thus far. The program has enabled delegations from both countries to visit one another in short stays of around 1 week. A strong emphasis has also been placed on direct cooperation (joint student working groups, joint conference organizing, etc.). Besides cooperation meetings, a fall seminar on optoelectronics was held in Algeria in November 2006 and the 1st Algerian–German International Conference on New Technologies and their Impact on Society (AGICNT 2008) was held at the University of Sétif in Algeria in May 2008.

The Survey's Implementation in Germany and Algeria

A survey of the attitudes and expectations of students and teachers with regard to the continuation and expansion of the German–Algerian exchange program was conducted. This survey, which was carried out within the context of the aforementioned cooperative activities, was implemented with the aim of assembling a broader pool of data on the attitudes and expectations of teachers and students.

Table 1
Joint Activities for German–Algerian Inter-University Cooperation

Date	Activity
June 2006	Kick-off workshop at the University of Ilmenau, Germany Survey planning
November 2006	Fall seminar on optoelectronics at the University of Sétif, Algeria Data collection in Germany and Algeria
June 2007	Planning for joint German–Algerian conference International Student Week at the University of Ilmenau, Germany
December 2007	Program committee meeting for the 2008 1st Algerian–German International Conference on New Technologies and their Impact on Society (AGICNT 2008) conference at the University of Ilmenau, Germany
May 2008	AGICNT 2008 at the University of Sétif, Algeria

Development of the Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was developed jointly by German and Algerian researchers. The survey's themes and the individual questionnaire items were determined in the working groups formed at the kick-off meeting in Germany (see Table 1) and in e-mail consultations between members of the German and Algerian research team. The questionnaire was developed based on current research on academic exchange programs and on Algeria and Germany. Ten guided interviews conducted in a preliminary study with German and Algerian scientists—all with previous experience in the respective exchange country—also influenced the questionnaire's development. German–Algerian cooperation in the questionnaire's development helped to ensure that the questionnaire's topics and the formulation of its individual questions remained relevant and culturally appropriate for both sides.

Although the questionnaire for students focused on the learning environment, the questionnaire for university teachers/researchers concentrated on teaching and research conditions. To collect data on the respective attitudes of students and teachers in both countries, the German participants were asked questions about Algeria and the Algerian participants were asked questions about Germany.

In addition to basic demographic questions, the four standardized questionnaires (respectively for students and teachers; living in Germany or Algeria) contained the following five topical areas:

1. Knowledge about the partner country
2. Ways in which the partner country is depicted in one's own domestic media
3. Study and research conditions in one's own country and in the partner country
4. Degree of interest in academic exchange with the partner country
5. Intercultural communication and competencies

The questionnaires were written in German for the German participants and in Arabic for the Algerian participants and were also subjected to a preliminary test.

Data Collection

The survey was carried out in November of 2006. The survey questionnaire was completed online by the German participants. In Algeria, the questionnaire was administered in paper or pencil format due to the lesser availability of Internet resources (compare Durrant & Dorius, 2007). In a convenience sample, students and teachers were invited to participate through university classes, e-mail, and personal solicitations.

Sample Description

Full data sets were obtained for a total of $N = 551$ individuals. The $n = 270$ German students participating in the survey had a mean age of 22 years, and 51% were female. The Algerian student sample ($n = 214$) also showed a mean age of 22 years, but the percentage of women was higher, reaching 63%. Also $n = 24$ German teachers and researchers took part, with a mean age of 36 years and a high percentage of men (91%). The Algerian teachers' sample ($n = 43$) also consisted of more men than women although the percentage of male participants reached only 68%. Besides, Algerian teachers and researchers were younger than their German counterparts, with a mean age of 30 years.

Results of the German–Algerian Survey

Because of the fact that the study was explorative in nature and not designed to test a specific hypothesis, descriptive-statistical results of the five topical areas are reported here.

Knowledge about the Partner Country

Approximately one quarter of the German survey participants (23%) had previously vacationed in the Maghreb countries of Morocco and/or Tunisia. However, not a single German participant had previously been to Algeria. In the case of the Algerian survey participants, not a single individual—with the exception of the project participants—had ever been to Germany. Due to the fact that neither side had any direct experience with the partner country, previous knowledge, if any, necessarily stemmed from the media, educational institutions, or personal conversations.

Whereas half of the German survey participants indicated that they had some degree of active knowledge about Algeria, 90% of the Algerian participants indicated

Table 2
Sources of Information About the Partner Country

Information Source	German Participants	Algerian Participants
Television	60%	74%
Internet	51%	47%
Newspapers	32%	37%
Journals/magazines	27%	15%
Books	17%	29%
Educational institutions primary school/university	32%	31%
Personal conversations	21%	34%

the same with respect to Germany. Those who had previously acquired active knowledge about the partner country had primarily obtained their information from various media sources (see Table 2).

Thirteen percent of the surveyed Algerians reported to have read at least one book by a German author. Typically only last names were cited. These included philosophers (e.g., Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche), writers (e.g., Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Franz Kafka), scientists (e.g., Albert Einstein), and one politician (Adolf Hitler). Only two of the German survey participants reported having read at least one book by an Algerian author. The two authors cited were Albert Camus as well as the journalist Mohamed Sifaoui (*Inside Al Qaeda: How I Infiltrated the World's Deadliest Terrorist Organization*). Both authors were born in Algeria and later emigrated to France.

There was a relatively wide gap in the subjective assessment of their level of knowledge about the partner country between Algerians and Germans (see Table 3). On the mean, the surveyed Algerian students appraised their level of knowledge about Germany on a six-step rating scale as *rather high*. The German students, by contrast, classified their level of knowledge about Algeria as *low*. Although the German students indicated that they knew in comparative terms the most about Algeria's religion, the Algerian students felt rather well informed not only about religion in Germany but also about the country's politics, economy, educational system, and contributions to science (see Table 3).

In addition to a subjective appraisal of one's level of knowledge, several objective knowledge questions were asked about the partner country, for example, "identify the capital city" or "name the head of state." On the whole, the Algerian participants performed better than the German participants on this section of the questionnaire (see Table 4).

The pattern of answers provided by the teachers mirrored that provided by the students in both countries although as a rule the teachers demonstrated themselves to be somewhat better informed, as one would expect.

Table 3
Subjective Level of Knowledge About the Partner Country in Various Areas

Knowledge About the Partner Country by Area	German Students		Algerian Students	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Religion	2.26	1.30	3.67	2.48
Current events	1.90	1.15	3.43	1.50
Politics	1.71	1.08	3.68	2.49
Science/education	1.66	1.06	3.70	2.40
Daily life	1.65	1.00	3.21	2.70
Economy	1.61	1.04	3.72	2.38
History	1.56	0.99	3.37	2.21

Note: 1 = *very low*; 2 = *low*; 3 = *rather low*; 4 = *rather high*; 5 = *high*; 6 = *very high*; $n_{\text{German students}} = 270$, $n_{\text{Algerian students}} = 214$.

Table 4
Percentage of Objective Knowledge Questions About the Partner Country Answered Correctly

	German participants			Algerian participants	
	Students $n = 270$	Teachers $n = 24$		Students $n = 214$	Teachers $n = 43$
Capital of Algeria?	70%	75%	Capital of Germany?	84%	79%
Algiers			Berlin		
Algerian independence?	17%	46%	Reunification of Germany?	45%	79%
1962			1990		
Ramadan?	76%	79%	Christmas?	20%	46%
Islamic month of fasting			Celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ		
Algerian president?	12%	21%	German chancellor?	19%	56%
Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika			Angela Merkel		

In summary, both sides lacked direct experience with each respective partner country. However, the Algerian students and teachers had spent more time informing themselves about Germany and demonstrated a greater degree of knowledge than the German students and teachers did with respect to Algeria.

Depiction of the Partner Country in Domestic Media

More than half of the German survey participants (51%) complained that the volume of German media reporting on Algeria was insufficient, 31% indicated that the level of reporting was appropriate, and 17% had no opinion. According to the surveyed German students and teachers, domestic media reporting on Algeria was primarily neutral (44%) or negative (21%) in its tone. None of the German survey participants expressed the view that domestic reporting on Algeria was positively toned. The remaining 34% refrained from characterizing media coverage.

Similarly, more than half of the Algerian survey participants (58%) complained that there was too little media reporting on Germany in the Algerian domestic media. According to the survey participants, Algerian media reporting on Germany was primarily neutral (40%) or positive (36%) in its tone. Very few indicated that reporting was primarily negative (5%); 19% of the participants refrained from answering this question. An asymmetry in media reception was also manifest. None of the German survey participants indicated that they used Algerian media, yet a number of Algerian participants said they turned to German media sources (e.g., the magazine published by the German Federal Foreign Office, *Deutschland*, available at www.magazine-deutschland.de, or the German–French TV broadcaster ARTE via satellite television). A minority of surveyed Algerian students and teachers indicated that they never watched German satellite television (42% and 30%, respectively). Eight percent of Algerian students and 5% of the Algerian teachers watched German satellite television often or very often, 25% of the students and 23% of the teachers watched it sometimes, and 23% of the students and 39% of the teachers watched it rather rarely (for more information about the importance of domestic and foreign satellite television in Algeria, see Hadj-Moussa, 2003).

A survey of journalists and other opinion leaders in the Maghreb countries corroborates the opinion expressed by Algerian students and teachers that Algerian media coverage of Germany is primarily neutral or positive in nature. The surveyed journalists and opinion leaders in the study had a very positive perception of Germany, particularly of its economic, scientific, technological, sporting, and cultural achievements (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e.V., 2006, p. 8). Apart from the low level of knowledge shown with respect to Algeria, the German survey participants also seemed to particularly lack positive media messages about the country.

Study and Research Conditions at Home and in the Partner Country

The surveyed German and Algerian students were asked how important certain aspects of their studies were to them and to what extent these priorities had been fulfilled. The results showed that the Algerian students had higher expectations than the German students and that these expectations had been fulfilled at their university to a lesser extent (see Table 5).

Table 5
German and Algerian Students' Evaluation of
Study Conditions at Their Home University

	German Students				Algerian Students			
	Importance		Fulfillment		Importance		Fulfillment	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Course work practical in nature	5.31	0.92	4.37	1.04	5.69	0.91	3.79	1.99
Internships	5.13	1.02	4.19	1.23	5.74	0.84	2.09	1.60
Use of new media and technologies	4.96	1.17	4.63	1.06	5.72	0.89	1.99	1.54
Diverse opportunities for specialization	4.87	1.20	4.26	1.21	5.49	1.27	2.59	1.87
Foreign-language training	4.78	1.15	3.71	1.30	5.86	0.66	2.67	1.88
Degree obtained quickly	4.69	1.23	4.94	1.06	2.56	1.89	—	—
Personal guidance from teachers	4.60	1.08	4.22	1.25	5.18	1.47	2.59	1.85
Seminars with active participation	4.56	1.14	4.30	1.09	5.01	1.54	2.37	1.77
Group work	4.43	1.15	4.51	1.27	4.96	1.64	2.55	1.87
Scientific work	4.31	1.19	4.85	1.02	5.56	1.13	2.83	1.96
Opportunity to give presentations	4.01	1.29	4.10	1.49	4.98	1.73	3.15	2.18
Completion of a semester abroad	3.98	1.66	—	—	5.56	1.13	—	—
Highly theoretical course work	3.32	1.08	4.35	1.06	3.61	2.01	3.86	2.11

Note: Six-step rating scale in terms of importance (1 = *totally unimportant*, 2 = *unimportant*, 3 = *not that important*, 4 = *somewhat important*, 5 = *important*, 6 = *highly important*) and fulfillment (1 = *totally unfulfilled*, 2 = *unfulfilled*, 3 = *rather unfulfilled*, 4 = *rather fulfilled*, 5 = *fulfilled*, 6 = *highly fulfilled*).

In only one respect did the surveyed German students have higher expectations for their university education than their Algerian counterparts: They assigned a much higher level of importance to completing their studies quickly. This can be primarily explained by the fact that many students in Germany are compelled to hold jobs to meet the costs of their studies and thus hope for economic reasons to complete their education quickly. In Algeria, however, students' living expenses are covered by the state. The quick attainment of a degree is also important in Germany as it elevates one's chances in the job market. In Algeria, by contrast, the extension of one's studies is often viewed as desirable because of the comparatively high rates of unemployment among university graduates. Both the German and Algerian students were unified in their attachment of a high degree of importance to practical course work with real-world applicability. Compared with their German counterparts, the Algerian students assigned a much higher degree of importance to foreign-language training, scientific work, and the completion of a semester abroad.

The surveyed German students evaluated practical course work and foreign-language training as important but found that reality did not fully fulfill their expectations concerning these aspects. Conversely, German students indicated that

their studies consisted of more theoretical and scientific work than they considered important. Among the Algerian students, as well, the theoretical content of their studies surpassed the relative importance they assigned thereto; in terms of scientific work, however, a marked deficit was registered. In the results yielded from the Algerian students there was also a stark discrepancy between the relative importance and current fulfillment of course-work practicality and the use of new media and technologies: They stressed the importance of both aspects and noted that in reality, fulfillment was not in the least given.

The rift between expectations and reality experienced by the Algerian students can be accounted for by a range of general infrastructure problems (compare Khelfaoui, 2004). The rapid expansion of student enrolment at Algerian universities has not been accompanied by a commensurate addition of university staff or technical resources (e.g., computer centers with Internet access). In addition, because of governmental guidelines and high student volumes, Algerian universities and professors have traditionally focused more on teaching activities and less on research work. This serves to explain the deficit in scientific work bemoaned by the participating Algerian students. In view of the business environment in Algeria, which in many respects still remains weak, it is also not surprising that the Algerian students perceived a deficiency in number of internships offered by companies.

The German and Algerian teachers and scientists were asked to evaluate the importance of certain aspects of their working and research environments and to identify the extent to which these aspects were presently fulfilled at their university (see Table 6).

Although most of the German scientists surveyed indicated that key aspects of their research environment had been fulfilled, in Algeria the available university infrastructure did not meet the expectations of those surveyed and was predominantly judged as insufficient.

On the whole, the surveyed German students and teachers were of the view that the basic conditions they held important at the university had been *rather fulfilled*. By way of contrast, the surveyed Algerian students and teachers were of the opinion that these categories were *unfulfilled* or *rather unfulfilled*. All four groups judged foreign academic exchange and contact to be important on a general level (i.e., no specific country was specified). The Algerian survey participants attached a higher value to foreign exchange and contact than their German counterparts. German students and teachers who participate in an academic exchange program with Algeria would encounter a study and research environment that is evaluated by Algerian students and teachers as insufficient.

Interest in Academic Exchange with the Partner Country

The survey results showed that the majority of Algerian students and teachers had a strong interest in spending a period of time at a German university studying or

Table 6
Evaluation of Research Conditions at Their Home University
by Algerian and German Teachers and Scientists

	German Teachers				Algerian Teachers			
	Importance		Fulfillment		Importance		Fulfillment	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Access to current academic literature	5.90	0.31	3.80	1.67	5.63	1.09	2.33	1.87
Availability of assistance from university staff	5.50	0.69	3.97	1.57	5.41	1.09	2.70	2.03
Availability of funding	5.50	0.61	2.85	1.39	5.70	1.00	2.17	1.48
Technical resources	5.21	0.71	4.35	1.18	5.79	0.83	1.88	1.10
Cooperation with foreign universities	5.10	0.79	3.58	1.50	5.65	1.09	2.22	1.25
Cooperation with domestic universities	4.85	0.93	3.84	1.38	5.55	1.04	2.41	1.52
Scientific work abroad	4.75	1.02	—	—	5.00	1.48	—	—
Cooperation with companies	4.63	0.95	4.11	1.45	5.57	1.01	1.79	1.32

Note: Six-step rating scale in terms of importance (1 = *totally unimportant*, 2 = *unimportant*, 3 = *not that important*, 4 = *somewhat important*, 5 = *important*, 6 = *highly important*) and fulfillment (1 = *totally unfulfilled*, 2 = *unfulfilled*, 3 = *rather unfulfilled*, 4 = *rather fulfilled*, 5 = *fulfilled*, 6 = *highly fulfilled*).

conducting research. In this regard, the female participants were somewhat less eager than the male participants (see Table 7). The primary reasons cited in a free-response question for such an interest included the quality of German facilities, the high academic quality and reputation of German universities, as well as the overall higher standard of living. However, some of the survey participants also expressed a clear unwillingness to participate in an academic exchange program with Germany. These participants cited such reasons as a lack of interest in Germany, a preference for French-speaking countries, a disinclination to go to a non-Islamic country, or a desire to stay in Algeria.

By contrast, German students and teachers expressed considerably less interest in spending a period of time studying or researching in Algeria. In this regard, there was no appreciable difference in the level of interest exhibited by female and male survey participants. Many German survey participants indicated that Algeria was not up to par with other European or North American countries and was therefore less attractive as a destination for a foreign exchange. Concerns were raised first and foremost with respect to academic opportunities, the language barrier, the security situation, and cultural differences. On the other hand, many German survey participants qualified their misgivings by mentioning their lack of knowledge about Algeria. Some also expressed a strong interest in spending a period of time studying

Table 7
Interest in a Stay Abroad in the Partner Country
for Study or Research (In Percentage)

	German Students			German Teachers	Algerian Students			Algerian Teachers
	Total <i>n</i> = 270	Women	Men	Total <i>n</i> = 24	Total <i>n</i> = 214	Women	Men	Total <i>n</i> = 43 Teachers
Yes	4	4	4	3	69	62	79	98
Perhaps	21	19	23	38	14	18	8	—
No	48	52	45	52	12	13	9	—
No response	27	25	28	7	5	7	4	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

or researching in an Islamic country. Nonetheless, more than a quarter of the surveyed German students and teachers indicated a potential willingness to participate in a German–Algerian exchange program under certain conditions (“perhaps”). A large number of German (43%) and Algerian (57%) students indicated that they would not be able to make a contribution to the financing of a stay abroad in the partner country. The remaining students indicated they could partially (German: 34%, Algerian: 25%) or fully (German: 3%, Algerian: 1%) finance a stay abroad.

The German teachers or scientists indicated that they could envision a research stay at the Algerian partner university if such a stay were beneficial for a specific research project. They also indicated a preference for stays of a rather short duration. Concerns were raised about the security situation in Algeria and the university’s infrastructure. The Algerian scientists anticipated that a stay abroad at the German partner university would be highly profitable, particularly because of the good infrastructure and intercultural experiences that would be gained. The language barrier was identified as a problem, because proficiency in German or in English is required to teach at a German university.

Both the German and Algerian students expressed a desire for more precise information about the university system and culture of the partner country, in addition to language courses and organizational assistance to prepare them for a stay abroad (e.g., the provision of lodging near the campus; job opportunities).

Intercultural Competencies

Intercultural competency is a specific type of skill that is primarily obtained through personal experience. The acquisition of intercultural competencies is facilitated by

Table 8
Evaluation of the People of the Partner Country

	Germans' Assessment of Algerians				Algerians' Assessment of Germans			
	Students		Teachers		Students		Teachers	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Very talkative and chatty	4.15	1.12	4.12	1.73	3.91	1.98	3.40	1.89
Very diligent	4.11	1.07	3.86	1.10	5.29	1.34	5.51	0.84
Very interested in politics	3.89	1.06	4.24	1.09	4.51	1.70	3.39	1.73
Interested in technology	3.73	1.03	3.56	1.38	5.57	1.10	5.63	0.73
Very interested in the development and problems of other countries	2.98	1.02	3.29	1.64	3.66	2.09	3.11	1.78
Sports are very important	3.29	1.23	3.13	1.41	5.63	0.97	5.79	0.57
Clear gender roles	4.76	1.19	4.20	2.01	2.53	2.08	2.69	2.09
Very open-minded	3.55	1.12	3.28	1.84	3.65	2.04	2.77	1.45
Very religious	5.23	0.96	4.05	1.27	2.98	1.88	2.81	1.45
Family plays an important role	5.39	0.88	5.37	0.83	4.01	2.00	3.23	1.56
Very friendly	4.51	0.95	4.82	0.88	4.52	1.84	3.72	1.85
Highly reliable	3.59	0.96	3.31	0.95	4.74	1.73	5.18	1.29

Note: Six-step rating scale (1 = *totally inapplicable*, 2 = *inapplicable*, 3 = *rather inapplicable*, 4 = *rather applicable*, 5 = *applicable*, 6 = *highly applicable*).

certain attitudes (e.g., respect, openness, and a curiosity with regard to other cultures) as well as a positive opinion of the culture with which one is engaging (compare Dearthoff, 2006, p. 254). The German–Algerian exchange program also intends to promote the acquisition of intercultural competencies. For this reason, explorative questions about perceptions with regard to the partner country's people and interpersonal situations were also posed.

The German and Algerian students and teachers were asked how they would evaluate the people of Algeria and Germany based on a set of characteristics. The German survey participants characterized the Algerians as being strongly family oriented, highly religious, and devoted to clear gender roles (see Table 8). The surveyed Algerians emphasized the German focus on sports and technology and also underscored their diligence and reliability. The pattern of answers provided by the participants reflected well-known cultural stereotypes. In view of the fact that the surveyed groups had no previous direct contact with the foreign culture (the Germans in particular had little previous engagement with Algeria; see section on knowledge about the partner country), it follows logically that an appreciable number of those surveyed selected the option "don't know" in each category. The German and Algerian survey participants both consider each other to be friendly and open-minded. This is a good precondition for intercultural exchange.

Table 9
Students' Evaluation of Various Situations

	German Students Regarding Algerians		Algerian Students Regarding Germans	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Hangs up an Algerian/German flag in his/her room	4.48	1.15	4.79	1.75
Wears traditional clothing on campus/Is rather reserved in conversations	4.34	1.20	2.64	1.78
Asks you not to step on his/her prayer rug/Sets up a Christmas tree in his/her room	4.92	1.32	3.69	1.34
Excuses him or herself for not drinking any alcohol/Orders wine in a restaurant	4.66	1.50	1.99	1.51
Expects to be invited to your parents' or your family's house/Has never introduced his/her family to you	2.66	1.24	3.14	1.47

Note: Seven-step rating scale (1 = *strongly disapprove*, 2 = *disapprove*, 3 = *rather disapprove*, 4 = *don't care*, 5 = *rather approve*, 6 = *approve*, 7 = *strongly approve*).

The results of the survey participants' assessments of selected situations showed that the Algerian students would judge negatively of German students consuming alcohol. By contrast, the German students would not have a negative view of Algerian students abstaining from alcohol (see Table 9).

The surveyed German and Algerian students were also asked what advice they would give to exchange students coming to their respective country. Both, students from Germany and Algeria stressed in some respect the same points. They advised incoming students to acquire *language skills* (above all Arabic or French and German or English, depending on the country exchange students are coming to). Furthermore, they mentioned the importance of *seeking contact* and building friendships with native students and advised exchange students *to learn as much as possible* in the respective area of study.

An important issue was *respect and adaptation to the foreign culture*. German students advised Algerian exchange students to adapt to German culture in the following ways: accept the consumption of alcohol and clothing styles; observe German punctuality; adopt German conventions for greeting one another; and refrain from adopting any "radical" or "fundamentalist" postures (in terms of politics or religion, for example). A number of survey participants also warned of a possible confrontation with xenophobic groups, as such groups are more prevalent in the former East Germany. Algerian students also stressed the importance of heeding Algerian culture and religion; above all to show respect (do not make any critical remarks or blasphemous pronouncements); follow Islamic conventions where possible (e.g., don't drink alcohol, wear appropriate clothing, avoid contact with the

opposite sex and “immoral” behavior); and not to proselytize or openly practice the Christian faith or not to advance any racist or anti-Muslim views.

Besides, German students advised incoming students to observe bureaucratic procedures and requirements (e.g., health insurance; enrolment deadlines for classes and tests; administrative office hours, etc.) and to take weather conditions into account (especially the cold winters). Algerians also mentioned that Germans coming to Algeria should learn to adjust to different conditions, which in some respects may be worse than those found in Germany (e.g., technical facilities at the university, residential dorms, cafeteria food, etc.).

Although both groups were in agreement as to the first four points mentioned, they yet differed in the relative emphasis they placed on them. Indirectly, it was clear that the surveyed German students primarily envisioned an unsuccessful intercultural exchange in terms of an Algerian student who is unable to communicate effectively and restricts his or her contact to other Algerian exchange students. By contrast, the surveyed Algerian students entertained the negative image of a German student who openly attacks the Islamic faith while leading a conspicuous and provocative Western lifestyle. Nevertheless, five of the Algerian respondents wrote explicitly that Algeria is a free society and that German exchange students would be free to behave as they fit.

Ramifications for German–Algerian University Exchange

The following ramifications for the future planning of German–Algerian exchange activities can be drawn from the results of the survey:

Both the Algerian teachers and students have a strong interest in an academic stay abroad in Germany. The vast majority would immediately take advantage of such an opportunity. Conversely, a small group of the surveyed German students (4%) and teachers (3%) are interested in a stay abroad in Algeria. In addition, a fairly significant number of participants indicated they were “undecided.” The critical mass required for an organized exchange program therefore seems present.

Given the fact that the German participants exhibited a greater reluctance to participate in a German–Algerian exchange program, informational activities would be advised to stimulate interest and curiosity as well as recruit potential participants from the ranks of the otherwise undecided. Such informational activities could include flyers, a website, and informational events with individuals who are already involved in German–Algerian exchange. In this regard, a necessary first step is to simply draw attention to Algeria as a potential exchange destination with a high potential for rewarding intercultural education. As the study’s results show, half of the surveyed German students had never been specifically concerned with Algeria and the other half had been confronted with media messages that they personally evaluated as neutral or negative—but never positive—in tone. Due to competition

from other exchange destinations, it is likely that only a small number of German students and teachers will participate in the program over the mid- to long term even with greater informational and recruitment efforts. An exchange program with a limited number of participants can nevertheless be highly valuable, particularly when implemented over a longer period of time.

The surveyed Germans and Algerians viewed one another on a personal level as being open-minded and friendly. This can be assessed as a positive basis for intercultural exchange.

Due to the lack of direct contact between both cultures, perceptions were strongly based on media depictions and were to some extent marked by preconceived judgments and uncertainties. It is therefore necessary to make focused efforts to counteract such notions in the period prior to the actual exchange. Information must be provided to address the concerns of German students regarding proper conduct in an Islamic country. Conversely, the questions Algerian students have with regard to the practice of the Islamic faith in Germany must be addressed. For example, the information that there is a mosque at the Ilmenau University of Technology (Masjed Mosque: www.stud.tu-ilmenau.de/~muslstud/) and that diverse cultural and religious activities regularly take place for Muslim students of different nationalities can help to dispel fears. This assumption is underlined by the fact that other universities hosting large numbers of students from Muslim countries have similar offers. For example, Eid ul-Fitr, the Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, was celebrated by staff, students, and members of the local Muslim community at Swansea University's Mosque in September 2008, including guests from across the university like the University's vice-chancellor (Press Office of Swansea University, 2008).

In terms of study and research conditions, there are marked infrastructure discrepancies between Algeria and Germany. To prevent disappointment on the part of the German participants, it would be advisable to make these conditions transparent beforehand and to adjust exchange activities accordingly. As the technical facilities at the Algerian University are comparatively less advanced than they are in Germany (in the area of new media, for example), projects should be considered within the context of the exchange program that have fewer requirements in terms of technology. Alternatively, it is also conceivable that German–Algerian study and research teams could use mobile equipment brought over from Germany for joint projects. In addition, the flexible use of resources outside of the University is also possible (e.g., the inexpensive Internet cafes found throughout Algeria).

The Algerian scientists expressed a strong interest in cooperating with foreign universities, and, at the same time, the Algerian students indicated a desire for more scientific and group work. In this way, it seems particularly logical to organize the academic exchange program around joint projects. For example, the ways in which Germany and Algeria are depicted in each country's respective media could be systematically analyzed in a joint project embedded in the media or communication sciences. A project of this nature could be divided into phases, with all project

participants working together in one country in certain phases and communicating via Internet in others. In this respect, shorter stays could also be integrated. On an academic level, such projects would be of considerable value by opening up highly relevant fields of research otherwise inaccessible to German teachers and students because of the language barrier (i.e., insufficient knowledge of Arabic to analyze Arabic media content).

In the interest of intercultural education, it does not make sense within the context of a German–Algerian exchange program to simply integrate exchange students into the foreign university's regular study curriculum. However, integration in the standard curriculum can take place to a certain extent and is particularly sensible for German students with a good command of French or Algerian students with a good command of German or English. Language courses can also help to prepare students beforehand. For the acquisition of deep cultural competencies, however, special courses for exchange students that concentrate on historical, cultural, and political topics in the partner country are advised. In addition, a project- and research-oriented curriculum based on small Algerian–German groups with appropriate professorial guidance offers the best chance for the practice of intercultural cooperation.

With the inclusion of teachers in the exchange program for the undertaking of research projects with students, aspects of the partner country and intercultural cooperation can also find a place in regular lessons and thus expand the horizons of the native students. Exchange students often remain isolated without organized forums for social contact (Ward, 2001). Therefore, the exchange should also be supplemented by social and cultural events that provide exchange students with the opportunity to come in contact with other students at the foreign university.

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Nicola Döring is professor of media design and media psychology at Ilmenau University of Technology, Germany.

Kamel Lahmar does research and lectures in sociology and demography at the Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif, Algeria.

Mohamed Bouabdallah does research and lectures in industrial psychology at the Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif, Algeria.

Mohamed Bouafia is a professor of optics and precision engineering at the Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif, Algeria.

Djamel Bouzid is a professor of optics and precision engineering at the Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif, Algeria.

Gerhard Gobsch is professor of experimental physics at Ilmenau University of Technology, Germany.

Erich Runge is a professor of theoretical physics at Ilmenau University of Technology, Germany.