



**Knowledge Exchange Project for Promoting German in  
Hong Kong - Integration of Research and Teaching**

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## Knowledge Exchange Project for Promoting German in Hong Kong - Integration of Research and Teaching

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This paper examines a university-pioneered project for promoting German language and culture which integrates research, teaching and knowledge exchange. The project aims to enhance the interest within the general Hong Kong community in learning the German language and understanding the country's culture. Staff and students of the German Programme at the University of Hong Kong initiated outreach programmes benefitting local secondary school students in Hong Kong by organizing various German language and cultural workshops. It also generated a teaching and experiential learning opportunity for German Programme university students. Drawing on the results of surveys, the study shows that secondary students demonstrated a high appreciation of learning a foreign language and a keenness to study further. Tangible impacts of the project, including increased offerings of German as a foreign language in secondary schools, indicate the value of this knowledge exchange initiative and it provides an example of best practice for future projects relating to German and other foreign languages in Hong Kong and other cultural contexts. The article also undertakes a detailed analysis of the workshop's materials and process, as well as a study of useful parameters for a successful knowledge exchange day for learners of German.

### 1. Background and Philosophy

The contemporary worldwide trend at universities is for the knowledge and expertise of faculty members not to be kept within the campus but to be shared and transferred for the benefit of the wider community by way of social responsibility. Knowledge exchange (KE) is generally defined as “a process which brings together academic staff, users of research and wider groups and communities to exchange ideas, evidence and expertise.”<sup>1</sup>

KE activities aim to contribute social, economic, cultural, health and environmental benefits to society and community. In the tertiary sector, KE projects are built on expertise in the universities and the impact of research can be increased through the process.

Knowledge exchange, in conjunction with teaching and research, is one of the three key intrinsic components of all educational endeavors conducted at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). HKU has a long tradition of commitment to educational, social and cultural interchange with the non-academic sectors of society through organising a wide range of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ed.ac.uk/arts-humanities-soc-sci/research-ke/support-for-staff/knowledge-exchange-resources/knowledge-exchange-info>.

activities, such as public lectures, applied research schemes and delivery of professional and continuing education courses, amongst others. The HKU KE strategy aims to make a positive impact on society and defines KE as

engaging, for mutual benefit, with business, government or the public to generate, acquire, apply and make accessible the knowledge needed to enhance material, human, social, cultural and environmental well-being.<sup>2</sup>

By way of definition, the term KE is used to emphasise the two-way process of knowledge exchange between HKU and society with bilateral benefits: at the one end, HKU transfers knowledge and skillsets to the public. At the other end, HKU staff and students are enriched by the teaching experience and through fostering a closer connection with the general local community. KE integrates research and teaching and enhances community cohesion and rapport.

Despite Hong Kong being an international city, opportunities to learn European languages other than English are very limited (Chong 2012: 27; Eschenlohr 2003: 130; Fluck 2007: 166; Hess 1996: 36; Wannagat 2003: 129). Cultural concepts of foreign countries, except for English-speaking countries, Japan and Korea, are limited to stereotypical images. If any secondary school student in Hong Kong is asked what they know about Germany, the first impressions they will mention are normally Nazism, sausages and beer. There is, regrettably, little appreciation of Germany's rich literary diversity and musical and architectural traditions, or awareness of its tremendous technological innovations (Chong et al. 2014: 71).

The HKU KE Project "German Language and Cultural Project in Secondary Schools" aims to promote German-speaking countries as modern, advanced societies, with a plurality of lifestyles and regional identities and provide secondary school students with realistic and positive perceptions of contemporary Germany. There are also limited opportunities in Hong Kong for learning German and little research on teaching and learning German. Therefore, investigation in this neglected research area has the potential to benefit students.

## **2. Objectives and Learning Outcomes**

The KE project aims to enhance the interest both in secondary schools and within the general Hong Kong community in learning German as a foreign language and understanding the associated cultures. The main target group is Hong Kong secondary schools studying the local

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ke.hku.hk/about-ke/hku-ke-strategy>.

curriculum. Various German language and cultural workshops were organized at each of the target schools. The vision is that these social, cultural and educational initiatives will have a significant impact on both the local and international curriculums of the Hong Kong and international educational system by providing students with the opportunity to learn a new foreign language and understand the associated culture with recognition as “Other Learning Experience”<sup>3</sup> for “Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education” and as “Creativity, Activity, Service”<sup>4</sup> for the “International Baccalaureate Diploma Program”.

The learning outcomes of the KE workshops for the individual participants include:

- Demonstrate raised awareness and interest in German language and culture
- Use skills of oral and written presentation in German
- Communicate one’s ideas in German
- Understand important social and cultural aspects of German-speaking countries
- Develop intercultural communication, multicultural understanding and cross-cultural perspectives
- Demonstrate an appreciation of human heritage and respect for humanistic values

The project also provides HKU German Programme students with a unique opportunity to engage in experiential learning. Students, as research assistants of the project, are encouraged to be ambassadors of the German language and take a role as teaching assistants and mentors. For decades, the importance of experiential learning in education theory and the concept of learning as participation in social practice have been highlighted by philosophers and educationists (Dewey 1963; Lave 1996: 149) in the East and the West:

When you know something but don’t act on it, your knowledge of it is still superficial. After you’ve personally experienced it, your knowledge of it will be much clearer and its significance will be different from what it used to be. (Chu Hsi 1990: 116)

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<sup>3</sup> The Other Learning Experiences is one of the three components of the New Senior Secondary Curriculum that complements core and elective subjects (including Applied Learning and other language courses) for the whole-person development of students. These experiences include: Moral and Civic Education, Community Service, Career-related Experiences, Aesthetic Development and Physical Development. <http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/doc/eng/OLEParentPamphlet.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Creativity, Activity, Service is one of the three essential elements that every student must complete as part of the Diploma Programme. Creativity includes arts, and other experiences that involve creative thinking. Activity includes physical exertion contributing to a healthy lifestyle, complementing academic work elsewhere in the Diploma Program. Service includes an unpaid and voluntary exchange that has a learning benefit for the student. <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/diploma-programme/curriculum/creativity-activity-and-service/>

At HKU and universities worldwide various forms of experiential learning have been incorporated into the curriculum. In some faculties at HKU students must participate in this for fulfilment of the graduation requirements.<sup>5</sup>

The KE project crucially integrates teaching and research at university level. University staff and students are made aware of the attractions and difficulties of learning German for secondary school students which provides useful data for further teaching, research and studies.

### **3. Engagement Process**

The KE team consists of a Lecturer of the HKU German Programme as the Project Coordinator and 25 HKU German Programme students as Research Assistants. The main target group is Hong Kong secondary schools studying the local curriculum. German language and cultural workshops were conducted at each of the target schools with the aim of promoting German language and culture at secondary school level within the wider Hong Kong community.

The KE process commenced with the transferral of knowledge and skillset from the Project Coordinator to the HKU German Programme students who then took them forward as German instructors teaching German language and culture to Hong Kong local secondary school students. Prior to the first workshop, the Project Coordinator organized an induction and training session to equip student research assistants with basic teaching skills and expertise. After each KE workshop, the Project Coordinator also conducted evaluation and review sessions with student research assistants, in order that they could reflect and learn from their experiences and improve their skillset at future workshops.

#### **3.1 KE Language and Culture Workshops**

The target language is German. The KE workshops include all-round content related not only to Germany, but also major German-speaking countries such as Switzerland and Austria. A variety of different kinds of German language and cultural KE workshops were designed to achieve the learning outcomes. The particular topics include:

- The German Alphabet and Short Phrases
- Basic Pronunciation, Grammar and Daily Conversations
- Introductory Cultural Briefing: The Major Cultural Facets of Germany

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<sup>5</sup> <https://tl.hku.hk/reform/experiential-learning/>.

- Summer Courses and Exchange Programmes in German-speaking countries
- Studying and Living in German-speaking Countries
- German History and New Identity

Teaching the German alphabet, basic pronunciation and grammar helps students to acquire fundamental linguistic knowledge. Through an introduction to major cultural facets of Germany students gain greater insight into the foreign culture, customs and values. With several in-depth topics on education, social life and history, the cultural workshops also give students more detailed information about different socio-cultural and historical aspects.

### **3.2 On-campus KE event at HKU**

After the KE workshops were completed, running from 2014 to 2017 for three consecutive years, a “German Fun Day” was organized in collaboration with the German Consulate Hong Kong, Goethe-Institut Hong Kong, German Swiss International School Hong Kong and HKU German Association on HKU campus in May 2017. Teachers and students of schools participating in the KE workshops during the past years were invited to come to HKU to attend this event. Representatives of the co-organizers gave talks and addressed the students on various topics including overseas studies in Germany. This event provided an occasion for secondary school students to take part in a “follow-up” activity to meet with each other, to enrich and share their learning experiences as well as to further communicate in German through various talks, competitions and interactive games. Moreover, the KE team promoted the German Programme at HKU and provided secondary school students with some insight into undergraduate German studies at HKU.

## **4. Deliverables**

The KE team was able to reach out to and forge strong ties with the wider community of Hong Kong. The participating schools range from top-tier direct-subsidy schools to government-aided schools and international schools. 45 workshops were conducted over three years from 2014 to 2017 with a significant increase in scale. The project which was first launched in 2014 encompassed 10 schools and 362 secondary students. By 2017, the project was successfully partnering with 28 schools and reaching out to over 1600 students.

25 HKU German Programme students were given the chance to share their knowledge, expertise and skills in teaching German in language and cultural KE workshops. Original

teaching materials were created by the Project Co-ordinator and HKU student research assistants for language and cultural workshops and distributed to the students of 28 secondary schools. The website of the KE Project “German Language and Cultural Project in Secondary Schools” was created and maintained for sharing information about the project with the main non-academic groups of beneficiaries and for further promotion of German language and culture.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2015, the KE project “German Language and Cultural Project in Secondary Schools” has been developed as a sustainable project by fostering long-term partnerships with four local schools<sup>7</sup> in Hong Kong which have adopted the German language as an “Other Learning Experience” subject for the “Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education” curriculum. Increased offerings of German courses have been undertaken across a wide social spectrum of secondary schools in Hong Kong.<sup>8</sup> Two additional schools have demonstrated a keen interest in offering German.<sup>9</sup> Such development shows the tangible impacts of the KE project and is a clear indication of the intrinsic value of this knowledge exchange initiative which can be adopted as a best practice model for future projects involving the teaching of German and other foreign languages at secondary school level in Hong Kong and beyond, adapted to fit other cultural contexts. The content of the language and cultural workshops will clearly need to be tailored according to which foreign language is taught in which context.

## 5. Survey Results

For research, evaluation and statistical purposes, stakeholders’ surveys to obtain appraisal and feedback for assessment were distributed to and collected from both secondary school students and HKU German Programme students. The anonymous survey form for secondary school students consists of multiple-choice questions and space for open-ended comments. The HKU students’ survey contains questions for open-ended comments only.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.german.hku.hk/germanke/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> La Salle College, Sacred Heart Canossian College, St. Paul's Co-educational College and Po Leung Kuk Centenary Li Shiu Chung Memorial College.

<sup>8</sup> Sacred Heart Canossian College since 2009, La Salle College since 2017 and St. Paul's Convent School since June 2018.

<sup>9</sup> St. Paul's Co-educational College and Po Leung Kuk Centenary Li Shiu Chung Memorial College.

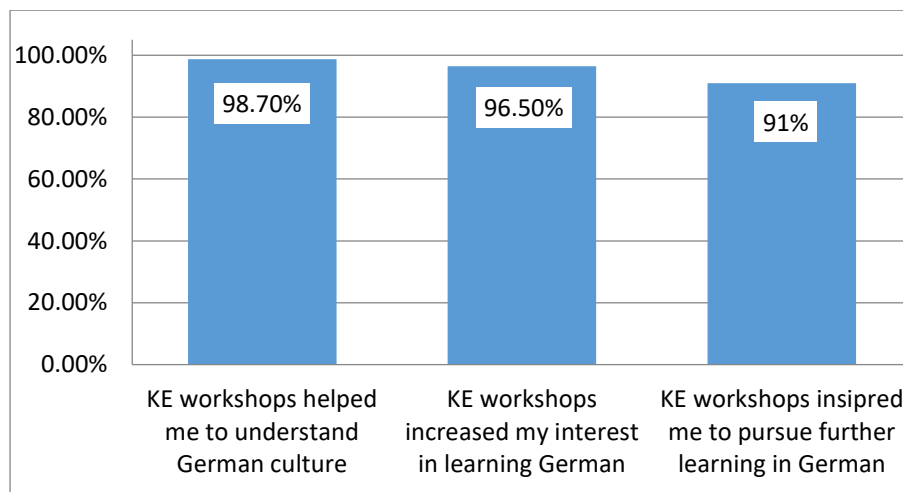
<sup>10</sup> The questions of the surveys are shown in the Appendix.

The survey of secondary school students was conducted and collected in the school straight after the KE-workshops in the years 2014-2017, while the survey of HKU students was sent via email. 1301 secondary school students aged 12 to 17 have completed the survey and 25 HKU German Programme undergraduates have also responded.

The results of the surveys demonstrate a high appreciation of this kind of KE project and a strong demand for the continuation of KE workshops in the future. Both secondary school students and HKU students stated that they had obtained an important and meaningful experience as well as gaining constructive and insightful knowledge throughout the knowledge exchange learning process. For HKU students, the KE project provided them with an enriching experience, valuable teaching training and experiential learning opportunities.

### 5.1 Secondary School Students

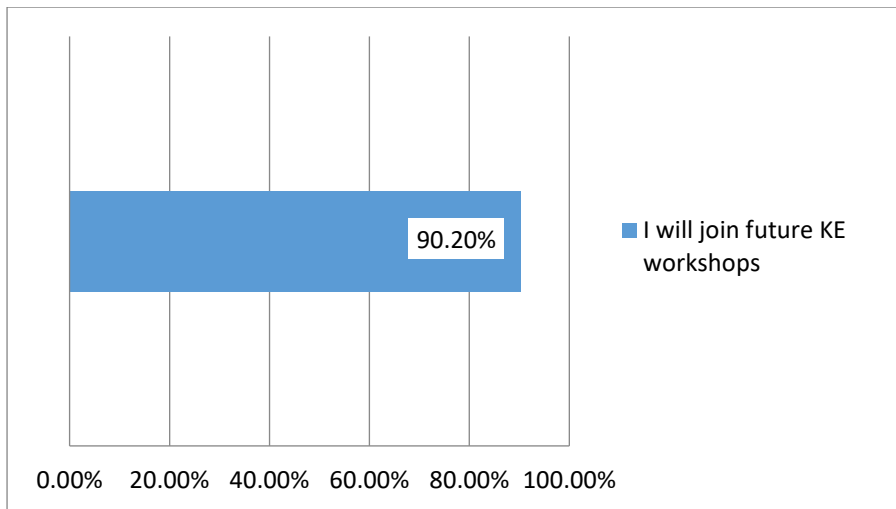
According to Survey Result No. 1, around 96% of secondary school students on average indicated that the KE workshops increased their interest in learning German, helped them better understand German culture and inspired them to pursue further learning of German.



#### Survey Result No. 1

According to Survey Result No. 2, over 90% of the respondents indicated that they would join this kind of KE project or workshop again in the future. Secondary students therefore demonstrated great enthusiasm in learning a new foreign language and experiencing a different culture.





### Survey Result No. 2

In the open-ended comments, students noted that the KE project provided a platform for them to get an introduction to what German language and culture are really like. They gained greater insight into German culture, acquired fundamental linguistic knowledge and were able to apply what they have learnt through self-introduction and basic conversational sessions. Many students exhibited an increased interest in and awareness of German language and culture after participating in the KE workshops.

“My interest in German has increased a lot. I feel being closer to Germany!” (Secondary school student)

“I did not know about German culture before. After this workshop, I am interested in Germany more. German words and culture are interesting and attractive.” (Secondary school student)

Students also indicated that the KE project raised their awareness, understanding and appreciation of foreign languages and cultures. The KE experience empowered intercultural competency, language capability and aspirations for increased travel and study-abroad opportunities. The cultural workshops provided a boarder world view to secondary school students and enhanced their mindfulness towards language and cultural diversity:

“There is a huge range of languages that we should learn. We can chat with people from different nationalities directly and make friends easily.” (Secondary school student)

## 5.2 German Programme Students at University

The KE project gives HKU German Programme undergraduates invaluable experience in teaching German and sharing German culture with other secondary students across Hong Kong. They also gained insightful work experience as well as teamwork, leadership, mentorship and

communication skills through organising workshops, student meetings and interactive activities.

All 25 university student research assistants expressed the view that the experiential learning and teaching experience through the KE project had greatly helped them with honing and improving successful learning skills for their own HKU German studies in many ways.

First of all, through the teaching experience in KE workshops, university students gained more confidence and improved their own language proficiency through speaking and teaching German in front of an audience of secondary students, making them more passionate about pursuing their further studies in German:

“KE offers us a sneak peek at the influence of a language. Sharing with students from different secondary schools empowers me to be more confident in using the knowledge I have learnt in university.” (University student)

“I am happy to see the result of what I have learnt, and how useful it is in the way I am able to teach others. It is a great capstone in the progress of my German learning. Such satisfaction shall boost my passion in improving my German.” (University student)

Meanwhile, the process of preparing, organizing and conducting the various language and cultural workshops helped university students reinforce their German linguistic skills, consolidate their language foundation, revisit their cultural knowledge and even explore new learning fields, which in return motivated them further in their own German studies:

“For every workshop, we needed to prepare for and teach different topics about Germany. Although I was teaching basics, the thinking process of preparing what is to be said is an inevitable revision and internal lecture to me.” (University student)

“By teaching the basic German I could consolidate what I have learnt in HKU German programme. Throughout the preparation of the culture workshop, I acquired additional knowledge about the German culture, which in turn inspired me to further pursue and work hard on my German studies.” (University student)

University students found it most challenging to get all secondary school students involved, stay focused and attentive and maintain a productive classroom atmosphere during the workshops. After each school visit, they felt they had improved their teaching skills by becoming more articulate and experienced in engaging with secondary school students.

“Sometimes it can be upsetting when the students are not as active as expected. But this also gave me an opportunity to be more encouraging and active, so as to get introverted students involved.” (University student)

“It was quite difficult in the beginning to motivate participants, as some of them were shy when we asked for their responses. Yet, this improved later when I have gained more teaching experience.” (University student)

## 6. Parameters of a Successful Knowledge Exchange Day

Despite the enthusiastic responses of participants to the 45 KE workshops conducted over a three-year period from 2014-2017, key findings demonstrate that the process has also experienced numerous challenges. While some activities and methods do not work well, some others find favour with the participants.

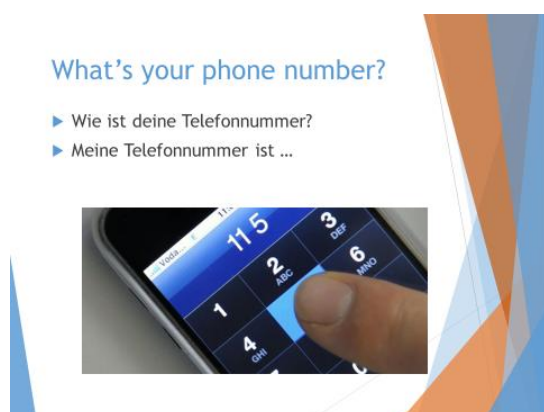
For the majority of the participating secondary school students, it was the first time they had an opportunity to learn a new European language other than English. The biggest challenge was to motivate all students without any previous German knowledge to be involved and stay attentive throughout the entire duration of the KE workshops. Teaching materials, skills and activities continuously improved in various ways in order to facilitate this. A successful KE day depends on the way the parameters are as detailed below.

### 6.1 Interaction and Application

For a long time, interaction has been considered an important component within the foreign language learning context for successful outcomes (Allwright 1984: 156). The specific KE process shows that the monotone delivery of PPT presentations of the first workshops did not work and immediately led to a drop of energy and decline in interest within the room. Students' responses to the initial design also highlight the importance of the interaction:

“I hope there will be more interaction and games in the language and cultural workshop. It will help me to learn more if I can use the phrases and practice.” (Secondary school student)

Learners were greatly motivated after more games or quizzes were integrated within each section of the workshop. For instance, students were asked to use basic greeting phrases in self-introduction and conversational sessions. A game that consisted of hearing the phone number in German and calling the instructor helped participants with learning numbers effectively:



Another interactive session was held during breaks between the language and culture workshops. The session consisted of German food tasting, whereby secondary school students were able to apply German phrases they had just learnt at the language workshop to order German snacks:



In the first workshops with a large group of learners, it was extremely difficult for instructors to keep the students feeling engaged throughout the entire workshop. This experience confirmed that activities in small groups are conducive to implementing learning objectives in cases where a KE workshop comprises of a large number of over 50 participating students. This teaching strategy has been developed over the three years of workshop delivery as a result of experiences of instructors of the KE team:

“If there are many participants, it is better to make them sit in groups and allow them some time to practise in the language workshop. Students, especially inactive students are much more motivated to speak in a smaller group.” (University student)

Therefore, the KE workshop participants were allocated to smaller groups when further activities were undertaken. In addition, each small group with no more than 10 students was assigned an instructor so that students could practise individually and in a more interactive way with the instructor in the group.

## 6.2 Effective Learning Process

The KE workshops are extra-curricular activities and therefore should be set up in an enjoyable way to allow students to experience the joys of learning foreign languages beyond a regular classroom in Hong Kong where the focus is largely put on the exam-oriented learning topics, writing and reading rather than speaking and listening. The KE workshops should be well structured with a large variety of activities aiming to enhance communicative skills and experiential learning:

### Rundown and Topics:



- Language Workshop (45 mins)  
Basic German for Communication  
a 30-minute break with German Food Tasting!  

- Cultural Workshop (45 mins)
  - Introductory Cultural Briefing: The Major Cultural Facets of Germany
  - Studying and Living in German-Speaking Countries

In addition, structured use of audio/visual aids and fun learning materials result in more active participation and better understanding of the German language and culture:



You're welcome.  
**Bitte.**



**The word "bitte" is very useful!**

English	German
Pardon?	Bitte?
Please.	Bitte.
Go ahead.	Bitte.
Here you go.	Bitte.
You're welcome.	Bitte.
Not at all.	Bitte.




One Day in Berlin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ks2mkRb1IMU>

SCHOOL OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES  
FACULTY OF ABE, THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

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**German Alphabet Table**

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd
 Apfel	 Bär	 CD	 Deutschland
Ee	Ff	Gg	Hh
 Elefant	 Fisch	 Gans	 Haus
Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll
 Idee	 Joghurt	 Katze	 Löwe
Mm	Nn	Oo	Pp
 Maus	 Nase	 Obst	 Papagei

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**German Numbers**

0 null	6 sechs
1 eins	7 sieben
2 zwei	8 acht
3 drei	9 neun
4 vier	10 zehn
5 fünf	

**Useful German Phrases**

Hilf	Guten Tag! Hallo!
Good morning!	Guten Morgen!
Good evening!	Guten Abend!
I'm ...	Ich bin ...
How are you?	Wie geht's?
Good/Bad	Gut/Schlecht
Goodbye!	Tschüss!
See you!	Auf Wiedersehen!
Yes	Ja
No	Nein
Thank you!	Danke!
You're welcome.	Bitte.
Sorry!	Entschuldigung!
Enjoy the meal!	Guten Appetit!
Yummy!	Lecker!
Cheers!	Prost!
Break	Pause
Finished/Don't!	Fertig!
Quickly!	Zack! Zack!
Happy birthday!	Alles Gute zum Geburtstag!
I love you!	Ich liebe dich!
All the best (Add oil!)	Toi, toi, toi!
Good luck!	Viel Glück!

To ensure an effective learning process, instructors need to be articulate in engaging with secondary school students and proactive in guiding them to practise German words and discuss German culture. The workshops demonstrate that exchange between the university students and secondary school students, as well as the personal sharing sessions about exchange programmes and summer courses, help to engage secondary school students.

“I find the experience sharing session of the university students very inspiring. It helps me to know more about the life as a student from a personal perspective.” (Secondary school student)




“I want to know more about the daily lives of Germans, e.g. what do people do in their free time.”  
(Secondary school student)

### The German Language

**Why German?**


**Useful!**

- Germany has the largest economy in Europe and the fourth largest in the world.
- Germany is a major trading partner of Hong Kong and China. A knowledge of German might be useful for your future career.



### Sundays in Germany

- Family day
- Time to rest



- All the shops are closed (from 2014 shops may open on designated Sundays throughout the year e.g. 8 Sundays in Berlin)

Introducing major German cities by showing some video clips of local TV programmes on “working holidays” helped students make connections between the cities and working life in German-speaking countries and their own, despite the long distance from Hong Kong. Under the “working holiday” scheme, young people are able to apply for a visa, which will allow them to stay in the country for up to 12 months. During the period, they may work to finance their stay or study short-term courses. Many Hong Kong young adults are interested in the working holiday scheme worldwide, including in German-speaking countries:



“Introduction to German festivals” was chosen as a topic as festivals reveal much about a country’s culture including customs, values and religion. For the part on festivals, the PPT presentation concentrated on the most typical festivals with the aim of activating students’ curiosity and raising their awareness of the culturally-specific dimensions of these celebrations. The special learning outcome associated with this session is to demonstrate respect for cultural difference, as they learn about the importance of festivals not only in Chinese culture but also in other cultures. Festivals such as Christmas are illuminated by discussion of the tradition of the advent calendar and the tale of St. Nicholas etc., and students are asked to compare the scale of Christmas with Chinese New Year’s celebration.

The contents of the workshop also needed to fit into the local schools’ context and curriculum. For Hong Kong, the secondary school curriculum entails history and arts, alongside science subjects. Among others, sessions on elements of German history, such as World War I and II, as well as post-war German history align with the secondary school curriculum in Hong Kong. To cater for this need and in the light of feedback from the students, topics related to post-war German history and national identity were chosen for further KE workshops:

“I am interested in German history after WWII, as we are learning it in school.” (Secondary school student)



Traditionally, education is one of the top priorities within Hong Kong society. The KE project plays a role in educating students about career and life planning which is essential in secondary education (Wong 2017: 126). Besides German language and culture, the specific KE workshops with a focus on “Studying in German-speaking Countries” motivated students to plan for their future study, as these provided them with a chance to learn more about university education in both Hong Kong and Germany. Most of the students in Hong Kong are not aware of the advantages of Germany as a place of study, in particular, the absence of tuition fees at German universities.





## 6.4 Tailor-made Materials for Addressing Diverse Learning Styles, Social Groups and Age Groups

With 28 secondary schools participating, circumstances vary hugely with different student learning styles, social groups and age groups identified and addressed. The KE workshop materials and handouts are continually optimized, the contents regularly moderated and improved to meet the specific needs and requirements for each individual school visit.

Examples of such redesign of materials and teaching strategies as a response to the experiences and feedback of students and instructors were illustrated in the previous paragraphs regarding interaction, effectiveness of learning process and selection of topics.

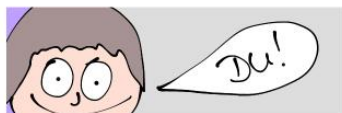
Apart from these aspects, school policies also vary from one other. Some schools place more emphasis on language and humanities subjects while others put more focus on science subjects or extra-curricular activities. More complex grammar structures were introduced for schools which aim at multilingual competency and where students were likely to be more experienced language learners, e.g. personal pronouns and verb conjugation of regular and irregular verbs:



du



you  
(informal)  
(singular)



Sie



You  
(formal)  
(singular)



wohnen (to live)



ich	wohne
du	wohnst
er, sie, es	wohnt
wir	wohnen
ihr	wohnt
sie, Sie	wohnen

heißen (to be called)



ich	heiße
du	heißt
er, sie, es	heißt
wir	heißen
ihr	heißt
sie, Sie	heißen

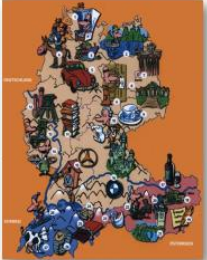
Specific cultural topics such as sports and music were included for schools that are more interested in extra-curricular activities and arts:



In general, visual and aural learning styles are compatible with and effective for the majority of young secondary school students. Therefore, large quantities of pictures and videos clips to stimulate their senses and enhance their performance were incorporated in PowerPoints (Hawk and Shah 2007: 5). Since small groups teaching has been developed over the period of three years as part of the KE delivery, passive learners and students with social learning challenges could be catered for and were given the opportunity to learn in groups with 6 to 8 persons. In schools that provided a lot of students for the workshop, more interactive games and quizzes were introduced to motivate and engage students. Active and keen learners were assigned more challenging tasks, such as German idioms and tongue twisters.



The participating schools range from top-tier direct-subsidy schools to government-aided schools and international schools. Students from privileged social backgrounds, e.g. from the boarding and international schools, had opportunities to visit Germany for an exchange programme. For these kinds of schools, the KE workshops aimed to prepare students for their exchange and help them to adapt to a new cultural environment when they immerse themselves in a German community. Relevant topics and content for the workshops were offered, for instance students learnt useful basic German words and phrases as well as helpful tips for their visit and travel in German-speaking countries:

Useful German Words and Phrases		Tip 5 – Recycle	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Wie viel kostet das?</i> How much is that?</li> <li>➤ <i>Ich hätte gern...</i> I would like...</li> <li>➤ <i>Zahlen bitte!</i> The bill please!</li> <li>➤ <i>Wo ist die Toilette?</i> Where is the bathroom?</li> <li>➤ <i>Herren</i> Gentlemen</li> <li>➤ <i>Damen</i> Ladies</li> <li>➤ <i>Zum Stadtzentrum, bitte.</i> To the city center, please.</li> <li>➤ <i>Zum Bahnhof, bitte.</i> To the train station, please.</li> <li>➤ <i>Zum Flughafen, bitte.</i> To the airport, please.</li> <li>➤ <i>Sprechen Sie Englisch?</i> Do you speak English?</li> <li>➤ <i>Ich bin krank.</i> I am sick.</li> <li>➤ <i>Hilfe!</i> Help!</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ You may recycle cans and bottles in supermarkets for refund! (0,30 Euro per bottle in Hamburg)</li> </ul>	
<p><i>Gute Reise!</i> Have a good trip!</p>			

Students of government schools from financially disadvantaged social backgrounds were also able to join the KE language and culture workshops. The KE workshops aim to provide a platform for this social group to have an initial idea of what German language and culture is like, beyond stereotypical impressions. On this basis, the workshops have further sparked students' aspirations to explore more options in future relating to German-speaking countries, whether through travelling, continuing to learn the German language at university level or even working abroad in Germany:

“The workshop is useful for me to communicate with people from German-speaking countries when I travel there.” (Secondary school student)

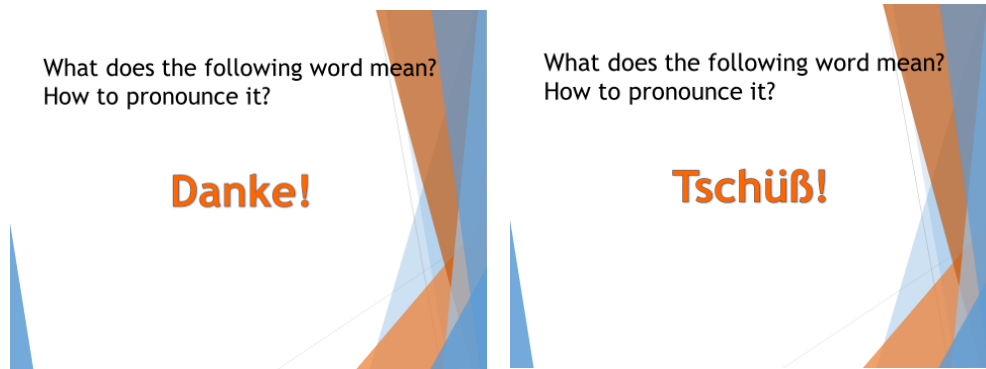
“It is good to know that I can study German as a major subject in Hong Kong” (Secondary school student)

“I want to study and work in Germany in the future.” (Secondary school student)

In comparison with international school students, local school students were generally more passive in answering questions and engaging in games. However, it was observed by the KE team that the social backgrounds of students did not have any significant influence or impact on their motivation for learning. Students of government schools from financially disadvantaged backgrounds were not less motivated and did not perform worse as compared to students from privileged backgrounds, e.g. those from direct-subsidy schools or international schools:

“I am particularly happy to see students who have financial difficulties were able to join our workshops. They cherished the opportunity and were motivated to learn more.” (University student)

Apart from types of students and social groups, different age groups need to be addressed (Purdy 2018: 37). The participating students are aged between 13 and 16 years. In schools with junior students, basic language skills can be taught with more control questions to check what students have learnt and measure their understanding of content, for instance:



Keeping the workshops active in fun ways and including songs can maintain their interest, as younger students respond well to movement and songs. Instructors should be involved in the small group activities to provide them with individual guidance and mentoring. Students at higher levels tend to learn in a more focused way. With a view to facilitating their learning, more in-depth topics, practical expressions and revision work can be introduced through longer sessions. Examples of these are:



While older learners can work more independently, materials designed to include their own experience and interests enhances their engagement. For instance, talking about their own hobbies and teaching them the relevant phrases and expressions. In general, interaction, personalized tasks and relevance are the key to successful activities for all age groups.

### 6.5 Influences of Linguistic and Cultural Contrasts

The target language, German, and the native language of the local secondary school students, Chinese, belong to two different language families and show enormous differences. Language contrast has influences on the learning process (Oldin 1989: 18). For instance, German is supposed to be more difficult for Chinese students than for English or other European learners. However, the learning process of students has demonstrated that English has more linguistic influence than Chinese among the students when it comes to learning German. This is due to the prevalent use of English during and after British colonial rule in Hong Kong. When learning another foreign language at secondary school or university level, Hong Kong students tend to compare it with English, their first foreign language (Chong 2012: 27; Eschenlohr 2003: 130).

Drawing specifically from the teaching and learning experiences of the KE workshops, it shows that the linguistic parallels between English and German were both useful for and a hindrance to the learning process. On one hand, it was easier for secondary students to associate similar words in both languages and to memorize the new words, such as *fish/Fisch*, *house/Haus*, *milk/Milch* etc. On the other hand, students made typical mistakes in pronouncing German words which are influenced by English, for instance *denke* [dɛŋkə] instead of *danke* [danjkə]; *z* [ts] was spoken as voiced *s* [z] as in English; and the German umlauts were ignored etc. Comparable results can be predicted for Hong Kong learners of other European languages, especially Germanic languages, but the outcomes can vary if Asian languages are being taught, for e.g. Korean and Japanese. The content and level of KE language and cultural workshops for Korean and Japanese can be far more advanced, as Japanese and especially Korean pop culture and TV dramas are becoming extremely popular in Hong Kong and many people have previous linguistic knowledge through attending courses at secondary school level or in private institutions. To conclude, the language involved has an influence on the design and development of the knowledge exchange activities.

The KE language workshops focused on basic beginners' level communication. This may explain why no significant influences of linguistic parallels and contrasts could be observed. The cultural workshops with an introductory briefing lasted for a duration of 45 minutes only. Apart from stereotypical impressions of German culture, no obvious culture shock was demonstrated among the students. Again, this could be caused by Hong Kong's role as a former British colony. Students in Hong Kong have been in contact with English/British and general European culture from a very young age.

Further investigations with a longer series of workshops and data based on regular German lessons are needed in order to measure the precise impact of linguistic and cultural similarities and differences.

## **6.6 Relevance for Future Projects in Other Contexts**

The model and practice of the specific KE workshops can be applied to future projects within Hong Kong, for instance to introduce other foreign languages, as well as in other contexts, such as delivery of German KE workshops in other areas outside of the German-speaking countries. Engagement in this kind of KE workshops can help to increase a university's impact on society and culture and achieve the following:

- **Schools, Students and Educational System**

1. Enhance experiential learning and intercultural competency
2. Support educational system by providing students with opportunities of learning a new foreign language and culture
3. Develop a sustainable project by fostering long-term partnerships with schools
4. Develop a foreign language as a formal elective subject within the school curriculum

- **Wider Local Community and Communities of the Foreign Language**

1. Raise public awareness, interest and knowledge of learning a foreign language and understanding the country's culture
2. Benefit communities of the foreign language through promotion of positive images of the country and appreciation of the culture and heritage

- **University Students and Alumni**

1. Gain valuable experiential learning skills and teaching/working experience outside the classroom
2. Stimulate / confirm interest in teaching and better preparation for a career in teaching
3. Encourage further studies in the foreign language and working in corporations of the country

## **7. Conclusion and Visions**

Living in a globalized world and an international city like Hong Kong means that foreign language capability is a valued asset amongst the city's residents in a myriad of ways. Foreign language competency opens up many opportunities and facilitates personal growth and fulfilment through better understanding of different cultures and greater appreciation of the importance of cultural diversity in our contemporary society. This simultaneously helps widen one's perspectives and cultivate individual personal identity. Therefore, German and other

foreign language programmes which benefit young minds within different social contexts throughout Hong Kong should in future receive greater support from the community.

Promotion of the German language requires increased efforts from all stakeholders. The following suggestions aim to effectively support and increase German learning opportunities, improve the popularity of German as a foreign language and enhance the quality of German Programmes in Hong Kong.

First of all, German-speaking companies in Hong Kong should require German competency as a prerequisite or preference for employment in job advertisements and retain German as a corporate language. They should make the German language part of their proud identity. Hong Kong has been Germany's trading partner for more than 150 years and remains an important gateway to the Chinese market for German companies on account of its well-established economic infrastructure and independent judicial system. According to the Federal Foreign Office, around 600 German-speaking companies and many German company representatives are located within the territory. Germany as an economic superpower in Europe coupled with the remarkable and favourable economic relations between Germany and Hong Kong should provide significant synergy to motivate the learning of German. The tangible value of German as a foreign language can be elevated in a pragmatic and utilitarian society like Hong Kong if there is the general perception that German as a foreign language has importance, value, significance and relevance in future careers and business, trading and economic prospects for the local community.

Moreover, German Programmes should offer all major students internships or training opportunities in German companies. Presently, there are internship programs at HKU to help students get a better start in life in the outside world. By incorporating practical content and business elements in the academic programme, students are made "fit" for the requirements of their future professions. All students can benefit from such internship opportunities which enable students to practice and polish their German and gain insight into the workings and operation of German-speaking companies. This will further benefit them enormously in their future roles as mediators between German and Chinese companies.

In addition, further outreach projects could be initiated to promote German within the general community. The vision is to develop long-term partnerships with all interested secondary-schools to provide German as an elective OLE for the HKDSE curriculum or as a Creativity,

Activity, Service (CAS) initiative for local and international school students studying the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IB).

Furthermore, participation by HKU students in future KE projects involving local secondary schools can become an integral part of the German Programme curricula. The KE project could be developed as a valuable capstone<sup>11</sup> experience at HKU for the benefit of all German major programme students. The KE Project is designed to facilitate the acquisition and application of disciplinary knowledge and principles in the early years of study at university and to provide an invaluable experiential learning and teaching experience for university students, in particular for those who are considering teaching German as their future career.

Last but not least, in-depth surveys can be conducted to investigate further the motivation, interest and challenges of learning German as a foreign language. It would improve instruction skills and teaching materials by helping to identify generic student weaknesses in learning a foreign language at secondary school level and encouraging experimentation with differently formulated methods of instruction and specially crafted teaching materials to overcome such challenges. Future investigation of research topics in a Hong Kong context such as “Teaching and Learning German as a Foreign Language in a Multi-cultural Context”, “Typical Learning Problems for Local Students and Strategies for Improvement” etc. are of interest. The results and findings would add huge value to and greatly enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching German at universities, significantly benefitting German Programme students at universities, and helping to promote German as a foreign language in Hong Kong and other communities beyond. As illustrated, the Hong Kong experience which has been described in this article has broader ramifications and has the potential to feed into the development of KE projects in other cultural contexts which aim to promote a foreign language and culture.

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<sup>11</sup> A capstone course at HKU is an integral part of all major programmes which is designed to allow the integration and application of disciplinary knowledge and principles acquired in the early years of study.



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## Keywords

Knowledge Exchange, GFL in Hong Kong, Secondary Schools, German Programme

## Appendix: Questions of the Surveys

### HKU KE Project Survey of Secondary School Students

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Form: \_\_\_\_\_

Female/Male: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### I. Project / Workshop Effectiveness

Please answer the questionnaire by circling your answer.

1. KE workshops increased my interest for learning German. Yes / No
2. KE workshops helped me to understand German culture. Yes / No
3. KE workshops inspired me to pursue further learning in German. Yes / No

#### II. Anonymous open-ended comments

1. Will you join this kind of KE projects/workshops again in the future? Why?

2. Additional comments and suggestions you would like to make.

**HKU KE Project  
Survey of HKU Student Research Assistants**

Name:

1. What aspects of this KE project did you like most?
2. What aspects of this KE project did you find most difficult?
3. Did the experiential learning outside classroom experience through assisting in this KE project help you with achieving successful learning skills of your German studies at HKU? In what aspects?
4. Additional comments or suggestions you would like to make.