

Dealing with cultural issues in culturally diverse classrooms: The case of business schools at Dutch universities.

Abstract

This paper presents the results of a qualitative empirical study in 7 business schools belonging to Dutch universities. The study examines to what extent teaching staff is supported to cope with cross-cultural differences in the classroom. The case studies discussed reveal different approaches by the business schools to cope with cultural differences in class. These different approaches are evaluated. A clear relation with the drivers of internationalization, different for each business school, was not found. Recommendations concerning management policies in business schools are provided.

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Introduction

As a response to a globalizing world, institutes of higher business education is becoming more internationally-oriented (e.g. van der Wende, 2001; Stone, 2006; Beerkens & van der Wende, 2007). However, several authors (Van Damme, 2001, Bartell, 2003; Qiang, 2003) have indicated that institutes of higher business education (or even departments within one and the same institution of higher education) may vary substantially in terms of the degree to which they have been internationalized. For instance, institutions that limit themselves to participation in worldwide exchange programs such as Erasmus may be thought of as having a 'low profile', whereas institutions that set up joint-degree programs with institutions in foreign countries or set up their own satellite campuses in other parts of the world may be conceptualized as having a 'high profile'. These differences in profile may reflect differences in higher education institutes understanding of the concept of internationalization.. As stated by Bartell (2003, p.46), "internationalization conveys a variety of understandings, interpretations and applications, anywhere from a minimalist, instrumental and static view, such as securing external funding for study abroad programs, through international exchange of students, conducting research internationally, to a view of internationalization as a complex, all encompassing and policy-driven process, integral to and permeating the life, culture, curriculum and instruction as well as research activities of the university and its members." Knight (1997) clusters the possible rationales for internationalization into four groups: political, economic, academic and cultural/ social (Qiang, 2003, 252).

It is clear that institutes of higher business education are confronted with an increasing number of culturally diverse classrooms. As such, they feel the need to prepare business students to become effective players in a cross-cultural business environment. Critical in this respect is that future business managers (that is, business students) become fully aware of, and sensitive to cross-cultural differences in personal beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral norms (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). If they succeed in developing a high level of awareness and sensitivity they are likely to become more effective in their interactions with persons having different cultural backgrounds, be it other students (while studying) or companion business managers and stakeholders (after graduation) (see Straffon, 2003; Hammer et al., 2003).

According to Otten (2003), senior management of institutes providing higher education (for instance, deans of business faculties) are now convinced that *good* academic education requires students to

develop a broader perspective that is composed of “intercultural competence, critical thinking, and comparative thinking” (Otten, 2003, 19). Yershova, Dejaegere & Mestenhauser (2000) claim that intellectual competencies are generally perceived as being universal competencies, but are –in reality- culture-specific.. The authors make an analysis of three distinct intellectual capabilities: intercultural competence, critical thinking, and comparative thinking. They conclude that all three intellectual competencies are strongly influenced by culture. Yershova et al. (2000, 45) define intercultural competence as a consciousness-altering process, a dynamic interaction of cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes in an individual (Yershova, 2000, 45). Critical thinking, generally perceived as most universal, consists of a combination of knowledge, dispositions, and thinking strategies of which knowledge is especially culture dependent. Comparative thinking is defined as “a conscious and deliberate mental operation of relating views and perspectives on familiar things to the unfamiliar” (Yershova, 2000, 56). Comparative thinking by most writers is assumed to be universal; In reality, “both social psychology and practical experience suggest that the overriding tendency in such comparisons is to look for similarities that fit into our prior conceptual structures, and to either reject or evaluate negatively the findings that do not fit. As a result, such “cross-cultural” comparisons are very much ethnocentric and culture-bound.

To avoid ineffective encounters between students with a different cultural origin, and between students and their course instructor, course instructors are also required to have these competencies, namely to be cross-culturally competent, and to be able to think in a creative and comparative manner (Yershova, 2000, 65; Otten, 2003, 19).

Some authors (for instance, Otten, 2003; Barmeyer, 2004) have stressed the need to provide adequate cross-cultural training to course instructors who face the challenge of dealing with culturally diverse groups of students. According to Barmeyer (2004), such training should make course instructors aware of, and competent to use (new) teaching methods which are superior in terms of more effective cross-cultural interaction (e.g. using different learning styles, giving more time for questions after presentation). Obviously, effective teaching methods should well match with the individuals’ preferred learning styles. Given that learning styles are –at least in part- culturally determined (Barmeyer, 2004), the effectiveness of a particular teaching style is conditional on the particular mix of different cultures encountered in a multicultural class. Multicultural classes consisting of a group of French and German students should offer both cognitive teaching styles making use of direct lecturing, meeting the needs of the German students’ cognitive learning styles and extensive discussions after case studies, meeting the learning needs of the French’ more affective learning styles (see descriptions in Barmeyer, 2004).

Despite the awareness for adequate cross-cultural training many authors (see Yershova, 2000, 40; Otten, 2003) have criticized institutes of higher education as they would have failed to well-prepare students and course instructors to interact effectively in a culturally diverse classroom. Therefore it is worthwhile to make an empirical assessment of the kind of policy measures these institutes of higher education have taken (if any) to prepare students and course instructors for effective cross-cultural interactions in culturally diverse classrooms. Universities would benefit from adopting some good-practice principles. **In this paper, we aim at identifying and evaluating the adequacy of policy measures taken by seven business schools belonging to universities in one European country, The Netherlands.** In addition, we discuss some guidelines on education and learning, as suggested by the literature and derived from the interviews. This, to enable institutes of higher education (if necessary) to make substantial improvements in dealing with an increasingly international group of students. Single interviews with senior management of business schools (also referred to as management schools) such as faculty deans (or vice-deans) provided the empirical data for this study.

Drivers for internationalization

To be able to understand the different institutes' approaches towards internationalization we first discuss the drivers of internationalization. Such drivers are important to consider as they reveal the reasons of business schools' actions.

After we elaborate on the drivers of internationalization, we will discuss culture-related problems encountered in culturally diverse classrooms, and present possible ways to deal with such problems.

Based on the literature we distinguish between four different drivers of internationalization:

1. The needs and requirements of students (that is future employees) attending higher education have changed significantly over the last ten years as a response to the process of globalization of the economy, societies, and labor markets (Beerkens, 2003; Healey, 2008). For example, more and more people work for foreign-owned companies (Scott, 1992; cited in Qiang, 2003). This phenomenon is frequently mentioned as a main driver for many institutes of higher education since they are responsible for preparing their students to operate successfully in a global environment (e.g. ; Bartell, 2003; Cant, 2004; Cheng & Walker, 1997; Qiang, 2003;; Schuerholz-Lehr, 2007).
2. Internationalization has resulted from increasing levels of economic competitiveness, both at the -institutional and -national level (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Scott, 1992; cited in Qiang, 2003). At the institutional level, students from abroad generate extra income for institutes

of higher education. At the national level, internationalization is seen as a necessity since it contributes to more skilled and knowledgeable graduates entering the labor market, leading to a higher level of comparative competitiveness of the nation under study (Knight, 1997; Qiang, 2003).

3. The internationalization of education may also be a consequence of an academic rationale. Compliance with international academic standards is easier whenever an international dimension is added to teaching, research and the service (Knight, 1997) provided by universities. The international dimension will enhance the research and knowledge capacity of institutes of higher education as well as the acquisition of knowledge and language. Cultural and social factors (e.g. universities eager to increase cultural understanding; see Altbach and Knight, 2007) are also partly responsible for the internationalization of higher education (Knight, 1997).

Possible problems in a multicultural classroom

The four different drivers mentioned above, have initiated many universities to internationalize their core activities (education, research, service to society). The main emphasis in this study is on the interaction within a culturally diverse classroom. As such, the multicultural aspects of the learning and teaching process are of central concern in this study.

Interaction problems

Wiseman, Hammer and Nishida (1989) point out that multiple cultural backgrounds within a classroom may complicate interpersonal interaction between individuals. As such, mutual misunderstandings are likely to occur, and individuals may (at least potentially) develop a negative attitude towards individuals from other cultures. The mere exposure to multiple cultures in a culturally diverse class does not automatically result in successful intercultural interaction. Domestic students may show a tendency to stay in their own familiar group of friends and, at the same time, international students are more likely to form a national community (that is, a monocultural group) or become part of an international reservation (Otten, 2003). One reason for the development of monocultures (groups of students consisting of only one nationality) is students' expectation to achieve academic goals more easily alone, or alternatively, in homogeneous groups. (Otten, 2003). "A survey among German students (in Germany) found that more than 60% of them had no contact or hardly any contact with foreign students at their campus" (Bargel, 1998 in Otten, 2003, p.14).

Possible advantages of working in a multicultural class such as the development of intercultural competences can thus be dwindled by the development of monocultures. This is recognized by Le

Roux (2002) , who states that ethnical or cultural subgroups are a complicating factor for development of effective communication in a culturally diverse class. Otten (2003) states that an important task for teachers is to assure that the diversity of cultures in a classroom is used as a resource to create a rich environment where effective intercultural interaction takes place. Ideally, work assignments should be executed by multicultural groups. As such, the teacher is required to actively manage intercultural interactions among students. (le Roux, 2002). This is a challenging task as it typically required more time, energy and patience. In order to succeed, both the teacher and the students need to be motivated and institutional support should be provided (Otten, 2003). This requires a higher level of institutional flexibility (Cooper, 2007). "A common problem to all institutions is that they do not allow differences in interaction because all unknown and unexpected differences are disturbing elements to the institutional procedures. Diversity that cannot be assimilated to the frame of reference is perceived as disturbing to the institutional routines" (Otten, 2003, 16). The institutional routines referred to in this quote include routines like the selection of course content and material, design of classroom setting and teaching material, communication with students, the role of teachers, and routines regarding exams, plagiarism and absence.

Problems are also encountered due to fellow students' and teachers' inability to understand a foreign student's behavior when being confronted with another cultural environment. For instance, foreign students may demonstrate a tendency to segregate and isolate themselves and they may overreact and experience stress when being confronted with an unfamiliar culture. Such behavior may be interpreted by their teacher as an indication of their unwillingness to integrate, making a smooth integration even harder (Otten, 2003).

Language barriers

The unfamiliarity with the language of instruction may also create serious problems in the educational process. Many students in a culturally diverse classroom cannot use their mother language which makes effective interaction extremely hard. Besides difficulties related to comprehension, terms and expressions used may have a different connotation in ones own as opposed to the foreign language or culture. "Teaching in the international classroom requires lecturers to master specific skills that they cannot be expected to possess on the basis of their general academic background, which they have acquired by and large under national conditions" (Teekens, 2003, 112). So,, special attention should be paid to teaching staff's command of the language of instruction (that is mostly English). It is not only a matter of translating words; cultural values giving specific meaning to words play an important role here. "Values are mostly learned implicitly. Coded messages in speech, humor, body language, personal relations, and so much more

make the classroom a miniature country, reflecting all the social and cultural interaction in society at large. So, in spite of the fact that teaching is universal in nature, it tends to be very national in character” (Teekens, 2003, 114). Management must take staff development seriously if domestic staff is supposed to effectively function intercultural.

Possible solutions to deal with culture related problems.

The problems with intercultural interaction in class may have a negative influence on the development of intercultural competences of students. As mentioned before by Otten (2003), the teachers face the challenge of creating a learning environment in which intercultural learning can take place (e.g. Otten, 2003; Stier, 2003; Teekens, 2003). It is important that teachers are familiar with various teaching methods that help them dealing with different expectations of students from various cultures. Therefore, teachers should be familiar with a wide range of teaching methods and they should be encouraged to shape a broader, more international view during their teaching training (Otten, 2003). According to Adrian-Taylor, Noels and Tischler (2007) contact with and support from teachers is found to be particularly important for foreign graduate students’ academic success and effective intercultural interaction. Students who have a good relationship with their supervisors are more likely to experience low stress levels, minimal psychological and physical problems, and overall satisfaction with their business school.

Development of teaching staff

Internationalization of the staff is perceived as one of the important elements of internationalizing business schools (Olson and Kroeger, 2001). There are two ways of internationalizing your teaching staff: firstly, by attracting new intercultural competent teachers, and, secondly by exposing the existing staff to intercultural training and to get some teaching (and research) experience abroad.

Otten (2003) states that it is the responsibility of the teacher to create an intercultural classroom where intercultural skill development can take place, even though if it may be easier for students to achieve the academic goals when they work alone or in a monocultural group. It is Otten (2003) as well who states that the most practical way to deal with the different learning needs of students from various cultural backgrounds is to increase the number of teaching methods the teaching staff is familiar with. This should be achieved best by teacher training. “Teaching in intercultural educational environments should be sensitive to different cultural styles of learning and teaching. This sensitivity is essential, regardless of the subject, whether it is a ‘universal’ scientific phenomena or not” (Otten, 2003, 19).]

Selection of students

Selection of students can help accelerate the internationalization of the business department. By limiting the number of students coming from the same country, the establishment of monocultures can be avoided. It is also possible to select students on more personal characteristics, like 'openness', enhancing the interaction process.

Next to selection, students can also be made familiar with cultural differences, by offering them cognitive knowledge in courses or training of skills during specific workshops.

Method

Members of the management boards of ten business schools, that were part of ten Dutch universities were selected and invited to take part in the study. The authors excluded their home university from this study as to ensure that any prejudice or negative experiences would affect the results of this study. Business schools were selected if they offered economics, management, or business degrees. The criterion for selection of departments was that they had to offer management, economics or business degrees. Criterion for a respondent was that he/ she holds a position in the departmental board. They had responsibility for the internationalization of the business school (3 respondents), responsibility for education (or education and internationalization) at the business school (3 respondents), or familiarity with these two fields as a result of being a member of the board of the business school (1 respondent). So, in total seven respondents of seven business schools agreed to participate. All participants were male. The seven interviews were conducted face-to-face with the respondents at their universities in May and June 2009, using semi-structured interviews. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Respondents, as well as their universities, were assured of anonymity and confidentiality in the presentation of the research results. In six of the seven interviews two researchers were present. One of them asking questions, the second one making notes.

Results

The data obtained through the interviews was nicely organized in a table based on the three dimensions central to this research: drivers for internationalization, recognition of problems related to the presence of multiple cultures (in class), and measures taken to adequately deal with the problems encountered. The transcriptions of the interviews were systematically analyzed, and parts of the text were with respect to each of these three dimensions. For every dimension the case-wise results were summarized in Table 1 (see appendix) and the results were interpreted to assess the extent to which a dimension was present. The results of these analyses are elaborated on in the next section.

This study aimed to explore: (1) to what extent the business schools of 7 Dutch universities actually experience problems with effective intercultural communication in culturally diverse classrooms. (2), the presence of strategies and actions of the business schools to prevent from such problems to occur.

To get a feeling of the institutional context in which to place these results, first the drivers to internationalize of the different participating business departments are reflected.

Main motives for internationalization

As shown in the Introduction, universities may vary in terms of their motivation for internationalizing their core activities, as well as the extent to which they internationalize.

In four of the interviews, changing academic standards were mentioned to be the main motive for internationalization (case 1, 4, 7, 8). More specifically, three out of four respondents referred to quality of research as a driver for internationalization (case 1, 7, 8). The exact reasons mentioned include “eagerness to be the best international player in a specific field of research (case 1)”, “a university department’s success is mainly determined by the international reputation attracted on in a research area (case 7)”, and “internationalizing without a quality impulse is nothing. We do not want to have international academic staff, just because they are from abroad. We want to recruit the best person which implies that you have to recruit internationally, simply because not all the best researchers can be found in just one country. (case 8).” In the fourth case, the respondent emphasized that the internationalization of the business department is a result of the nature of science: “Within the scientific world there is a tendency to work across borders. At this moment you will see that our staff has many international contacts. Many things you don’t have to stimulate, they just happen because scientists in general think across borders (case 4)”. The respondents of cases 1, 7, and 8 indicated that the internationalization of their business schools was mainly a result of their eagerness to excel in publishing scientific research. The respondent of case 4 indicated that internationalization at their business school was more a natural way in which universities in general tend to develop. So, in quite some cases the main motive of internationalization is to enhance the academic quality of the business school, reflected in the number of high quality scientific publications.

In two other cases (case 3, 5) the preparation of students to work and live in a global environment was considered to be the most important factor of internationalization. “We consider it to be important that students in order to prepare for their future performance have worked in an international environment. That they have worked with students from China or Korea for example, and that they have noticed that the way of work may be very different (case 3)”. To create an

international atmosphere the respondent of case 5 indicated that “a critical mass of foreign students and foreign teachers is necessary to bring the Dutch in international spheres”.

In only one case (case 2) economic motives were considered to be the main driver to internationalize. “To internationalize is not a goal in itself, but to be honest, at a certain moment it is just a matter of survival (case 2)”.

So, overall we find that the quality motive and the motive to prepare students for a future international working environment are the most important drivers for internationalization by the business schools.

The fourth group of drivers for internationalization, social and cultural motives, was not mentioned by any of the respondents during the interviews.

Recognition of problems regarding effective intercultural communication

During all interviews respondents indicated that they recognized problems with effective intercultural communication. The problems mentioned varied from different expectations of the students regarding examinations, teaching styles and grading process, to problems in group work, intercultural interaction and non-integration of foreign and domestic students. Two respondents indicated particularly culturally related problems of individual foreign students (cases 1 and 2), whereas the other five respondents indicated particularly interaction and integration problems within a culturally diverse class (cases 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8).

Problems related to interaction and integration

In the theoretical part of the introduction, the difficulty of integration of domestic and foreign students was mentioned as a result of the formation of monocultures and the tendency of students to interact mostly with students from their own country. Such patterns of behavior were identified by the respondents from cases 4, 5 and 7. The respondent from case 4 mentioned “you must ensure that you don’t have too many students from a single foreign country, otherwise a monoculture will develop. Different monocultures are then likely to exist next to each other.” This respondent indicated that a large group of students with the same cultural background is likely to internally hide any problem they might have with the institutional education system, resulting in teachers not noticing the existence of problems until the moment of truth, e.g. during examination. Another problem related to a low level of integration of foreign and domestic students was reported by the respondent of case 5. The respondent indicated that differences exist in the way Dutch and foreign students approach their study. For Dutch students the informal part of studying, social life, and developing yourself outside the walls of the university is considered to be important. For students

from abroad their study is “their reason to be here”. These differences in their study mentality resulted in “cultural clashes” according to the respondent of case 5. “The risk exists that when the group of foreign students is too small (compared to the group of Dutch students) they become a subgroup and that they start to behave as a subgroup.” This may inhibit further integration. The group of foreign students can even find itself positioned opposite to the group of domestic students.

The respondent of case 7 also listed having difficulties with the integration of students. “Dutch students prefer to work with Dutch students; Germans prefer to work with Germans. Groups of students have the tendency to stay with their own core.” The existence and development of monocultures also stimulated prejudices towards other cultures: “Italians are lazy, Chinese don’t speak English, South-Americans don’t live up to their agreements, et cetera.” Another reason complicating the integration of foreign students concerns the fact that there is hardly any integration of students outside the university. “Student and study associations fail to commit foreign students to them. Also in boards and councils you see hardly any foreign students. There is a separate guesthouse for international students, so it stays a bit of a separate group.”

The presence of a large group of students from the same cultural background is not always cumbersome. The respondent of case 8 indicated that in their international oriented program, many different nationalities are present. Except for the domestic (Dutch) students, which represent approximately 50% of all students enrolled in the programme. The fact of having such a large group of domestic students does not create any problems with intercultural interactions according to the respondent: “that is, because the Dutch group of students has a very international mind, they have a very international outlook, and they want to work with international people.” This business department (case 8) selects both foreign and domestic students on these personal characteristics, like openness and inquisitiveness. The respondent indicated that presently they did not have culturally related problems, although in the past they had some problems with students from Asia. Especially, adjustment problems as well as a lack of assertiveness were among the most common problems.

The problems identified by the respondent of case 3 also include problems with regard to effective intercultural interaction. Although, the respondent did not relate these problems to a possible existence of monocultures. He mentioned that “It is difficult to involve students from Asia in dialogues. And, in groups Asian students often have the propensity to copy texts produced by other students, the well-known problem of plagiarism.” The respondent of case 3 indicated that both

domestic and foreign students are likely to have very similar expectations of the study, but different expectations regarding the nature of the educational system.

Individual problems

When discussing issues with culturally diverse classes, the respondent of case 1 indicated, that there were not many problems at their university. The cooperation between domestic and foreign students goes well. "Is not always easy, but there have been no strange events where students think 'how do we have to solve this'? They are young and flexible." Some individual problems are, however, recognized by the respondent. These problems relate to different expectations of individual students more than interaction or integration problems between culturally distinct groups. The respondent provided an example of Chinese students who have different expectations of grading and the consequences of the grades they receive. The Chinese students are selected to come to this university and have paid their tuition fees. "They have put money into their studies and they cannot go back to China without losing face if they do not have their diploma, that's not possible." These (Chinese) students reason that they invested money into the programme, which should result into a diploma in the end.

The respondent of case 2 also mentioned different expectations of the educational system between students from different cultural backgrounds, e.g. uncertainty about what to learn exactly for examinations. "The students who are not used to our way of examining need much more clarity about what to know for a specific exam." Also examination styles are different and therefore sometimes problematic: "multiple-choice for example, what we use sometimes is for some foreign students really impossible to pass successfully. These foreign students have never done it before, while the Dutch students already made national assessment (the CITO-exam) in multiple-choice format at the end of primary school."

Solutions to culturally related problems

Although all 7 respondents recognized some culture related problems, measures taken to solve or prevent these problems to occur differ strongly. Measures used differ from offering both academic teachers and students the possibility to voluntarily attend courses on improving their intercultural skills, to more encompassing solutions as attention for dealing with cross cultural differences in a multicultural classroom as part of a development trajectory of academic teachers.

The respondent of one institute (case 7) indicated culture-related problems between students and/or students and staff. To tackle the problem, they installed a workgroup which was given the

task to identify the main problems and to provide possible solutions. The workgroup indicated that continuous monitoring and training is necessary for the staff that has difficulties interacting with students from different cultures. To guarantee cultural awareness of all staff, the workgroup proposed to include cross-cultural training in the basic training programme for academic teachers where their educational skills are developed. A similar solution is already implemented by the business department of case 8. Within the business school of this institute attention for cross cultural problems and how to cope with them is part of the training and development of staff with teaching tasks in a tenure track (most of the new scientific employees start in such a tenure track). Hence, it is an integrated part of the development of the staff with teaching tasks. Failure to cope with cultural differences has consequences for tenure. Besides this development of the teaching staff, the respondent of case 8 also mentioned various measures they installed in or even before the first year of their international programmes. These measures include selecting only those foreign students who are likely to succeed in the educational system of this business school, the creation of multicultural work groups (groups of culturally diverse students working on a problem or case), courses on how to work with cultural differences, and a buddy and mentoring system.

The respondent of case 4 emphasizes the importance of teaching experience for the teaching staff. All teachers have gone through the 'basic qualification in education'. This didactical course, required to teach in universities includes some elements of teaching multicultural classes. "Learning from theory is one, to put it into practice is much harder and, hence, the classroom is the place where you have to learn it."

To solve culture related problems from occurring, the respondent recognized the importance of preventing the development of monocultures, by limiting the number of students coming from one country. Another solution was found in training students how to operate in multicultural settings in general and more specific in culturally diverse classroom settings.

The respondent of case 5 used different measures to solve integration problems between culturally diverse students. Firstly, international students were asked to indicate the problems they faced. This was done to get a clear image of the existing problems. Secondly, meetings were organized, where students had to reflect and describe their own cultures and to identify those values that they found most important for their studies. These exercises were facilitated only by expert teachers. The students themselves led and organised the meetings. "It was an extraordinary good and useful exercise, it forced students to think about and reflect on their own behavior. It was really valuable and it resulted in a set of 'campus values'.", according to the respondent of case 5. This exercise took place in 2006. The next years, the viability of the 'campus values' was discussed together with a

delegation of the students. Every few years this exercise should be repeated, according to the respondent..

In their programmes students were selected only if they were international minded.

The examples provided of measures taken by the institutes of cases 5, 7, and 8 to prevent or solve culture related problems, is in contrast with cases 1, 2, 3 where no or minimal measures have been installed. The respondent of case 1 indicated that they had learnt from the experiences and mistakes of other departments of their university regarding the recruitment of foreign students. As an example he states that they have never recruited extensive numbers of Chinese students due to proper selection. "You definitely want to have a strict selection procedure when students come from abroad."... "We have a Chinese former colleague of us, who does the selection of the Chinese students for us. That is one of the most difficult barriers to overcome, to determine how to separate the chaff from wheat. Because of cultural differences it is very difficult to do it." The respondent of the case 2 indicated that they organize panel discussions with delegates of the students, both domestic and foreign, four times a year, to discuss what problems exist. The next step is than to discuss these difficulties with the respective teachers. Those discussions are not explicitly focused on cross cultural problems.

In contrast to the respondents of case 1 and 2, the respondent of case 3, recognized culturally related interaction problems. To overcome these problems students and teachers were offered on a voluntarily basis, to participate in courses discussing cultural differences, and aiming to improve intercultural skills.

Discussion

The objective of this research was to explore and to describe to what extent the different business schools of Dutch universities identify culture related problems in their multicultural classrooms and what strategies / measures are taken to prevent from or cope with these problems.

As argued in the theoretical part of this paper, differences were expected between business schools in the way they dealt with culture related problems in their classrooms. Different drivers to internationalize, differences in the history of the business schools result in different perceptions of problems encountered in culturally diverse classrooms. Respondents (deans, vice-deans, coordinators) from all participating business schools have recognized at least some form of culture related problems. The problems recognized include individual writing problems of foreign students, as well as more complex interaction and integration problems between foreign and domestic

students and teachers. Measures taken for dealing with these culture related problems differ a lot as well, varying from selection of students to the supply of courses for both teachers and students to improve their understanding of different cultures. In one case a large exercise was performed with students to come up with a set of campus values.

All participating departments have at least several years of experience with culturally diverse classrooms. Why these differences in perception with regard to culture related problems? A reason for these differences might be found in the sensitivity and awareness of the teaching and supporting academic staff that problems occurring are a result of cultural differences. A second reason might be the level of internationalization in terms of the number of foreign students present at campus, and the level of institutional internationalization at the campus. Institutional internationalization refers to whether the organizational structure is open or not to foreign staff to make career within the university for example. Indications were found that this last argument might be a determining factor. Further research is required to investigate this in depth.

The results show that those business departments that have encountered or experienced the more complex integration or interaction problems between foreign and domestic students and teachers, have also implemented, or are installing, more encompassing measures (workgroup discussing campus values, panel meeting, intercultural awareness training, and selection of students) to prevent culture related problems from occurring (cases 5, 7, and 8). Those business departments are aware of the importance of the role of the teacher as an active manager of cross cultural encounters and interaction. This is in line with the points of view of Le Roux (2002), Teekens (2003), Stier (2003) and Otten (2003), who bring forward the importance of a cross cultural competent teacher. To enhance the knowledge and skills of the teaching staff, the respondents of cases 7 and 8 indicated that they are implementing, or have already implemented an intercultural training for their teachers. that is ongoing and does not consist of a single day training only.

Solving or preventing culture related problems from occurring is, however, not only the task of the teachers in the classrooms. There must be institutional support. Selection of students on language, motivation, and general management knowledge (using tests) is another option that is embraced by most of the respondents. However, in most cases, only selection on language proficiency takes place. The role of language in culturally diverse classrooms is not to be underestimated. Many authors have mentioned it as a potential problematic issue in multicultural settings (e.g. Teekens, 2003; Wiseman et al., 1989). The respondents of cases 1 and 8 indicated that a normal proof of English was not enough for those students coming from Asian countries. In case 1, a former employee of the

university who now lives in China is responsible for the selection of Chinese students in China. . The respondent of case 8 indicated that they require, especially for students coming from Asia, a proof of active language proficiency to ensure that they are able to participate actively in group discussions.

This study was not meant to judge the participating business schools on the way they treat their culture- related issues. The sole objective was to provide insight in the differences that exist and to provide an overview of what measures seem to be appropriate to support cultural interaction in culturally diverse classrooms. There is no single solution to culture related problems and any measure taken should always fit the context of the educational institute. Measures include student selection, especially with a focus on (active) language proficiency during the education process. As the Dutch educational system is more interactive than most foreign students are used to, students are required to participate actively in group work and discussions. Another measure, mentioned more often is providing courses to students and teachers on cultural differences and the effects these differences might have on group work in class, or work in general. A third measure relates to the role of the teacher. Teachers should be aware of potential problems between foreign and domestic students when they have to work together or potential problems in their own interaction with foreign students. As suggested by various authors, but also by different respondents during this study, a combination of ongoing teacher training in combination with in-class practice seems to be most effective in preventing culture related problems from occurring.

Based on this study no indications were found that a relationship exists between a business department's driver for internationalization and the level of recognized culture related problems or preventive measures. The question raises, however, to what extent a business school should try to satisfy the needs of the foreign students. As foreign students have made the choice to study abroad, they may be expected to be willing to adjust themselves to the Dutch business schools' educational system. However, this is a question that should be answered by each single institute based on their drivers for internationalization and their institutional vision. Not for every institute internationalization is a central concept to their daily business, and hence, marginal activity in this field is enough to achieve their objectives.

Recommendations

Although this research is descriptive in nature we like to sum up some recommendations for business schools in Dutch universities with regard to internationalization.

Internationalization is firmly present in most Dutch business schools today. After a period of experimentation since the late nineties with regard to internationalizing the curriculum, attracting foreign students and staff, it is time to move to a new phase of embedding the internationalization process more firmly into the organization. Some universities find themselves clearly into this new phase while others are still in the first phase.

Central point in internationalizing the business school is to answer the question how to enhance the learning climate and to give students the opportunity to learn in an internationalized business school. The most important moment for learning by students is in the moment of cultural interaction between students and between students and teaching staff in the classroom. The key actor from the business school side in this process is the teacher. To optimize this learning moment, business schools need to install structural and behavioral measures. From the interviews it was clear that not all business schools experience problems with regard to internationalization; this is however no guarantee of a good quality internationalization process. The sheer lack of visible problems in intercultural education is often related to the lack of cross-cultural awareness of the teaching staff making them not very capable in critically reviewing the learning processes in class resulting in lower levels of reporting 'problems'. This inhibits an effective intercultural learning process for the students; cross-cultural education will per definition 'normally' lead to problems among or between students which can then be used to start a problem-related learning process.

From the structural side it is important that internationalization is part of the overall strategy and is visibly supported by the management of the faculty. By describing the strategic aims with regard to internationalization, the management will become aware of the drivers behind this process. Clarity about these drivers is fundamental to success.

In order to shape supporting conditions for learning during cross-cultural interactions in class, the recruitment and selection process need to be critically thought through. As concluded from the interviews, it is important to manage the expectations of students with regard to success. Students should have a sophisticated level of English in order to guarantee active participation and communication in the learning process and to increase the chance of graduation. Especially for students from Asia a failure to graduate is hard to overcome due to the existence of a shame culture. Besides, skills in using research methods is a necessity for graduating in Dutch business schools while this is not always the case in foreign universities. Selection is also important to prevent the formation of monocultures which have a devastating effect on integration. The existence of large cohorts of students of a single country may hide culture-related problems. Large cohorts may also impede cross-cultural learning of the individual students. Active involvement of students in discussing intercultural related problems may contribute to a better learning climate in class and benefit individual cross-cultural learning.

Not only students, also staff should be qualified and motivated to interact with the foreign students. This means that staff development should take place with regard to internationalization of the business school; this can be reached by (English) language training and cross-cultural training. The teaching staff must be aware of their own values and their own perspectives on learning; besides, staff needs to enlarge their learning styles repertoires. The first activity takes place in most business schools from the research; the second in almost none. Staff development is a long term process where training, experience, and reflection need to alternate. Although the teaching staff of business schools travels a lot and presents articles in international conferences, from the interviews it became clear that they hardly ever teach to classes abroad.

Another structural measure, only incidentally chosen in some business schools, is a 'buddy' system where foreign students are coached by a host student.

In summary, although there is a general (proud) feeling of international awareness among Dutch citizens in general but also among staff in higher education, in reality, staff and management of Dutch business schools is not enough aware of the conditions necessary for cross-cultural learning. We hope that this research contributes to more awareness.

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Appendix

Table 1: Overview of the different dimensions per case study.

| Dimension | Indicators | Case 1 | Case 2 | Case 3 | Case 4 | Case 5 | Case 6 | Case 7 | Case 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| General info about int. | Drivers for int. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality of research - Positioning - Appearance - Network | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Means to survive - Keeping number of students up level - Reputation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reputation - Offering students an int. environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural process inherent to nature of universities - Logical response to int. of business environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offering of an international environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation - Not so many policies indicating that it might not be a priority. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - necessary to compete with int. renowned business schools - Quality of research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quality of research - Quality in general - |
| | Int. of organization / management | Hardly any. No int. staff on management positions. Most meetings still in Dutch | Hardly any. No int. staff on management positions. Main language throughout the organization is Dutch. Meetings more and more in English. | Only slightly. Almost none int staff members on management positions | Slightly. | No. Meetings of management are in Dutch. | Yes. International staff also on important positions | Difficult. Management is Dutch. Dutch language is used mainly. Management is done the Dutch way. | Yes. Dean is international. Supporting staff is becoming international as well. |
| Consciousness of cross cultural issues | Recognition of importance of language | Slightly. Recognition of lack of professional communication in English. | Slightly. Recognition of Dutch bachelors as barrier for int students. | Yes. English important since it is recognized that it can cause difficulties next to cross cultural problems. | Yes. Important to attract foreign students. | Yes. Only Dutch is spoken in classtime to prevent internationals from feeling excluded. | Yes. If teachers do not have an adequate level of English they lose a part of their didactical skills. | Yes. The faced problems with the integration of int. students in faculty councils due to language barriers. | Yes. To prepare students for international work environment. To prepare students for international competition for jobs. |
| | Recognition of cross cultural problems in multicultural classrooms | Yes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different expectations of examinations - Not used to negative | Yes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -used to different teaching styles -not used to buy books -different examination | Yes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -interaction -group work -plagiarism -put up jobs | Yes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different expectations of examinations of int. students. | Yes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International students have a different perception of studying as part of their lives. - Exclusion of | Not known. | Yes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Misunderstanding of Asian cultures. - Problems with interaction. - Problems with | Yes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff used to use different teaching styles - Native English speakers speak too fast. |

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| | | marks | methods. | | - Inappropriate to ask questions - plagiarism | int. students in commissions because of language issues. | | monocultures - Integration of students is difficult. | - |
| | Measures taken to tackle cross cultural problems | Some. - Strict selection of foreign students | No. Only standard evaluations (both paper and panel). | Some. voluntarily. - Voluntarily modules are available for students and modules are available for teachers. Modules aim to improve intercultural skills. | Some. - Use of teaching assistants. - Teachers teach groups of students how to deal with different cultures, also in educational settings. - Preventing for mono cultures. | Yes. Exercise with international students to identify all the problems the face. Exercise with all students to let them formulate 'campus values'. | Not known | Yes. Work group has been formed led by an intercultural coordinator. Task is to identify problems and to come up with plans to improve intercultural cooperation and integration. | Yes. Development trajectory as part of tenure track with specific attention for dealing with cross cultural differences in a single classroom. Selecting only int. students who are likely to succeed and have a good level of English. Students of IBA in the first year have a buddy system, mentor system and cross cultural groups are created. |
| Int. of faculty / staff | Recruitment of int. staff | Yes. Recruiting best researchers. Staff not yet int. Staff has still more disadvantages than advantages. | Yes, but is difficult. For int. study preference for int. staff. For other studies not necessarily. | Yes. Searching for both Dutch and internationals. Slight preference for int. staff. | Yes. Recruiting on int. job markets. | Yes. | Yes. | Yes. Recruitment on international job markets | Yes. But not recruiting just to recruit int. staff, but recruiting the best people to enhance quality of the business school. |
| | Intercultural development / training of staff | No. | No. Doubts if different qualities are necessary to teach in multicultural | Yes it is possible to attend a module to train intercultural skills, but it is | Slightly. Experience is seen as the best way to learn how to operate in multicultural | No. Almost none teaching staff development. Supporting staff has received a | Probably. Respondent is not aware of it. General perception of development | Yes in development. Working on a continuous process that evaluates and | Slightly. Part of tenure track. Dependent per person if international experience is |

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| | | | groups in comparison to teaching domestic groups. | not mandatory. (not a majority who attended the modules) | classrooms. International experience that is stimulated is mostly research based. | cc training. | opportunities is good. English diploma is required for every teacher teaching in English. | improves the cross cultural competences of teaching staff. | extra stimulated or not. |
| Other remarks | | | Not yet alert that students from other cultures might have different expectations of their teachers. | | Some developments regarding internationalization just occur and are not a result of strict policy making. | | Education is more important than research. (Respondent is only working for 3 months for this university) | | |