

Chapter 55

Dealing With Cross– Cultural Issues in Culturally Diverse Classrooms: The Case of Dutch Business Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the extent to which faculties receive support in their coping with the challenge of cultural differences in their international classroom. The authors explore this relationship in eight business schools in Dutch research universities. These cases offer an in-depth description of the problems encountered in cross-cultural interactions, such as development of monocultural groups, lack of proper foreign language understanding, and stereotyping. They also discuss potential solutions in terms of language training, cultural awareness training for both teachers and students, institutional support, and the business school's rationale for internationalization.

INTRODUCTION

As a response to a globalizing world, business schools are becoming more internationally oriented (e.g., Altbach, 2015b; Beerkens & Van Der Wende, 2007; Deardorff, de Wit, & Heyl, 2012; Guillotin & Mangematin, 2015; Kedia & Englis, 2011; Knight, 2015). This international orientation has resulted in classrooms occupied by teachers and students belonging to different cultures, all of whom are engaged

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in a cross-cultural learning process (Makalela, 2015; Otten, 2003). Several authors (Childress, 2009; Kwok & Arpan, 1994; Qiang, 2003; Van Damme, 2001) indicate that institutes of higher education vary substantially in internationalization, from only being involved in student-exchange with the European Erasmus program representing a low international profile up to joint degree programs and overseas campuses representing a high international profile. Depending on the international profile a different degree of understanding and support may be expected from the business schools management.

One of the relatively new elements in international business schools is the presence of students representing different national cultures which can lead to both opportunities as well as barriers for learning. The ability to cope with cultural differences within the international classroom requires new competencies from the teachers and students. International and intercultural competencies are also perceived as important to develop in international higher education according to the Dutch Ministry of Culture, Education, and Science (Van Gaalen & Gielesen, 2014). Language skills is another competency in need of improvement for teachers and students in international higher education. Brustein (2007) signals a lack of competence and a lack of interest in studying foreign languages among US students, while companies search for students having these foreign language skills. Sawir (2005) contends that there is a lack of language skills among Asian international students studying in Australia. The former requirements for competence development of students and teachers in higher education raise the question about the degree of the institutional support given by the management of these business schools. Depending on their drivers for internationalization this support may be stronger or weaker with the risk that many institutes may not realize or underestimate the (devastating) consequences of their (lack of) support for the learning process of the individual students and the job satisfaction of the business school's faculty. This introduction leads us to the following central questions for this study.

How can we improve understanding of (1) the role of culture in the learning process in the international classroom, (2) how to improve the learning process across different cultures, and (3) the support business schools provide to faculties to adequately deal with such culture related challenges in the learning process. In addition to these three questions, we explore the relationship between the business school's degree of support and its rationale for stimulating internationalization processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Different Rationales

Researchers investigating the effectiveness of cross-cultural learning processes have identified several rationales underlying business schools' internationalization process (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Padlee, Kamaruddin, & Baharun, 2010). This literature review identifies six rationales. First, increasing globalization will lead to more students operating in an international business setting after graduation (Qiang, 2003). Thus, the business school aims to offer a learning environment that reflects this setting, namely, a community of people from different cultures (students and teachers) that experiences learning through interpersonal interactions. The goal of this learning experience is to equip students with the academic and professional competencies required to be successful in their future careers.

The second rationale is grounded in the idea that to excel in highly specialized scientific research, which typically requires substantial research funding investments and specialized staff, international col-

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