

Study or internship abroad and the acquisition of international competencies



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Translation: J. den Heijer

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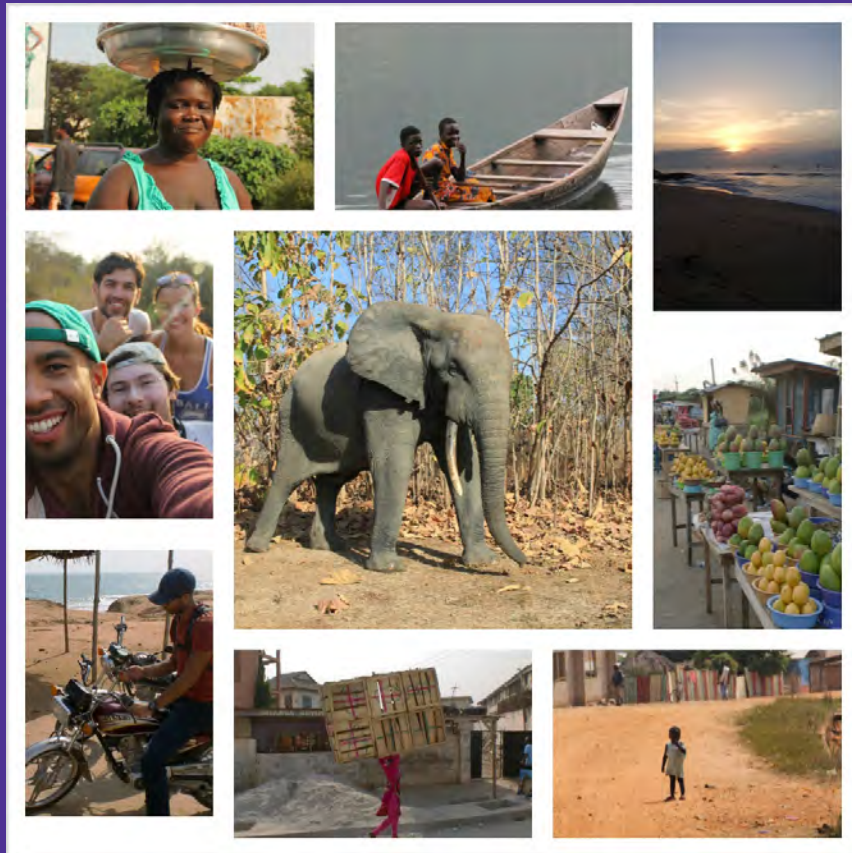
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1 Introduction

International cooperation has always been a characteristic of Higher Education. In a world in which borders are fading and global issues are increasing in severity and size, and the power and scope of communication is expanding, internationalization is both facilitated and needed more than ever.

There is a multitude of reasons for Higher Education Institutes to cooperate internationally, including pedagogical, economic, socio-cultural, academic, and political reasons. Internationalization is believed to contribute to the quality of education, as well as the international and social profile of a university. It provides institutions with a competitive advantage when attracting foreign students, and counterbalances demographic developments. It is also believed to address the needs and wishes of students and staff. In other words, there are several incentives for internationalization, and it is often not particularly clear exactly which incentive brings about which activity and with which objective (*cf.* Childress, 2010).

The main rationale for internationalization in universities of applied sciences is in producing graduates who are world citizens: who possess the set of international competencies needed to function well in international and multicultural work and social environments. Through internationalization, universities hope to deliver graduates who are open and respectful towards other cultures and ideas, who have knowledge of their profession on an international level, who are familiar with their own culture and those of others, who know other countries, are multilingual and have the ability to listen, observe, analyze, relate and reflect. Alumni equipped with those competencies are able to function better and more easily in a globalized world and a multicultural environment. They have learned how to behave appropriately and are able to communicate effectively in other cultural settings.

Universities have various internationalization instruments at their disposal, for example, student and staff mobility, an internationalized curriculum, internationalization at home through international classrooms, minors,

summer schools, educational and research partnerships with foreign institutions and capacity building projects in developing countries. It is not always clear if and how various types of activities affect the development of individual competencies, and to what extent. It is often assumed that there is a causal relation between effort and effect, but this assumption is rarely verified.

The development plans of The Hague University of Applied Sciences (HOP 7, 2009-2013; HOP 8, 2014-2020) stipulate that it is the university's vision *to train students to be globally-minded professionals with an international and multicultural perspective, who are world-citizens, interested in global issues and able to deal with diversity in a constructive manner. They are to be professionals, who possess the competencies to function well in an international and intercultural environment.*

The Hague University of Applied Sciences states in its 2014 Institutional Strategic Plan "Global Citizens in a Learning Society" the ambition to be the most international institution of its kind in The Netherlands by 2020. This was taken up in the internationalization policy plan for 2015-2020.

Central to that comprehensive policy is that students should be given the opportunity to develop the necessary international competencies in each program.

This was also described in the old THUAS internationalization Policy (Nooij, 2011), in force at the time of this study, which was completed in 2013. This publication is a translation of the study in Dutch (Hoven & Walenkamp, 2013).

The basic principle of both the old and the new policy is that students of all faculties and degree programs are equipped with international competencies, that they are introduced to internationalization and that they are prepared for an international future. Consequently, every faculty is to incorporate internationalization in its multi-annual 2020 plan outlining what the desired approach is in developing the international competencies of their students. All programs are to internationalize their curricula, introduce the concept

of global citizenship and enhance the internationalization means to achieve these goals in their own way.

The Research Group International Cooperation¹ aspires to generate knowledge that supports universities of applied sciences in the development and implementation of their internationalization policies. Besides gaining insight into which international competencies the job market requires, and what skills, knowledge and attitude are needed by teaching staff, it is also important to explore the effectiveness of different instruments in developing international competencies among students, and to find out how these instruments can be used most effectively (*cf.* Walenkamp & Funk, 2014; Funk et al., 2014a,b; Walenkamp, 2014; Funk & Walenkamp, 2013; Hoven & Walenkamp, 2013; Hernández Sanchez & Walenkamp, 2013a,b; Walenkamp & Hoven, 2011).

The focus of the present study is the extent to which an internship or study abroad contributes to students' development of international competencies, such as interpersonal and intercultural competencies, foreign language skills, and international academic and professional competencies.

In the academic year 2009-2010 a quantitative preliminary study was conducted among all students who had been on a study or internship abroad in that particular year (Walenkamp & Hoven, 2011). In 2011-2012 follow-up research was done among several selected groups of students.

The purpose of this research is to provide insight into the possible added value of a study or internship abroad to the development of students' international competencies, and the conditions and factors influencing this development.

The hypothesis is that an experience abroad for study or internship purposes does, in fact, stimulate the acquisition of international competencies.

The importance of a foreign experience in acquiring international competencies is not fully recognized by all. Various authors have indicated that the educative effects of a stay abroad are mostly related to interpersonal

¹ Lectoraat Internationale Samenwerking

and intercultural developments and to a considerably lesser extent to academic and professional development.

Stronkhorst (2005), for instance, concluded that the greatest value of a stay abroad, according to students, was the element of fun and adventure, followed by personal development. Academic and professional development scored significantly lower. Paunescu (2008) also states that the educative effects of a stay abroad mostly lie in personal, social and cultural development and to a significantly lesser extent in academic and professional development. The added educative value can mainly be found in extracurricular, social and cultural areas. However, according to Paunescu, this does not imply that the international experience, the increased autonomy and foreign language skills cannot have a positive effect on the employability of students.

Nevertheless, Tan & Alan (2010) emphasize the importance of international exchange in the professional development of students. An experience abroad does not only contribute to the development of their foreign language skills, but the 'culture shock' also forces participants to look at their experiences and behavior, and their professional development, from different perspectives. Treading outside their comfort zone and being immersed in a completely different, unfamiliar professional context allows participants to compare a variety of professional approaches, to become aware of their own professional practice, and to reflect on these critically.



Research among former Erasmus students, questioned five years after their stay abroad, showed that their foreign experience had had a positive effect on their job perspectives and career progression in various areas such as chances of getting a first job, responsibilities given, and getting a position and salary appropriate for their educational background (Janson et al., 2009). Research suggests that participation in the Erasmus exchange program is a successful 'door opener'. International experience does not only increase international competencies, but also improves other, so called 'soft skills', which are greatly valued by employers as well. Study abroad is viewed as an indicator of these competencies and may therefore improve one's chances of finding a job. However, when comparing these data with those of earlier studies, these positive effects do seem to decrease over time.²

A recent Erasmus Impact Study (Brandenburg, 2014) again gives the "effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalization of higher education institutions". An interesting study, "Hidden Competences", by the Finnish organizations Demos and CIMO found that 'skills and knowledge that result from international experiences are the kind of competences that the labour market needs... but seems incapable of recognising these competences; they are hidden', and they should be made visible (Leppänen, Saarinen, Nupponen & Airas, 2014).

In their study among American employers, Orahod, Kruze & Pearson (2004) also found that employers value study-related experiences abroad, and believe that these experiences contribute to the development of skills which are highly appreciated. Students themselves also acknowledge that their stay abroad has enabled them to both grow on a personal level, and to develop skills that strengthen their position on the job market. These skills include: having a holistic perspective, managing day-to-day activities, problem-solving in unfamiliar cultural contexts, communicative skills in diverse cross-cultural contexts, open mindedness, and respect for other cultures.

² Besides this, it was also noted that the effect cannot fully be attributed to participation in the Erasmus exchange program. First of all, because many participants had already had some experience abroad before going abroad as part of their degree. Moreover, more than half of the participants also appeared to have stayed abroad outside the Erasmus exchange program. In other words, Erasmus exchange students are a selective group in terms of grades, interest in foreign experience, foreign language skills, and the ability to afford an international experience.

Existing international literature puts forward multiple factors that influence the effects of a stay abroad on the development of international competencies:

a. Factors related to Personal Background:

- the motivation and expectations of the student;
- previous experience abroad and experience in interacting with other cultures;
- the starting level of the student in terms of foreign language proficiency and intercultural skills: the higher their initial skill levels, the less effective a stay abroad will be on the development of international competencies. At the same time, having basic knowledge, skills and an appropriate attitude does improve the chances of interacting with the local population, operating successfully and to maximizing the international learning experience (Stronkhorst, 2005; Groisbois et al., 2010).
- the student's conceptual and analytical skills, as well as the cognitive ability to identify and verbalize international experiences.

b. Conditions surrounding their stay abroad:

- The duration of the international experience: some authors claim that a period of three to four months is too short to make significant progress in competency development (Caudery et al., 2008; Stronkhorst, 2005).
- The living and housing conditions while staying abroad, such as the level of involvement and interaction with the local community, versus a stay in an 'international bubble' (Caudery et al., 2008; Groisbois et al., 2010). In relation to this, Paige & Goode (2009) describe several situational variables and personal factors that can cause intense emotions and psychological stress, and could, consequently, affect the developmental process. These factors include *cultural difference; ethnocentrism; cultural immersion; cultural isolation; language; prior intercultural experience; expectations; (in)visibility; status; power and control*.
- Vande Berg & Paige (2009) emphasize the importance of conditions and factors that force students to tread outside their 'comfort zone' and confront them with direct, authentic, and cultural encounters: proficiency

in the local language which enables interaction; being more or less forced to communicate in a foreign language; the intensive interaction with the local population by, for instance, taking part in local community programs, doing voluntary work; living among the local population; a minimum stay of a semester, and the opportunity to relate real experiences to abstract knowledge.

c. Support provided by the home institution prior to, during and after the stay abroad.

An important condition for the development of international competencies is an adequate support system provided by the home institution before, during and after a stay abroad.

According to De Wit (2011), it is a misconception that mobility automatically leads to internationalization and the many assumptions regarding the added value of mobility are questionable. Research indicates that if students are merely sent abroad, without any preparation or supervision, the added value in terms of international and intercultural competencies remains limited (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001; Stronkhorst, 2005; Bennet, 2009; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009; Deardorff, 2006, 2009; Weber-Bosley, 2010). An international experience unaccompanied by preparation and supervision specifically aimed at intercultural development will achieve only limited effects.

"... without explicit and intentional intervention into the study-abroad experience, students, in general, will limit themselves to surface-level observations and experiences abroad, ..., the intercultural learning process requires a framework within which students reflect on their experiences, analyze behaviours and values, suggest tentative conclusions or generalizations, and apply such on the next set of experiences."
(Weber-Bosley, 2010: 58)

The 'traditional' notion that a foreign experience and immersion in a foreign culture more or less automatically lead to an increase in international competencies does not fully correspond with reality.

Vande Berg & Paige (2009) have identified a paradigm shift in which more emphasis is placed on school support specifically targeted at developing these competencies:

“research was confirming that many if not most U.S. students were not in fact learning effectively abroad when left to their own devices, ..., the researchers found that U.S. students clearly benefit when their learning is facilitated”. (Vande Berg & Paige, 2009: 432)

“the traditional non-interventionist study abroad paradigm is waning. ... a new paradigm is emerging, one based on the understanding that students learn more effectively abroad when we intervene in their learning”. (ib.: 433)

It is therefore not surprising that existing literature focuses extensively on various aspects of targeted supervision, and the importance of providing this support prior to, during and after students' stay abroad. (Orahod et al., 2004; Stronkhorst, 2005; Cauderey et al., 2008; CERI, 2008; Deardorff, 2009; Paige & Goode, 2009; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009; Weber-Bosley, 2010; Hernández Sanchez & Walenkamp, 2013).

Programs of study therefore need to define clearly what the “*what, why and how of various international orientation activities*” (Stronkhorst, 2002) are. In other words, visualizing the underlying reasons for internationalization, explaining why internationalization is important and how it relates to a professional profile, deciding which competencies need to be developed and how an international experience can contribute to this developments, and finally outlining how internationalization can be incorporated in the curriculum.

Yet, too many students are still leaving their home institution without any specific preparation regarding foreign language skills and intercultural competencies. Consequently, many of the anticipated outcomes in terms of competency development are not achieved.

As Paige & Goode state, effective preparation is crucial in the development of intercultural competencies. However, preparation alone is not enough: intentional intercultural learning also has to be incorporated in students' experiences during and after their stay abroad:

“The intercultural dimension needs to be integrated throughout the student learning process, from pre-departure orientation through reentry and beyond, ..., Pre-departure programs can establish the intercultural learning frame of reference. On-site provision of intercultural learning opportunities combined with systematic reflection regarding intercultural experiences can support students in developing intercultural competence. Reentry programs can integrate intercultural knowledge and skills into life decisions related to further education and careers. (...) Throughout students should be given the chance to reflect on and make sense of their intercultural experiences”. (Paige & Goode, 2009: 346)



Without adequate preparation and support students have often proven unable to recognize and articulate the knowledge and skills acquired during their time abroad. This is why it's crucial to support students in identifying learning experiences and articulating the results of these experiences, as well as translating them into relevant learning outcomes. (Orahoud et al., 2004; CERI, 2008; Deardorff, 2009).

"... without adequate preparation and support learners are not able to articulate clearly and specifically what they have learned. ... So, the question becomes: "Have learners been prepared adequately for intercultural experiences and in interacting appropriately with those from different cultural backgrounds, thus intentionally developing learners' intercultural competences to at least some degree?" ... Through adequate preparation and in-depth cultural learning, as well as ongoing intervention and support, learners are able to more sufficiently articulate the learning that occurs". (Deardorff, 2009: 487/488)

It is important to keep in mind that this process should not only take place after the student has returned: it should be incorporated in all phases of the learning process, prior to departure, during their stay abroad and upon return. The Research Group International Cooperation has therefore developed a training module for students who go abroad (Hernández Sanchez & Walenkamp, 2013a,b)

"Study abroad advising should incorporate a focus on skills outcomes in all phases of the advising: in pre-departure orientation, during the study abroad and during reentry briefings. Advisors can teach students appropriate language to reflect positively on their study abroad experience". (Orahoud et al., 2004: 128)

1.2 International and intercultural competencies: what do they entail?

"... there is a rich conceptual and theoretical landscape from which many models have emerged. Furthermore, there is extensive commonality across these models, which provide strong conceptual paths along which future theory development can and should progress. There is also, however, a strong suspicion, ..., that many conceptual wheels are being reinvented at the expense of legitimate progress. Specifically relatively few efforts have been made to systematically test the validity and cross-cultural generality of the models posited to date". (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009: 45)

One of the difficulties that presents itself when defining the required competencies, is the large number of terms that are used interchangeably to refer to this broad concept, such as *international*, *intercultural* or *global competence*, *global citizenship*, *intercultural effectiveness* or *sensitivity*, *cross-cultural competence* (Fantini, 2009; Deardorff & Jones, 2012).

For this study the terms international and intercultural competencies are used alongside one another. Some authors may consider these two terms to be interchangeable or may use the same definition for either concept, but in the present study they are used as two different concepts: the term international competencies is used as an umbrella term of which intercultural competencies are an important and substantial element.

International competencies are made up of:

- Interpersonal competencies;
- Intercultural competencies;
- Foreign language competencies;
- International academic competencies;
- International professional Competencies.

The definition of intercultural competencies is based on the description of Deardorff inspired by Boeckler and Ulama:

“Intercultural competence is the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations. It is supported by specific attitudes and affective features, (inter)cultural knowledge, skills and reflection”.

“Appropriate interaction means that central aspects of cultural identity, key orientations and norms valued by participating actors are not violated to the extent that mutual recognition is put at risk and deep disharmony is caused. (...) It (intercultural competence) can serve as the capacity for sensitively perceiving, identifying and mediating conflicts grounded in cultural differences. It includes the capacity for anticipating and constructively coping with possible and actual conflicts in an early stage of interaction.

As to the criterion of effective interaction, it principally connects intercultural competence to the model of purposive-rational action. (...) It implies that the actors actually achieve their valued individual and collective, transactional and/or relational objectives”. (Boecker & Ulama, 2008: 7-8)

In other words, intercultural competencies are based on the development of certain attitudes, knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness which enable a person to behave and communicate effectively and adequately in intercultural situations. The term adequately used here refers to the specific context in which the interactions take place (Deardorff, 2009)³.

Based on this description, acquiring intercultural competencies therefore encompasses the following four dimensions:

³ These 4 elements of knowledge, attitude, skills and critical cultural awareness can also be found in works of several other authors in more or less the same wording. Byram et al. (2001), for instance, arrives at a similar division when describing the five ‘Savoirs’: Savoir (knowledge); Savoir être (attitudes); Savoir apprendre et savoir faire (skills of discovery and interaction) Savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating); Savoir engager (critical cultural awareness). For an elaborate overview of definitions, models and components of intercultural competencies, please refer to Spitzberg & Changnon (2009).

1 Attitude

Attitudes, according to Deardorff, form the basis for all other aspects of intercultural competence. A fundamentally positive attitude towards intercultural situations is the first step: respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity, an open, curious, non-judgmental attitude towards people of different cultural backgrounds, and being open to insecurity and unfamiliar, uncertain situations

2 Extensive cultural knowledge

This includes extensive knowledge and understanding of culture in general, as well as culture-specific knowledge related to a holistic understanding of the respective culture, and the historical, political and social context. In other words, broad knowledge of the various aspects of culture that influence both ones’ own way of interacting and that of others:

- Understanding one’s own and other people’s world views, morals and values, and lifestyle;
- Understanding the role and impact that cultural aspects have on behavior and communication.
- Understanding historical, political and religious contexts.
- Sociolinguistic awareness of the relationship between language and meaning in society.

3 Intercultural skills

Relevant cultural knowledge differs per intercultural context and, like global knowledge, is limited in potential. Process-oriented skills are therefore particularly important, because they enable a person to deal with a wide range of situations, to acquire knowledge of different lifestyles, cultural determinants and practices, and to process these in such a way that they can achieve constructive intercultural interaction.

The following skills are of particular relevance:

- Listening, observing, interpreting;
- Analyzing, evaluating, and making connections between different cultural aspects;
- Being able to manage differences and conflicts, including having the capacity to understand and handle various cultural-specific ways of conflict management (Boecker & Ulama, 2008; Deardorff, 2009).

4 Critical cultural awareness

Lastly, both cultural (self) awareness (Deardorff, 2009) and '*critical thinking skills*' (Boecker & Ulama, 2008) are crucial. That is to say, the ability to reflect on cultural aspects, to be able to change perspectives, and to broaden and relativize ones frame of reference in mindset and behavior. Or, as Byram et al. (2001) put it: '*one's critical cultural awareness is the ability to make informed critical evaluations of perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures*'.

The level of intercultural competence then depends on the extent to which the aforementioned aspects (attitude, knowledge, skills and cultural awareness) have been developed. Further developing these four dimensions enables a person to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations.



2 Research Objective

The objective of the present study is to gauge the added value of study or internship abroad to the development of international competencies in students, as well as the conditions and factors that influence this development.

Added value here is defined as the advantages of study or internship abroad in comparison to similar activities undertaken in the home country. Added value could be achieved in several areas:

- interpersonal competencies;
- intercultural competencies;
- international academic and professional competencies;
- proficiency in one or more foreign languages

This research aims to answer the following question:

To what extent and in what way does a study or internship abroad stimulate the acquisition of international competencies by students, and what are the contributing factors?



3 Preliminary research

In 2009-2010 research was conducted among all THUAS students who had gone abroad for study or internship in the course of that same academic year. This preliminary study was based on earlier research by Maarten Regouin, professor (lector) Internationalization and the International Professional Practice of Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen, The Netherlands (*cf.* Walenkamp & Hoven, 2011). Students were requested to complete an online questionnaire both before and after their stay abroad. A control group, consisting of students studying or doing an internship in The Netherlands in the same period, were asked to do the same. A total of 861 students of the test group were invited to participate in the pre and posttest, of which 134 students (30 percent) took part in the pretest and 68 (17 percent) in the posttest.

This research focused on the following aspects in particular:

- Students' foreign language proficiency
- Students' intercultural competencies, categorized into six dimensions: flexibility; open-mindedness, social initiative, cultural empathy, *cultural consciousness*, and *ambiguity tolerance*;
- Students' personal, social and professional development

In terms of demographics, the respondents in the test group distinguish themselves from the average THUAS student by a higher percentage of female students, an under-representation of allochthonous students (i.e. of recent immigrant descend), an over-representation of students with previous international experience, and ambitions for an international career. In addition, 92 percent of the test group respondents came from only five programs of study in three academies: the Academy of Primary School Teaching, the Academy of European Studies & International Communication Management, and the Academy of Marketing & Commerce⁴.

⁴ In 2014 the fourteen 'academies' of The Hague University of Applied Sciences were reorganized into seven faculties.

Although the percentage of respondents is relatively low, making it difficult to determine to what extent they are representative for the entire test group, and how this test group compares to students who stayed at home, the study arrived at several remarkable findings:

- Students are critical in their assessment of the information, preparation and supervision provided by their home institution. According to respondents, the quality of study and internship abroad could be improved in several areas by spending more time on providing information, preparation and supervision. Improving the provision of information, and stimulating and facilitating a foreign experience are also expected to have a significant impact on the number of students going abroad.

When asked about their motives for staying at home, students from the control group indicated that they either did not feel stimulated by their program of study, did not see the point in staying abroad, or listed reasons indicating some form of fear.

- In general, respondents who had been abroad were somewhat disappointed in their expectations with regard to the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge, preparation for a professional life, and the level of the study program. They are also less satisfied with how well their program of study prepares them for international professional practice. Nevertheless, for the majority of respondents their stay abroad still exceeded their expectations.
- Looking at the development of intercultural competencies in students who went abroad, there is no significant difference between the pretest and the posttest. A foreign experience does not make them more empathic, tolerant or open-minded. However, they do appear to become slightly more culturally aware and socially pro-active.

- There *does* appear to be a difference between test group (students who go abroad) and the control group (students who stay in The Netherlands), with the former scoring significantly higher on intercultural competencies both in the pretest and the posttest. Yet, as the pretest indicates, this difference is already present prior to students' international experience, and is also not affected by their stay abroad. Those who travel abroad are - and remain - more interculturally competent than those staying at home. Both groups show little to no development in intercultural competencies during the period of studies or internship under investigation.
- The foreign language skills of students, which were measured through *self-assessment* based on the *European Language Portfolio*, also show little or no difference in students' self-assessed English language proficiency before and after their stay abroad. Students do show some progress in other foreign languages.



Understandably, the question arises as to how these latter two findings can be explained. Based on international literature there are at least five possible explanations:

1. The instrument used, based on the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) by Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2002), measures fairly predetermined personality traits and not, or to a significantly lesser extent, competencies to be developed. Consequently, the questionnaire findings do not show differences between pretest and posttest. The difference between students going abroad and those staying at home could then be explained by the fact that the former have a more multicultural personality than the latter. However, their personality hardly changes as a result of a relatively short stay abroad.
2. It could be the case that only a selective group of students go abroad and that the high scores of the test group on specific international competencies are a result of factors such as socio-economic background, previous experience abroad or having immigrant parents or not. (cf. Janson et al., 2009, on participants of the Erasmus exchange program). In comparison to the total student population our test group could comprise students with a different socio-economic background, with previous foreign experience, and more foreign language proficiency. Because their level is higher from the onset, a - second or third - 3 to 6 month period abroad may have less of an impact (cf. Stronkhorst, 2005; Caudery et al., 2008).
3. Another possible explanation is that students, especially when assessing their foreign language skills and intercultural competencies, do not score themselves significantly higher, and in some cases even lower, because staying abroad has made them aware of the limitations and gaps in their knowledge and skills, and they measure their skills more critically than before they left. However, objectively speaking, they may still have become more proficient in the foreign language and may still have become more interculturally competent, but because they view their knowledge and skills more critically, they score themselves not higher in the posttest than they did in the pretest.

4. In addition, the positive effects of staying abroad in comparison to remaining in The Netherlands could be only marginal due to a lack of adequate preparation and supervision. A lack of adequate supervision could also result in an inability among students to recognize and articulate what they have learned (Orahoud et al., 2004; CERI, 2008; Deardorff, 2009).
5. Using online questionnaires based on students' own perceptions may not be the best instrument to record their development in intercultural competencies (cf. Deardorff, 2009).





4 Methodology

In order to overcome the limitations of a low response rate, a possibly insufficient representativeness of the respondents, an operationalization of international competencies that may have been inadequate and the choice of instruments in the preliminary study, as well as to gain more insight into the questions raised above, the methodology for the follow-up study of 2011-2012 was adapted in several areas.

1. With regard to the response rate and representativeness of the test group, the decision was made not to include all academies, but to work closely together with four programs and academies: Primary School Teaching (PABO), European Studies, the Academy of Social Professions, and the minor Development Cooperation of the Research Group International Cooperation. These are programs that differ greatly in terms of prominence of internationalization and students' foreign experiences, as well as in the support provided to students who participate in international activities.

In addition to the test group, which is made up of all students of the aforementioned programs who did an international internship or semester in the academic year 2011-2012, a control group was formed consisting of third year students Primary School Teaching and Social Professions who stayed in The Netherlands in the same period. 42 students were asked to be part of the control group, out of which 26 (61.9 percent) participated in the end. European Studies students and students of the minor Development Cooperation could not be included in the control group because an international experience is a mandatory part of these programs.

2. Operationalizing international competencies, including intercultural competencies:

Based on an elaborate study of existing literature, this research systematically distinguishes between foreign language proficiency, interpersonal competencies, academic & professional competencies, and intercultural competencies. Based on the model designed by Deardorff (2009) the concept intercultural competencies is divided into several dimensions, such as attitude, knowledge, skills and cultural awareness.

3. More so than in the preliminary study, the follow-up study took into account several background and environmental variables which, as previous research indicates, may affect the development of international competencies. These variables include:

- Variables related to personal background (education, social-economic position, previous experience abroad, motivation).
- Housing and living conditions abroad (accommodation, extent of immersion, culture shock).
- Preparation and support from school during and after the stay abroad.

4. Instead of exclusively using the online self-assessment used in the preliminary research, this study makes use of various instruments and sources. For intercultural competencies in particular, it is recommended to use a broad approach making use of an extensive selection of qualitative and quantitative methods and instruments. This will also allow for triangulation of data (Deardorff, 2009; Fantini, 2009).

As in the preliminary study, the present study has made use of an online questionnaire for the pre and post measurements. In these questionnaires, students were asked several questions related to their background, motivation for going abroad, and their expectations and experiences. Students were also asked to respond to a large number of statements on the preparation and support provided by their home institution, and the competencies they developed or should have developed while abroad. For the intercultural competencies in particular, the Intercultural Readiness Check was included. This is an instrument that claims to measure

development in competencies, more so than the MPQ. (<http://www.ibinet.nl/irc2/index.php?lrv=v>).

In addition to the questionnaire, reentry interviews were held with 23 students. The interviews focused extensively on their experiences, the conditions surrounding their stay abroad, the competencies they had developed, and the supervision and help offered by their home institution prior to, during and after their stay abroad. Based on these data it is not only easier to interpret and contextualize the findings of the online questionnaire, but it also provides insight into several factors that are said to influence the learning process of students and their development of international competencies (see point 3 above).

Finally, a 360 degrees feedback form was distributed among teaching staff, family and friends of several of test group students in which they were asked to assess the developments they noticed in the students as a result of their stay abroad.



5 Findings

This chapter presents the findings of pre and posttest questionnaire, the reentry interviews, and the 360 degrees feedback

5.1 Pretest: online questionnaire

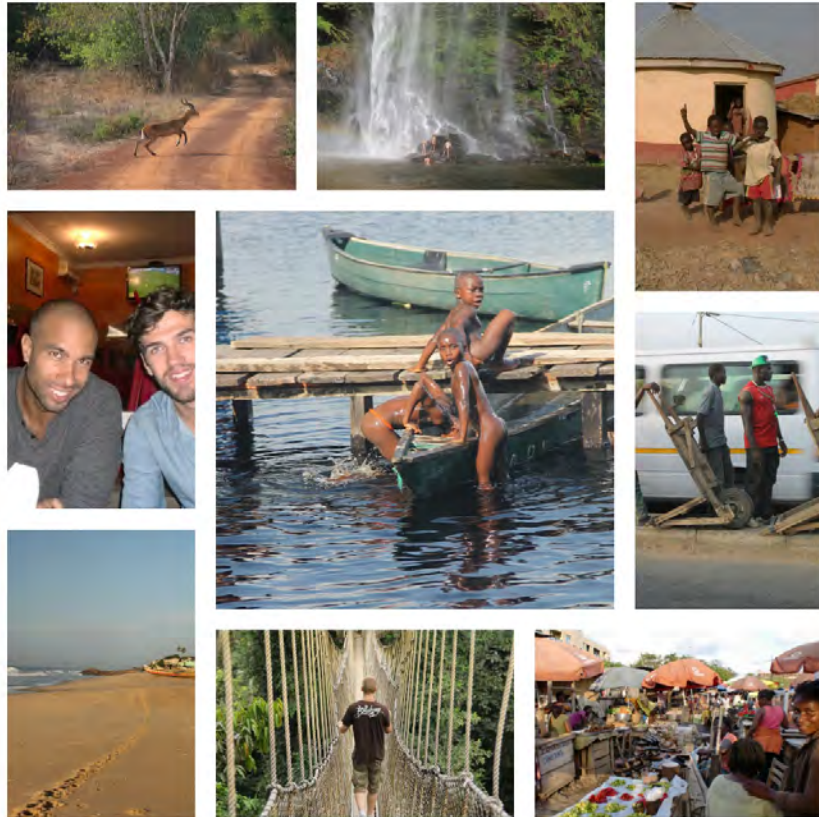
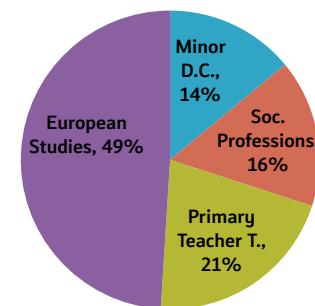
5.1.1 Response rate

Out of the 200 students invited to participate in this study, 71 (38.2 percent) took part in the pretest. For Primary School Teaching, The Academy of Social Professions and the Minor Development Cooperation this meant a response rate of 93.8, 84.6, and 90.0 percent respectively. The response rate for European Studies is significantly lower: out of the 150 students invited, only 35 (23.3 percent) completed the online questionnaire.

Out of the 71 students that completed the online questionnaire, 39 also completed the Intercultural Readiness Check. In addition, a control group consisting of 26 Primary School Teaching and Social Professions students completed the questionnaire, and 19 of them also filled did the IRC.

5.1.2 The students

A division based on program of study, shows the following:

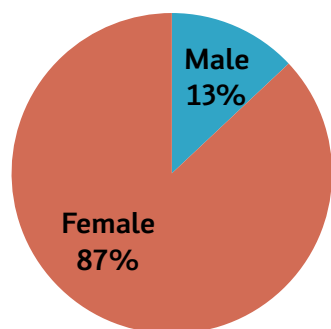


In terms of age, 54.5 percent of students was aged between 21 and 25. 37.7 percent was younger than 21, and 7.8 percent was 26 to 30 years of age.

92.9 percent of respondents have Dutch as their mother tongue.

The test group differs from the control group and the total THUAS student population in the following aspects:

- The high percentage of female students in the test group; no less than 62 of the 71 students (87.3 percent) was female, whereas female students only make up 46 percent of the entire THUAS student population. However, it should be noted that the participating programs of study have an above average female student population, with female students making up 85% of students at Primary School Teaching, 81% at Social Professions, and 73% at European Studies. This could to a large extent account for the high percentage of females in the test group.



- An underrepresentation of allochthonous students: 15 respondents (21.1 percent) were students of whom one or both parents were born outside of The Netherlands (in comparison to 38.5 percent of the control group). 4 respondents (5.6 percent) were themselves born in a country other than The Netherlands. In comparison to the entire THUAS student population, where 40 percent of students are allochthonous, students of immigrant descend were underrepresented.

- An overrepresentation of students with previous international experience: Out of the 67 respondents who were born in The Netherlands, 17 (25.4 percent) had previously lived abroad. 13 of them (76.6 percent), all students of European Studies, had previously lived abroad for reasons of study. The remaining 4 students had lived abroad because of work (17.6 percent) or family (5.9 percent). The amount of time spent abroad previously varied from 3 months to 3 years. In the control group 10 percent of respondents had previously lived abroad.
- 63.4 percent has a higher general secondary education (HAVO) diploma, 23.9 percent has a diploma in vocational education (MBO), and 8.4 percent in pre-university education (VWO). Compared to the overall THUAS student population, differences are mainly noticeable in the percentage of students with general secondary education and vocational diplomas: 48 percent of all THUAS students has a general secondary education diploma, 27 percent has a vocational diploma, and 8 percent a pre-university education diploma. There are also large differences between the participating programs of study: 47 percent of Social Professions students and 32 percent of students of Primary School Teaching has a vocational diploma, in comparison to 17 percent of European Studies students.

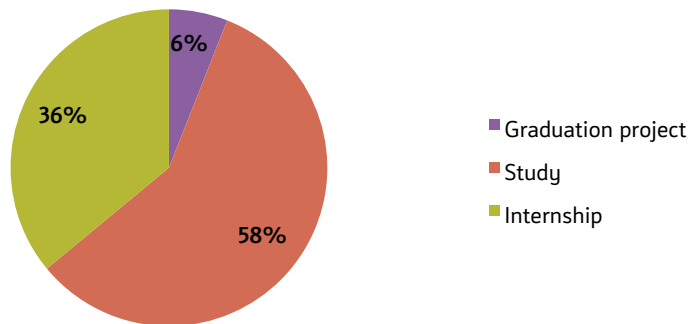
Prior education	Test group	THUAS	European Studies	Primary School Teaching	Social Professions
Pre-university education (VWO)	8	8	8	8	5
Higher general secondary (HAVO)	63	48	43	49	36
Vocational education (MBO)	24	27	17	32	47

The relatively small number of test group students with a vocational diploma and the large number of test group students with a general secondary education background can therefore partially be explained by the large number of European Studies students among the respondents: 29 out of the 35 ES-students in the test group (82.9 percent) have a general secondary education background.

- Higher level of education of parents: 40.8 percent of fathers and 38.0 percent of mothers of test group respondents have a Bachelor's or Master's degree. In the control group this was 30.8 and 38.5 percent respectively.

5.1.3 Purpose, reasoning and motivation

41 Students (57.7 percent) go abroad for reasons of study, 26 (36.6 percent) to do an internship and 4 (5.6%) for their graduation project.

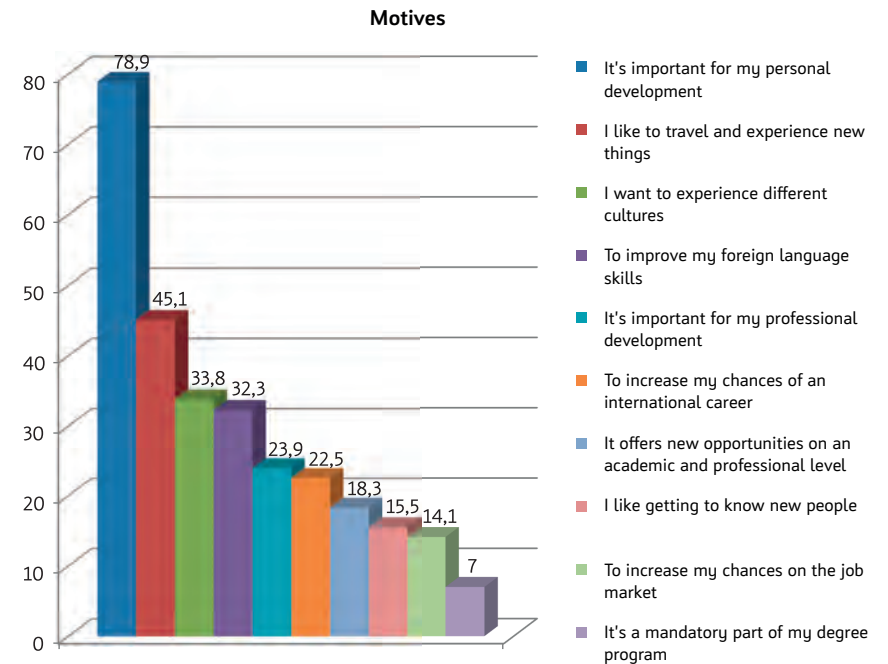


For 32 students (45.1 percent), study or internship abroad is a mandatory part of their degree. For the other 54.9 percent an international experience is optional.

For 76.1 percent of students, their international experience takes place in year 3 of their 4 year Bachelor program. 22.7 percent goes abroad in their 4th year of studies and 1 (1.1 percent) in year 2.

All students stayed abroad for a period of 3 to 6 months.

When asked about their main reasons for doing an internship or study abroad (with a maximum of three answers), students mostly listed reasons related to personal and cultural growth, followed by a desire to improve their foreign language skills. Professional and academic motives scored considerably lower.

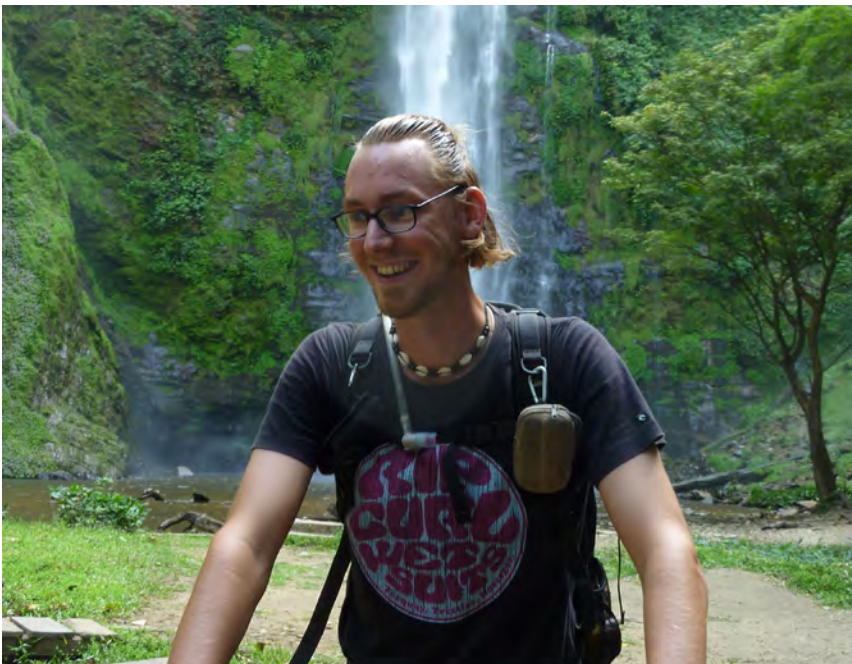


The most important reasons for participants in the control group to stay at home, were:

- Financial reasons (60%)
- Not wanting to be away from family and friends for a long period of time (45%)
- Work or other obligations (35%)
- Does not see the added value (20%)
- Study or internship abroad is not stimulated or facilitated by school (10%)
- Fear (10%)

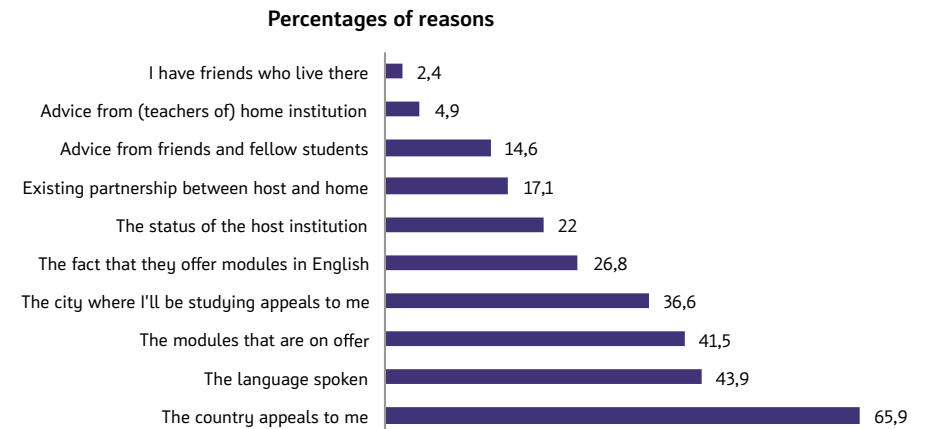
When looking at students' destinations, 60.6 percent remains within Europe and 39.4 percent travels to other continents. Here we can see a remarkable difference between students going abroad for study and those doing an internship:

- Of the 41 students leaving The Netherlands for reasons of **study**, 35 decide to stay in Europe (85.4 percent). Belgium (6), United Kingdom (6), Spain (5), France (4), and Sweden (4) are among the most popular European destination. The remaining 6 students leave for The United States, Australia, Canada and Israel.
- 18 of the 26 students doing an international **internship**, leave for various destinations outside of Europe (69.2 percent): Ghana (8), Dutch Antilles (4), Indonesia (2), Peru (2), Madagascar, and The United States. The 8 students that remain in Europe, leave for Belgium (4), France (2), Germany, and The United Kingdom.
- Of the four students doing their graduation project abroad, two went to Cambodia and two to Ghana.



Besides the country itself, students who go abroad to **study** also listed the language spoken, the modules on offer, and the location/city as major reasons for choosing a particular destination.

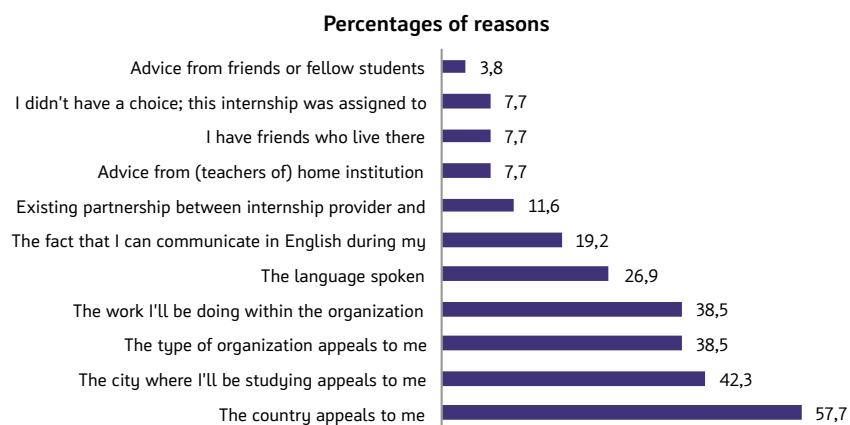
Reasons for choosing a destination among students who study abroad*



* A maximum of three answers could be given.

The country and city/location is also an important factor for students who go abroad to do an **internship**, followed by the type of organization, the type of work, and the language spoken.

Reasons for choosing a destination among students who do an internship abroad*



5.1.4 Expectations

Prior to departure, students generally appear to have high expectations of their stay abroad in terms of personal and cultural growth. These expectations are somewhat lower regarding their academic and professional development.

	Statements (N=71)	Percentage of affirmative responses
1	During my stay abroad I expect to become proficient in the local language	60,6
2	I expect to improve my English proficiency	78,9
3	I expect my stay abroad to contribute significantly to my personal development	98,6
4	I expect my stay abroad to increase my level of independence	88,7
5	I expect my stay abroad to make me more flexible	84,5
6	I expect to gain more insight into my own capabilities and limitations	85,9
7	I expect to be better able to deal with uncertainties and unfamiliar situations	81,7
8	I expect my stay abroad to allow me to expand my social network	81,7
9	I expect to increase my knowledge and understanding of (dealing with) other cultures	81,7
10	I expect to improve my skills in communicating with people with different cultural backgrounds	87,3
11	I expect to learn a lot about the culture of my destination	73,2
12	I expect my stay to contribute significantly towards my academic development	74,6
13	I expect to learn a lot about my field of work during my study or internship	73,2
14	I expect to gain knowledge and skills which I would not be able to develop in The Netherlands	63,4
15	I expect to learn how to apply my knowledge and skills in different, unfamiliar situations	78,9
16	I expect my stay abroad to be a valuable addition to my degree work at THUAS	91,5
17	I have positive expectations of the level of my study / internship abroad	84,5
18	I expect my stay to contribute significantly to my professional development	81,7
19	I expect my study/internship to provide adequate preparation for my professional practice	60,6
20	I expect to be able to develop a broader perspective to my field of work	74,6
21	I expect to gain more insight into my career perspectives after graduation	54,9
22	I expect a study/internship abroad to improve my chances on the job market	69,0



5.1.5 Preparation and supervision from home institution

By means of several statements, students were asked to give their opinion on the preparation and supervision provided by their home institution. Although to a somewhat lesser extent than in the preliminary study, quite a few respondents were negative about their preparation and supervision:

- 29.6 percent of students indicated that their home institution did not provide enough information on the host institution or organization.
- 25.4 percent lacked procedural information.
- 21.2 felt they were being sent back and forth.
- 21.1 percent did not receive enough information on study / internship abroad from their home institution.
- 19.7 percent felt they did not receive information in time and that the information provided was insufficient.
- 22.5 percent did not feel they were effectively supported in their preparations.
- For 33.8 percent it was unclear how they would be supervised while staying abroad.

Nevertheless, the test group does seem more positive than the control group on the following issues:

- 52.1 percent of the test group was given sufficient information on study/ internship abroad by their programme of study in the preparatory phase, compared to 33.4 percent of the control group;
- 46.5 percent were provided with the necessary information early enough in advance, compared to 33.3 percent of the control group.
- 43.7 percent had a consultation with their supervisor prior to departure, compared to 33.3 percent of the control group.

5.2 Posttest

5.2.1 Posttest online questionnaire

Of the 71 students who completed the pretest, 43 students also filled in to posttest upon reentry. Of these 43 students, 83.7 percent is female and 16.3 percent is male. 41 of them, 95.3 percent, were born in The Netherlands. Three respondents (7.3 percent) had previously lived in The Netherlands. Categorizing these students based on education, shows the following:

Programme of Study	Number	Percentage
European Studies	18	41.9
Primary School Teaching	9	20.9
Academy of Social Professions	8	18.6
Minor Development Cooperation	8	18.6

In terms of educational background of the respondents' parents, 39.6 percent of fathers and 39.6 percent of mothers has a college or university degree. 8 students (18.6 percent) have at least one parent who was born abroad. 28 students (65.1 percent) went abroad to study, 12 (27.9 percent) did an international internship, and another 3 students (7 percent) went abroad for their graduation project. This means the posttest group shows great similarity with the pretest group, with the exception that the percentage of students who had already lived abroad previously was much smaller in the posttest (25.4 compared to 7.3 percent). This may be a result of the relatively low number of European Studies students taking part in the posttest.

a. Development of competencies

When asked about the impact of a stay abroad on the development of international competencies, students indicated their experience had mainly contributed to the development of interpersonal and intercultural competencies, as well as to their English language proficiency. Academic and professional competencies were less impacted by their foreign experience. These results are congruent with those of previously conducted international research, and with the expectations and motives formulated by students prior to departure, which predominantly personal, social and cultural in nature.

When looking at the different competencies, we see the following: Almost all students (90.7 percent) believe that their stay abroad contributed greatly to their personal development. A total of 8 questionnaire items surveyed students' personal development, and on average 75 percent of students felt that their personal development was positively affected by their stay abroad. For example, approximately 75 percent said it had increased their level of confidence and self-image, their independence, flexibility and adaptability, their insights into their capabilities and limitations, and broadened their world view.

Notably, 6 of the 8 items were rated more positively by students who went abroad for internship than by those who went abroad to study.

Statements (N=43)	Percentage of positive responses (agree and fully agree)		
	Percentage	Internship (N=12)	Study (N=31)
Personal Development			
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to my personal development	90.7	100	82.1
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to my confidence level and my self-image	74.4	91.7	67.9
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to my level of independence	76.8	66.7	78.6
My stay abroad has significantly increased my level of flexibility and adaptability	74.4	83.3	67.9
By staying abroad I have gained insight into my own capabilities and limitations	76.7	83.3	75
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to expanding my social network	69.8	58.3	71.4
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to broadening my world view	76.7	91.7	67.9
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to my social involvement	51.2	58.3	41.9

Between 53.5 and 81.4 percent of respondents were positive about the contribution their stay abroad had made to various dimensions of intercultural competencies.

Students indicated to have learned a great deal about the culture of their foreign destination (81.4 percent), were able to expand their knowledge and understanding of (dealing with) other cultures (79 percent), increased their social and communicative skills (76.7 percent), are more in tune with their own emotions and are better able to deal with them (74.4 percent), have learned to look at things from different perspectives and to put themselves in someone else's shoes (74.4 percent), and have learned to deal with insecurities and unfamiliar, uncertain situations (72.1 percent). The international experience had also impacted their ability to put aside or question their own opinion and relativizing their own culture, albeit to a lesser extent (53.5 and 58.2 percent respectively).



And again, students who did an internship abroad are more positive about their learning experience than those who studied abroad.

Statements (N=43)	Percentage of positive responses (agree and fully agree)		
	Percentage	Internship (N=12)	Study (N=28)
Intercultural Competencies			
Because of my stay abroad I have gained more respect and appreciation for cultural diversity	69.7	66.7	67.9
Because of my stay abroad I have developed an open and non-prejudiced attitude towards people of different cultural backgrounds	58.1	58.1	57.1
Because of my stay abroad I have learned to put aside and question my own judgment	53.3	50.0	57.1
Because of my stay abroad I have learned to deal with insecurities and unfamiliar, uncertain situations better	72.1	75	71.4
Because of my stay abroad I have expanded my knowledge and understanding of (dealing with) other cultures	79.0	91.7	71.4
Because of my stay abroad I have learned a lot about the culture of the country I visited	81.4	83.3	78.6
Because of my stay abroad I have learned a lot about the historical, political and religious context	58.2	58.3	57.1
Because of my stay abroad I have learned a lot about world views, morals and values of the local inhabitants	72.1	75.0	67.9
Because of my stay abroad I have learned a lot about the influence of cultural elements on people's communicative and behavioral style	65.1	66.7	60.7
Because of my stay abroad I have improved my skills of interacting with people with cultural backgrounds other than my own	65.1	50,0	71.4
Because of my stay abroad I have improved my interpersonal and communicative skills	76.7	83.3	75.0
Because of my stay abroad I have increased my ability to interpret and understand cultural practices and situations.	65.1	66.7	71.4
Because of my stay abroad I am more aware of and better able to deal with my emotions	74.4	83.3	67.9
My stay abroad has taught me to look at things from different perspectives and to consider someone else's position and point of view	74.4	83.3	67.9
My stay abroad has taught me to relativize my own culture.	58.2	58.3	53.5

Although the scores are high for the majority of items, statements measuring the extent to which a stay abroad contributes to the development of academic and professional competencies did receive a lower score. For 58.2 percent their stay abroad was important in the development of their academic competencies. This was 65.2 percent for professional competencies. Results also show that students who went abroad to study are particularly positive about their academic development (60.7 compared to 41.5 percent), while students who did an internship are considerably more positive about their professional development (75.0 compared to 60.5 percent)

Respondents are particularly positive about the extent to which their stay abroad has helped them acquire knowledge and skills which they would not have been able to learn in The Netherlands (74.4 percent), learn to apply knowledge and skills in other, unfamiliar situations (72.1 percent), and develop problem solving and innovative skills (65.1 percent).

60.5 percent of students believes that their international experience has improved their chances on the job market. The same number of students claims their stay abroad helped them develop a broader professional perspective.

Considerably fewer students are positive regarding the insights they have gained into their career perspectives after graduation (30.2 percent), the development of their conceptual and analytical skills (37.3 percent) or the way their stay abroad has affected their motivation for studying and their field of work (44.2 percent).

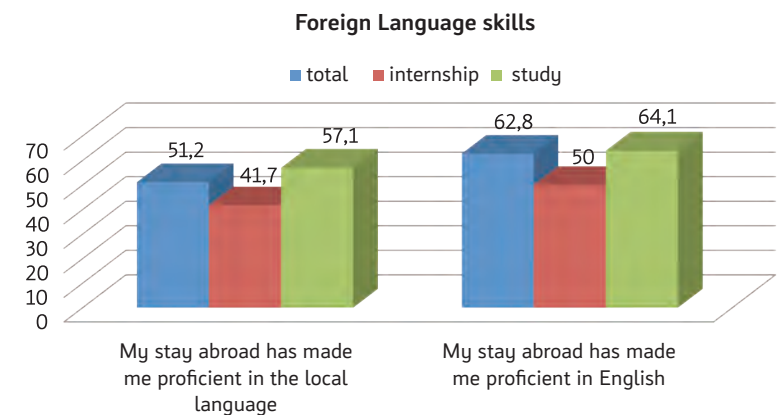
55.8 percent of respondents said their stay abroad enabled them to learn a lot about their field of work. Interestingly enough, only 33.3 percent of these respondents had done an internship whereas 64.3 percent had studied abroad. On the other hand, international interns are generally more positive about their development in problem solving and innovative skills (83.3 percent), as well as their ability to think 'out-of-the-box' (66.7 percent) than their student counterparts.

Statements (N=43)	Percentage of positive responses (agree and fully agree)		
	Percentage	Internship (N=12)	Study (N=28)
Academic Competencies			
My stay abroad has significantly contributed to my academic development	58.2	41.7	60.7
During my internship/study abroad I learned a lot about the profession	55.8	33.3	64.3
Because of my stay abroad I acquired skills and knowledge that I wouldn't have learned in The Netherlands	74.4*	75.0	75.0
Because of my stay abroad I learned to put to practice knowledge and skills in different, unfamiliar situations	72.1	75.0	75.0
Because of my stay abroad I developed my problem solving and innovative skills	65.1	83.3	57.1
Because of my stay abroad I developed my out-of-the-box thinking	62.8	66.7	57.1
Because of my stay abroad I developed my conceptual and analytical skills	37.3	41.7	35.7

* The percentages appear not to add up, because the first column also includes the students who went abroad for graduation work.

Statements (N=43)	Percentage of positive responses (agree and fully agree)		
	Percentage	Internship (N=12)	Study (N=28)
Professional Competencies			
My stay abroad has significantly contributed to my professional development	65.2	75.0	60.7
Because of my stay abroad I've gained more insight into career opportunities after graduation	30.2	41.7	25.0
Because of my stay abroad I've improved my chances on the job market	60.5	58.3	60.7
Because of my stay abroad my motivation to study and practicing my profession has increased	44.2	33.3	42.9

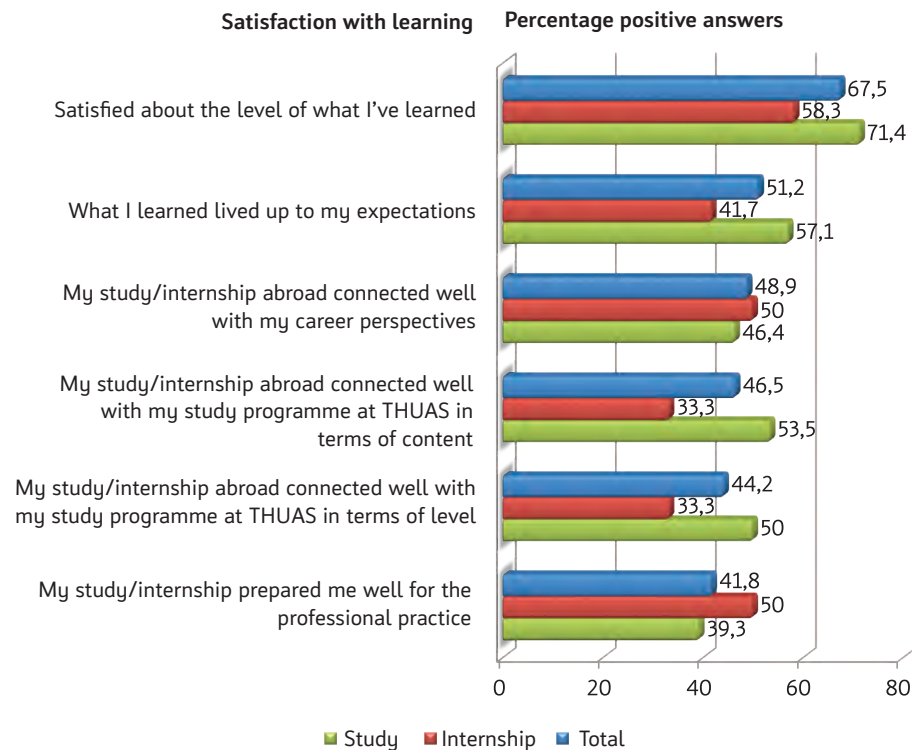
In terms of foreign language proficiency, 62.8 percent of students indicate that their stay abroad has allowed them to learn to speak the English language well. 51.2 percent believes to have become proficient in the local language.



When asked about how satisfied they were with what they had learned, 67.5 percent of respondents indicated to be satisfied, as opposed to 14 percent who were unsatisfied.

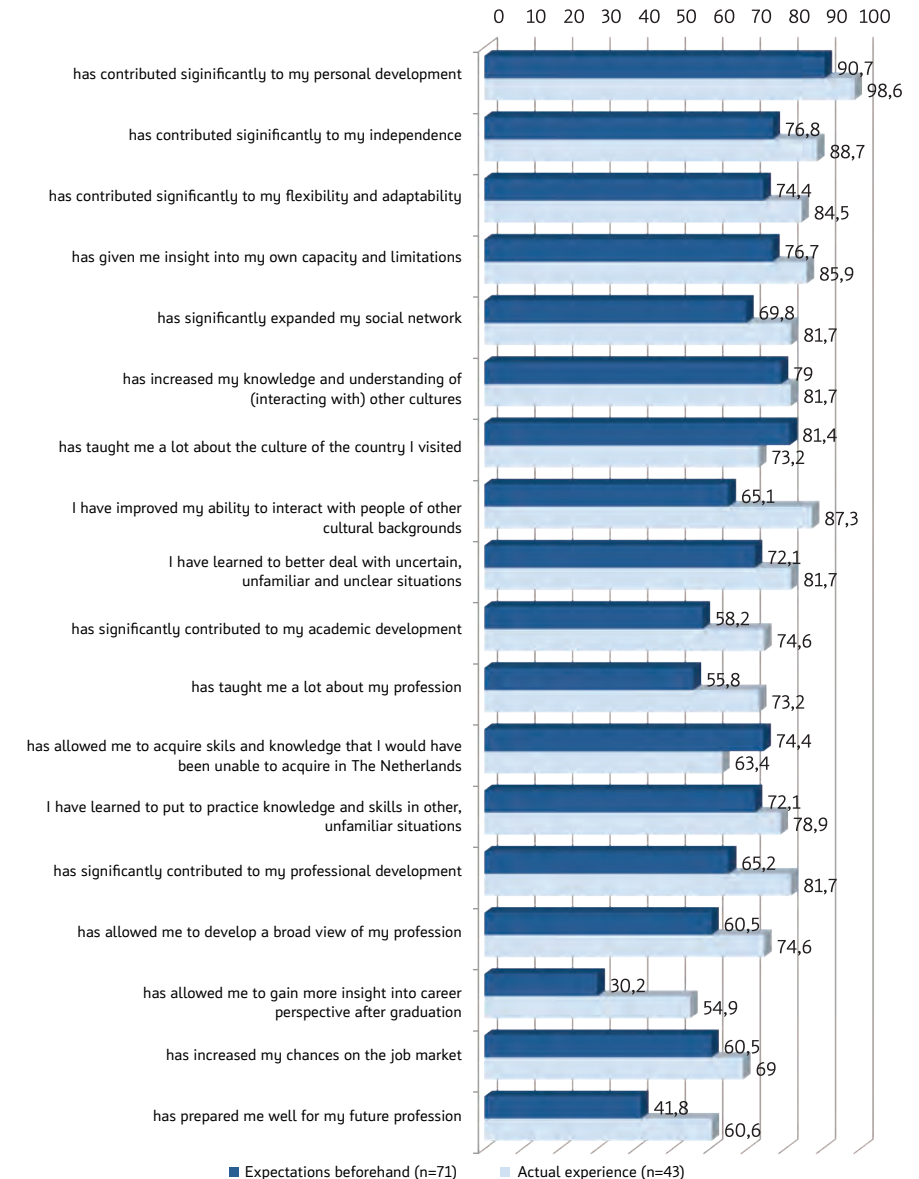
Less than 50 percent of respondents are satisfied about how their international experience relates to their study program and their job perspectives, as well as the extent to which it has prepared them adequately for their professional practice.

Students who studied abroad tend to be more satisfied about the level and content of what they have learned than students who went on an internship. The exact opposite is the case for 'professional perspectives' and 'preparation for the professional practice'.

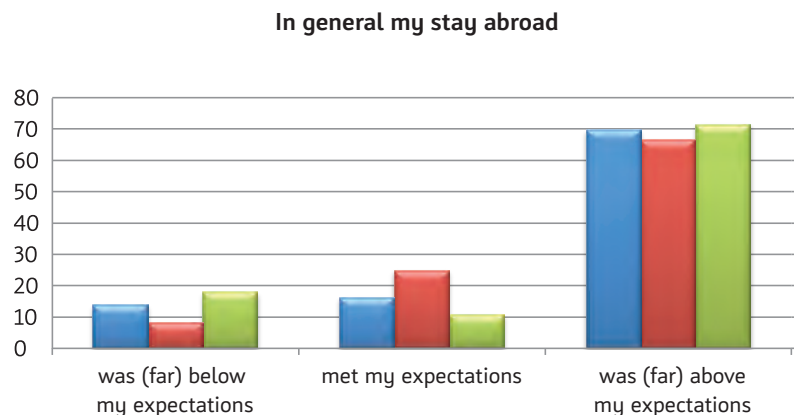


When comparing students' expectations prior to departure and their opinion afterwards, we can conclude that the actual experiences do not live up to the expectations:

Statement: (through) my stay abroad...



Nevertheless, over two thirds of the respondents indicated that their stay abroad exceeded their expectations (by far).



The development of competencies categorized into various background variables

When categorizing the results into different background factors, which were taken into account in the study (gender, education, parental education level, previous experience abroad, ethnicity), we see that only the factor 'native-immigrant'⁵ is statistically significant for the development of international competencies. This is true for both the average total score (all competencies combined) and for the separate scores for personal development, intercultural competencies and academic competencies. The only exception is 'professional competencies'. For these competencies the variation is not statistically significant.

The other background variables do not appear to be of statistical significance. The numbers in the table below refer to the mean of the answers given to the statements on page 44-49. '5' means completely agree', and '1' means completely disagree'.

⁵ Autochthonous vs. allochthonous

	Gender		Education mother 1			Education father 1			Previous experience abroad		Immigrant/ Allochthonous 2	
	Male	Female	Low	High	Don't know	Low	High	Don't know	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Personal development	4,12	4,00	4,14	3,85	-	4,08	4,00	3,63	3,98	4,03	4,59	3,98
Intercultural development	4,05	3,82	3,91	3,77	-	3,81	3,94	3,70	4,11	3,82	4,37	3,74
Academic development	3,81	3,61	3,63	3,67	-	3,68	3,70	2,67	3,73	3,63	4,35	3,48
Professional development	3,97	3,27	3,30	3,51	-	3,48	3,37	2,40	3,40	3,38	3,75	3,30
All international competencies	3,99	3,67	3,74	3,70	-	3,76	3,75	3,10	3,80	3,72	4,27	3,60

Blue = the differences that are statistically significant according to the (independent samples) t-test, with $p < 0.05$

- Education level mother/father:
Low: general/lower secondary education / intermediate vocational education
High: vocational or academic university / higher secondary education
- Immigrant: one or both parents born outside The Netherlands.

The development of competencies categorized by study program

Although there are no statistically significant differences in competency development per study program, there are still some interesting variations:

- Generally speaking, European Studies (ES) students score relatively high (26 of 36 statements score above average), whereas students of the minor Development Cooperation (DC) score relatively low (11 of 36 statements are above average);
- ES-students score low on interpersonal competencies in comparison to students of Primary School Teaching (PST/PABO) and Social Professions (SP). However, SP-students do score remarkably low on various dimensions of Intercultural Competencies.
- Students of the minor DC, and to a lesser extent PST-students score relatively low on academic and professional development. ES and SP students score above average on almost all related statements.

Statements (N=43)	Percentage of affirmative responses (agree / totally agree)				
	Tot.	ES	Minor DC	PST	SP
Personal development					
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to my personal development	90.7	83.3	100.0	88.9	100.0
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to my confidence and self-image	74.4	66.7	62.5	100.0	75.0
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to my independence	76.8	72.2	75.0	88.9	75.0
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to increasing my flexibility and adaptability	74.4	66.7	75.0	77.7	87.5
By staying abroad I have gained insight into my own capabilities and limitations	76.7	72.2	75.0	77.7	87.5
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to expanding my social network	69.8	72.2	37.5	77.7	87.5
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to broadening my world view	76.7	83.4	75.0	66.6	75.0
My stay abroad has contributed significantly to my social involvement	51.2	55.5	37.5	44.4	62.5
Intercultural Competencies					
Because of my stay abroad I have gained more respect and appreciation for cultural diversity	69.7	83.3	62.5	66.6	50.0
Because of my stay abroad I have developed an open and unprejudiced attitude towards people of different cultural backgrounds	58.1	66.7	50.0	66.6	37.5
Because of my stay abroad I have learned to put aside and question my own opinions	53.5	66.7	50.0	44.4	37.5
Because of my stay abroad I have learned to deal with insecurities and unfamiliar, uncertain situations better	72.1	66.7	87.5	77.7	62.5
Because of my stay abroad I have expanded my knowledge and understanding of (dealing with) other cultures	79.0	83.3	75.0	77.8	75.0
Because of my stay abroad I have learned a lot about the culture of the country I visited	81.4	83.3	100.0	77.7	62.5
Because of my stay abroad I have learned a lot about the historical, political and religious context	58.2	50.0	62.5	66.6	62.5

Statements (N=43)	Percentage of affirmative responses (agree / totally agree)				
	Tot.	ES	Minor DC	PST	SP
Because of my stay abroad I have learned a lot about world views, morals and values of the local inhabitants					
Because of my stay abroad I have learned a lot about the influence of cultural elements on the behaviour and communication style of people	65.1	55.6	87.5	77.7	50.0
Because of my stay abroad I have increased my skills to interact with people with other cultural backgrounds than my own	65.1	77.8	50.0	66.6	50.0
Because of my stay abroad I have increased my interpersonal and communicative skills	76.7	83.3	62.5	66.6	87.5
Because of my stay abroad I have increased my ability to interpret and understand cultural practices and situations.	65.1	83.3	87.5	55.5	37.5
Because of my stay abroad I am more aware and better able to deal with my emotions	74.4	66.7	87.5	77.7	75.0
My stay abroad has taught me to change perspectives and to place myself in someone else's position and point of view	74.4	66.7	75.0	77.8	87.5
My stay abroad has taught me to relativize my own culture.	58.2	61.1	50.0	55.5	62.5
Academic Development					
My stay abroad has significantly contributed to my academic development	58.2	77.7	12.5	44.4	75.0
During my internship/study abroad I learned a lot about the profession	55.8	72.2	25.0	55.5	50.0
Because of my stay abroad I acquired skills and knowledge that I wouldn't have learned in The Netherlands	74.4	77.8	37.5	88.8	87.5
Because of my stay abroad I learned to put to practice knowledge and skills in different, unfamiliar situations	72.1	83.3	50.0	66.6	75.0
Because of my stay abroad I developed my problem solving and innovative skills	65.1	66.6	62.5	55.5	75.0
Because of my stay abroad I developed my out-of-the-box thinking	62.8	66.6	50.0	55.5	75.0
Because of my stay abroad I developed my conceptual and analytical skills	37.3	44.3	37.5	22.2	37.5

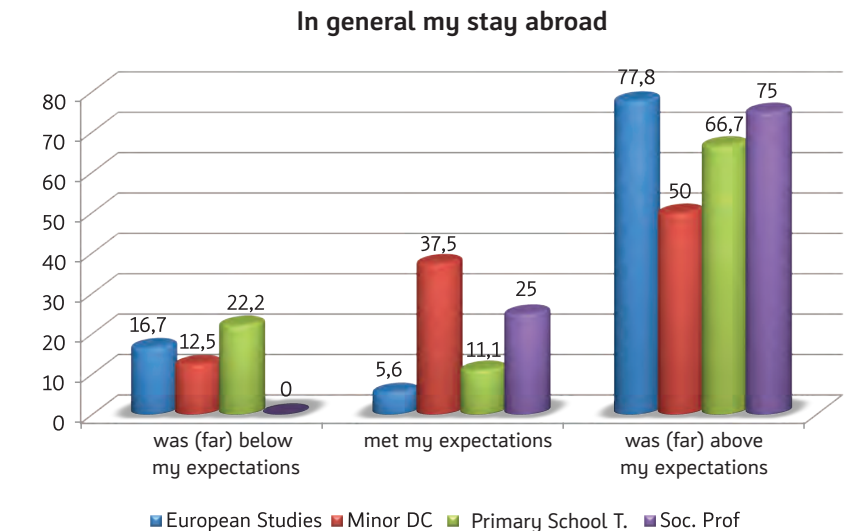
Statements (N=43)	Percentage of affirmative responses (agree / totally agree)				
	Tot.	ES	Minor DC	PST	SP
Professional Development					
My stay abroad has significantly contributed to my professional development	65.2	83.3	37.5	33.3	87.5
Because of my stay abroad I have been able to develop a broader view of my field of work	60.5	72.2	12.5	77.8	62.5
Because of my stay abroad I've gained more insight into career opportunities after graduation	30.2	44.4	12.5	0.0	50.0
Because of my stay abroad I've improved my career perspectives	60.5	83.3	25.0	44.4	62.5
Because of my stay abroad my motivation to study and practicing my profession has increased	44.2	55.6	12.5	33.3	62.5
Foreign language skills					
My stay abroad has made me proficient in the local language	51.2	72.2	12.5	44.4	50.0
My stay abroad has made me proficient in English	62.8	77.8	50.0	66.6	37.5

ES-students are generally more satisfied about what their international experience has taught them than students from other programs. Students of the minor DC are least satisfied when it comes to the way their stay abroad relates to the content and level of their study program, their career perspectives and preparation for their professional practice.

The level of satisfaction for PST and SP students varies depending on the competency and dimension. SP students, for instance, are less satisfied about the level of what they have learned and the way their international experience relates to their education. However, they are more satisfied than others about the way it relates to their career perspectives and how it has prepared them for the professional practice. PST students, on the other hand, are more satisfied about the level of what they have learned and less satisfied about the way their study/internship has prepared them for their future professions.

Satisfaction about what was learned	Percentage of affirmative responses (agree / totally agree)				
	Tot.	Es	Minor DC	PST	SP
I am satisfied about the level of what I have learned	67.5	83.3	50.0	66.6	50.0
In terms of content, my study/internship abroad related well to my program of study.	46.5	61.1	12.5	44.4	50.0
In terms of level, my study/internship abroad related well to my program of study.	44.2	61.1	12.5	44.4	37.5
My study/internship abroad prepared me well for my future profession	41.8	50.0	12.5	33.3	62.5
My study/internship abroad related well to my career perspective	48.9	50.0	25.0	44.4	75.0
What I learned lived up to my expectations	51.2	55.6	50.0	55.5	37.5

However, for all programs the vast majority of students felt their stay abroad met or even exceeded their expectations.



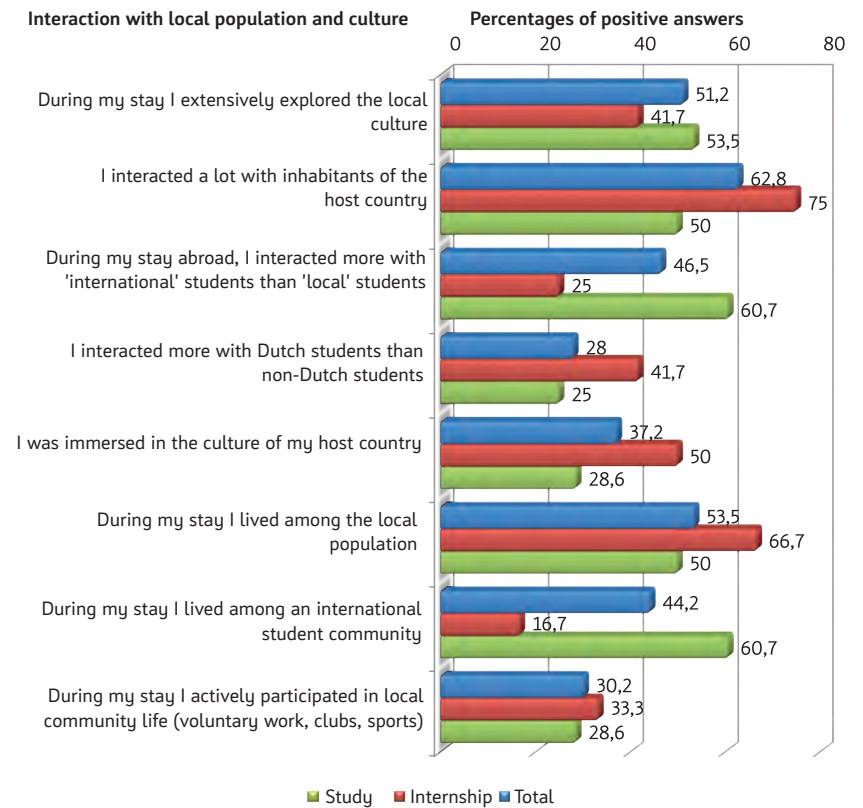
b. Conditions surrounding the international experience

The vast majority of students travelled a lot during their stay abroad, underwent a host of new experiences, and got to know many new people.

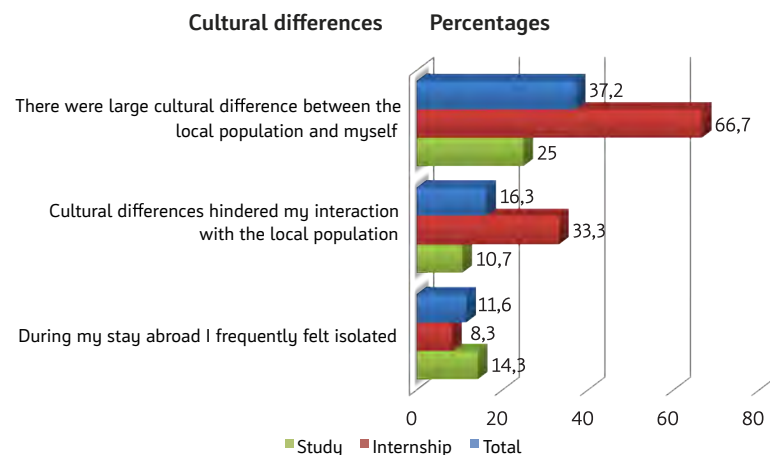
	Percentage of affirmative responses
I travelled a lot during my stay abroad	62.8
I have experienced a lot of new things during my stay abroad	90.7
I got to know a lot of new people during my stay abroad	83.8

For a large part of the participating students, interaction with local population and culture appears to have been limited. There are, however, in various respects clear differences between students who studied abroad and those who did an internship.

- 60.7 percent of students lived in an international student community, in comparison to 16.7 percent of interns;
- On the other hand, 66.7 percent of interns lived among the local population;
- 50 percent of interns and 28.6 percent of students felt they were immersed in the host culture;
- Only 33.3 percent of interns and 28.6 percent of students actively participated in local social life



37.2 percent of students (of whom 66.7 percent were interns) indicated to have experienced large cultural differences between themselves and the local population. 16.3 percent felt that these differences hindered their interaction with the locals. Out of 43 students, 5 (11.6 percent) said they frequently felt isolated.



c. Preparation and supervision by home institution

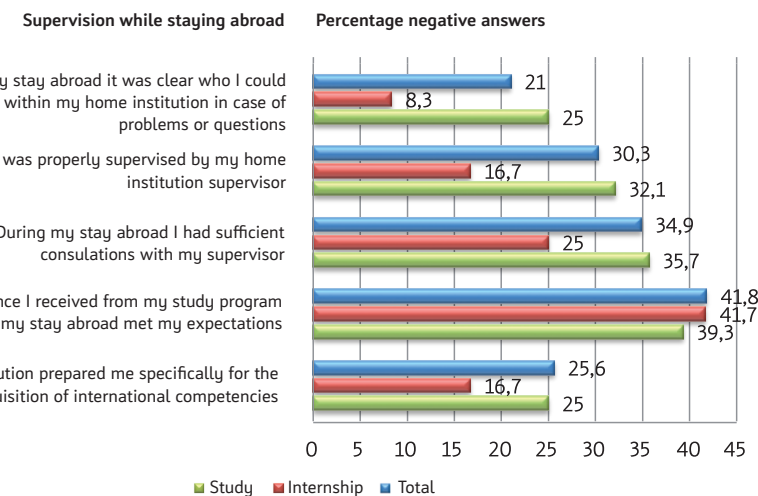
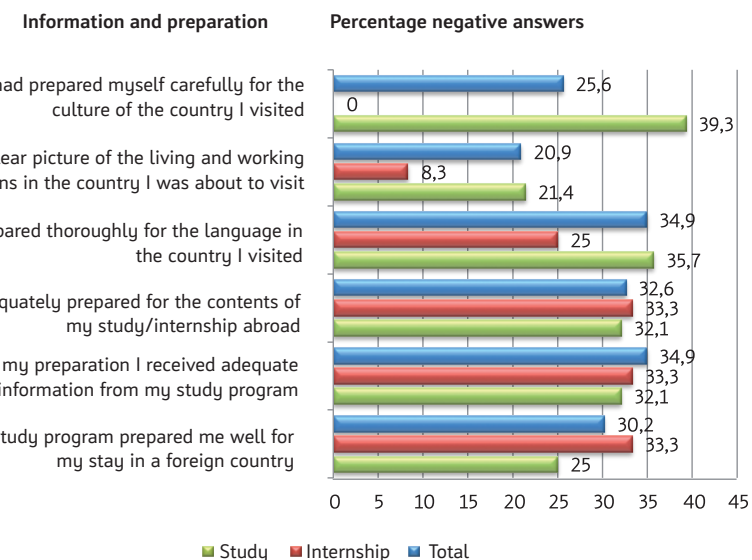
It seems that there is still room for improvement in terms of pre-departure preparation, for the student as well as the home institution:

- The posttest indicates that 25.6 percent of students did not prepare adequately for the culture of their destination; (16.9 percent in the pretest);
- In hindsight, 20.9 percent did not have a clear picture of the living- and working conditions in their destination; (pretest 9.9 percent);
- 32.6 percent was insufficiently prepared for the content of their study / internship abroad; (pretest 14.1 percent).

With regard to the preparation and supervision provided by the home institution:

- 30.2 percent states to have been insufficiently prepared by their study program;
- 34.9 percent feels they did not receive enough information from their study program;
- 30.3 percent did not receive proper guidance from their supervisor;
- 34.9 percent did not have enough consultations;
- 41.8 indicated supervision did not meet their expectations, and
- for 21.0 percent it was unclear whom they should go to in case of problems or questions.

When distinguishing between internship and study abroad, it appears that most dissatisfaction occurs among students who went to study abroad.





Information, preparation and supervision/guidance per study program

Again there are clearly noticeable differences when dividing the data according to program of study.

ES students are considerably more positive about the information, preparation and supervision provided by their study program than students of the three other programs. Students of the minor DC are clearly less satisfied.

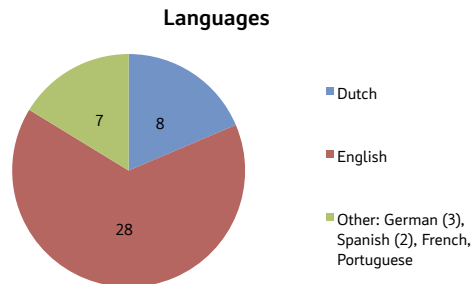
Many students are negative about the supervision by the home institution during their stay abroad.

Statements (N=43)	Percentage <i>negative</i> responses				
	Tot.	ES (18)	Minor DC (8)	PST (9)	SP (8)
Information and preparation					
I had adequately prepared myself for the culture in my destination	25.6	38.9	12.5	33.3	0.00
I had a clear picture of what to expect in terms of living and working conditions at my destination	20.9	22.3	25.0	22.2	12.5
I had adequately prepared myself for the language spoken at my destination	34.9	33.4	50.0	22.2	37.5
I was adequately prepared for the content of my study / internship abroad	32.6	22.2	37.5	55.6	25.0
My home institution provided me with enough information in preparation for my stay abroad	34.9	27.8	25.0	44.4	50.0
My home institution prepared me well for my stay abroad	30.2	22.2	37.5	33.3	37.5
Supervision during stay abroad					
During my stay abroad it was clear who I could contact in case of questions or problems	21.0	11.1	25.0	44.4	12.5
During my stay abroad I was properly supervised by my supervisor at my home institution	30.3	16.7	62.5	33.3	25.0
During my stay abroad I had sufficient consultations with my supervisor	34.9	22.3	62.5	33.3	37.5
The supervision of my home institution during my stay abroad met my expectations	41.8	22.3	75.0	44.4	50.0
My home institution specifically prepared me in terms of international competencies	25.6	11.1	37.5	33.3	37.5

This is congruent with the findings regarding the development of competencies. Those students indicating to be satisfied with the preparation and supervision provided by their home institution (European Studies), are also more satisfied about their competency development. The opposite is also true: students who appear least satisfied with the preparation and supervision provided (minor Development Cooperation) also seem more negative about their development in competencies and are less satisfied about what they've learned.

d. Languages

During their international experience, respondents communicated in the following languages:



When asked about their level of proficiency in this language, more than 90 percent of the 35 respondents indicated to be proficient or very proficient in terms of speaking, listening and reading skills. For writing skills the scores are slightly lower.

When comparing the scores of the pre- and posttest we can see the following:

Pretest (n=58)	Very poor	Poor	Sufficient	Good	Very Good
Listening skills	1.7	1.7	8.6	55.2	32.8
Speaking skills	1.7	5.2	24.1	58.6	10.3
Reading skills	-	5.2	17.2	60.3	17.4
Writing skills	1.7	10.3	34.5	43.1	10.3

Posttest (n=35)	Very poor	Poor	Sufficient	Good	Very Good
Listening skills	-	-	2.9	45.7	54.1
Speaking skills	-	-	2.7	74.3	20.0
Reading skills	-	-	8.6	60.0	31.4
Writing skills	-	2.9	22.9	57.1	17.1

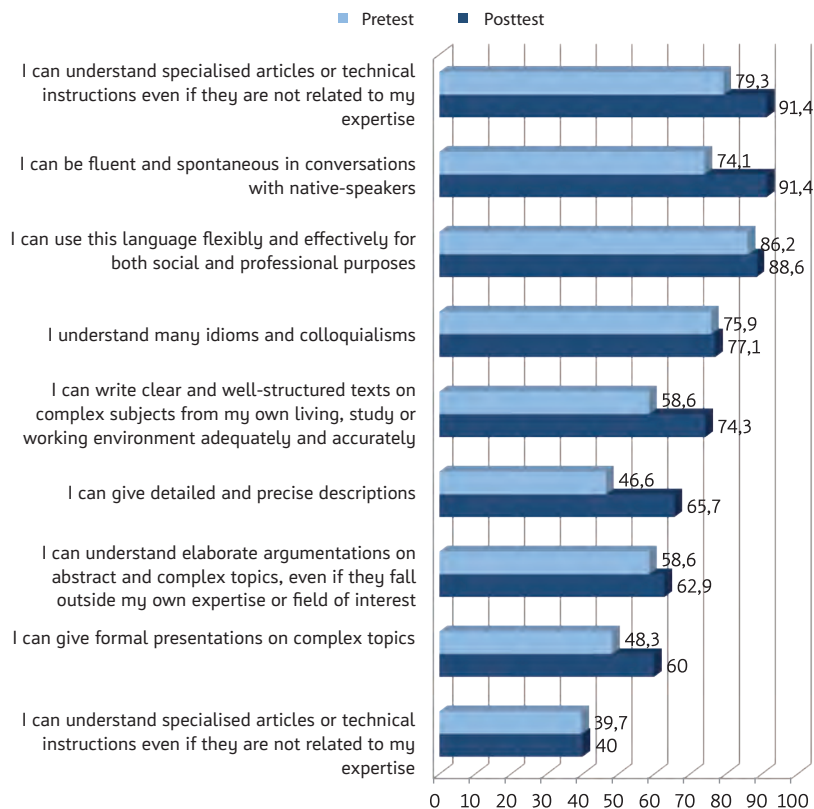
Respondents were also asked, both in the pretest and in the posttest, to respond to several statements in reference to the language they used during their international experience.

Comparing these two scores shows that respondents feel they have improved in comparison to the pretest.

In other words, after returning from their international experience, respondents consider themselves more proficient in the foreign language.



Percentage affirmative responses



For the majority of the respondents, language did not hinder their interaction with the local population or hamper them in successfully completing their study program or internship.

	Percentage of affirmative responses
During my stay abroad, language was not a barrier for studying or doing my internship	69.7
During my stay abroad, language was not a barrier for my interaction with the local population	74.4

5.2.2 The Intercultural Readiness Check / IRC

In addition to several the statements related to intercultural competencies in the online questionnaire, the pre and posttest also made use of the Intercultural Readiness Check (IRC) in order to measure the development of intercultural competencies of students. The IRC distinguishes 4 dimensions:

1 Intercultural Sensitivity

The score on this dimension indicates the extent to which a person is aware of his own cultural background and shows, in his behaviour, that he considers other cultures as equal. The scores also show to what extent a person is actively trying to understand another person's thoughts and feelings, for instance by paying attention to verbal and non-verbal signals.

Intercultural Sensitivity distinguishes two separate aspects:

- Aspect 1: Interest in cultural differences; the ability to understand that one's interpretations, morals and values are culture-specific, and to show awareness, by one's behaviour, of someone else's morals and values
- Aspect 2: Attention to signals; the extent to which someone pays attention to verbal and non-verbal signals.

2 Intercultural Communication

This score indicates the extent to which a person listens actively to others, and tries to understand how his communication style comes across to others. A high score on this dimension means a person takes the time to communicate effectively, and is careful when conveying a complicated message. They will adapt their style of communicating to the needs of their audience.

Aspects of intercultural Communication:

- Aspect 1: Active listening: the extent to which someone conscientiously communicates with others and sufficiently takes into consideration the expectations and needs of others.
- Aspect 2: Adaptation of communication style: the extent to which people adapt their way of communicating to cultural requirements.



3 Building commitment

This score represents the extent to which someone is attentive towards others and knows how to generate interest in and enthusiasm for a common goal. A high score on this dimension means a person is good at establishing relationships and building strong and varied networks. They continuously try to understand the needs and interests of different parties, and are convinced that there is a flexible solution that brings together all these interests.

- Aspect 1: building relationships; the extent to which someone invests in establishing relationships and different networks.
- Aspect 2: Uniting various needs; the extent to which someone tries to understand the needs and wants of various stakeholders and finds flexible solutions that fulfill those needs.

4 Managing uncertainty

The score on this dimension indicates the extent to which someone understands the dynamics of a culturally diverse environment, and is self-aware in his dealings with unexpected situations. The score also shows to what extent a person is prepared to adopt a novel approach and sees cultural diversity as a source of inspiration.

- Aspect 1: Openness towards cultural complexity; the extent to which someone is prepared to deal with the challenges of a large cultural diversity.
- Aspect 2: Trying out new approaches; the extent to which someone is stimulated by diversity as a source of knowledge and innovation.

Comparing the test group and the control group

Comparing the average pretest scores of the test group and control group on the four dimensions, shows the following:

	Intercultural sensitivity	Intercultural communication	Building commitment	Management uncertainty
Test group (N=39)	4.62	4.77	4.00	4.38
Control group (N=19)	4.37	5.21	4.63	4.84

Surprisingly enough and in contrast to the pretest, the test group scores are lower than those of the control group, except for the dimension Intercultural Sensitivity. So the findings of the pretest, that the test group was more interculturally competent than the control group from the onset, are not confirmed by the posttest results.

Comparing pre-test and post-test

Comparing the average pre- and posttest scores of the test group on the four IRC dimensions shows a marginal increase in three of the four dimensions. The differences on all four dimensions are so small, however, that their meaning is questionable.

	Intercultural sensitivity	Intercultural communication	Building commitment	Management uncertainty
Pretest (N=39)	4.62	4.77	4.00	4.38
Posttest (N=30)	4.90	4.80	4.13	4.01

A comparison of the individual pre- and posttest scores of 10 randomly selected students, results in the table below. Each cell in the table highlights the students' individual scores on the dimensions *Intercultural Sensitivity (IS)*, *Intercultural Communication (IC)*, *Building Commitment (BC)*, and *Management of Uncertainty (MU)*, as well as the corresponding aspects. In case only one score is listed, it means the pre- and posttest scores were identical.

Higher score in posttest	38
Lower score in posttest	19
No difference in pre- and posttest	63

Stud	IS	IS- facet 1	IS- facet 2	IC	IC- facet 1	IC- facet 2	BC	BC- facet 1	BC- facet 2	MU	MU- facet 1	MU- facet 2	Internship/ Study
1.	3	2-1	1	4-5	1	3	3-4	2	1	4	2	1-2	internship
2.	4-6	1-2	2	4-3	1	2	2-3	1	1	1-2	2-3	1	internship
3.	5	2	2	3-5	1-2	1-2	6-5	2	3-2	2-3	3	1	internship
4.	6-5	2	2	6-7	2-3	3	4-5	1-2	2	4	2-3	2-3	internship
5.	3-5	1	1-3	2-4	1-3	1	4-7	2-3	1-2	5-6	2-3	2	internship
6.	8	3	3	6-4	3-2	2-1	8	3	3	7-8	3	2-3	grad.
7.	2	1	1	5-3	2-1	2	3	1	1	6-4	2-1	2	study
8.	7-8	3	3	6	3-2	3	4-6	1-2	2	5-6	3	1-2	study
9.	9-5	3-2	3-2	8	3	3	4-3	1	3-1	1	1	1	study
10.	6-9	3	1-3	4-3	2	1	1	1	1	3-4	2-3	1	study

As can be seen from the table above, the differences in the pretest and the posttest results appear to be only marginal and vary per student. Only the last dimension 'Managing Uncertainty' seems to show a general progress. Although these results are by no means conclusive, due to the limited number of students and the limited differences in scores, there again appears to be a distinction between respondents who went abroad to study and those doing an internship. On average, interns scored higher after their international experience than respondents who studied abroad.

Control Group

Comparing the pretest and posttest scores of the control group shows a decrease in three of the four dimensions.

	Intercultural sensitivity	Intercultural communication	Building commitment	Management uncertainty
Pretest (N=19)	4,37	5,21	4,63	4,84
Posttest (N=11)	4,64	4,45	4,36	4,55

However, like the test group, the changes here are only minimal (tenths of a point on a scale of 1 to 10) and could very well be ignored. Moreover, it should be noted that in both cases, but even more so for the control group, the number of respondents was very small. As a result, one or two strong deviations would automatically strongly affect the mean score.

This notion seems to be confirmed when comparing the individual pre- and posttest scores of 10 students: there are slightly more positive than negative scores, although the differences are minimal.



Higher score in posttest	32
Lower score in posttest	27
No difference in pre- and posttest	31

Stud	IS	IS- facet 1	IS- facet 2	IC	IC- facet 1	IC- facet 2	BC	BC- facet 1	BC- facet 2	MU	MU- facet 1	MU- facet 2
1.	6-2	3-1	2-1	7-2	2-1	3-1	4-3	2-2	1-1	4-5	2-2	1-1
2.	5-7	1-2	3	8	3-2	3	5-6	1-2	2-3	6-4	3-1	2-1
3.	8	3	3	5	1-2	3	5-6	2	2-3	8-7	3	3
4.	3	2	1	2-3	1-2	1	1-2	1	1	3-4	2	1-2
5.	3-6	1-3	1-2	7	3	3	5	2	2	7-5	3	2-1
6.	5-6	2-3	2	5-2	2-1	2-1	4	2	1	4	2	2-1
7.	5	2	2	4-6	2-1	2-3	3-4	1	2	4-5	2	2
8.	2-2	1-1	1-1	1-2	1-1	1-1	4-4	2-2	1-1	8-7	3-3	3-3
9.	3-5	1-2	2-2	5-6	2-3	2-3	5-6	3-2	1-2	5-6	2-2	3-2
10.	6-5	1-3	3-1	8-7	3-3	3-3	8-6	3-3	3-2	2-2	3-3	1-1

	Number	Destination
Study	7	Denmark, Estonia, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, Sweden
Internship	14	Belgium, England, Aruba, Curacao, Peru, Ghana, Madagascar, Indonesia
Graduation	2	Ghana, Cambodia

Reasons for studying or doing an internship abroad

When asked about their reasons for going abroad for an extended period of time, students indicated that personal and cultural motives were the major driving forces in their decision making: experiencing what it is like to live abroad for an extended period of time, being away from home, living on their own, meeting other people, getting to know other cultures, traveling, seeing other countries and gaining new experiences.

Nevertheless, most students were also motivated by academic and professional factors. Various students indicated that they aspired to take up their profession abroad. For some this meant returning to their own, or their parents', country of origin. Others are interested in pursuing an international career. Some had similar interests, but were less sure and would like to experience, by studying or doing an internship abroad, whether working in a foreign country would actually suit them.

Another group felt that study or internship abroad is a good way to expand their professional horizon. It allows them to do things which they may not be able to do in The Netherlands or at THUAS, such as take specific courses or to develop themselves in areas that are less prominent in The Netherlands, to explore similar programs of study, to see how people from other countries market themselves, and to gain insight into professional practice and policies in relevant areas in other countries.

Besides this, for a number of students the desire to become more proficient in a foreign language, in most cases English, also plays a part in their decision to stay abroad for an extended period of time.

Living conditions during stay abroad

Accommodation and interaction with the local population

Most students arrange their own accommodation, in some cases with help of the host institution or internship provider. The majority of students, especially those who went abroad to study, shared a house or flat with other Dutch or international students, sometimes on campus or the complex of the internship provider.

Social activities also often take place within this 'international bubble'. As a result, contact with the local population is often limited to minor daily tasks, such as grocery shopping, internship or study related activities, or whilst travelling and going out. However, even then respondents are often accompanied by others students.

Contact with the local population and culture is even more limited by the fact that students do not speak the local language.

The minority of students, all of whom went abroad to study or to do an internship, lived among the local community, mostly on their own, but in some cases with a host family. In general, this last group interacted more with the local population and felt more immersed in the local life and culture. Very few students were actively involved in local social life by, for instance, doing voluntary work.

The language

An important factor in the selection of a country and city of destination is the availability of English-instructed modules and courses, or the ability to use English as the main language of communication during their internship. Students generally consider themselves to be quite proficient in English. A few made an intensive effort to improve their English.

On a few occasions, students deliberately chose courses taught in a different language (Spanish, Turkish), so as to become more proficient in this language, or because they believed they were already proficient enough to complete their internship or study successfully in this foreign language.

Although most students did not experience a language barrier during their study or internship, they did note that communicating was sometimes more difficult than anticipated: the proficiency level required to express yourself accurately with the necessary nuances, the local accent, the pace of speaking, and limited knowledge of jargon, are all factors that, especially in the first couple of weeks, required quite a bit of attention.

In some cases, the language did actually form a barrier, predominantly in situations where English was not the national language, but where students had expected it to be the language of communication at their internship. There are, for instance, examples of students who had expected their target groups to be proficient enough in English and French, but who discovered on site this was not the case. Consequently, these students experienced tremendous difficulties in completing their tasks and communicating with the target group. Existing knowledge of the local language and any preparatory activities conducted prior to departure did not always prove sufficient to perform at their internship or host institution. Several students indicated to have underestimated this beforehand. On rare occasions, students actually terminated their internship ahead of time.

Cultural differences

None of the interviewed students felt they had experienced a 'culture shock'. Some stayed in a country with a culture and standard of living similar to what they were accustomed to in The Netherlands, such as England, Sweden, Denmark, and Belgium. In other words, it did not affect their stay and contact with the local population. On the occasion that they did experience cultural differences, these differences were mostly related to manners and etiquette: being less direct in interaction, being more polite, being more careful and less bold in expressing their own opinion, experiencing more, or less, hierarchy.

This was different for the students who did internships in African, Asian and South American countries. Although most of them indicated to have prepared themselves beforehand, they initially did need to get accustomed to the local conditions and environment. Especially the extent and severity of poverty, witnessing this poverty first-hand, and the living conditions of the local population were elements that brought about a certain 'shock'. But not to the extent that this inhibited their performance or learning. On the contrary, some actually saw this as an extra stimulus and challenge which intensified their learning experience even more.

Other cultural differences experienced included:

- Hierarchical relations within organizations
- Slower pace of life and sluggishness with which things are arranged and organized
- Different way of dealing with time and appointments
- The experience that people often see you as a rich foreigner, and because of this uncertainty about whether people are sincerely interested in you or not.

A valuable learning experience, as indicated by some students, is experiencing what it is like to belong to a minority, to be the exception, and to be an outsider for the first time in their lives. Living in a city like The Hague, many had already been accustomed to living in a multicultural society, but while they were staying in Africa or Asia, they experienced for the first time what it is like to not belong to the majority or the dominant culture.

How has their stay abroad contributed to the development of international competencies?

When asked about what they have learned and which competencies they have developed, students list a wide range of aspects extending over various dimensions of interpersonal, intercultural, academic and professional competencies.

As was also the case when looking at motives and expectations, interpersonal and intercultural dimensions are dominant. Nevertheless, according to students themselves, their stay abroad also lead to important academic and profession developments. Below you can find an overview of what respondents considered their most important development per dimension. It is worth noting that almost all points were mentioned by multiple students.

a. Personal development

Almost all students indicate to have grown on a personal level. They have become more assertive, more independent, more proactive/outgoing, and have gained more insight into their own behaviour and mindset. Aspects listed by students include:

- Becoming more assertive
- Becoming more independent and proactive/outgoing
- Learning to take responsibility
- Learning to take initiative, setting out their own course and sticking by it
- Perseverance
- Increase in self-confidence, learning to trust their own instincts and insights
- Challenging and getting to know oneself in entirely unfamiliar circumstances
- Learning that some things take time and allowing oneself the time to settle in and get used to a new environment, accepting that sometimes things take a lot of energy.
- Increasing awareness and understanding of one's own fortunes; being happy with what you have, the little things, life in The Netherlands.

b. Intercultural competencies

- Having an open attitude towards differences and being different; being open for interaction with people of other cultural backgrounds, with cultural differences and different manners and customs.
- Empathy
- Adaptability, flexibility: accepting that things may be different, can go differently than expected, different from what you are used to.
- Being able to communicate with limited verbal means.
- Handling difficult, unfamiliar, unclear situations, in which it is not clear what to expect or what is expected of them;
- Experiencing what it is like to be an outsider, the minority, the exception;
- Learning to work in a multicultural environment, with colleagues that clearly have a different way of thinking and doing, and where you yourself are the exception, an outsider;
- Knowledge of the country, the local and national culture.
- Knowledge (and understanding) of the importance of culture, and the way that it shapes people's behaviour.
- Changing one's perspective of The Netherlands, the world. On the one hand by appreciating more what we have and how things are organized, and on the other hand learning to relativize and realizing that many things are only relative.
- Being able to put things in perspective; not taking things for granted or as self-evident.

c. Academic/Professional

- Becoming more knowledgeable and interested in the possibilities to build a career abroad.
- Getting a clear idea of one's future perspectives; knowing what one wants and what one does not want.
- Gaining insight into the way the industry, policies, and facilities run in another country.
- Gaining specialist knowledge that would not be available in The Netherlands until continuing education;
- Learning that some things that are less prominent in Dutch education. Gaining knowledge that could not be acquired in The Netherlands in the same way.
- Being able to adjust one's own way of working to those of others, and to different circumstances.
- Putting into practice previously acquired knowledge in sometimes difficult situations; when there are fewer means at your disposal, one has to be flexible and put to use one's own knowledge creatively.
- Creatively handle what you have learned; being creative with the means that are available.

However, despite the fact that their international experience was definitely worth their while, and often exceeded their expectations (by far), some respondents did feel they did not gain much on a professional and academic level; their stay abroad was interesting, but did not generate any new insights. Foreign programs of study, but mostly internships, did not always fit their own degree course and professional perspectives, were not challenging in terms of content or did not allow them to learn what they had hoped for beforehand.

d. Language

Various students indicated they had improved their English language proficiency; a – significant – improvement in their speaking and/or writing skills, extended vocabulary, being able to bring nuances to their expressions.

However, this is not the case for all students. Some pointed out that the level of English proficiency at their destination or within the international student community was limited, which consequently had impeded their language learning.

Satisfaction with learning progress

The majority of students indicated to be satisfied about how much they had learned and the extent to which their foreign experience had met their expectations. The vast majority felt they had learned enough and that going abroad was an experience that mostly exceeded their expectations, and which they would not have wanted to miss. Some students did, however, note that they were mostly satisfied on a personal level; in other words, the development they went through on a personal and intercultural level and what an experience their stay abroad had been.

Others remarked that they learned a lot academically and professionally speaking; perhaps differently from how they would have learned in The Netherlands, perhaps less systematic, less methodical or less corporate, but by no means less valuable.

Other students, however, felt that their study or internship abroad did not fit the level of their Dutch degree program, their future profession or their own professional perspectives. In terms of content, they felt they may have learned more if they had stayed in The Netherlands. Or they felt they could have gained more, had their preparation and supervision, both from the home- and the host institution been better. This does not take away from the fact that they would not have wanted to miss this experience, and that they would definitely recommend it to fellow students.

Preparation and supervision by programs of study

The four participating programs of study all offer different preparation and supervision programs during and after an international experience. Usually, these supervision programs differ depending on whether a student decides to study abroad or do an internship.

- **Preparation**

Students consider the preparation programs for an international internship to be quite intense. Besides making practical arrangements, students in most programs also needed to complete a series of assignments, in addition to the regular course work scheduled in a particular period. This regular course work does not take into consideration the preparatory work that needs to be done for a study or internship abroad.



Some students commented that the assignments are too general, and do not take into account the large diversity of countries that students go to, are not sufficiently relevant for the national or local context and do not adequately prepare for their actual internship. From this perspective, the preparatory phase should distinguish between, for instance, assignments for North- and Western Europe, America, and Africa. Although the working and living conditions may vary depending on location, the actual preparation for each destination is quite similar.

In the case of study abroad, most programs leave students to their own devices when it comes to their preparation. They need establish contact with the foreign university themselves, and need to organize their stay there. The home institution may occasionally offer some assistance, if necessary.

Where internships abroad, similar to an internship in The Netherlands, often have predetermined learning objectives and competencies, this is often not the case for study abroad. Students follow a pre-agreed program and when they have met all the requirements, their home institution signs off on their transcripts and transfers their grades. Usually without formulating additional requirements in terms of the international competencies that need to be developed. This might result in students being less involved in wanting/ having to acquire and develop their (international) competencies. As far as the practical arrangements of a stay abroad are concerned, there does not seem to be a consensus among the interviewees. Some students believe that preparing independently leads to a greater personal development; others indicate they had missed important practical support.

Several preparation programs are said to be time consuming and interviewees felt that there should be more focus on practical issues. However, students of the minor Development Cooperation, which has a five week preparation program, that most students find very intensive, did indicate that their preparation was very informative, and that it was definitely of added value to the internship that followed.

Overall, predetermining learning objectives and outlining the academic and professional competencies that need to be developed, appeared to have increased respondents' satisfaction after completing their international experience.

Supervision while staying abroad

Respondents are moderately satisfied about the supervision received during their internships. They appreciate and value regular contact with their home institution during their stay abroad. They also believe there should be an assigned contact in The Netherlands, and that the speed with which questions are answered or feedback is given should be monitored more closely. They generally feel more alone and left more to their own devices when abroad.

Respondents' expectations do not always seem to match those from the home institution and these expectations should be more aligned to one another. Respondents indicate it is not always clear who their supervisor is: some programs assign a staff member to support students, and a separate one to supervise them. As a result, it is not always clear to students whom they should go to for which issues.

Finally, interns are often dissatisfied about the contact between their home institution and their supervisor abroad. They feel contact between both institutions is essential, but currently lacking.

Supervision and support from the home institution and contact with the home front is also important because not all internship providers are able to provide the necessary support, and the support these companies do provide is sometimes lacking. Not all host institutions have a clear picture of what the students are coming to do, what they are able to do and what the expectations of the home institution are.

Students who went abroad to study, usually did not receive support or specific supervision. Contact with the home institution was limited to an occasional e-mail checking to see if all was still going well.

Respondents understand that all parties involved, both teachers and students, have a full and busy schedule, but they would appreciate it if their home institution would show more interest in their foreign experience.

Opinions are scattered when it comes to the desired supervision and support during a stay abroad. Although regular contact is preferred, many students indicate supervision does not have to be more intensive. Usually, students are already busy with their regular course work or internship activities and they would not want to have to do a lot of 'homework' for their degree program at home.

Nevertheless, as one student noted, having to keep a journal and including fixed moments of reflection could contribute to the development of international competencies and maximizing a foreign experience. Now processing and assessment are entirely in the hands of the host institution. Apart from administrative activities, the home institution does very little in terms of development of international competencies. Opinions are also mixed when it comes to the assignments that should be made: some consider the required portfolios and blogs a burden, whereas others see it as a useful tool for reflection.

Supervision upon return

Students are generally satisfied about the supervision they receive once they have returned from their international experience. They are positive about presenting their experiences to fellow students or class mates to learn and see how others have spent their time abroad. Keeping a journal while abroad, putting together a portfolio, presenting to others, and reflecting on activities and how these have affected their competency development are considered important tools to verbalize their learning process and to create awareness of what their stay abroad has taught them. Several students indicated that these activities showed them that they had actually learned more than they had expected beforehand. Some students would have liked to have received more support after returning from their stay abroad, for instance by having a face-to-face evaluation with their supervisor. This could also be an important part of the learning process, and could help process their experiences. Students return home from an, in their eyes, unforgettable experience, but often find little understanding or interest for their findings back in The Netherlands.

• Conclusion

The wishes in terms of preparation and supervision from the home institutions seem somewhat inconsistent. On the one hand, students would prefer a stricter and clearly structured program. On the other, they also require a certain flexibility from the home institution and would rather not have to do too much work. Nevertheless, students who followed more intensive and strictly organized preparation programs, are more satisfied about their supervision and learning process. It is this stricter and more intensive program which receives the most positive evaluations. Students whose supervision was less intensive (before, during and after their stay abroad) do not consider their supervision inadequate, but are generally less satisfied about their learning process.

5.2.4 360 degree feedback

As a final step, respondents were asked to collect feedback from individuals who could adequately assess their progress and development, such as teachers, fellow students, parents and friends, after returning from their stay abroad, in order to get more insight, but also a different perspective into their developments in attitudes, knowledge and skills. This feedback was collected by means of a 360 degree feedback form in which assessors were asked to compare students' status before and after their international experience, based on predetermined criteria. If assessors felt there was no noticeable difference in a particular criterion, they did not have to fill in a score.



		Strong decrease	Slight decrease	No difference	Slight increase	Strong increase	No answer
1. Interpersonal competencies							
	Independence, self-sufficiency			14	14	14	
	Confidence, positive self-image			13	21	8	
	Flexibility, adaptability			16	17	9	
	Open mindedness			10	24	8	
	Insights into one's own capabilities and limitations			10	21	11	
	Showing initiative			15	14	13	
	Expanding world view			7	22	13	
	Social responsibility			17	14	10	1
	Total interpersonal competencies (%)	-	-	30.4	43.8	25.6	0.3
2. Intercultural competencies							
2.1	Attitude (%)	-	-	35.1	45.8	18.5	0.6
	Respect for and appreciation of cultural differences and diversity			12	21	9	
	Openness, being non-judgmental			14	22	6	
	Willingness to discuss and put aside one's own opinion			19	18	5	
	Handling insecurity, and unfamiliar, uncertain situations			14	16	11	1
2.2	Knowledge (%)	-	-	10.7	47.6	41.7	-
	Knowledge of other cultures			3	15	24	
	Knowledge of the influence of culture on people's behaviour and communication			6	25	11	
2.3	Skills (%)	-	1.2	36.3	41.7	20.8	
	Social and communicative skills			12	19	11	
	Consideration for situation / context			16	17	9	
	Awareness of and dealing with own emotions		1	15	18	8	
	Self-reflection		1	18	16	7	

2.4	Critical cultural awareness (%)			44.0	39.3	11.9	4.8
	Being able to change perspectives and understanding another's position and perspective			18	21	3	
	Relativizing one's own culture			19	12	7	4
Tot.	Total intercultural competencies	-	0.4	32.9	43.7	22.0	1.0
3. Academic and professional competencies							
3.1	Academic competencies (%)			33.3	38.1	10.3	18.3
	Subject-specific knowledge			11	19	5	7
	Conceptual, analytical thinking			21	11	2	8
	Critical, explorative attitude			10	18	6	8
3.2	Professional Competencies (%)	1.2	3.6	38.4	29.5	18.8	8.6
	Applying knowledge and skills in special, non-routine situations			16	13	7	6
	Problem-solving, innovative capabilities			16	16	7	3
	Out-of-the-box thinking			15	17	6	4
	Vision of profession		2	18	9	8	5
	Own career perspectives	1	3	15	14	6	3
	Job-market opportunities		2	17	14	7	2
	Motivation for studies / practicing profession	1	4	16	10	7	4
	Interest in international career	2	1	16	6	15	2
Tot.	Total Academic and Professional Competencies (%)	0.9	2.6	37.0	31.8	16.5	11.3
4. Foreign Languages							
	Speaking/Listening/Writing and Reading skills in a foreign language	-	-	14.3	35.7	40.5	9.5

Of the 42 people who filled in the feedback forms:

- 30.4 percent did not notice any development in interpersonal competencies, and 69.4 percent noticed a slight or strong increase.
- 32.9 percent did not notice any development in intercultural competencies, and 65.7 percent noticed a slight or strong increase.
- 37.0 percent did not notice any development in academic and professional competencies, and 48.3 a slight or strong increase.



In other words, two thirds of the assessors had observed a difference in the interpersonal and intercultural competences of the student they had assessed. An increase is also noted in the academic and professional competencies of students, albeit to a lesser extent, with slightly less than 50 percent. This difference could partially be explained by the fact that some assessors did not answer all questions because they were unable to fully assess that particular dimension, thereby adequately following the survey instructions, as they were instructed beforehand not to answer any questions they did not have sufficient insights into.

Finally, 4.8 percent of assessors noticed a decrease in the professional and academic competencies of the respondents they assessed. When looking at the answers provided in more detail, we can see that this can be attributed to a change in professional vision and career perspectives, a decreased interest in an international career or a decrease in the motivation for studying or practicing their profession.



6 Analyses and discussion

6.1 General

As a result of the findings in the preliminary study, several adaptations were made to the follow-up research. This new methodology allowed us to supplement the previous research findings with several additions and nuances. In addition, some previous findings were not supported by the follow-up study. It is worth noting, however, that the number of students in this follow-up study was relatively low.

6.2 The preliminary study compared to the follow-up study

One of the most remarkable conclusions of the preliminary study was the fact that a stay abroad did not, or hardly contribute to the international competencies of students. Besides this, according to the selected method of measurement, prior to departure the test group was already more internationally competent than the group that stayed at home (control group).

Based on the follow-up study, the following remarks can be made with regard to these preliminary findings.

6.2.1. Composition of the test group

Starting with the last finding of the preliminary study, it seems that the group of students going abroad for study or internship is quite a selective group when compared to the entire student population at THUAS. The following points are particularly striking: the test group had a remarkably high percentage of female students, parents had higher levels of education, the group had fewer allochthonous students, and many students of the test group had had previous foreign experiences.

The follow-up study, however, does allow for the following nuances to be made:

- The higher percentage of female students could largely be explained by the student population of the programs of study participating in this research. Primary School Teaching, Academy of Social Professions, and European Studies are all programs with a high percentage of female students.
- The percentage of students with previous experience abroad can be largely attributed to the participation of European Studies students. The majority of these students have previously had to spend time abroad for purposes of study or internship.

What remains is the relatively low percentage of immigrant students and the generally high level of education of the parents. However, when compared to the control group, the latter discrepancy is less in the follow-up study than in the preliminary study. Since these data are not available for THUAS as a whole, the findings of this study cannot be compared to the overall THUAS student population.

6.2.2. The test group of students who go abroad is internationally more competent than the group of students that stays at home.

In contrast to the findings of the preliminary study, the outcomes of the Intercultural Readiness Check used in this second study indicate that, prior to departure, the test group is not more interculturally competent than the control group. This means that the follow-up study does not provide support for the preliminary conclusion that the test group was more interculturally competent from the onset, and therefore had less of a need to go abroad. It is possible that self-selection caused respondents in the preliminary study to form a unique and specific group within the total group of students going abroad for internship or study purposes.

6.2.3. A stay abroad for study or internship purposes does not contribute to the development of intercultural competencies among students.

This finding of the preliminary study also remains unsupported. Although the Intercultural Readiness Check does not show a clear pre- and posttest distinction in intercultural competencies, the other three instruments (online questionnaire, open interviews, and 360 degree feedback) do, in fact point, to an increase in students' international competencies, including intercultural competencies.

The same is true for foreign language proficiency. In the preliminary study, students did not consider themselves more proficient in English after their return than they had done prior to departure. However, in this second study, students do score themselves higher in the posttest than they did in the pretest. The outcomes of the student interviews also support these findings.



6.3 Is there an added value / what did students learn?

The stories of students are generally strongly in favour of study and internship abroad. The responses in the online questionnaire, and even more so the interviews, illustrate that for the vast majority of students their stay abroad - greatly - exceeded their expectations and enabled them to learn a great deal. According to students it was an unforgettable experience, one that everyone should undergo at least once in their life.

As far as the learning process is concerned, the results of the online questionnaire, interviews and the 360 degree feedback show development in various dimensions of international competencies. Mostly in terms of interpersonal and intercultural competencies. Three quarters of students feel they have become more self-reliant and more flexible, have learned a lot about the foreign culture, the morals and values of their host country, and have gained more knowledge and understanding of (dealing with) other cultures, have increased their social and communicative skills, are better able to change perspectives and to understand someone else's position and point of view. In terms of intercultural competencies, the progress can mainly be found in knowledge and skills and to a lesser extent in attitude and critical cultural awareness.

Students also went through significant developments in terms of professional and academic competencies, albeit to a lesser extent. The online questionnaire highlights several aspects that benefited as a result of an international experience for approximately 65 to 70 percent of the respondents:

- Handling insecurities and unfamiliar situations
- Problem-solving and innovative skills
- Out-of-the-box thinking
- Applying knowledge and skills in deviating circumstances and situations in which there is no routine solution at hand.

In recent years, these aspects have been valued more and more in the training of professionals at vocational universities, and apparently also by employers. In addition, 74 percent indicated to have acquired knowledge and skills that they would not have been able to acquire in The Netherlands. 61 percent of respondents said they had developed a broader perspective on their field of work. The interviews and 360 degree feedback also point towards an increase in these competencies.

In terms of foreign language proficiency, respondents also scored themselves higher in the posttest. And again, this notion is confirmed by the interviews and 360 degree feedback.

When comparing the answers given upon return and the expectations beforehand, it can be concluded that, overall, students' experiences in each of the chosen sub-areas fell short of their expectations. Surprisingly, 86.1 percent of students in the posttest did indicate that their stay abroad in general - vastly - exceeded their expectations.

6.4 Study – internship

When distinguishing between answers of students who went abroad to study and those who went abroad to do an internship, the following differences occur:

First of all, study and internship abroad have different end results. Study abroad focusses on the development of academic and subject-specific aspects, and contributes to a broader perspective of the profession and industry. These students also score slightly higher than interns on foreign language proficiency, often English language proficiency. For internships abroad the most frequently listed answers are related to professional competencies, out-of-the-box thinking, and problem-solving and innovative skills.

However, these are not the only differences between study and internship abroad. It appears that internships abroad provide a stronger learning experience than study abroad. On average, students who did a foreign

internship score slightly higher in the development of interpersonal and intercultural competencies.

A possible contributing factor could be students' living conditions abroad. Results indicate that the living and working conditions were different for students who went abroad for an internship than for students who studied abroad. Interns more often lived amidst the local population, were more 'immersed' in the local culture, and were more frequently confronted with large cultural differences between themselves and the local population.



Besides this, the majority of interns went to countries outside Europe, mostly Africa, Asia, Central and South America, whereas 85 percent of the students going abroad to study stayed within Europe.

The present study is not conclusive about whether the intensity of learning experiences can be attributed the factor 'internship versus study abroad' or whether it is a result of local environmental factors. However, anecdotes and experiences from students point towards several environmental factors which existing literature also notes as factors that influence competency development among students (Caudery, et al, 2008; Paige & Goode, 2009; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009).

Therefore, the findings support the considered, conscious usage of study and internship abroad for the development of international competencies. After all, study and internship do not achieve the same end results and do not offer the same opportunities for the development of international competencies.

Given their importance for the learning process, and in particular the development of personal and intercultural competencies, local conditions should also be taken into consideration. Students are now often left to their own devices when it comes to living and working conditions, or they are arranged by the host institution. In the interest of competency development, home institutions might want to consider being more actively involved in the living and working conditions of their students abroad, and might want to give it a more prominent position in the learning process.

6.5 Preparation and Supervision by home institution

6.5.1 Satisfaction

As far as the preparation and supervision by their home institution is concerned, we can conclude that there are still several points for improvement.

Similar to the results of the preliminary study, 30 to 35 percent of respondents in the present study express dissatisfaction about various aspects of the way their home institution prepared them for and supervised them during their stay abroad. Additionally, students who studied abroad are more dissatisfied about their supervision than those who did an internship.

Improving the stream of information would not only benefit students who have chosen for an internship or study abroad, but could also encourage some students, who now chose to stay in The Netherlands, to go abroad as well. The responses of the control group do, in fact, indicate that they decided to stay at home because they did not see the added value of an international experience, did not feel stimulated, or even felt hindered by the home institution, or were hesitant towards going abroad. Improved information provision could perhaps stimulate some of these students to spend a period abroad for study or internship.

When analyzing the data per study program, we can see differences in terms of satisfaction regarding the learning process and competency development, as well as satisfaction regarding the preparation and supervision provided by the home institution. There is a correlation between satisfaction about the provided supervision and preparation on the one hand, and the development of competencies on the other. It is not clear whether this correlation is causal.

One factor that could possibly be of influence here is whether a stay abroad is an integral, and mandatory part of the curriculum for all students, and whether the entire study program is characterized by international elements, such was the case for European Studies. Not only were ES- students more satisfied about the preparation and supervision by their home institution, but they were also happier with their competency development and their

learning process in comparison to students of other programs. It is possible that the international character of the program of study and the prominent position of internship and study abroad in the curriculum enables students to better recognize and verbalize their international competency development. For the other programs participating in this study a foreign experience was not a mandatory part of the curriculum. Instead it is offered as an additional and optional part of the program. This means the role or purpose of an international study or internship, in relation to the course profile and its place in the curriculum, is not always clear. Consequently, the international competencies that should be acquired and developed during the international experience may not be clearly and unambiguously defined, and a preparation and supervision program specifically targeted towards this development, as well as systemic assessment of international competencies after students have returned may be lacking.

The existing package of information provision, preparation and supervision, which mainly focuses on practical and administrative issues, is not always clear to students, and is also not always considered motivating or useful.

Students of the minor Development Cooperation are also somewhat less satisfied on several aspects.

However, this minor does include an intensive supervision program, especially prior to departure, in which students are prepared for their stay and work abroad. Students are unmistakably positive about this program. It provides them with knowledge and information on developmental issues and helps students to understand situations and developments that occur while abroad. Besides this, students feel that presenting and reflecting on their experience abroad afterwards is important in creating awareness and verbalizing their development. Judging from the interviews held after reentry, DC students' appreciation mainly seems to be negatively affected by two factors: insufficient supervision by their home institution while abroad, and dissatisfaction about how their internship relates to their study program and job perspectives. As a result, these students score lower on satisfaction regarding the learning process than students from other study programs.



6.5.2 Points of improvement

The present study brings to light several possible points of improvement in terms of preparation and supervision of students.

- *A considered and goal-conscious approach in using study and internship abroad for the development of international competencies.*

It is important for study programs to carefully weigh the options when choosing either study or internship abroad. That is to say, study and internship do not achieve the same results and do not offer the same opportunities for the development of international competencies. This means study or internship abroad should be given a clear place and role in the curriculum, and clear learning objectives should be formulated beforehand. Given their importance to the learning process, particularly in terms of interpersonal and intercultural competencies, local conditions should also be taken into consideration.

- *More information and clarity on the possibilities, requirements, procedures and supervision from the home institution*

As previously mentioned, one third of the students is dissatisfied about the provision of information and supervision of the home institution prior to their departure. In addition, part of the control group indicated they did not feel stimulated, and sometimes even discouraged and for this reason decided against going abroad for study or internship.

- *Be better prepared for the country and destination, as well as for the content of study or internship*

Students indicated, especially after returning, that they did not sufficiently prepare for their stay abroad and that they did not attempt to get a clear picture of the local living and working conditions prior to departure. Solid preparation generates insights and understanding and allows students to recognize their experiences while abroad. Additionally, an orientation more focused on the content of international study and internship, and the local conditions could help in forming realistic expectations and preventing disappointment.

- *Regular contact with home institution while abroad*

Multiple students expressed the need for more contact with their home institution while staying abroad. Regular contact ensures students feel less left to their own devices and is particularly important for international interns as internship providers are often unable to provide the supervision and support students need, and often do not know what is expected from them, and what they can expect from students in return. This means there is also a need for more and regular contact between home institution and internship provider.

- Remarkably enough, the more intense a preparation and supervision program is, the more satisfied students are about their learning process. Although students are not always happy with intense preparation and supervision programs, and are also not always satisfied with their content, it does seem that their satisfaction about their learning process increases with the intensity of their preparation and supervision program.
- According to respondents, the opportunity to learn from study and internships abroad, and the way their level and content relates to their own program of study and job perspectives, leaves to be desired and is often a source of disappointment. The programs of study should make this more of a focus point.

Finally, apart from the abovementioned points of improvement, the present study together with existing literature, also allows us to formulate two recommendations:

As is emphasized in detail by existing literature, if programs of study want to optimize the development of international competencies in foreign experiences, they need develop a clear preparation and supervision program for their students to support them prior to, during and after their stay abroad (Orahod et al., 2004; Deardorff, 2009; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009; Weber-Bosley, 2010; Hernández Sanchez & Walenkamp, 2013).

The student interviews confirm the importance of a program that prepares them for the living and working conditions that await them, provides them with the necessary knowledge and skills, and helps them to understand the local situation and their experiences during their stay abroad. Besides this, students emphasize the importance reflecting on experiences and their relevance to their professional training during and after their stay abroad, as well as the importance of recognizing their experiences and their learning process and verbalizing these in terms of professional development and professional competencies.

A clear purpose statement is crucial in the development of such a preparation program, as are a clear formulation of the learning objectives and competencies that need to be developed (Deardorff, 2009; Stronkhorst, 2005). These can then form the basis for a targeted program and enables home institutions to inform students beforehand on what is expected of their stay abroad, which - aspects of - international competencies should be covered and how these will be assessed and evaluated (*cf.* Hernández Sanchez & Walenkamp, 2013).



7 End conclusion

As described in the previous sections, the current follow-up study was adapted in several ways as a result of the findings in the preliminary research in the academic year 2011-2012.

These adaptations were mainly in the following areas:

- Increasing the response rate of the test group, and consequently the representativeness of the research data;
- Operationalizing international competencies, including intercultural competencies;
- Taking into consideration background variables, and
- Refining and expanding the research instruments.

This new approach allowed for several additions and nuances to be made to the findings of the previous study and also provides a more nuanced picture of the development in international competencies.

Nevertheless, the development of international competencies remains a tricky field of research. Similar to the MPQ based questionnaire in the preliminary study, the Intercultural Readiness Check also showed no, or only limited differences between the pretest and the posttest.

This could be the result of multiple factors:

- The differences that occur in a period of 3 to 6 months could be too small for the IRC to register.
- Given the limited number of respondents, a small number of strongly deviating scores could have a relatively large impact on the average scores in the different dimensions.
- Students might score themselves lower in the posttest because their stay abroad has made them view their own knowledge and skills more critically.
- Lastly, students may be unable to adequately recognize and verbalize their development in international competencies due to a lack of sufficient preparation and supervision.

However, statements in the online questionnaire, the interviews and the 360 degree feedback paint a different picture: the data collected with these instruments point towards an increase in intercultural competence as a result of international experience.

This emphasizes the importance of using a mixed method and sources approach, which also corresponds with recommendations made in existing literature (Deardorff, 2009; Deardorff & Jones, 2012; Fantini, 2009).

Not only do the interviews and 360 degree feedback show changes in students' competencies that remained unnoticed in the IRC, but the data obtained through these interviews also contributes greatly to the interpretation of the data collected through the online questionnaire. Nevertheless, the findings of this study should still be taken with caution. Although changes in the research methodology resulted in a larger response and increased representativeness of the test group, the limited number of response rate remains a weakness and leaves little room for an analysis of the data per, for instance, background factor. The pretest and posttest comprised of 71 and 43 respondents respectively. Dividing these up into smaller sub groups depending on characteristics and other factors would lead to such small numbers that it is almost impossible to reach meaningful conclusions. This problem is accentuated even more by the longitudinal character of this research. The response rate in the posttest, for which only students who had participated in the pretest were invited, is 60.6 percent. In addition, the follow-up study, despite the implementation of the 360 degree feedback, relies heavily on students' own perceptions.

Research findings show that the preparation and supervision of students still has room for significant improvements.

Crucial in the development of such a programme are a clear learning outcomes, the relevance of study and internship abroad for the study program, and the international competencies that these international activities aim to develop. These can then form the basis for a targeted program in which students are prepared and supervised prior to, during, and after their stay abroad. (Orahood et al., 2004; Deardorff, 2009; Deardorff & Jones, 2012; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009; Weber-Bosley, 2010; Hernandez Sanchez & Walenkamp, 2013).

At the same time it offers new opportunities for research into the development of international competencies. With the operationalization of THUAS' Internationalisation policy there are new opportunities for curriculum internationalization, defining internationally oriented learning outcomes, and for research into the acquisition of international competencies among students. These competencies will be outlined more clearly and acquiring them will no longer be only optional. Some students will receive training specifically targeted towards the development of those competencies. (*cf.* Hernandez & Walenkamp, 2013), whereas others will not. Some will take part in international classroom projects, and others will be part of multicultural Dutch groups. Some will receive intensive supervision by teachers who are knowledgeable and experienced in international activities, and others will not. Some will go to developing countries, and others will stay closer to home (*cf.* Belt et al., 2015).

Defining learning outcomes and looking for effective and efficient methods to acquire competencies and will be combined with research into the wants and needs of alumni and employers in terms of international competencies, and what this means for set learning outcomes and curriculum design.



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