

Improving the interpersonal relationship between a Dutch University of Applied Sciences and international students.

Case study Aeres University of Applied Sciences Dronten



Bachelor thesis

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Preface

In front of you lay my bachelor thesis on improving the interpersonal relationship between a Dutch University of Applied Sciences and its international students. It took me half a year to write a research proposal, collect feedback from lecturers and finally conduct my research. Everything was planned down to the smallest detail, but already during the writing of the introduction it became clear that there was a bigger problem behind my original topic. Accordingly, I threw out the entire planning and started again. This was frustrating because I am very attached to my planning and often find spontaneous changes difficult. In addition, the COVID-19 virus threw a spanner in the works as my interviewees all had to be quarantined at the same time. Because of this, I could not conduct my interviews in the normal sense, but do them in an online environment. This did not make it any easier to get the information I needed. However, my interviewees were motivated and saw their benefit in my bachelor thesis, so they did their best to give me as much information as possible. I am very grateful to them for this.

Another person I would like to thank is Liesbeth Meijer, my coach during the writing of my bachelor thesis. She was very understanding of the fact that I am a perfectionist and like to finish my work before a deadline. Mrs. Meijer gave me the right impulses to make my work as good as possible and calmed me down when I got stressed if something did not work out according to my planning. I would also like to thank Henka Rooze as well for helping me to look critically at my work with her feedback on my research proposal. Furthermore, I would like to thank my colleagues at the International Office of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten. They were always available to help and advise me and shared all the information they found useful for my bachelor thesis.

Not to forget, I would like to thank my family. Unfortunately, they could not be physically with me during this process, but I could always count on them. They gave me all the support they could offer and they understood that I could take less time for them than I would have liked to. I would also like to thank my boyfriend and my parents-in-law for taking the time to help me through this process. As best as they could, they took the place of my family, supported me in my writing process, gave me feedback where possible and were a calming influence for me, when I was stressing too much.

This path was certainly not an easy one, but I can now proudly say that I made it. I hope you enjoy reading this bachelor thesis and that I can improve the interpersonal relationship between the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten and the international students.

Kim Laura Koziol

Summary

Currently there are round about 94,236 international students in the Netherlands following an international studies at a university or a University of Applied Sciences. This number is growing each year but recently some of these international students struggle due to the missing interpersonal relationship to the faculties they are studying at. Furthermore, the whole world is facing the COVID-19 virus for nearly two years already which makes it even harder to build up interpersonal relationships. For international students, this is a pity because they come to the Netherlands for the full study experiences, which includes an interpersonal relationship with the faculties they are studying at, their fellow students and all other people in the Netherlands.

In the whole Netherlands, students mention mental health issues due to the lockdowns and the not existing interpersonal relationship. They can barely visit their family and friends in their home country and struggle to build up connections to the Dutch people.

In this case study, nine international students from seven different countries, studying at the Aeres University of Applied Sciences, participated in two rounds of group interviews. They were asked for their feelings and experiences with the interpersonal relationship with the University of Applied Sciences in Dronten.

The results of these interviews showed, that the interpersonal relationship with the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten is insufficient. Interviewees mentioned that they feel segregated from the Dutch and that the communication was not working well. Furthermore, they were bothered by Dutch students and that they get the feeling that they are not welcome in the Netherlands. Their interpersonal relationship with the staff of the faculty is better than with the Dutch students, but due to the fact that they do not get the chance to learn Dutch, the communication is hard for them. As well the participants mentioned that a lot of the staff at the faculty do have an insufficient level of English. The interpersonal relationship among the international students is good because they live in the same building and are aware of the cultural differences which occur among them. All of them would like to improve the interpersonal relationship with all parties at the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten.

The six dimension model of Hofstede and the Culture Mapping tool of Meyer were used to get more information about cultural differences among the international students and the differences with the Dutch culture. This theory was helpful to find out if the experiences and feelings of the interviewees depend on their cultural background or not. It emerged that people with big cultural differences struggle more with building up an interpersonal relationship with the University of Applied Sciences than people from cultures which are comparable to the Dutch culture.

The internal factors of cultural differences and the external factors of the behaviour and attitude of the Dutch people are reasons which influence the interpersonal relationship a lot. To improve the interpersonal relationship between the international students and the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, an awareness of cultural differences must be created. Furthermore, the faculty must become more international from within.

Samenvatting

Op dit moment zijn er ongeveer 94.236 internationale studenten in Nederland die een internationale studie volgen aan een universiteit of een University of Applied Sciences. Dit aantal groeit elk jaar, maar de laatste tijd heeft een deel van deze internationale studenten het moeilijk door de ontbrekende interpersoonlijke relatie met de faculteiten waar zij studeren. Bovendien wordt de hele wereld al bijna twee jaar geconfronteerd met het COVID-19-virus, wat het nog moeilijker maakt om interpersoonlijke relaties op te bouwen. Voor internationale studenten is dit een groot nadeel, omdat zij naar Nederland komen voor de volledige studie ervaring, waartoe ook een interpersoonlijke relatie met de faculteiten waar zij studeren, hun medestudenten en alle andere mensen in Nederland behoort.

In heel Nederland maken studenten melding van psychische problemen als gevolg van de lockdowns en de niet bestaande interpersoonlijke relaties. Ze kunnen hun familie en vrienden in hun thuisland nauwelijks bezoeken en hebben moeite om een band op te bouwen met de Nederlandse personen aan hun faculteit.

In deze casestudy namen negen internationale studenten uit zeven verschillende landen, studierend aan de Aeres Hogeschool, deel aan twee rondes van groepsinterviews. Zij werden gevraagd naar hun gevoelens en ervaringen met de interpersoonlijke relatie met de University of Applied Sciences in Dronten.

Uit de resultaten van deze interviews bleek, dat de interpersoonlijks relatie met de Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten onvoldoende is. De geïnterviewden gaven aan dat zij zich afgezonderd voelen van de Nederlanders en dat de communicatie niet goed verloopt. Verder hebben ze last van Nederlandse studenten, worden van deze gepest en krijgen ze het gevoel dat ze niet welkom zijn in Nederland. Hun interpersoonlijke relatie met het personeel van de faculteit is beter dan met de Nederlandse studenten, maar doordat ze niet de kans krijgen om Nederlands te leren, is de communicatie voor hen moeilijk. Ook gaven zij aan dat een groot deel van het personeel op de faculteit het Engels onvoldoende beheersen. De interpersoonlijke relatie tussen de internationale studenten is goed omdat zij in hetzelfde gebouw wonen en zich bewust zijn van de culturele verschillen die er tussen hen bestaan. Allen zouden de interpersoonlijke relatie met alle partijen op de Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten willen verbeteren.

Het zes dimensies model van Hofstede en de Culture Mapping tool van Meyer zijn gebruikt om meer informatie te krijgen over cultuurverschillen tussen de internationale studenten onderling en de verschillen met de Nederlandse cultuur. Deze theorie was nuttig om uit te vinden of de ervaringen en gevoelens van de geïnterviewden afhankelijk zijn van hun culturele achtergrond of niet. Het bleek dat mensen met grote culturele verschillen meer moeite hebben met het opbouwen van een interpersoonlijke relatie met de hogeschool dan mensen uit culturen die vergelijkbaar zijn met de Nederlandse cultuur.

De interne factoren van cultuurverschillen en de externe factoren van het gedrag en de houding van Nederlanders zijn redenen die de interpersoonlijke relatie sterk beïnvloeden. Om de intermenselijke relatie tussen de internationale studenten en de Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten te verbeteren, moet er een bewustzijn van cultuurverschillen worden gecreëerd. Verder moet de faculteit van binnenuit internationaler worden.

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1. Introduction

Over the last years, the number of international students in the Netherlands increased rapidly. In 2010 48,408 international students were studying in the Netherlands – nine years later this number is twice as high with 94,236 international students (Statista, 2021). According to the VSNU (Association of universities of the Netherlands), these are 14% of all students in the Netherlands. Looking at four popular university rankings, the Netherlands belongs to the top 2% of the 17,000 universities worldwide (Association of universities of the Netherlands, 2021). In 2021 the University of Utrecht stood in 50th place of the Academic Ranking of World Universities. Regarding the CWTS Leiden Ranking, this university even got 49th place in 2020. According to the QS World University Ranking, the TU Delft stood in 57th place in 2021. In 2021 the Wageningen University placed 62 in the Time Higher Education ranking (Association of universities of the Netherlands, 2021). These four rankings are used worldwide to compare universities to each other. The rankings only focus on the service of the universities which is educating the students. One thing which they do not measure is the relationship of the students and the university.

Even if the universities are ranked very well, the international students still struggle to find their place in the Netherlands. Especially due to the COVID-19 virus which influences the world for more than a year already, the mental health of students deteriorated. International students got influenced even more than Dutch students because they could not visit their families in the



Sylwester Slawomir Pyrkowski • 3.+
Fraud Analyst at American Express
6 Monate • 🔒

+ Folgen ...

I am finally ready to say that this pandemic has affected me as a student and I dare to say that I am not the only one.

I am as unmotivated, uninspired and unproductive as never before.

I barely see my lecturers in person.

I can't volunteer anywhere.

I struggle to find any paid internships or simple part-time jobs.

I can't constructively argue with my fellow students on any important study-related topics without losing internet connection.

I study at one of the best universities in Europe and yet I haven't even seen its library, canteen or a different hall than the one assigned to us by arrows and signs as if we're on a crime scene.

I know that the world barely holds it together but we, the students, are struggling. We are depressed.

If this is not going to be addressed, we will continue to be so. This will affect our lives after the graduation, and ultimately will affect our future careers.

I am tired of getting one email per month from university asking me if I am ok, I am not. No one is ok.

No, we will not going back to our normal lives any time soon, in fact we most probably never will, especially without appropriate measures in-place to tackle increasing depression among students internationally.

[#studentsupport](#) [#education](#) [#universitylife](#) [#depression](#)

[Übersetzung anzeigen](#)

Figure 1: LinkedIn post by Sylwester Slawomir Pyrkowski (Pyrkowski, 2021)

vacation periods anymore, they were not able to build up a network and connect with other people and they did were not able to get to know the country and the culture (Morbée, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Vermote, & Waterschoot, 2020). Due to several lockdowns and quarantines students had to stay at home and get online classes. A post by Sylwester Slawomir Pyrkowski, an international student following the law master studies at the University of Amsterdam, went viral on LinkedIn stating that many international students got depressed due to the circumstances they had to handle because of the COVID-19 virus. This post was placed in April 2021 and received 15,577 likes and 251 comments were shared below the post. Many people gave their

opinion on Pyrkowski's post and discussions started. International students were shouting for help and stated that the interpersonal relationship with the universities was insufficient. Other people thought that the students were just making a fuss and did not appreciate the good life they have. Even professional researchers, teachers, psychologists, and experts gave their point of view on the post and supported the opinion of the students, and encouraged them to share their stories (Pyrkowski, 2021).

Not only does this LinkedIn post shows that the mental health of students worsens but studies such as the study of "The Motivation barometer" does as well. This study was done in Belgium in 2020 and shows that 1 of 5 students has depressive feelings more than half of the week. Furthermore, this study shows that feeling connected is very important for students (Morbée, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Vermote, & Waterschoot, 2020). Due to the COVID-19 situation, this was not that unusual because people could not meet in person. By that, the communication was limited to online communication.

An article in an Erasmus magazine shows that online communication and online learning are not sufficient for international students to come to the Netherlands. They still would like to have the full experience, including learning something about the Dutch culture, networking with Dutch people, and visiting the country. The enrolment of international students at universities of applied sciences decreased by 2.7% but the number of international students at universities increased by 13% (Erasmus Magazine, 2021).

This shows that international students are missing something during their studies in the Netherlands. Due to the COVID-19 situation the way of meeting people, studying, and communicating changed a lot. Universities already adapted their teaching methods to online teaching using several platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. However, it is important to find out what the international students miss in the relationship with their university and on which way the situation could be improved. It seems that the new teaching methods work quite well for the students but that they miss an improvement of the interpersonal relationship with their university during a long-term pandemic.

Especially during a long-term pandemic, it is important to have an interpersonal relationship with the university as an international student. Connection belongs to the psychological needs of the hierarchy of needs of Maslow. This hierarchy is a theory to measure theory of psychological health predicated on fulfilling human needs (McLeod, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2018). Interpersonal relationships are ongoing interactions between people that involve the mutual fulfilment of both party's needs. Self-disclosure or sharing of personal and intimate information about oneself are key characteristics of interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships are essential for human development and survival. Relationship dynamics and norms vary across cultures, bonding, attachment, and socialization (Franz & Moulton, 2021).

At the moment we do not know how the international students perceive the interpersonal relationship with the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten. Furthermore, we do not know if cultural differences between the Dutch University of Applied Sciences and the international students affect the interpersonal relationship. If there is an effect of these differences we do not know in which way they affect the situation. It is important to measure the relationship between the international students and the university and to find out what the ideal situation would be. Regarding the pyramid of needs of Maslow, it is one of the basic needs to

feel connected (McLeod, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2018). During a long-term pandemic such as the COVID-19, the University of Applied Sciences is nearly the only contact to other people for international students. Due to that, the situation has to be improved and solutions must be found for possible future pandemics so the international students do not feel left alone anymore. Even if this research is done for the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, it is relevant for all universities in the Netherlands that this research is carried out because not only the students at this university feel unheard and unseen by their university but a lot of other students in the Netherlands have the same feeling.

2. Theoretical framework

As mentioned in the introduction this research is meant to find out what the situation of interpersonal relations between a University of Applied Sciences and its international students is, if culture influences this situation, and how the situation might be improved. For that, it is important to discuss some theories before.

The theoretical framework defines some terms which will appear frequently in this research and it explains theoretical models which will be used to find answers to the research question. Firstly, the interpersonal relationship will be explained and defined. There are a lot of different theories about interpersonal relationships. The theory used in this report will be elucidated in this chapter. Furthermore, this chapter includes a definition of communication which is an important part of keeping the interpersonal relationship intact. Since this research is focused on international students, intercultural communication will be defined as well.

Except for a model on interpersonal relationships two models on cultural dimensions and human motivation will be explained: the six dimensions of Hofstede and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Hofstede's six dimensions model gives the possibility to compare different cultures which are important to do in this research because cultural differences might influence the interpersonal relationship between a university and its international students. Maslow's hierarchy of needs must be included in this research because connection and interaction with other human beings is a human need and there might be negative results if a person experiences no or small satisfaction of this need.

First, a definition of interpersonal relationships will be given because it is the basis of this whole research. The different types of interpersonal relationships will be explained as well to understand which type of relationship the University of Applied Sciences has with the students. This will deviate into the teaching staff of the University of Applied Sciences and the managing and organizational staff.

2.1 Interpersonal relationship

Maggie Franz and Sunday Moulton discuss the key features of interpersonal relationships. Franz taught communication and rhetoric at university level for several years and specialized in legal rhetoric and critical race theory. Moulton earned a Ph.D. in Anthropology and taught college courses and high school ACT/ SAT Prep. According to them, interpersonal relationships are ongoing interactions between people that involve the mutual fulfilment of both party's needs. Self-disclosure or sharing of personal and intimate information about oneself are key characteristics of interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships are essential for human development and survival. Relationship dynamics and norms vary across cultures, bonding, attachment, and socialization (Franz & Moulton, 2021). According to the pyramid of needs of Maslow, it is a psychological human need. The pyramid of Maslow consists of five human needs which are organized into three categories: Basic needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfilment needs. Basic needs are biological/ physiological needs and the need for safety. Psychological needs consist of the need for love and belonging and the need for esteem. The need for self-fulfilment is the need for self-actualization (McLeod, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2018). Due to that interpersonal relationships are already developed in infancy and early childhood. If interpersonal relationships are not built up as a stable base at this age,

people often suffer from mental and physical problems throughout their lifetime (Franz & Moulton, 2021).

2.1.1 Types of interpersonal relationships

Franz and Moulton have well-defined different types of interpersonal relationships. These are family, friendship, romantic, platonic, and professional. Each of them has a distinct influence on people's sense of self and well-being. One person can fulfil the role of more than one type of relationship, for example, a sister can feel like a best friend as well. Interactions between members of a household who share a blood relationship are called family relationships. These can be relationships such as parent and child, legal relationships, such as married couples, or siblings among each other. Family relationships are unique because they usually are non-voluntary and last a whole life (Franz & Moulton, 2021).

Friendship relationships are voluntary bonds entered into with people who are not necessarily blood-related or part of the same household. Friendships usually grow from shared interests and beliefs and for this reason, friendships provide enjoyment and well-being. Sometimes it even happens that friendships have a greater level of intimacy than family relationships (Franz & Moulton, 2021).

Romantic relationships differ from family and friendship relationships because they are comprised of people who are dating, coupled, or married, due to that they often have more intense levels of physical intimacy. Relationships like these have three interconnected components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. The feeling of closeness, bondedness, and attachment belongs to intimacy. Intimacy is not only found in romantic relationships but is a vital component of romantic love. Passion is an intense feeling of emotional and sexual excitement for someone else and is the factor that distinguishes romantic relationships the most from other types of relationships. Commitment is the deep feeling of connection to someone else. It is the sense of loyalty, obligation, and permanence people feel for each other. As well as friendships, romantic relationships can be a source of enjoyment, well-being, and self-development (Franz & Moulton, 2021).

Platonic relationships exist between people who are intimate and bonded in a non-sexual way. These relationships can inspire ideas and connect people to the divine. An example, is two friends who are deeply connected and inspire each other's creativity (Franz & Moulton, 2021).

Professional relationships refer to more formal interactions that are focused on work tasks. They only take place in the context of a workplace and come with explicit hierarchical relations of power. The level of hierarchy determines the level of formality in interactions in a company. If people are at the same level they will have fewer formal interactions than those who occupy different positions (Franz & Moulton, 2021).

Interpersonal relationships are always changing because they are the product of continuous communication and can be strengthened and weakened depending on the quantity and quality of interactions (Franz & Moulton, 2021).

The relationship between international students and their University of Applied Sciences can be two different types. Between the managing and organizational staff, it is a professional re-

relationship because the University of Applied Sciences is an organization that is offering a service to the students who pay for it. Their interaction is very formal and it is clear that the staff has more power than the students. The relationship between the teaching staff can be a mix of a professional relationship and a platonic relationship. The teachers are placed on a higher hierarchical level than the students but they inspire the students as well and share partly the same interests.

To be able to use his/ her full potential, a person first must fulfil his/ her basic and psychological needs. Feeling connected to someone else belongs to the psychological needs of a person which means that the international students cannot put their full energy and passion into their studies if there is a lack of interpersonal relationships. As mentioned in the introduction, many students were not able to visit their families, make new friends or even see their teachers or other university staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pyramid of needs of Maslow shows how important it is to fulfil psychological needs. That is the reason why this model is used in this research.

2.2.2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Abraham Harold Maslow was an American psychologist who became famous for the creation of his hierarchy of needs, a theory of psychological health predicated on fulfilling human needs. These needs could be grouped up into three groups: basic needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfilment needs. Figure 2 shows which human need belongs to which group and explains shortly what each need means (Wikipedia, 2021).

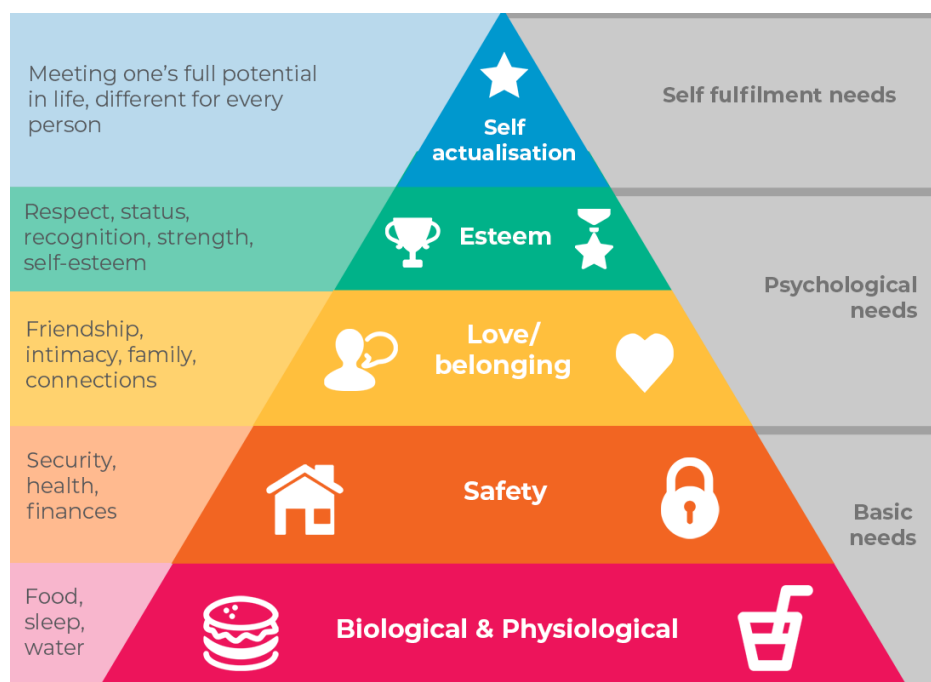


Figure 2: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Professional Academy, 2021)

The first of the basic needs are the biological requirements for human survival. To these belong for example air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, and sleep. Each human being strives to fulfil these needs and they are even included in human rights. The human body cannot function optimally if these needs are not satisfied, which is the reason why Maslow

considered biological and physiological needs the most important (McLeod, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2018).

Safety needs are the second level of the basic needs and include for example protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, and freedom from fear. When these needs are satisfied, the human being needs love and belongingness. Interpersonal relationships as friendship, intimacy, trust, and acceptance, receiving and giving affection or love are examples of this. Furthermore, affiliation and being part of a group (family, friends, work) can be included in the third level of human needs. For international students it seems hard to satisfy this need during a prolonged pandemic as the COVID-19 pandemic since they are not with their families anymore, probably only know a few people, and most have just the possibility to stay in contact with people by using online communication tools (McLeod, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2018).

The fourth level is esteem needs which can be classified into two categories:

1. Esteem for oneself (Dignity, achievement, mastery, independence)
2. The desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige).

The need for respect or reputation is most important for children and adolescents and precedes real self-esteem or dignity indicates Maslow (McLeod, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2018). This means that as well for the international students, this is an important need to satisfy - they want to be recognized and respected. The last needs are self-actualization needs, including realizing personal potential, self-fulfilment, seeking personal growth, and peak experiences. This is the desire to become everything one is capable of becoming (McLeod, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 2018).

For this research, especially the psychological needs seem to be important because they are about interpersonal relationships and the connection of people.

To interpersonal relationships of course belong interpersonal communication. This is the process of exchanging information, ideas, and feelings between two or more people through verbal or non-verbal methods (Smarp, 2020). Communication plays a big role in interpersonal communication.

2.2 Definition communication

Communication is so powerful that no group or organization can exist without it. Communication is the transfer and understanding of meaning, which must be understood because only that we can convey information and ideas. In perfect communication, thoughts would be transmitted to the receiver understood the same mental picture the sender intended. This is never achieved in practice but increased understanding of the functions and processes of communication can lead to improvement (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

There are three different types of communication: oral, written, and nonverbal communication. Oral communication such as speeches, formal one-on-one, and group discussion, and the informal rumour mill or grapevine are popular forms of communication. The biggest advantages of oral communication are speed, feedback, and exchange. A sender can receive a

response in a minimal time and the receiver can rapidly show if he/ she is unsure or not. Researchers indicate that humans are bad listeners because they tune the other person out and rush to advise. Active listening helps to learn more and build trust if someone is genuine and not judgemental. Oral communication gives social, cultural, and emotional exchange components. If humans purposefully exchange cultural social components, cultural boundaries can be transcended and trust, cooperation, and agreement between individuals and a team can be built. A major disadvantage is that there is a potential distortion if a message has to be passed through several people (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Letters, e-mail, instant messaging, organizational periodicals, and any other method that conveys written words or symbols are included in written communication. Some ways of written communication create a digital or physical long-term record, while others provide a quick, fleeting information exchange (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Nonverbal communication includes body movements, the intonations or emphasis people give to words, facial expressions, and the physical distance between the sender and the receiver. Mostly, nonverbal communication is used without the acknowledgment of its usage. For example, people smile to project trustworthiness or uncross their arms to appear approachable. Facial expressions can show arrogance, aggressiveness, fear, shyness, and other characteristics. Physical distance also has a meaning: proper spacing between people largely depends on cultural norms. If someone stands closer to somebody else than is considered appropriate, it may indicate aggressiveness or sexual interest; farther away, it may signal disinterest or displeasure (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

The three channels differ in their capacity to convey information. Some can handle multiple cues at the same time, facilitate fast feedback, and be very personal, while others score low on these factors. Face-to-face communication scores highest in channel richness, which is the amount of information that can be transmitted during a communication episode. Video conferences, telephone conversations, live speeches, and voice mail have a high channel richness as well. Formal reports and bulletins on the other hand score low on channel richness. Rich channels give the chance to observe (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

While choosing a communication channel depends on whether the message is routine or not. Channels with a low richness can carry routine messages efficiently because they tend to be straightforward and have minimal ambiguity. Nonroutine communications on the other hand are likely to be complicated and have the potential for misunderstanding. Oral communication is the best choice if the sender needs to gauge the receiver's receptivity. As well, the receiver's preferred mode of communication should be considered. The sender has to consider both speaking skills when choosing a communication method (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Written communication is mainly used for complex and long communications as business e-mails, offers for a client, or general information in form of advertisement. Short, written messages can be very efficient too, if they can replace a time-consuming phone call. A disadvantage of written communication is the limitation in emotional expressions. Emotions can only be delivered by the use of emojis but for many people, the meaning of some emojis is not clear. That is the reason why it is mainly used to be tangible, verifiable, and to keep the communication "on the record". In professional conversation e-mails and letters are mainly used to communicate. Texts are a solution if the sender needs a quick response, but they can be distracting as well (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Of course, there are not only different communication types and channels but as well different communication styles. For good communication, it is important to identify someone's communication style and to be aware of their style of communicating. Some styles make it easier to communicate with other people without disrespecting them, which promotes effective communication, lowers the risk of conflicts, and promotes a healthy relationship. There are seven communication styles: assertive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, submissive, manipulative, direct, and indirect (DS Psychology Group, 2017).

The assertive communication style is the most recommended because it reflects and promotes high self-esteem. It allows the user to achieve what he wants to achieve and gives him the confidence of communicating without being manipulative. In this way, the user of this communication style does not hurt others but protects their rights while being respectful to others. Assertive communication is the least used communication style because people need to know how to express themselves socially and emotionally, take responsibility for their choices, and give the possibility for disagreement (DS Psychology Group, 2017).

People who want to win even if it is at someone else's expense use the aggressive communication style. People using this method feel like their needs are more important than that of others. As well they feel like they have more rights and are contributing more than other people. Due to that, this is not an effective communication style. Often this style involves using frightening, loud, threatening, and hostile voices and relies on intimidating, not respecting, and bullying others. In this way, the own goal is achieved but other people are hurt. The receiver often becomes uncooperative, defensive, afraid, humiliated, and will lose his/ her respect for the aggressive person (DS Psychology Group, 2017).

A passive-aggressive communication style seems to be passive on the surface but actually, the anger is acted out indirectly. People who feel powerless and are resentful use this communication style. Their feelings are expressed through the subtle undermining of the object of their resentment. Mostly these people gossip and are two-faced - they try to present the perfect picture but they are doing the opposite on the back. Often people fall into their trap without knowing it. They end up hurt, angry, confused, and also resentful. Due to that, it gets harder for them to trust others and it makes them unwilling to work in teams. This communication style leads to a positive result for the user but it has a negative effect in the long term because people start to lose their trust in the user (DS Psychology Group, 2017).

The submissive communication style is used by people who are looking to please others and avoid conflicts. They put the needs of others before theirs because they feel like the needs of others are more important than theirs. Due to their feeling of not being good enough, they do not contribute much and think that others have more rights than them. The user of this method feels inferior and harms his/ her self-esteem. To not be hurt, they avoid confrontation and feel apologetic. Usually, they will yield to other people's preferences and are not able to express their feelings, needs, and desires. It is hard for them to make decisions and to take responsibility. Due to that, the receiver will feel guilty, frustrated, and exasperated (DS Psychology Group, 2017).

The manipulative communication style is scheming, calculating, and shrewd. To use this style, a person has to be very skilled at controlling and influencing others for their advantage. They always have an underlying message which the receiver does not recognize. This method might seem effective but it means that someone does not have regard for others and is focused on what he/ she is going to get in the end. It is hard to say not too manipulative people because they make people feel guilty to reach their goal. The feeling of guilt can make the receiver

frustrated and resentful, annoyed, angry, and irritated. These feelings make it hard to work with manipulative people (DS Psychology Group, 2017).

The use of a direct communication style means to not mask the message which is meant to be passed across. Clear language must be involved, so the receiver can understand the message easily. If a receiving party does not want to hear something, this method can seem harsh. In the case of cultural differences or a limitation in time, this communication style is the right one to use because the message can be delivered as quickly and clearly as possible (DS Psychology Group, 2017).

The last communication style is the indirect style which is the opposite of the direct communication style. Using this method, a person masks his/ her intentions and needs. Their goals are hard to be seen and it can be hard to find out what they are trying to communicate. Usually, facial expressions or subtle signs of disagreement are used in this method. The receiver often does not understand what is wrong and might end up thinking that the user does not like them for no particular reason. In teamwork, this can lead to a lot of problems (DS Psychology Group, 2017).

There are eight barriers to effective communication: filtering, selective perception, information overload, emotions, language, silence, communication apprehension, and lying. Filtering means that the sender is manipulating the information so that it will be seen more favourably by the receiver. If an organization has more vertical levels in its hierarchy, the more opportunities there are for filtering. The receiver selectively sees and hears based on their needs, motivation, experience, background, and other personal characteristics. This is called selective perception and happens without the acknowledgment of the receiver (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Information overload is a condition in which information inflow exceeds an individual's processing capacity. If there is an information overload, individuals tend to select, ignore, pass over, or forget it. In the worst case, they may put off further processing until the overload situation ends. This results in loss of information and less effective communication (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Emotions can be a great barrier too since individuals interpret messages differently whether they have positive or negative emotions. Effective communication is hindered by extreme emotions. The rational and objective thinking processes are disregarded and emotional judgments substitute them. In language, a barrier can be found as well because words mean different things to different people. Silence or lack of information build barriers too and are ignored easily. This is a mistake because silence can be the message to communicate non-interest or inability to deal with a topic. It can as well be an outcome of information overload, or a delaying period for considering a response (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Communication apprehension is an undue tension and anxiety about oral communication, written communication, or both. People might find it extremely difficult to talk with others or become anxious when they have to use the phone. Lying is the final barrier to effective communication. Some people are telling lies considerably more than others, mostly this does not happen in face-to-face conversation because people feel less comfortable then (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Furthermore, there are barriers to cross-cultural communication. The six key barriers are ethnocentrism, stereotyping, psychological barriers, language barriers, geographical distance,

and conflicting values. People tend to look at other cultures through their lenses, that is called ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism means that somebody implicitly believes that his/ her way of doing things and seeing things is the right and only way. Negatively judging behaviours that do not conform to their world vision is a result of that. This creates a “us versus them” mentality that can be detrimental to good communication (Compoint, 2018).

Stereotyping can be a great barrier as well. People rely on oversimplified clichés about people from other cultures. Often people forget that individuals are unique and that it is not possible to predict a person's behavior based on his or her nationality. Psychological barriers influence good communication as well. In being flexible in their style of communicating people can feel artificial acting in the way the people from the other culture would. That leads people to stop interacting with people from other cultures and from going abroad, they simply feel uncomfortable and like actors (Compoint, 2018).

Language barriers are one of the biggest barriers to communication. Nowadays, nearly every person who can attend education gets the possibility to learn the English language because it is the world's language. Still, it happens that some people are more fluent than others, this can create social distance between members. People can withdraw from communication because others speak too fast or use too much slang. This can as well lead to the fact that others are seen as incompetent and unqualified (Compoint, 2018).

Geographical distance might be seen as a barrier as well because people struggle with differences in time zones or even smaller things as lunch breaks (Compoint, 2018). In Spain for example it is common to have a long break in the afternoon because it simply is too warm to work. Germans on the other hand do not live in such a warm climate and might not understand why a Spanish person prefers to have a meeting in the morning or the evening.

The last cultural barrier is different values. Cultural clashes happen, even if a person is trained well in cross-cultural communication. Sometimes other people's behaviour compromises the values of a person which can lead to a conflict. These cultural norms and values are explained by Geert Hofstede who's six dimensions theory and model will be explained later in this report (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

As already mentioned, communication can be influenced by culture and cultural differences. There are different ways of analysing cultural differences and finding out how they influence a situation, but to understand that, it must first be clear, what intercultural communication is. At the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, many different cultures can be found. All of these have to interact with the main culture in Dronten: the Dutch culture. An easy theory and model to find cultural differences and to explain them are the six dimensions of Hofstede. This comparison model will be explained in this chapter. To find even more cultural differences, the difference between low and high-context cultures will be explained as well.

2.3.1 Intercultural communication

According to F. E. Jandt, intercultural communication is:

“Intercultural communication is the interaction among people of different cultures.” (Jandt, 2021)

F. E. Jandt was a German teacher who earned his doctorate in communication from Bowling Green State University and taught intercultural communication for more than 40 years. His definition will be used in this research because especially during a long-term pandemic such as COVID-19; the virus limits the interaction among people. The several lockdowns and online teaching methods limited the interaction of people to online interaction. Physical interaction was barely allowed for some time and as mentioned before, connection to other people is one of the basic human needs.

Social interaction means any process involving mutual stimulation or response between two or more individuals. This can range from initial encounters between parent and offspring to complex interactions involving multiple individuals in adult life. The development of cooperation and competition, the influence of status and social roles, and the dynamics of group behavior, leadership, and conformity belong to social interaction and are important for the mental healthiness of people (American Psychological Association, 2021).

Erin Meyer states that “language only gives a partial indicator as to where a culture will fall on the Communication scale” and that “the history of a country strongly impacts its position on the Communication scale” (Meyer E. , 2015). The communication scale Meyer talks about is shown in figure 3 and describes how skilled a country is in communication based on its language and history. This must be considered while speaking about intercultural communication. People in low context countries describe good communication as precise, simple, and clear. Their messages are expressed and understood at face value and repetition is appreciated if it helps to clarify the communication. People in high context societies appreciate exactly the opposite. In their opinion, good communication is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered. Their messages are both spoken and read between the lines and they are often implied but not plainly expressed (Meyer E. , 2015).



Figure 3: Culture communicating scale and ranking (Meyer E. , 2015)

2.3.2 Six dimensions of Geert Hofstede

According to Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist well known for his pioneering research on cross-cultural groups and organizations, culture is:

“(1) the training or refining of the mind; (2) the unwritten rules of the social game, or more formally the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another – this meaning corresponds to the use of the term culture in anthropology.”
 (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010)

This definition will be used throughout this report because the six dimensions model of Geert Hofstede will be used. The model is built upon this definition of culture and shows the differences between the cultures of a different country. Figure 4 shows the cultural differences between Germany, France, and the Netherlands which are the countries that appear with a high frequency at Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten and Almere.

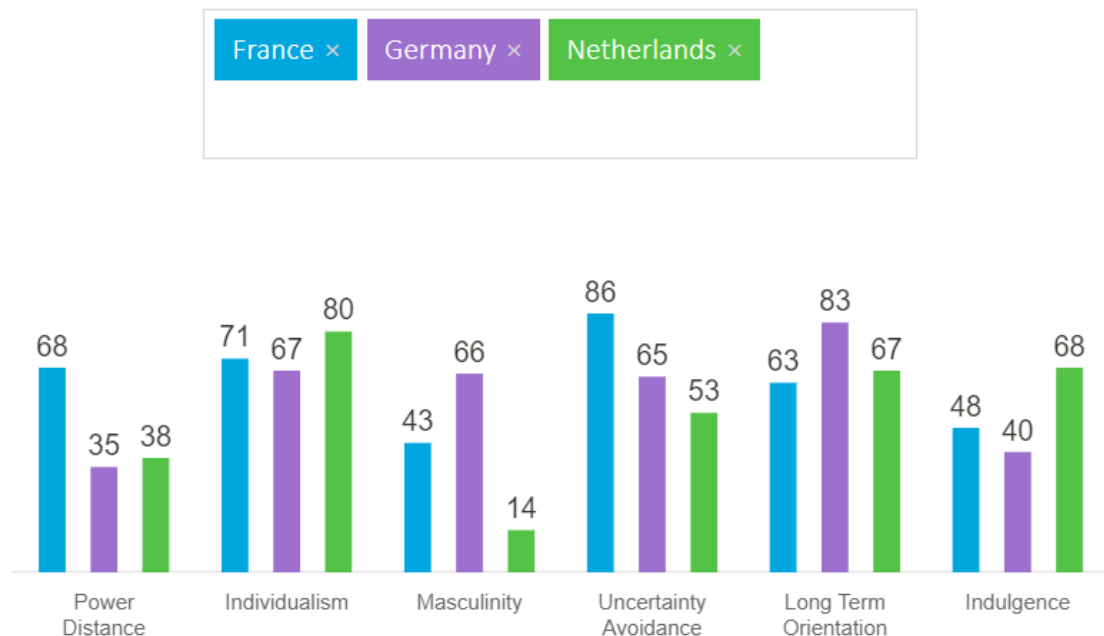


Figure 4: Cultural dimensions of Germany, France, and the Netherlands by Geert Hofstede (Hofstede insights, 2021)

To be able to use and analyse the model right, all dimensions must be defined. The following paragraph will explain all six dimensions according to Geert Hofstede.

- **Power distance:** the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. (from small to large)
 - *Power distance index (PDI):* a measure for the degree of power distance in a country's culture, originally based on the IBM research project.
- **Individualism:** the opposite of collectivism. Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family only.
 - *Individualism Index (IDV):* a measure for the degree of individualism in a country's culture, originally based on the IBM research project.
- **Masculinity:** the opposite of femininity. Masculinity stands for a society in which emotional gender roles are distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.
 - *Masculinity index (MAS):* a measure for the degree of masculinity in a country's culture, originally based on the IBM research project.

- *Uncertainty avoidance*: the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. (from weak to strong)
 - *Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI)*: a measure for the degree of uncertainty avoidance in a country's culture, originally based on the IBM research project.
- *Long-term orientation*: the opposite of short-term orientation. Long-term orientation stands for the foresting of pragmatic virtues orientated towards future rewards, in particular perseverance, thrift, and adapting to changing circumstances.
 - *Long-term orientation index (LTO)*: a measure for the degree of long-term orientation in a country's culture. LTO-CVS scores are based on the Chinese Value Survey among student samples; LTO-WVS scores are based on the World Values Survey of representative samples of national populations.
- *Indulgence*: the opposite of restraint. Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010)

For this research, it is important to distinguish the different cultures mainly appearing at Aeres UAS because there might be some cultural differences that could have a negative influence on the communication between the university and the international students. To find those differences the six dimensions model of Geert Hofstede is used.

As the six dimensions model of Geert Hofstede shows, people from different cultures can react to uncertainty and changes in their routines differently. One big change was that digital communication has grown in the last two years.

2.4 Electronic communication

From 2019 on the COVID-19 virus was an accelerator for digital communication. Teaching methods switched to online teaching, events went online and even business strategies changed to increased use of online platforms (Voorhaar, 2021). Due to that, it is important what electronic or digital communication means and how it influences the situation of interpersonal relationships between the University of Applied Sciences and the international students.

In this report the following definition of electronic communication (or e-communication) will be handled:

“E-communication, or electronic communication, refers to the transfer of writing, signals, data, sounds, images, signs or intelligence sent via an electronic device.” (Reference, 2020)*

E-mail, text messages, social media messaging, and image sharing are examples of e-communication, as well as Microsoft Teams or Zoom meetings. Nowadays, e-communication is a usual form of interaction for many people. It allows people to interact in different ways and combine many forms of media in the process. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic e-communication gave a great possibility to interact with groups through chat interfaces or video conferencing. Before COVID-19 appeared e-communication was used by companies to enhance their business and avoid obstacles, such as long-distance communication with their clients or partners (Reference*, 2020). By now, e-communication is even used in teaching,

healthcare, and many other sectors which did not have a high usage of e-communication before the pandemic.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the way of communicating switched from mostly non-electronic communication to electronic communication in all types of education. This is the reason why it is important to give this definition.

3. Main question and sub-questions

Out of the done research, some important questions are coming up which will be explained in this chapter.

3.1 Main question:

How can a Dutch University of Applied Sciences enhance its interpersonal relationship with its international students during a prolonged pandemic?

This question is important to answer because previous research shows that interpersonal relationship is one of the most basic needs of a human being. International students lately feel very disconnected from their universities which can lead to mental health issues. To answer this research, question the following sub-questions will be answered.

3.2 First sub-question:

What is the current situation of the interpersonal relationships between the students and a Dutch University of Applied Sciences?

To be able to find a way to improve the interpersonal relationship between a University of Applied Sciences and its students it firstly has to be clear what the current situation of interpersonal relationships between these two parties is. This question will be answered based on interviews with international students which will be based on a question list to measure their satisfaction with the interpersonal relationship with the university.

3.3 Second sub-question:

What would be the ideal situation of interpersonal relationships of the international students at a Dutch University of Applied Sciences?

The second sub-question will show what has to be improved to reach the optimal interpersonal relationship with the international students. For this, the interviews will be used as well. The psychologist will be interviewed on what the ideal interpersonal relationship between an organization and its clients is and the interviews with the students will be used to take their experiences and opinions into account. To find the perfect solution it is important to not only use the theory and know-how of a professional but as well the feelings and experiences of the students to find the best option for them.

3.4 Third sub-question:

How do cultural differences influence the interpersonal relationships between a Dutch University of Applied Sciences and its international students?

The third sub-question needs to be answered because there are many different cultures to be found at the Aeres UAS in Dronen and all of them act differently with each other and have different ways of communication and professional relationships. This question will mainly be answered based on literature research because there already is a lot of theory about cultural

differences and their influences on interpersonal relationships. The base of the research will be the six dimensions of Hofstede because this theory gives a good picture of the cultural differences of all countries in the world. Furthermore, the culture mapping tool of Meyer will be used to show the differences between high context and low context cultures. Besides that, some questions during the interviews will give more information about how the students are experiencing the cultural differences themselves. These questions will mainly focus on their experiences with Dutch people at the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten and their experiences of living together with many different cultures in one building. Due to the fact that experiences with people influence the interpersonal relationship between them, this information will help to find out if and in which way cultural differences have an influence on the interpersonal relationship of a Dutch University of Applied Sciences and its international students.

4. Material and methods

The questions posed in the study point to a qualitative approach as it concerns the experiences and opinions of international students. This involves in-depth information from the target group of international students at a University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. Because the research was commissioned by the Aeres UAS in Dronten, this research is a case study. The case study is a suitable method for gaining innovative insights from a social phenomenon, which in this case is the missing human relationship between a university of applied sciences and its international students. Explanatory research fits the case study well because it has to be described how the situation of the human relationship between the students and the university looks and how it should look to find the best solution. Based on a theory the main question can be answered. Several methods of data analysis can be used for a case study. The first one will be interviewing international students and the second literature research.

4.1 Interviews

To get in-depth information on how the international students experience the interpersonal relationship with the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, they will be interviewed in a focus group interview of five people. In the first round, international students who started their studies in the Netherlands in the educational year of 2020/2021 will be interviewed. They can give a picture of how the interpersonal relationships between them and the university were during a long-term pandemic and if there was a change when the governmental regulations became looser. In the second round, international students who just started their studies in the Netherlands in 2021, will be interviewed. They can give a picture of how the situation is now. By doing these two rounds it can be evaluated what the differences were during the lockdown situation during the pandemic and how it differs from now when the government allows more physical contact. During the interview, students are asked different questions, but the interview will be semi-structured to be able to continue asking after a question and get in-depth information. The questions which are asked to the interviewees are focussed on their emotions, experiences and expectations. In the annex a complete list of these questions can be found.

4.1.1 Focus group interview

A focus group interview is a qualitative approach, where the respondents are interviewed together. In this way, an in-depth understanding of social issues can be gained. It is not a statistically representative sample of a broader population because it aims to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals (McLeod, Simply Psychology, 2014). For this research, this way of interviewing people is useful because the research is a case study at the Aeres UAS in Dronten. A case study is a detailed investigation of a specific subject, such as a person, a group, an organisation or a phenomenon. Commonly, case studies are used in social, educational, medical, clinical or business-related research (Scribbr, 2021). Since this research is a social but as well business-related research, this research method can be used to get information to answer the research question.

During a focus group interview, the role of the interviewer is the moderator, he/ she makes sure that the group interacts with each other and does not drift off-topic. In the best case, the moderator will be similar to the participants in terms of appearance, have based knowledge of the topic being discussed, and exercise mild unobtrusive control over dominant talkers and shy participants. The interviewer must be highly skilled to conduct a focus group interview (McLeod, Simply Psychology, 2014).

A group interview generates qualitative narrative data through the use of open questions and allows the respondents to talk in some depth, choosing their own words. It also includes observational data, such as body language and facial expressions. Due to that, the researcher develops a real sense of a person's understanding of a question. Furthermore, it increases the validity because participants may feel more comfortable being with others as they are used to talking in groups in real life (McLeod, Simply Psychology, 2014).

In a group interview, it is very important to keep the interviewees' details confidential and respect their privacy (McLeod, Simply Psychology, 2014). The interviews will be recorded on film to be able to analyse them properly but the data will exclusively be used for this research. This will be mentioned and written down in a contract before the interview starts. Group interviews are less reliable because they use open questions and that may deviate from the interview schedule making them difficult to repeat. Furthermore, group interviews sometimes lack validity as participants may lie to impress the other group members. This can happen due to peer pressure (McLeod, Simply Psychology, 2014).

4.1.2 The interviewees

The first interview group will consist of six international students of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, who studied at the faculty in the educational year of 2020/ 2021. On 25th November 2021 from 8 o'clock pm until 10 o'clock pm the interview was planned. These students are chosen randomly, follow various studies and come from different countries.

Table 1: Interviewees of the focus group interview of 25th November 2021

	Country of origin	Gender	Age in years	Study	Residence
A	Russia	Female	24	International Equine Business Management	1H ¹
B	Italy	Female	23	International Equine Business Management	1H
C	Belgium	Female	22	Advanced Equine International Entrepreneurship	1H
D	Germany	Female	22	International Equine Business Management	OFW campus ²
E	Germany	Female	21	International Food Business	1H
F	Germany	Male	22	International Food Business	1H

The second interview group will consist of five international students of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, who study at the faculty in the educational year of 2021/ 2022. On 26th November 2021 from 8 o'clock pm until 10 o'clock pm the interview was planned. These students are chosen randomly, follow various studies and come from different countries.

¹ 1H = The international dorm of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences.

² OFW campus = Campus of the East Flevoland Residential Services

Table 2: Interviewees of the focus group interview of 26th November 2021

	Country of origin	Gender	Age in years	Study	Residence
G	France	Female	20	Plant Production	1H ³
H	Italy	Female	19	International Food Business	1H
I	Switzerland	Female	19	International Food Business	1H
J	Ghana	Male	23	International Food Business	1H
K	Romania	Male	31	International Horticulture & Management	1H

4.1.3 Analysis of the interviews

All interviews will be recorded to have the possibility to re-watch them and analyse them properly. Since interviews are qualitative data, a thematic analysis will be used. This way of analysing data is usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts. The data gets closely examined to identify common themes like topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly (Caulfield, 2021).

The most common form of thematic analysis follows a six-step process: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. There are two different approaches to thematic analysis: inductive and deductive. In the interview with the psychologist and the first two group interviews, the inductive approach will be used. The last group interview will use the deductive approach. Inductive means that the data determines the themes and deductive means that there already are themes based on theory or existing knowledge. For all interviews, a semantic approach will be used because the explicit content of the data will be analysed (Caulfield, 2021).

During the analyzation the following steps will be taken:

1. Familiarization

Firstly, it is important to get a thorough overview of all the data which has been collected before individual items are analysed. This involves transcribing the filmed interviews, reading through the text and taking initial notes, and generally looking through the data to get familiar with it (Caulfield, 2021).

2. Coding

The next step is coding the data which means highlighting sections in the text and coming up with shorthand labels to describe their content (Caulfield, 2021).

3. Generating themes

Step three is looking over the created codes, identifying patterns among them, and starting to come up with themes. Themes are broader than codes and most of the time they combine several codes into one theme (Caulfield, 2021).

³ 1H = The international dorm of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences.

4. Reviewing themes

Next, it has to be made sure that the themes are useful and accurate representations of the data. The themes get compared to the data set and if no problems are encountered, the themes get split up, combined, discarded or new ones get created (Caulfield, 2021).

5. Defining and naming themes

If the final list of themes is set up, it is time to name and define each of them. It involves formulating exactly what is meant by each theme and figuring out how it helps to understand the data. The researcher comes up with a succinct and easily understandable name for each theme (Caulfield, 2021).

6. Writing up

Lastly, the analysis of the data is written up. Usually, the results or findings address each theme in turn. It gets described how often the themes come up and what they mean, including examples from the data as evidence. A conclusion explains the main outcomes and shows how the analysis has answered the research question (Caulfield, 2021).

In this research, triangulation is applied to ensure the validity of the results. The use of triangulation increases the validity of the research results. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. It can also be seen as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2022). To gain insights into the interpersonal relationship between the Aeres University of Applied Sciences and the international students, two focus group interviews and in-depth literature research are done. The interviews are used to give a picture how the international students experience the interpersonal relationship with the University of Applied Sciences and the literature research will help to check if the experiences of the students are culture related or not.

4.2 Literature research

The literature research will be focused on the cultural differences of the international students at the Aeres UAS in Dronten. During this research, the focus lays on the cultural differences which may influence the way of communication. With this research method all three sub-questions will be answered. All cultures will be compared to each other based on the six dimensions theory of Geert Hofstede. This theory explains in detail why people are acting as they do in different circumstances, what the cultural background of this is and how it might collide with other cultures. Other books on cultural differences and cross-cultural management will be used in this research as well to find out on which levels and in which terms the student's cultures differ from each other.

The here for used books will be:

- Hofstede, G., Hofstede G. J., Minkov M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the mind*. McGraw Hill Education (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010)
- Meyer E. (2015) *The Culture Map: Decoding how people think, lead, and get things done across cultures*. Public Affairs (Meyer E. , 2015)
- Morrison T., Conaway W. A., & Borden G.A. (1994) *How to Do Business in Sixty Countries: Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands*. ADAMS MEDIA CORPORATION (Morrison, Conaway, & Borden, 1994)
- Trompenaars F. (2003). *Did the Pedestrian Die? – Insights from the WORLD'S GREATEST CULTURE GURU*. CAPSTONE (Trompenaars, 2003)
- Olofsson G. (2004) *When in Rome or Rio or Riyadh... Cultural Q&A for Successful Business Behavior Around the World*. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data (Olofsson, 2004)

The book “The Culture Map” will give information on how high and low context cultures differ in the way of communication and if that influences the interpersonal relationship between the UAS and the international students. “Cultures and Organizations” the book of Geert Hofstede will give a view on if the six dimensions he discusses in his theory are influencing the current situation between the University of Applied Sciences and the students. The other three books will deliver background information on the different cultures which can be found at the Aeres University of Applied Sciences. They will help to fill possible gaps which might come up during the use of the two theories and possibly fill them up. Furthermore, they will depict the different cultures more in detail and give information on how to act with people from different cultures.

The following keywords will be used to find the needed information:

- Cultural differences, cultural dimensions
- Equality, inequality, power distance, social classes
- Individualism, collectivism
- Gender roles, masculinity, femininity
- Uncertainty, avoidance
- Values, long-term orientation, short-term orientation
- Subjective well-being, indulgence, restraint
- High context, low context
- Intercultural communication, intercultural management, language
- Do's and don'ts, behavior

Greeni and Google Scholar will be used for further research to find recently published articles on cultural differences and their influence on interpersonal relationships. The results of this research will be given in a table to give a good overview of the differences of the countries followed by a conclusion.

4.3 Variables

Variables are all characteristics that can take on different values, such as age, gender, cultural background or living situation. Usually, the researcher wants to know the effect of one variable on another. Variables which are called independent are the cause of something and their value is independent of the other variables in the research. The effect of a cause depends on the changes in the independent variables and is called a dependent variable (Scribbr, 2021).

In this research there might appear some independent variables which could have a big influence on the outcome of the research. Mainly, these independent variables occur in the planning and realisation of the interviews. The only independent variables which might appear in the literature research could be that the chosen countries do not occur in the chosen books or they are based on other books in the literature list. This could lead to the fact that they are not used for the research because they do not provide any relevant information.

The COVID-19 virus is an independent variable which could lead to difficulties in organising and realising the interviews. It could happen that another lockdown is announced by the government of the Netherlands, that people have to be quarantined and cannot take part in physical interviews or that the whole interview has to take place online because people are not allowed to meet in groups anymore. Assuming that the interviews have to take place online due to COVID-19 regulations, technical difficulties could arise. Besides that, the interaction with and between the interviewees would be limited. The original plan of the interview would have to be adjusted to the online environment as well. An online interview is a challenge for an interviewer which might lead to the fact that the interviewer does not get all the information he/ she would like to have.

Furthermore, it might happen that people are not able to participate in the interviews due to other illnesses or personal reasons. This independent variable could lead to the dependent variable that the size of the interview groups could variate and that not as much different countries could be represented during the interviews. Due to this the research can still answer the research question, but it might be less reliable.

These variables must be considered during the research because they can have a great influence on the results of the research. If one of these variables occurs, it must be discussed in the discussion of the results and the influence on the results must be explained.

6. Results

The results per sub-question will be discussed below.

6.1 Current situation

During the two rounds of focus group interviews, nine students were asked for their expectations when they came to the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten to follow a study there. Many of them mentioned that they were shocked when they entered the dorm where they were supposed to live for at least a year.

“My parents cried when they left me at the 1H building because the circumstances were so bad.”, mentioned interviewee E (E, 2021).

“We had to invest a lot of money to have a good living standard in the 1H building.”, said interviewee F (F, 2021) about the living circumstances in the dorm of the international students.

Interviewee A said: *“We have to lower our expectations of living in an international dorm.”* (A, 2021).

Other interviewees mentioned that they expected the Dutch people to be open-minded and speaking good English due to experiences they made in bigger cities than Dronten and due to stories they heard about the Netherlands.

“I came to the Netherlands for the whole experience and I wanted to get to know the Dutch people and culture.”, said interviewee G (G, 2021).

“The situation is different in the big cities, people there dare to speak English and are helpful.” (G, 2021) As to be seen in these two quotes, she expected a whole different situation in the Netherlands than she is experiencing currently.

“I expected the Dutch people to speak better English from the things I heard about the Netherlands.” (G, 2021).

Furthermore, they wanted to get to know the Dutch culture and learn the Dutch language. Interviewee H said: *“I was surprised that there were no Dutch courses offered to us.”* (H, 2021). Other interviewees as well were disappointed that they did not get the chance to learn the Dutch language.

Besides they expected the Aeres University of Applied Sciences to be more international. They mentioned that the most events are in Dutch and they mainly get e-mails in Dutch with an English version below. Interviewee B mentioned the following: *“A lot of e-mails are only in Dutch”* (B, 2021).

All these expectations were disappointed when they began their study in Dronten and came into the current situation. The nine students who participated in the interviews were all asked for their experiences in the Netherlands so far. All of them mentioned that they feel as one big family within the international dorm (1H building) but do not have a connection to the Dutch people.

Some interviewees stated that their only positive interpersonal relationship to Dutch students were their classmates. All interviewees mentioned that they feel bothered by Dutch students who make racist comments. Interviewee I said: *“I feel segregated from the Dutch people”* (I, 2021) and interviewee H mentioned that *“We get unkind comments from the Dutch students coming from the bar ‘t Lab”* (H, 2021).

Some of the international students are members of the student's union but they feel a culture clash with the student's union and get the feeling that they ignore them. About the student union interviewee A says: *“The student union USRA does not help us, they do nothing for the*

international students” (A, 2021). Furthermore, they organised an international event the “International food market” before the autumn break, which was barely visited by the Dutch students. The international students think that these events could improve the communication and interpersonal relationship with the Dutch students. Interviewee A states: *“International events are the key for our integration at the Aeres”* (A, 2021). Besides that, not only more international events should be set up, but the current events which are only in Dutch should be at least translated in the opinion of the international students. *“I do not want to bother the Dutch people by asking for completely English spoken events, but it would help to build up a connection”*, says interviewee J (J, 2021). Currently the international students are not able to follow any events because they are mainly in Dutch. This makes them feel segregated because they cannot join the events from the university which are meant to be for all students.

All interviewees mentioned that they have a good interpersonal relationship with their teachers and they those sometimes even give them the feeling that they care. *“The teachers and the staff are willing to help us”*, states interviewee H (H, 2021). On the other hand, some interviewees are scared to ask questions to their teachers, but help each other when needed. Interviewee J says: *“We are one big family, that makes that we do not feel lonely”* (J, 2021).

6.2 Ideal situation

In the ideal situation the international students would feel an interpersonal relationship with the staff of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences, its Dutch students and the international students. The level of English must be better and there would be English and Dutch courses for everyone who would like to make use of those. A lot of the international students would like to learn the Dutch language and some want to stay in the Netherlands after their studies. Interviewee B mentioned that: *“I would like a language course for a whole semester”* (B, 2021). A language courses could be done by Dutch students and help the international students to already get a connection to some Dutch students.

Furthermore, some students would have liked a Dutch or international buddy who would helped them to find their place in Dronten in the beginning of their studies. *“I would like someone like a buddy but he/ she should do it voluntarily”* said interviewee B (B, 2021). The interviewees mentioned that the buddy must somebody who does not get payed for the job but does it because he/ she wants to meet the international students and help them.

Some of the international students would enjoy a mixed campus as well, even if that would mean that their rooms would not be furniture. They think that it would help to mix up with the Dutch students if they lived closer together or even in the same houses. As well they would like it if there were some Dutch students living in the international dorm to get the possibility to connect with these students. Interviewee G said: *“It is not easy to meet people outside the 1H building”* and that *“a mixed campus would help”* (G, 2021).

In the opinion of the international students, regular international or cultural events like the “International food market” would help to give all students an opportunity to get to know each other. If the events were on a regular base, it would be possible that people get used to it. Besides regular events organised by the international students, cultural events or lessons for everybody would enhance the awareness of the different cultures at the university. In that case the university would take the initiative to mix the students. Interviewee B stated: *“The whole university needs to become more international, there should be international communication courses for example”* (B, 2021).

Also, the international students would appreciate a clearer communication. They get a lot of e-mails they do not understand or which are not applicable for them. It would be useful for them if they did not have to search for an English version, but only get the e-mails which are important in English. Furthermore, the official events of the university should be in English to give

the international students a possibility to participate in the events as well and not feel segregated as interviewee I says. In the ideal situation all events and the biggest part of the communication should be in English if a university offers international courses.

6.3 Influence of cultural differences

It is evident that there are some cultural differences between the culture of the interviewees and the Dutch culture. These mainly came out during the literature and the use of the country comparison tool of Geert Hofstede and the country mapping tool of Erin Meyer. All outcomes of these tools which can be found in the appendix.

6.3.1 Living circumstances

The living circumstances are experienced as bad by some of the international students. Interviewee B for example said: *“In Italy, a dorm would not be that dirty because it is just not accepted.”* (B, 2021) and interviewee A stated: *“We have to lower our expectations of living in an international dorm.”* (A, 2021). This is a consequence of their restraint culture which is the opposite of the Dutch culture. Restraint cultures as the Italian, German and Russian culture can easily become pessimistic and cynical. Furthermore, they are restraint by social norms and do not put much emphasis on leisure time. Dutch people on the opposite are very optimistic and have a positive attitude. *“Komt goed”* means that everything will be fine and is a statement which is often used by the Dutch. If something is not perfect with the first try, it is okay to try again and do it better (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The bad living circumstances were only experienced by the students who studied at the Aeres UAS from September 2020 on.

Due to their high level of masculinity, two of the three German students experienced the living situation in the international dorm as bad as well.

“We had to invest a lot of money to have a good living standard in the 1H building.” (F, 2021)

“My parents cried when they left me at the 1H building because the circumstances were so bad.” (E, 2021)

“There were no cleaning tools, enough pans or fridges, so we had no good food the first weeks until we bought fridges ourselves.” (E, 2021)

These are some statements of them about the living situation in the international dorm. In masculine cultures as the German, Swiss, Italian and Russian culture, performance is highly valued and people are judged on their performance. The combination of the restraint and masculine culture leads to the fact that these international students see the manager of the international dorm as unqualified (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Interviewee B stated: *“The communication with the 1H supervisor does not work, she is not a good supervisor.”* (B, 2021)

6.3.2 Relationship of the Dutch and internationals

Interviewee J thinks that it depends on the background of a big part of the Dutch students. The Aeres University of Applied Sciences is a Dutch agricultural high school (Aeres Hogeschool Dronten, 2021) which means that many of the Dutch students have a farming background and belong to the sub-culture of the farmers in the Netherlands. The sub-culture of the farmers has been criticised due to the high level of nitrogen and phosphate in the Netherlands. They feel discriminated and excluded by the rest of the Dutch society (Majoor & Zuthem, 2020). This is a possible reason why they are not open-minded towards the international students but *“stay with their kind”*. *“The Dutch farmers (students) think that we do not take them seriously because we do not own a farm or cattle and we are doing research for alternatives to animal products”* states interviewee E (E, 2021).

For interviewee J this might depend on the fact, that the culture in Ghana is as well as the Russian culture collectivistic. Due to the fact that they made bad experiences with some Dutch students, they see nearly all Dutch students as one group which is against all international students. *“It is their farming background which makes them not like us”* (J, 2021) says interviewee J. *“There is a big culture clash between us and the Dutch people”* (A, 2021) states interviewee A. At the same time the students from collectivistic cultures are the ones who want to improve the relationship with the Dutch students the most, because they have a huge group commitment (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). *“I want to help to improve the situation”* (A, 2021) is a statement of interviewee A.

Students from collectivistic cultures have to get used to the fact that individualistic cultures just take care of their closest people, this makes them seem not hospitable to people from collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). People from collectivistic cultures build up relationships based on the level of trust (Meyer E. , 2015). If they trust a person deeply, they treat them like their family. *“We as internationals are all the same”* mentioned interviewee J (J, 2021). As they made bad experiences with the Dutch students, they do not trust them.

The high power distance in France, Ghana and Russia makes the relationship with the Dutch more difficult. They are used to a hierarchy and that the boss takes the responsibility. In the Netherlands independency is very important, everybody is responsible for their own actions. Furthermore, the Netherlands decentralise the power of the government which might be weird for students from a cultures which are extremely centralised like Russia and Ghana. They are used to just accept the decision of the leader and not discuss. People from countries with a high power distance would for example never call their teachers by their first names or criticise them publicly (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). *“The staff and teachers try to help us”* says interviewee A (A, 2021). Collectivistic cultures furthermore prefer a top-down decision making which means that the leader takes the decisions. Individualistic cultures prefer the consensual decision making style which includes the whole group in the process (Meyer E. , 2015).

6.3.3 Communication and language

The interviewees from France, Italy and Russia mentioned that sometimes the communication is unclear. They receive e-mails which are not necessary for them or which are only in Dutch. Interviewee B mentioned the following: *“A lot of e-mails are only in Dutch”* (B, 2021). *“I expected the Dutch people to speak better English from the things I heard about the Netherlands”* and *“The situation is different in the big cities, people there dare to speak English and are helpful”* said interviewee G (G, 2021). For these students this is a bad experience as well because they found another situation than they expected. It is a bad experience for them because they do not feel comfortable in ambiguous situations and require structure and planning (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

All interviewees were surprised that they did not get any Dutch language courses because they were willing to adapt their traditions and wanted to integrate in the culture. For all interviewees except of interviewee J, this depends on their high level of long term orientation. They want to integrate, get the whole study experience abroad and learn things about new cultures. They mentioned the following things:

“We would like to learn Dutch but do not get the opportunity to do so.” (E, 2021)

“I would like a language course for a whole semester.” (B, 2021)

“A language course would be nice.” (H, 2021)

“I would like to learn more about the Dutch culture.” (H, 2021)

Some of them even think about staying in the Netherlands, like interviewee H. She says: *“I would like to learn more about the Dutch culture because I plan to stay here in future”* (H, 2021). To have a chance to integrate, they need to be able to understand the language. This

is the reason why they ask for more events in English and more international events to show their culture as well.

Even if all parties spoke the same language, there could still occur problems with the communication. The Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland are countries which prefer a low-context communication. This means that good communication for them is precise, simple, and clear. Their messages are expressed and understood at face value and repetition is appreciated if it clarifies the communication. Italy, Russia, France and Ghana prefer high-context communication. Good communication for them is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered. Their messages are both spoken and read between the lines, but often messages are implied but not plainly expressed. These differences can lead to difficulties in communication and cause misunderstanding (Meyer E. , 2015).

Both cultural models show that cultural differences can influence the interpersonal relationship of international students and a Dutch University of Applied Sciences because they can lead to misunderstanding, miscommunication, confusion and disagreement. Furthermore, people can feel treated wrongly and not appreciated if they are not aware of the cultural differences which can occur in a culturally diverse group.

7. Discussion of results

In this chapter the used materials and methods, as well as the results will be discussed.

7.1 Results

During the interviews the participants mentioned that they got the feeling that the situation between them and the Dutch students is influenced by the background of the Dutch students. As mentioned in the results, the background of most Dutch students at the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, is the farming sector in the Netherlands. It was not possible to find enough valid information about this hypothesis, which is the reason why it is not explained in detail. To give valid information about this hypothesis, more research must be done.

Eight of the nine interviewees mentioned that they feel as one family within the international dorm. To the eight interviewees belong two students from collectivistic cultures, which are defined by Hofstede as people who see everybody around them as their family if they have a good relationship with them. This proves why the interviewee from Russia and Ghana see their dormmates as their family (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

In the opinion of the interviewees, the Dutch students did not attend the event which was organised by the international students because they did not dare to speak English. This cannot be proven because no Dutch students were interviewed. In 2019 the Netherlands stood on top of the EF English Proficiency Index, which is a rank to compare the level of English of the people in different international countries. The EF SET test is a passive language test and only conducts writing, reading and listening parts. This gives a good view of the level of English but not about the speaking skills of the participants of the test (EF, 2019). There is as well the opportunity that this depended on the lack of time, a not working marketing or just no interest in the event. More research has to be done to find the reason why the Dutch students did not attend the event and do not talk to the international student that much.

Due to the fact that the international students do not understand the Dutch language, it is clear why they experience the communication as unclear. Especially students from high context cultures are struggling with communication style of the Dutch people. It cannot be proven why the students from low context cultures have difficulties with the communication style of the Dutch. They should be used to a comparable communication style (Meyer E. , 2015). There is a possibility that they see the communication as unclear because there are a lot of e-mails only in Dutch or with an English version below, which they have to search for. The communication of an international University of Applied Sciences should be completely in English, so the international students can understand everything.



Figure 5: Current situation on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Professional Academy, 2021)

On Maslow's hierarchy of needs the international students are on the second level currently which is shown in figure 5. They do not feel safe in the Netherlands due to the fact that reparations take long and not all needed supplies for a good living available. For three of the seven interviewed cultures, this is a big problem because they avoid uncertainty and prefer structure and planning. They should be at least above the safety level to could enjoy their time in the Netherlands.

All interviewees need the third level to feel good because nobody can survive without love, feeling connected and having loved people around them. Especially for people from collectivistic countries, this is a pity. They like to see everyone around them as their family and are used to this. It is a big cultural shock for them if they come to an individualistic country and do not get the same feeling as at home. Due to the COVID-19 situation they cannot be with their families as easy as before and they feel segregated from the Dutch people in Dronten. At the moment the only friends they are able to see are their fellow dormmates which leads to the fact that they do not reach the third level. Furthermore, they do not feel connected with the university and are discriminated, ignored and bothered by Dutch students.

For three of the seven cultures, esteem is very important because their level of masculinity is above the average. They live in order to work and are success orientated. Not being able to reach this goal is very hard for them and even can become a point which can lead to a depression. No interviewee mentioned that they feel depressed at the moment of interviewing but there clearly is a possibility that there are some students feeling differently.

These are the reasons, why they do not the match the points for the fifth level. Due to the fact that the levels above the second level are not met, they are not able to reach the last level and completely do their best in their studies and enjoy their studies in the Netherlands. All interviewees strive to do their best and to make the best out of the situation, helping each other out, trying to learn Dutch and understand the Dutch culture on their own. Currently, the situation of the international students is worrying because they do not feel an interpersonal relationship

with the University of Applied Sciences and its Dutch students but only with their international dormmates.



Figure 6: Ideal situation on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Professional Academy, 2021)

In the ideal situation, shown in figure 6, the international students would reach the fifth level of the hierarchy of needs of Maslow. That would mean that they feel safe, have an interpersonal relationship with all students and the staff of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten and they would feel accepted and respected by all people they are dealing with. If this is met, it would mean that they can reach their full potential and make the best out of their studies, reach their full potential and enjoy their time in the Netherlands. For the whole Netherlands, this would be an advantage because in that case the international students could integrate in the Dutch society and contribute a lot to the Dutch economy.

7.2 Material and methods

In total there were eleven persons asked to participate in the interviews to get experiences, opinions and ideas from as many people from different countries and studies as possible. These eleven interviewees should have been spread over two rounds of focus group interviews. However, there were only five students participating during the first interview and four during the second one. The students who were not able to participate in the interviews informed the interviewer just before the start of the interview that they were not able to attend the interviews due to sickness and personal reasons. Due to the late cancellation, it was not possible to find replacements for them, which lead to the fact that there is no information about the experiences, opinions and ideas from students from Romania and Belgium. These two cultures are due to the cancellation not used for the literature research as well. Seven of the nine planned cultures could be compared to the Dutch culture, the participants follow different studies, vary in age and study time in the Netherlands and as well live under different circumstances.

Both interviews are recorded, so that the interviewer was able to listen to the interviews several times and to get as much information out of them as possible. Furthermore, there was a person

just listening and taking notes during the interviews to prevent that information get lost. Both interviews were transcribed the week after they took place. The results are analysed as objective as possible because the researcher's own interpretations did not occur.

It would have been better if the interviews had all been conducted in person, rather than by using Microsoft Teams. Due to the COVID-19 situation and a mandatory quarantine in the dorm of the international students, this was not possible. A physical focus group interview would have given more possibilities for interaction and would have given the students better opportunities to speak up. On the other hand, it was useful that the interviews could be recorded and relistened several times.

The interviews were semi-structured focus group interviews which gave the possibility to get in-depth information from the students. Due to the circumstances that the interview took place on Microsoft Teams, it was not always possible to continue asking because not all questions could be understood well enough.

The literature research was a good idea to get in-depth information on why the students experienced certain situations as they did. This gave a possibility for triangulation (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2022), which makes the research more valid. During the literature research, the researcher found out that not all books on the literature list could give useful and additional information to the results of the interviews. Due to this fact the following books were not used for the literature research:

- Morrison T., Conaway W. A., & Borden G.A. (1994) *How to Do Business in Sixty Countries: Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands*. ADAMS MEDIA CORPORATION (Morrison, Conaway, & Borden, 1994)
- Trompenaars F. (2003). *Did the Pedestrian Die? – Insights from the WORLD'S GREATEST CULTURE GURU*. CAPSTONE (Trompenaars, 2003)
- Olofsson G. (2004) *When in Rome or Rio or Riyadh... Cultural Q&A for Successful Business Behavior Around the World*. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data (Olofsson, 2004)

For the literature research, the culture map of Meyer and the six dimension model of Hofstede were used as well. The information about Ghana in the six dimension model of Hofstede is estimated, which is the reason why this information is not completely valid. Another circumstance which makes the literature research less valid is that the persuading scale of the culture map was not applicable for Ghana. Due to this, this scale could not be used for the cultural analysis.

The whole research was done as a case study because it would be very difficult to organise a focus group interview with international students from different Universities of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. It would have been difficult to organise such an interview due to the COVID-19 situation. Lately the regulations varied a lot and meetings with groups from different households became difficult to organise. In the beginning the focus group interviews were planned to take place physically, but due to the quarantine in the dorm of the international students this was not possible. Still, the material and methods are reliable because the research can be repeated in the same way at all Universities of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the material and methods are valid because everything what was planned to be measured, was measured.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

The previous chapters lead to a conclusion and, finally, to a recommendation.

8.1 Conclusions

This research tried to answer the question how the interpersonal relationship of a Dutch University of Applied Sciences and its international students can be improved during a prolonged pandemic such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Factors that were tested, were cultural differences, the influence of the COVID-19 situation, the interpersonal relationship between the international students who were or are living in the international dorm, the interpersonal relationship with Dutch students and the staff of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, which was used for this case study. Some conclusions can be drawn from the results and discussion.

8.1.1 Cultural differences

There are a lot of cultural differences which must be taken into account regarding the interpersonal relationship between all parties. These can mainly be recognised in the six dimensions model of Hofstede. The Netherlands itself is an individualistic and feminine country with a low power distance, a medium score in uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence. All people from other cultures with different scores than the Netherlands will feel a culture shock and there are cultural differences between the international students as well. This does not mean that they feel a culture shock in all dimensions of Hofstede's model, but they have to deal with them in each dimension which varies from the Dutch culture. Of course, this works the other way around as well. An example might be a student from Russia which feels segregated, not respected and struggles with the low power distance in the Netherlands. Russian people are very depending on a leader who tells them exactly when to do what and how to do it. In the Netherlands on the other side, leaders just give a deadline and a task without telling their employees how to do it exactly. Each way is alright, if the goal is met. While improving the relationship with the international students, these dimensions must be taken into account to prevent a culture shock or at least make it as easy as possible. Many things work different in various cultures.

8.1.2 Influence of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic did not influence the international students personally but the interpersonal relationship with everybody they could not meet in person as frequently as their dormmates. They did not mention depression or other mental illnesses which might occur due to several lockdowns and online classes. Nevertheless, it was less easy to get a connection to people from outside the international dorm during the pandemic because people were not allowed to meet in big groups, have parties or events where people could get to know each other. Furthermore, the bond with the staff and teacher could not be build up that strong as it would have been in physical lessons. The international students struggle to stay focussed on the lessons, teamwork is less easy and asking questions and discussing is not easy due to the online environment. Besides that, the communication via telephone, e-mail and other social medias has a bad influence on the situation. Miscommunication and misunderstanding can occur because everybody interprets written messages differently and explanations might be understood wrong. Of course, this depends on the language barrier as well, but in written messages, this is a smaller problem because texts can be translated.

8.1.3 Relationship between international students

At the moment, the interpersonal relationship between the international students themselves is very good. They feel like a big family and enjoy spending time with each other. On their social media it can be seen that they even invite each other to their home countries and visit each other in the holidays. This is the good influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The international students had to spend time together in the international dorm, they had to deal with many

various cultures in one building and were able to help each other to understand their cultural differences. Together they solved problems, managed the dorm and even had a lockdown which came out as enjoyable because they had each other. Some of the international students even call their dormmates their family because they were not able to see their family and friends at home for a long time. Even students who already finished their studies at the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, come along sometimes to visit their friends in the Netherlands.

8.1.4 Relationship with Dutch students

The interpersonal relationship with the Dutch students is very bad at the moment. Currently, the international students do not have much Dutch friends and feel segregated from the Dutch people. They are bothered and bullied by drunk Dutch students, even if they try to communicate with them. The Dutch students do not give a chance to the international students to meet them and to learn something about their culture, they even give them the feeling that they are not welcome in the Netherlands. Besides that, the international students see the level of English of the Dutch students as insufficient and feel like the Dutch students are not interested in cultural differences and their possible advantages. Furthermore, there are barely events or other possibilities for the international students to mix up with the Dutch students which has a bad influence on their interpersonal relationship as well. An international food market was organised by the international students but barely attended by Dutch students. The reason for the behaviour of the Dutch students is unknown at the moment and needs more further research.

8.1.5 Relationship with the staff of the UAS

As already mentioned in chapter 8.1.2, the bond with the staff of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten and the international students is not as good as it might have been without the pandemic. The international students appreciate the efforts the staff takes to help them as much as possible and they respect them a lot but the online communication has a bad influence on the interpersonal relationship. Some international students do not dare to ask questions or do not understand the explanations of the staff due to the online communication. They rather relate on the people who are closer to them than the staff. Furthermore, they do not have a very good relationship with the manager of the international dorm because of a language barrier. Mostly, they see the level of English of the staff as insufficient for an international University of Applied Sciences. Besides that, many e-mails and events are only in Dutch which makes it harder for the international students to integrate at the University of Applied Sciences. Sometimes, they cannot see which information and events are important for them and which not. They really would like a buddy program to have the possibility to ask someone all the questions they have and to not need to bother the staff. Furthermore, they would like the university to give them more opportunities to mix up with the Dutch students to learn more about the Dutch culture and build up a network. Currently, the Aeres University of Applied Sciences only offers language courses for German speaking students who are going to follow a Dutch study, which gives a big disadvantage to the international students. They barely get the possibilities to build up an interpersonal relationship with the staff and the Dutch students.

8.1.6 Mental health of the international students

The international students mentioned that they do not fight any mental health illnesses. At the moment they do not feel depressed or lonely because they have each other and build up a good interpersonal relationship with each other. Still, some of them feel segregated and are bullied by the Dutch students. On a long term this can have bad influences on their mental health. Furthermore, they do not reach the self-actualisation level of the pyramid of needs of Maslow, which means that they cannot reach their full potential which is important to enjoy a study. At the moment, the students are following a study which they like but they cannot use their full potential to do so which can have bad influences on their studies as well as on their mental health. A lower level of Maslow's pyramid of needs is love and belonging. Currently the

international students do not reach this level which is important for all people. They do not feel a big interpersonal relationship with the staff of the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten and do not have any connection with the Dutch students. On a long term, this might have bad influences on their mental health.

8.2 Recommendations

In this chapter there are recommendations for follow-up research and for the target group.

8.2.1 Follow-up research

The discussion showed that there is not enough information why the Dutch students behave badly towards the international students. There might be different reasons why the Dutch students are showing such a behaviour: the language barrier, bad feelings towards international students, their own background or just no interest in different cultures. To get a good picture of this, qualitative research must be used. In a quantitative research, the students would not be honest because it is a big confrontation. The researcher has to take care that the students do not feel offended. This quantitative research could be used as a base for a qualitative research among all Dutch students, to get a picture if all Dutch students do not like international students. During the research it must be taken into account that this hypothesis of Dutch students not liking international students, is based on the experiences and feelings of international students at one University of Applied Sciences.

Due to the fact that this research is of qualitative nature, with nine interviewees from seven different cultures, it is recommended to do some quantitative research on the interpersonal relationship of international students and a University of Applied Sciences. There were 94,236 international students (Statista, 2021) in 2019 with growing numbers. This research can be used as a base for a quantitative research among all international students in the Netherlands to find out if they all do not feel connected to their University of Applied Sciences or if that is just the result of this case study.

8.2.2 Aeres UAS Dronten

The situation that the international students do not feel connected to the Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten must be solved. This is something, all parties have to work on together but the Aeres UAS must take the initiative. A first step could be to not only focus on, how to get more international students and partner universities, but to improve the whole internationalisation process at the faculty. Currently, the faculty must become more international from within. For example, the communication with the international students should be only in Dutch and only about things which are important for them. They do not need information about internship companies in the Netherlands, which are only given to Dutch students.

Furthermore, the communication with the international students must be improved. This could be done by setting up a buddy program, so they have one person they can ask all the questions they have and the usual staff does not get overworked because they have to answer a lot of questions. Besides that, the level of English of the staff should improve. A mandatory Cambridge English course could help to improve the situation. As well, the international students would like to learn Dutch, so they should get the opportunity to do so. They come to the Netherlands for the full experience and that includes at least a basic course in Dutch.

To become more international, the Aeres UAS in Dronten should organise more international events to show everybody the advantages of the variety of cultures which can be found at the faculty. This would give the international students the possibility to build up a network and to bond with Dutch students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this might be a bit difficult but once meetings in bigger groups is allowed again, this should be done as soon as possible. Besides that, at least all events which are taking place at the faculty should have an English translation.

It would be enough to show a translated text on a screen or in a presentation, so the international students can understand what the event is about.

Another step to improve the interpersonal relationship between the Dutch and the international students could be, to go back to a mixed campus again. At the moment, the Dutch and the international campus are managed and owned by different parties. The international students would like to live together with the Dutch students, even if that would mean, that they had to get their own furniture.

By focussing more on the current international students than on the future international students, the interpersonal relationship could be improved. Improving this situation would as well mean to have a good mouth-to-mouth advertising because the international students would tell their friends and family about the nice experiences, they made at the Aeres UAS in Dronten.

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11. Appendix

11.1 Interview questions

The following lists will give the interview questions asked during the two rounds of focus group interviews. First, the questions asked to the students who attended the interview on 25th November 2021 will be given, followed by the questions for the students who joined the meeting on 26th November 2021.

11.1.1 Question list first group

1. How are you feeling today?
2. Is the quarantine still doable?
3. Do you see any differences regarding the COVID-19 situation between last year and this year?
4. Did you get used to living in the Netherlands together with so many different cultures in one building?
5. Would a mixed campus improve the connection to the Dutch students?
6. Do the Dutch people behave different than you do?
7. Could the interpersonal relationship with the Dutch students be changed?
8. Why do you not join activities organised by the student union USRA?
9. Did you try to explain Dutch people why you might have a different opinion sometimes?
10. Would a Dutch language course help you to improve the situation with the Dutch students?
11. Did the COVID-19 virus have an influence on the connection Dutch students?
12. Would you join a buddy program if you had the opportunity?
13. Does the international office offer sufficient help?
14. Are there differences in online teaching regarding the Netherlands and your home country?
15. Do you have a positive or negative feeling about the staff of the Aeres UAS Dronten?
16. Would an English course for the staff of the Aeres UAS Dronten help to improve the interpersonal relationship between you and the university?
17. What could the university do to improve your housing situation?
18. Did your change/ grow since you moved to the Netherlands?
19. Does your culture influence your opinion on the supervision of the international dorm?
20. Which improvements should be made?
21. Would you like to add something else to the interview?

11.1.2 Question list second group

1. How do you feel today?
2. How do you feel about the new COVID-19 regulations?
3. What do you not like about the online lessons?
4. Would you have started your studies in the Netherlands if you knew that the education might switch online again?
5. How is it going with so many different cultures in the international dorm?
6. Are there any difficulties with so many different cultures in one building?
7. What are your experiences with the Dutch people?
8. Would lessons about culture help to improve the interpersonal relationship?
9. Would you like activities to get to know the Dutch people?
10. Do you recognise differences in bigger cities?
11. Can you always ask the staff for help if needed?
12. Would you like to follow a Dutch language course?
13. Do you experience any cultural differences?
14. How is the communication with the university going?
15. Should all events at the university be in English?
16. What could possible improvements be?

11.2 Interview coding

Table 3: Coding of the interviews

	The Netherlands	Germany	France	Switzerland	Ghana	Italy	Russia
Power Distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 38 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 35 “The teachers tell us that German students will struggle to cooperate with Dutch students.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 68 “The teachers and the staff are willing to help us.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 34 “Sometimes I am afraid to ask questions because some teachers are snappy.” “Sometimes e-mails are only in Dutch.” “I feel segregated from the Dutch people.” “There should be more international events to mix up with Dutch students.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 80 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 50 “A lot of e-mails are only in Dutch.” “There is a big social divide in Dronten.” “I get a lot of e-mails which are irrelevant for me.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 93 “The staff and teachers try to help us.”
Individualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 80 Individualistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 67 “Dutch and international students separate during assignments.” “Teamwork during assignments is not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 71 “I came to the Netherlands for the whole experience and I wanted to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 68 “We have good connections with each other.” “We help each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 15 “We are restricted from socialising with people outside the 1H building due to the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 76 “We get used to each other.” “I do not have any Dutch friends.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score: 39 “I want to help to improve the situation.” “The student union

		<p>working well online – that’s unfair.”</p>	<p>get to know the Dutch people and culture.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The situation is different in the big cities, people there dare to speak English and are helpful.” • “I expected the Dutch people to speak better English from the things I heard about the Netherlands.” • “It is not easy to meet people outside the 1H building.” • “A mixed campus would help.” 	<p>when needed.”</p>	<p>COVID-19 situation.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We are one big family, that makes that we do not feel lonely.” • “We always help each other.” • “We are separated from the Dutch people. We are two groups.” • “We as internationals are all the same.” • “A language course would help to make the communication more effective.” • “A mixed campus would be nice to be able to socialise.” • “A buddy program would be helpful, too.” • “It is their farming background which 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I have no connection with the Dutch students.” • “I would like someone like a buddy but he/she should do it voluntarily.” • “We get unkind comments from the Dutch students coming from the bar ‘t Lab.” 	<p>USRA does not help us, they do nothing for the international students.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There is a big culture clash between us and the Dutch people.” • “International events are the key for our integration at the Aeres.”
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					makes them not like us."		
Masculinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 14 • Feminine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 66 • "We do not match with the Dutch people in Dronten." • "The Dutch farmers (students) think that we do not take them seriously because we do not own a farm or cattle and we are doing research for alternatives to animal products." • "We were shook that the university did not give us the opportunity to learn Dutch." • "We had to invest a lot of money to have a good living standard in the 1H building." • "My parents cried when they left me at the 1H building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 43 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 70 • "People in the big cities are more open, there are more international students. Big cities are more divers." • "It is unprofessional that the level of English is that bad." • "Events should at least be translated." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 40 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 70 • "The communication with the 1H supervisor does not work, she is not a good supervisor." • "The level of English is not good enough." • "An English course for the staff is necessary." • "The whole university needs to become more international, there should be international communication courses for example." • "I was surprised that there were no Dutch courses offered to us." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 36

		<p>because the circumstances were so bad.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There were no cleaning tools, enough pans or fridges, so we had no good food the first weeks until we bought fridges ourselves.” 					
Uncertainty Avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 53 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 65 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 86 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 58 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 65 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 75 • “I am afraid of online lessons because I cannot focus on the lessons.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 95 • “The bad circumstances made us grow and we had to take responsibilities.”
Long Term Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 67 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 83 • “We would like to learn Dutch but do not get the opportunity to do so.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 63 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 74 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 4 • “I do not want to bother the Dutch people by asking for completely English spoken events, but it would help to build up a connection.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 61 • “I would like a language course for a whole semester.” • “A language course would be nice.” • “I would like to learn more about the Dutch culture.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 81

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would like to learn more about the Dutch culture because I plan to stay here in future.” 	
Indulgence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 68 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 40 • “I feel attacked because the Dutch students act disrespectful because I am not able to speak Dutch.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 48 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 66 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 72 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 30 • “The Dutch people are not interested in us as international students and do not give us a chance to integrate.” • “There is no solution for the behaviour of the Dutch students. It is their mindset.” • “In Italy, a dorm would not be that dirty because it is just not accepted.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score: 20 • “The Dutch people at the Aeres are afraid to speak English.” • “We have to lower our expectations of living in an international dorm.”

11.3 Country comparison by Hofstede

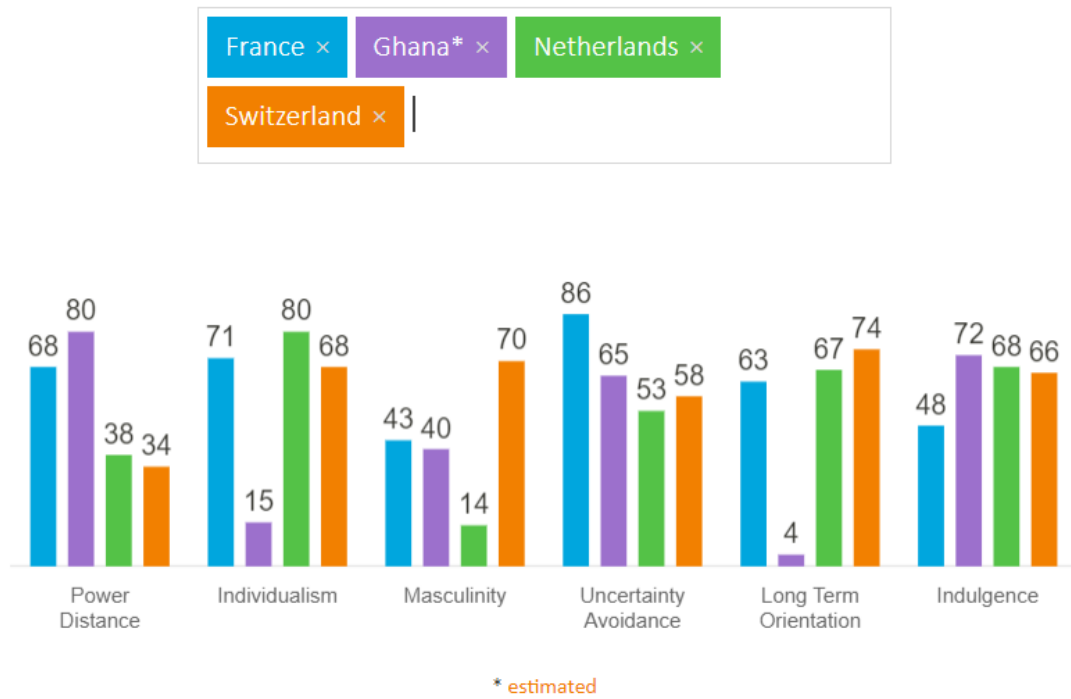


Figure 7: Country comparison by Hofstede 1 (Hofstede insights, 2021)

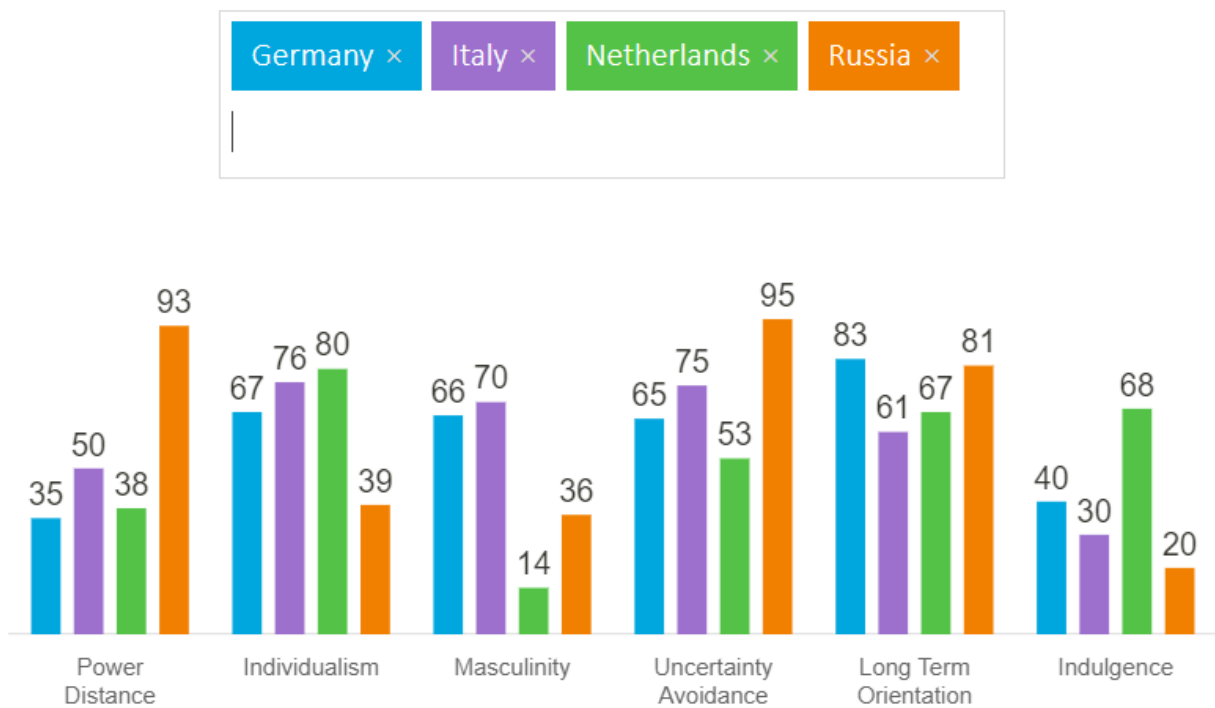


Figure 8: Country comparison by Hofstede 2 (Hofstede insights, 2021)

11.4 Culture map by Meyer

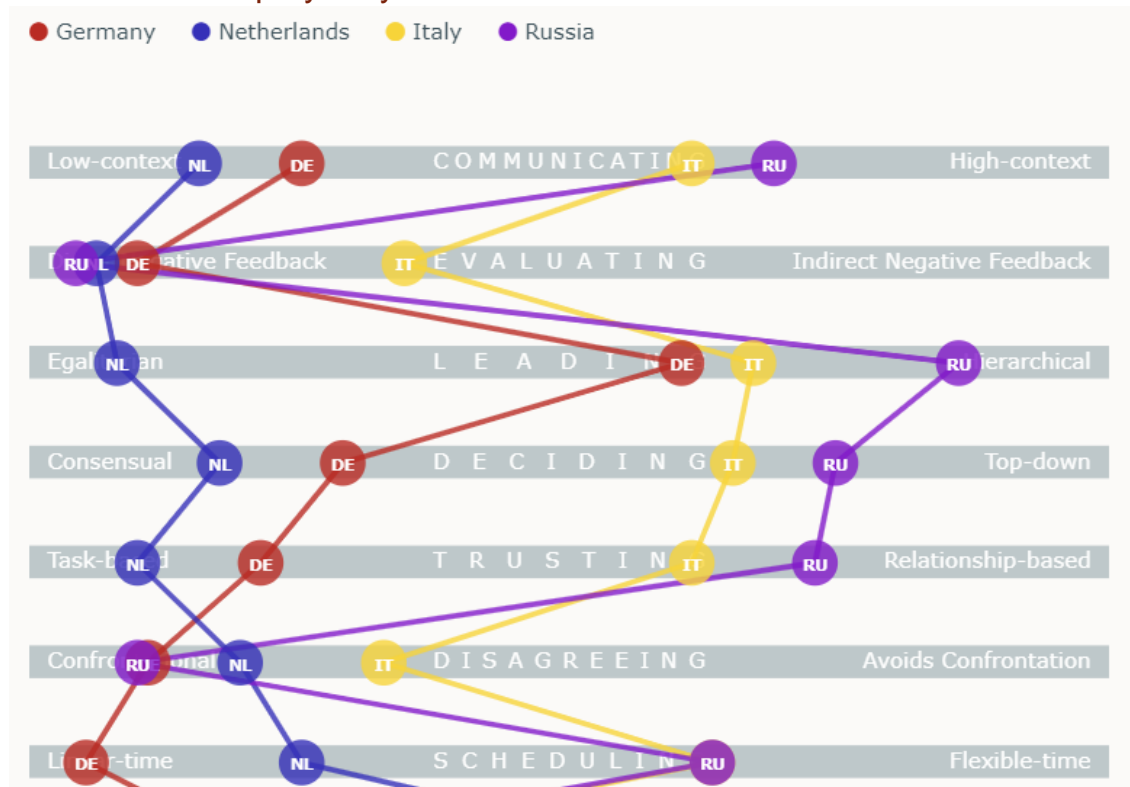


Figure 9: Culture map by Meyer 1 (Meyer E. , 2021)

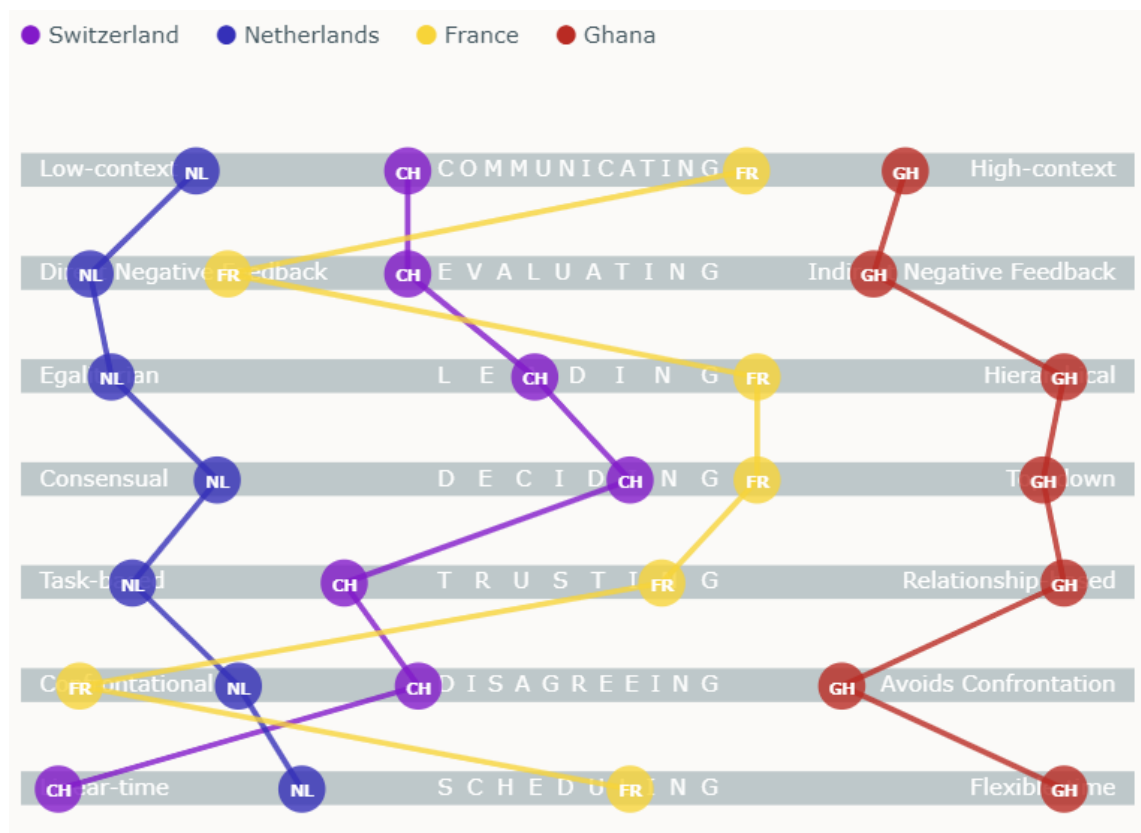


Figure 10: Culture map by Meyer 2 (Meyer E. , 2021)