

Culture Clash: Investigating Interpersonal Challenges Between International and Dutch Students

Daniel Diaz Olson

S2236974

Supervisor: Dr. Joyce Karreman
202000308 - M12 Bachelor thesis COM

Faculty of Behavioral Management and Social Sciences, University of
Twente

Bachelor Communication Science

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Abstract

This study investigates how cultural differences in communication contribute to misunderstandings or conflicts between international students and their Dutch counterparts in Dutch universities. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 international students from diverse backgrounds studying in the Netherlands. The research is grounded in Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, Hall's cultures, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), and Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT).

The findings reveal five main areas of conflict: direct communication style, language use, different working methods, hierarchical preferences, and broader cultural differences. Dutch directness often clashed with the indirect communication styles of international students. Language barriers came up when Dutch students switched to Dutch in group settings. Diverse working methods and project execution approaches led to tensions. Different attitudes towards hierarchy and authority caused misunderstandings. Broader cultural differences in time management and interpersonal interactions also contributed to conflicts.

The study proposes several strategies to address these challenges, including promoting inclusive language use, encouraging flexibility in working methods, addressing hierarchical preferences through open discussions, and enhancing intercultural competence. These findings have significant implications for curriculum design, orientation programs, and group work guidelines in multicultural educational settings.

This research contributes to the development of intercultural competence models and provides practical insights for improving cross-cultural communication and collaboration in diverse academic environments. The study's limitations include its sample size and context-specific nature, suggesting ways for future research to further explore and validate these findings in broader contexts.

Keywords: intercultural communication, cultural dimensions, cultural differences

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1. Introduction

Cross-cultural communication is important in our increasingly interconnected world, affecting communication between individuals from different backgrounds. Communication plays an important role in forming relationships and stimulating understanding, but it can also be a source of misunderstanding and conflict when it comes to cultural differences. As Singh (2020) said, “Most of the conflicts people encounter in foreign cultures stem from misunderstandings, which is what really leads to misunderstandings.” When individuals from different cultures communicate, differences in communication styles, norms, and values can lead to misunderstandings that, can escalate into conflict.

Cross-cultural communication is emphasized in this thesis due to its importance in improving understanding and reducing conflict in multiple settings. The need for effective intercultural communication skills increases as globalization increases diversity in industries from multinational corporations to academic institutions such as universities. By learning these skills, individuals can effectively work with cultural differences, reducing potential conflicts.

According to Hofstede (2011), culture is the set of values, and beliefs shared within a group or society. So it is important to understand and navigate these cultural differences to foster successful negotiation and conflict resolution. Effective communication skills enable individuals to encode, decode, and select appropriate media, ensuring that messages are interpreted in culturally relevant ways.

This thesis aims to investigate cultural differences that lead to misunderstandings or conflicts between international students and their Dutch counterparts. By examining Hofstede’s cultural theories, we can understand the underlying dynamics of intercultural communication better. For example, respect for authority and the norms applied in countries with Hofstede’s higher power gap, than the Netherlands, may affect communication behavior in academic

settings, potentially leading to misunderstandings between international students and Dutch colleagues.

To address this complexity, two main theories have been integrated: Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) and Communicative Accommodation Theory (CAT). EVT helps predict and explain how deviations from expected behavior, especially in nonverbal communication, can significantly influence interpersonal outcomes (A. Joardar, 2011). This principle is important for understanding how cultural differences in communication styles can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts among students. On the other hand, CAT focuses on how individuals adapt their communication style with the aim of reducing social gaps and increasing mutual understanding (A. Elhami, 2020). By how learners change their communication in response to cultural cues through analysis, we can identify ways to reduce misunderstandings and conflict in multicultural learning environments.

Integrating these concepts allows us to examine the nuances of intercultural communication in academic settings, providing insight into how students can effectively manage cultural differences. This study is especially important because of the negative consequences of miscommunication among students, which can include social isolation, poor academic performance, and missed opportunities to learn across cultures.

Using a qualitative approach, this study examines the experiences of international students in Dutch universities, focusing on their interactions with Dutch colleagues. Through in-depth interviews and analysis of real-world situations, the goal is to reveal the specific challenges students face with intercultural communication and identify effective strategies to overcome these barriers.

By understanding the development of intercultural communication through the lenses of EVT and CAT, this study seeks to provide practical recommendations for enhancing communication skills among student populations. The findings of this study may lead to the

development of targeted interventions to work on inclusive and collaborative learning environments, such as intercultural communication workshops and effective language practices for everyone. To summarize the goal of this research, the following research question will be used: How do variations in cultural dimensions, impact communication dynamics and potential conflicts between international students and their Dutch peers?

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study integrates Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) to examine how cultural differences impact communication dynamics between international students and their Dutch peers. This chapter starts by explaining the cultural differences and how the theories are linked to them. Finally, the theories and their relevance to the study will be further elaborated.

2.1 Cultural differences

According to Distefano & Maznevski (2000) culture encompasses the shared norms, values, and beliefs within a group or society, influencing how its members interact and engage in various activities. However, as stated by Signorini et al. (2009) there are some limitations to the research. These limitations include an oversimplification of cultural differences, inconsistencies between his categories, lack of empirical evidence from educational settings and overall a model of culture as static (instead of dynamic). We argue that educationalists interested in the field of students' experiences in internationally diverse settings should treat Hofstede's model more critically.

Hofstede's dimensions theory offers a comprehensive framework encompassing various aspects of culture, including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs.

collectivism, and masculinity vs. femininity (Hofstede, 2011). However, the dimensions may limit cultural elements, because it is outdated, due to the constantly changing societies. Nevertheless, it has still helped to do cross-cultural research, getting it one step closer to further comprehension of cultural differences (Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007).

2.2 Power Distance

Power Distance refers to the extent to which individuals in a society accept and expect an unequal distribution of power according to Hofstede (2011). In the context of communication, this can influence hierarchical structures and authority dynamics within organizations, including universities where international students and Dutch colleagues interact. For example, in societies with high Power Distance, according to the EVT, there may be greater differences to authority figures and less direct communication between students and professors or between junior and senior colleagues, otherwise it might be considered as violating expectations, leading to a conflict. In contrast, in Low power Distance cultures, there is a flatter hierarchy, communication between employees and employers is more informal and might entail some more personal content.

Furthermore “a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders“ (Hofstede, 2011). This aspect is crucial in understanding how cultural norms regarding power and inequality influence communication dynamics. According to the CAT, international students may adapt their communication styles based on their societal norms, while Dutch colleagues also exhibit behaviors shaped by their cultural understanding of power dynamics. These differences in perceptions and expectations regarding power can contribute to communication challenges and potential conflicts, such as Dutch peers being too direct with their international colleagues. Integrating the concept of power distances into the theoretical framework provides a deeper understanding of how cultural perceptions affect communication

processes and outcomes. It emphasizes the importance of considering cultural factors such as ability dynamics when exploring intercultural interactions. Figure 1 shows the leading scale, comparing countries from all over the world (Meyer, 2014). An egalitarian culture means there is more of a flat hierarchy, while hierarchical is a higher one.

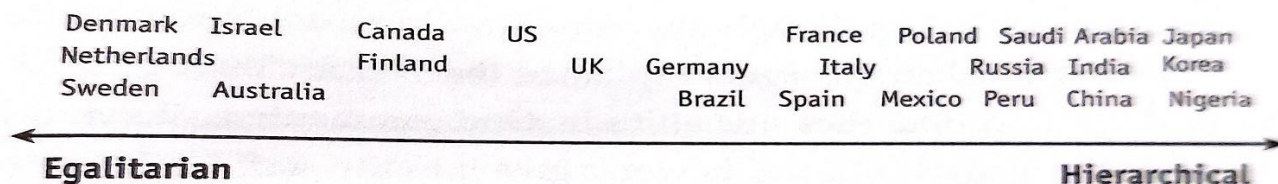


Figure 1: Leading scale (Meyer, 2014, p. 125)

2.3 Uncertainty Avoidance

Next, uncertainty avoidance reflects a community's tolerance and comfort level with its members regarding uncertainty in unstructured situations. For communication, individuals from a more uncertain avoidance culture may prefer clear rules, guidelines, and structured communication to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity. On the other hand, individuals who may come from a low uncertainty avoidance culture will be more comfortable with ambiguity and more open to informal communication styles (Hofstede, 2011). This can influence communication behaviors and preferences among international students and Dutch colleagues.

For instance, Dutch colleagues may value direct and open communication, because they may value honesty and transparency, however, it is not necessarily a strategy to avoid uncertainty. In contrast, international students from cultures with higher Uncertainty Avoidance may display a preference for clear instructions, obedience to rules, and disliking ambiguity in communication, which can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts in interactions with people from other cultures.

As per EVT, high uncertainty avoidance cultures may experience expectancy violations

as the extended family and prioritize group solidarity and loyalty in interactional situations, individuals from collectivist cultures can emphasize individual autonomy and self-expression and can achieve. According to EVT, going to a country with a different culture from where you come from, may result in violated expectations and misunderstandings, just like with CAT, individuals would have to adjust their communication accordingly.

For example, Dutch colleagues may exhibit more personal communication styles, valuing directness and assertiveness in expressing opinions. In contrast, international students from collectivist cultures may prioritize group solidarity and prefer more informal communication and avoid confrontation, which may lead to misunderstandings or conflict. Figure 3 shows you comparisons of the country of origin of some of the participants and how much they are individualistic.

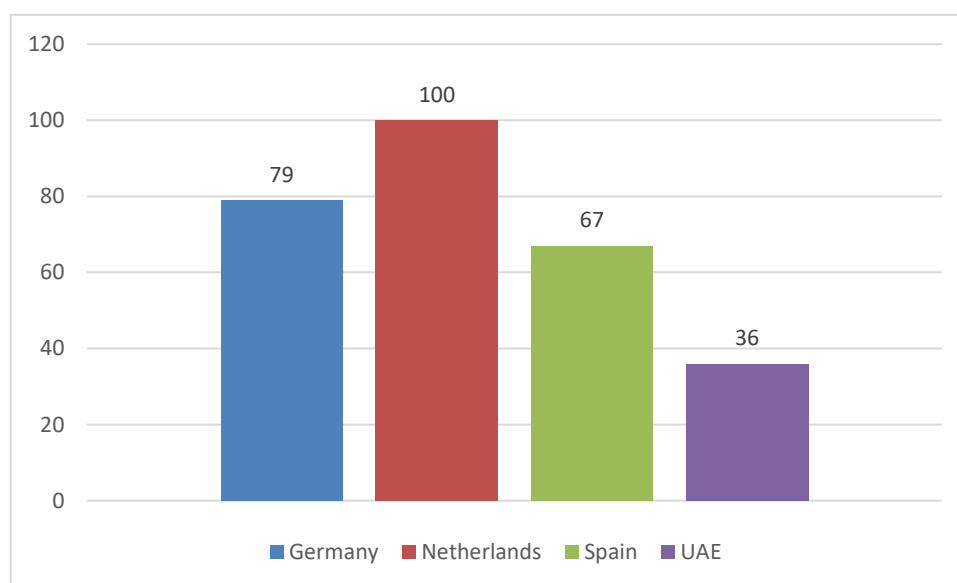


Figure 3: Individualism (Hofstede-insights.com)

2.5 Masculinity/ Femininity

The concept of gender provides insight into cultural variation in gender norms and communication styles, and provides a valuable perspective for understanding the complexities

of intercultural communication. Masculinity refers to societies that place a high priority on values such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and progress, often in contrast to traditional masculine traits as opposed to femininity, which emphasizes values such as submission, care, and quality of life, and reflects more traditional female characteristics in line with Hofstede (2011). In communication contexts, these gendered values can influence communication styles and preferences among individuals. In compliance with the EVT or CAT, expectancy violations might come from internationals or communication accommodation might be needed when coming from a different culture.

This kind of cultural differences can significantly impact communication dynamics and perceptions of gender roles among international students and Dutch colleagues. For example, in societies with high Masculinity, assertiveness, and competition may be valued in communication, potentially leading to assertive or confrontational interactions. In contrast, in societies with high Femininity, communication may prioritize harmony and empathy, with a focus on building relationships and consensus.

2.6 Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation

Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation pertains to societies' preferences for focusing on present versus future-oriented goals when making decisions. This cultural dimension provides insights into how individuals prioritize values such as perseverance, thrift, tradition, and social stability versus immediate gratification and adaptability. These cultural orientations can influence communication patterns and expectations among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Situations where these differences might play an important role in this study are for example project planning. Long-term oriented students might prefer detailed, long-range planning, while short-term oriented students might focus on immediate tasks and quick results (Hofstede, 2011). Others coming from long-term-oriented cultures might invest more time in

building relationships with peers and professors, seeing it as beneficial for future collaborations. However short-term-oriented students might be more flexible in adapting to new situations or changes in group dynamics. For this EVT could be focusing on time orientation which could affect project planning. CAT would focus more on adjusting the communication appropriately. Figure 4 represents the amount of long-term orientation of the 4 countries compared to each other.

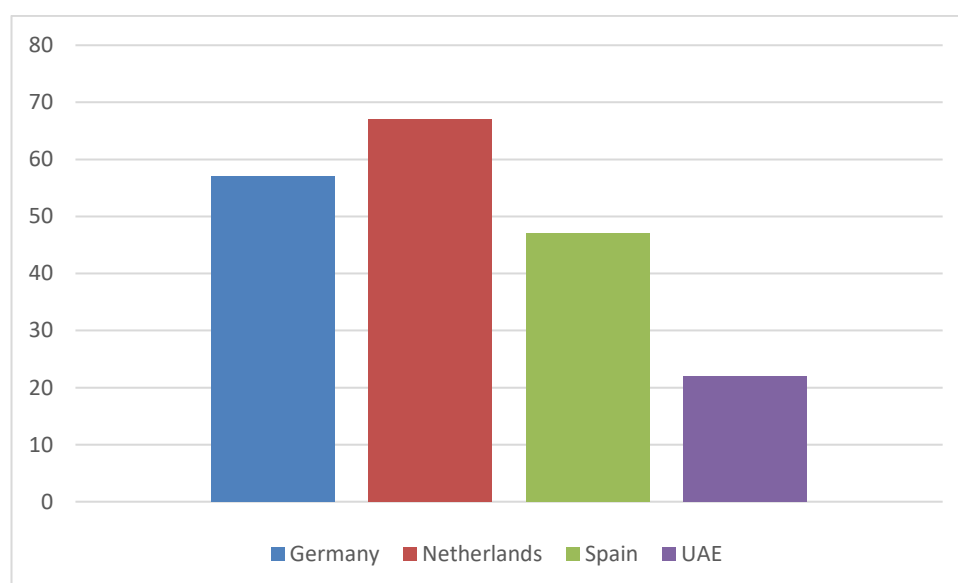


Figure 4: Long term orientation (Hofstede-insights.com)

2.7 Indulgence vs. Restraint

As indicated by Hofstede (2011) Indulgence vs. Restraint represents society's tolerance for gratifying natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun versus controlling and regulating such gratification through strict social norms. These cultural orientations can significantly impact communication dynamics and perceptions of social norms among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. For this situation there could be work-life balance expectations that were violated and need some clarifications, where EVT could play a role. On the one hand, the Netherlands for example tends to lean towards an indulgent culture, characterized by a high value on leisure, enjoyment, and personal freedom. As shown in Figure

5, Dutch students may exhibit more relaxed and open communication styles, with a focus on positive experiences and self-expression. On the other hand, international students from restrained cultures may find the Dutch emphasis on indulgence and informality challenging to navigate. In this case, CAT would be important to focus on communication accommodation. They may be more accustomed to formal, reserved communication and adherence to strict social norms.

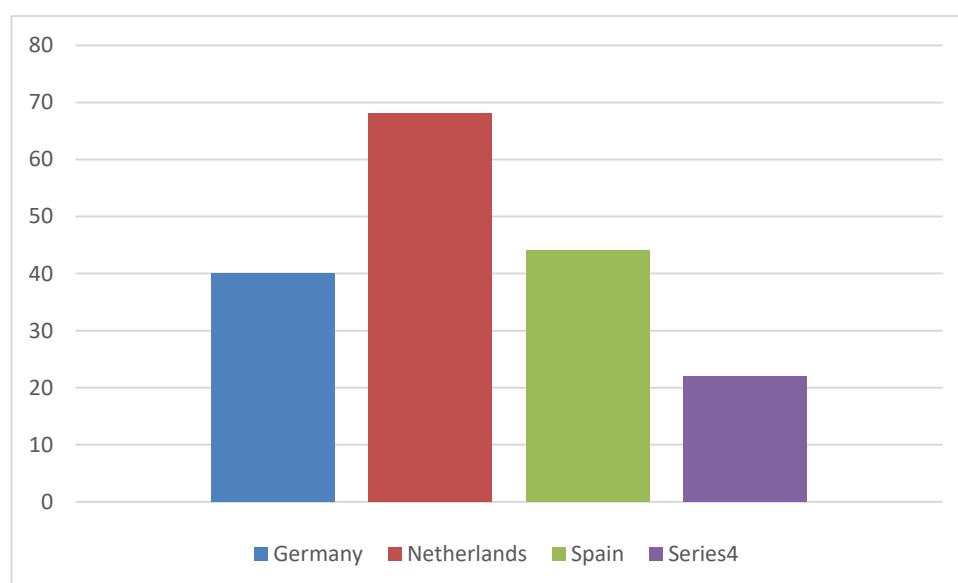


Figure 5: Indulgence (Hofstede-insights.com)

2.8 Hall's High- vs. Low-Context Culture:

Communication is the basis of human interaction, but what happens when cultural differences affect how we understand each other? One of the most important aspects of this is the distinction between high-context (HC) and low-context (LC) cultures. HC culture is all about reading between the lines, while LC culture prefers well-written material, these differences can shape how we communicate and understand each other. Dutch people, for example, coming from a more low-context country, often like to be direct, however, it can be perceived as blunt or harsh by people from high-context countries. EVT would help in understanding that the differences between Dutch and a more higher context country, could

lead to misunderstandings (Donghoon et al., 1998).

In contrast, the messages in HC culture are like a puzzle—you have to piece together the context to get the whole picture. Everything from body language to social cues adds meaning. In other words, LC culture is more about how it is said. People are direct and to the point, relying on clear communication to get their message across. Navigating a new environment can be challenging in HC and LC cultures. HC people may be great at thinking outside the box in their familiar programs but struggle in the face of something new (Hall, 1976 as cited in Hofstede, 2011).

However, in an LC culture, complex structures without context may be overwhelming, and clear direction is preferred. Conforming to CAT, both or one culture would have to accommodate, by for example high context cultures being more explicit in their communication and the other side be more attentive to implicit messages.

Understanding the differences between HC and LC cultures helps us get into subtle conversations, change our minds, and network with people from around the world. Figure 6 shows the differences between countries in this context.

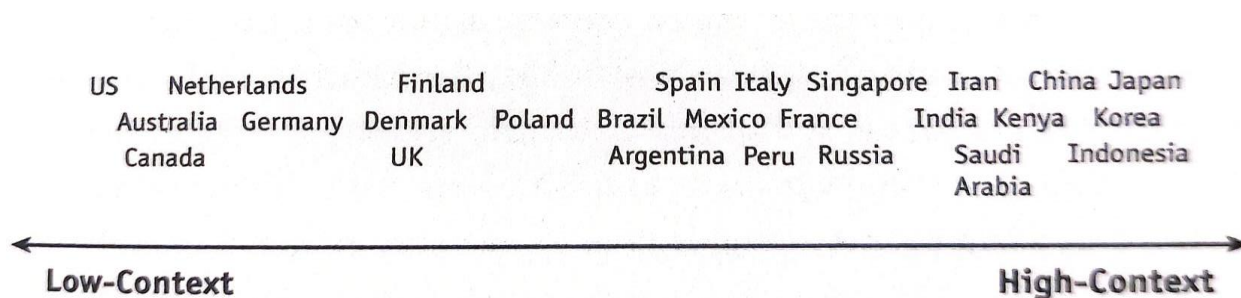


Figure 6: Communicating scale (Meyer, 2014a, p.39)

2.9 Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT)

As stated by Burgoon (2015), expectancy violation theory (EVT) suggests that deviations from expected behaviors, especially nonverbal communication, can significantly

influence interpersonal outcomes. The theory states that individual expectations of how others will react in a given situation have deep effects on human interaction. It is valuable to understand how international students and Dutch peers react and interpret behavior when it deviates from their own cultural norms. When these expectations are violated, it triggers an investigative process to assess the significance of the violation.

Interpretation and analysis of the violation determine whether it is positive or negative. EVT predicts that expectation violations can affect aspects of interpersonal communication, including attraction, trust, persuasion, and overall communication smoothness (A. Joardar, 2011). For example, positive violations, such as increased eye contact or appropriate touch, may enhance attraction and trust.

In comparison, perceived negative violations, such as invasion of personal space or inappropriate gestures, may reduce attractiveness and trust. The theory provides valuable insights into the complexity of interpersonal interactions by studying how expectancy violations affect communication outcomes.

By understanding these positive or negative results, it would be easier to understand what can enhance or hinder multicultural relationships and work on methods for improvement of the positive and prevention of the negative violations. Furthermore, these insights can contribute to developing students' intercultural competence.

Gaining insight through the possible predictions of EVT helps researchers predicting how deviations from expected behaviors may affect interpersonal development, which can inform interventions aimed at improving effective communication. By understanding the impact of expectation violations, individuals can better navigate interpersonal and intercultural interactions and foster more positive outcomes.

2.10 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT):

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is a fundamental framework for understanding how individuals adjust their communication styles in various social interactions. As defined by A. Elhami (2020), CAT "is an interpersonal and intergroup theory that explains the process of adjustment of individuals to their both communicative and social goals." This definition highlights the duality of CAT, addressing both individual-level interactions and broader group dynamics.

The theory posits that people modify their speech, vocal patterns, gestures, and other communicative behaviors to adapt to or diverge from their conversation partners. These adjustments are made based on various factors, including the desire for social approval, the need for effective communication, and the maintenance of personal or group identity.

In the context of intercultural communication, CAT becomes particularly relevant and insightful. As Fox et al. (2000) note, "Intercultural encounters provide a rich basis for understanding Communication Accommodation Theory." This observation underscores the theory's applicability in diverse cultural settings, where differences in communication norms and expectations are more pronounced.

By studying intercultural encounters through the lens of CAT, researchers can gain valuable insights into the complexities of cross-cultural communication (Gallois et al., 2005). This approach not only enhances our understanding of how individuals navigate cultural differences but also provides practical implications for improving intercultural communication in various settings, such as educational institutions, multinational corporations, and diplomatic relations.

To add some knowledge to the topic, of cultural differences and their challenges, the research will try answering the following research questions:

RQ: How do variations in cultural dimensions, impact communication dynamics and potential conflicts between international students and their Dutch peers?

3. Methodology:

This study used a qualitative approach to investigate how cultural differences in communication contribute to misunderstandings or conflicts between international students and their Dutch counterparts.

3.1 Research Design

After doing research and looking for relevant articles (Appendix 1), a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was chosen for this study because it is well suited for exploring the meaning of social factors, which is ideal for analyzing the experiences of international students in Dutch universities (Landsheer & Boeijs, 2008). Furthermore, a structured interview gives the chance to ask further questions during the data collection, which could lead to more reliable results as opposed to a questionnaire. As stated by A.Alhazmi and A.Kaufmann: “The qualitative method of phenomenology provides a theoretical tool for educational research as it allows researchers to engage in flexible activities that can describe and help to understand complex phenomena, such as various aspects of human social experience” (2022).

3.2 Sample:

17 international/non-Dutch students were recruited as participants for this study using convenience sampling from academic institutions across the Netherlands. This approach provides access to a diverse range of participants and allows for the exploration of different perspectives on the research topic. The sample size aimed at saturation, with additional interviews generating a few additional pieces of information, to ensure adequate data for thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2006). As shown in Table 1, data was collected through 17 interviews.

Participants nr.	Age	Gender	Nationality
1.	21	Female	USA
2.	21	Male	Germany
3.	23	Female	Germany
4.	21	Male	Spain, Luxemburg
5.	21	Male	UAE
6.	20	Female	Spain
7.	32	Female	Germany, Spain
8.	21	Male	Romania
9.	23	Female	Poland
10.	20	Female	Costa Rica
11.	25	Female	Bulgaria
12.	27	Male	Cyprus
13.	26	Male	Germany
14.	23	Female	Germany
15.	22	Male	Germany
16.	27	Female	Indonesia
17.	21	Female	Austria

Table 1. Sample characteristics

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Participants were invited to participate through email/WhatsApp invitations and announcements posted on social media platforms. This data collection happened after the BMSLab of the University of Twente allowed the research. Interested individuals were provided with detailed information about the study objectives and procedures before consenting to participate. During the interviews, the questions from the topic list were the main focus.

However, if there was a chance for more useful information, the interviewer deviated from the script and asked further into detail.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected from the interviews. In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), this approach involved systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Transcripts of the interviews were coded line-by-line to identify recurring patterns and themes related to cultural differences in communication and their impact on interpersonal interactions. Based on the patterns, codes were formed and organized into broader themes and sub-themes through an iterative process of data immersion and reflection.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study findings, strategies such as having a second coder for the transcripts were employed (collaboration) to ensure further credibility for the data interpretation. A Cohens Kappa of 0.648 resulted out of the equation which is in the spectrum of fair to good agreement ($0.40 < \kappa_{\text{kappa}} \leq 0.75$) "The use of inter-rater reliability (IRR) methods may provide an opportunity to improve the transparency and consistency of qualitative case study data analysis in terms of the rigor of how codes and constructs were developed from the raw data" (R. Cole, 2023).

The researcher maintained reflexivity by continuously reflecting on their assumptions, biases, and preconceptions throughout the research process. Reflexivity enhances the accuracy and credibility of qualitative research by acknowledging and addressing the influence of the researcher on the research process and outcomes (Finlay, 2002).

3.6 Data analysis

The coding process was done with the help of Atlas analysis software. First, all the interviews were transcribed. To ensure a reliable codebook for the analysis a fast read of the transcriptions was done together with my first impressions of the interviews. Furthermore, the clear definition of the codes was checked (Rose & Johnson, 2020), adding descriptions in cases where the name was not enough information.

Once the transcriptions of all the interviews were completed, the 36 codes created were checked. Codes that were rarely used were merged with other codes. For example, “Positive Violations” was merged with “Positive Experience” and “Direct Communication” was merged with “Low Context Culture”, because they were similar enough and led to the same conclusion. Through these steps the number of codes was reduced to 31. The result of the codebook can be found in Table 2.

Table 2:
Codebook

Group	Code
Communication styles	Direct communication
	Indirect communication
	High Power Distance
	Low Power Distance
	High Uncertainty Avoidance
	Low Uncertainty Avoidance
Cultural Norms and Values	Individualism
	Collectivism
	Masculinity
	Femininity
	Indulgence

	Restraint
Intercultural	Encoding and Decoding
Communication Skills	Adaptation
	Conflict Resolution
Misunderstandings and	Types of Misunderstandings
Conflicts	Sources of Conflict
	Resolution Strategies
Impact of Globalization	Increased Interaction
	Challenges and Opportunities
Expectancy Violations	Positive Violations
	Negative Violations
Accommodation Strategies	Convergence
	Divergence
High- vs. Low-Context	High-Context Culture
Cultures	Low-Context Culture
Personal Experiences	Positive Experiences
	Negative Experiences
Gender Dynamics	Masculine Communication
	Feminine Communication
Cultural similarities &	Cultural similarities
differences	Cultural differences

4. Results

This section presents the findings from our research on the ways to which cultural differences lead to misunderstandings or conflicts between international students and their Dutch colleagues. The data comes from 17 interviews that have been done with Non-Dutch students studying in the Netherlands, revealing several key areas of potential conflict and proposed resolution strategies. These findings can be understood through the lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), and Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT). The results will begin with elaborating on 5 main areas of conflict and will end with the strategies that the participants thought of when in a conflict in a project group. Each group will start with the most mentioned results from the interviews.

Main Areas of Conflict

4.1 Direct Communication Style

The direct communication style characteristic of Dutch culture emerged as a primary area of conflict. This can be explained through Hofstede's cultural dimension of high vs. low-context communication, which is closely related to Hall's high-context/low-context cultural framework. The Netherlands, as a low-context culture, values direct and efficient communication, which contrasts with the more indirect approach preferred by international students from high-context cultures.

This conflict aligns with the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), as international students often struggle to adapt to the Dutch communication style. As one participant noted,

“They could be more empathetic. (...) So I'm from the South from the States. So we kind of prioritize feelings over efficiency.” [1:American]

This quote illustrates the challenge of accommodating to a different communication style and the potential for misunderstandings.

According to EVT, this expectation violation of international students would trigger an evaluation process where they assess whether this directness is positive or negative. As the research shows, some participants initially perceived this directness negatively, leading to discomfort and potential conflicts.

The data revealed contrasting perspectives. Several participants expressed negative experiences, feeling “attacked” or offended by the perceived harshness of feedback. Others acknowledged that while the directness initially felt uncomfortable, they eventually adapted and recognized its benefits, appreciating the clarity and efficiency. Some viewed conflicts arising from direct communication as constructive opportunities for dialogue and understanding.

Additionally, one participant highlighted the importance of assertiveness, suggesting that adapting to a more direct communication style can be beneficial for personal and professional development, even if uncomfortable at first.

The findings indicate varying perspectives among international students. While some struggled with the perceived bluntness, others recognized its value and viewed conflicts as constructive. Individual factors influenced the perception of directness, highlighting the importance of cultural awareness and adaptability in cross-cultural communication.

Negative view towards directness:

When there was feedback it was just very harsh (...) and then only afterwards I found out it wasn't even meant in a bad way, but in the moment it really felt like an attack, but it was just very direct (...) [14:German]

“For me it was like, the negative was really pointed out there and the other things were just ignored, but that was just how it felt like.” [14:German]

Constructive view towards directness and conflicts:

“Turn up learning there so you got straight to the point and we we didn't have to do a little

dance. I feel like if you make a mistake here, it's they'll point it out, but it's like, OK, it's fixable. You know there's ways to to overcome it.” [5:UAE]

“I learned how to be a bit more assertive in group projects because I didn't know that could be more, and I think that it has helped me a lot because I think that is a quality that you do need.” [10:Costa Rican]

“They said they express their own views every time, which sometimes I might disagree with maybe that's where the conflicts stand from. But that doesn't necessarily mean that I had a negative experience. It was more constructive than, I don't know, negative, I would say.” [8:12 Cypriote]

4.2 Language Use

Language use emerged as another significant area of conflict identified in the study. Some Dutch students, feeling more comfortable expressing themselves in their native language, occasionally returned to speaking Dutch during group discussions. However, it unintentionally excluded non-Dutch-speaking international students, creating a barrier to their full participation and effective communication within the group. The language barrier sometimes resulted in miscommunication and inefficiencies in collaborative tasks during group projects.

The data revealed frustrations among the participants when Dutch was spoken during

group work, despite everyone's understanding of English. Participants expressed confusion and a sense of exclusion when their Dutch colleagues switched to their native language, preventing open and inclusive communication within the team.

The issue of Dutch students reverting to speaking Dutch during group discussions can be understood through CAT. This behavior represents a failure to accommodate non-Dutch speaking students, leading to feelings of exclusion. CAT suggests that successful communication often involves converging towards the communication style of others, which in this case would mean consistently using English in mixed groups.

This issue highlights the challenges that can arise when individuals prioritize personal comfort over inclusive practices in multicultural settings. While Dutch students may have felt better expressing themselves in their native tongue, this preference marginalized international team members and prevented effective collaboration.

The findings underline the importance of establishing clear language guidelines and helping create an environment that promotes inclusivity and mutual understanding. Methods against this challenge were promoted. By consistently using a common language accessible to all team members, misunderstandings and inefficiencies can be minimized, facilitating smoother communication and more effective teamwork.

“I work in a certain environment with international people and what surprised me a lot is that they still speak Dutch a lot. Even though everybody does understand English. Sometimes it felt like, okay, why don't you just speak English? For me that sometimes still happens.” [2:German]

4.3 Different Working Methods

Different working methods and approaches to project execution emerged as another significant area of potential conflict identified in the data collection. The conflicts arising

from different working methods can be analyzed through Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT). International students often brought diverse approaches to teamwork, influenced by their cultural backgrounds and educational experiences.

These differences can violate the expectations of Dutch students, leading to tensions. As one participant shared,

“I was trying to change the way we are approaching things, but the person was really set on what they have thought would be the best. (...) I don't think they're thriving in ambiguity (...).” [9:Polish]

This conflict relates to Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension, as cultures with high uncertainty avoidance (like the Netherlands) may prefer more structured approaches to work, while those from cultures with lower uncertainty avoidance might be more comfortable with ambiguity and flexible methods.

Effective communication, mutual understanding, and a willingness to compromise emerged as crucial factors in navigating these differences in working methods. By fostering an environment of open dialogue and respect for diverse perspectives, teams can use the strengths of different approaches and find common ground for successful collaboration.

4.4 Broader Cultural Differences

In addition to communication styles and language barriers, broader cultural differences, including attitudes toward hierarchy, time management, and interpersonal interactions, also played a significant role in the misunderstandings and conflicts observed between international students and their Dutch peers.

One notable area of cultural difference was the approach to hierarchy. The

international students interviewed in this study often needed time to adjust to the more egalitarian and informal approach to hierarchy that is typical in Dutch culture. This contrasted with the often more formal hierarchical structures they were accustomed to in their home countries. The lack of a distinct power distance in Dutch academic settings initially felt unfamiliar and required some time to adjust for some international students.

Furthermore, differences in time management practices, such as the perception of project group-set deadlines and punctuality, further contributed to misunderstandings and conflicts. Cultural variations in the importance placed on following the schedules and meeting deadlines lead to miscommunications and frustrations within project teams.

The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of cultural differences and their impact on cross-cultural interactions. While communication styles and language barriers were significant areas of conflict, broader cultural differences related to hierarchy, time management, and interpersonal interactions also played a crucial role in shaping the experiences of international students in Dutch academic settings.

“(...) it was just weird for me because I was used to the distance in the hierarchy. So I just needed some time to kind of, accept that it wasn't there anymore.”
[17:Austrian]

This quote illustrates the adjustment required for international students accustomed to more formal hierarchical structures, as they navigated the egalitarian approach to hierarchy in Dutch culture.

“Just the way that people sometimes talk to me just because they talk to each other like that. I'm just not used to it. And then I feel like I'm underneath them, because they're talking to me like that and I'm not allowed to talk to them like the same way.”
[3:German]

This quote highlights the discomfort experienced by some international students when faced with the directness and informality of interpersonal interactions in Dutch culture, which contrasted with their cultural norms and expectations.

4.5 Exposure to Cultural Diversity

The next main problem found for this research is the amount of exposure to cultural diversity before attending university, which also emerged as an influential factor in how the interviewees adapted to cultural differences. The data revealed that students who had previous experience with cultural diversity were generally more flexible and understanding of cultural differences. This prior exposure helped them navigate and adapt to cultural differences more effectively, reducing the likelihood of conflicts arising from cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Participants who had encountered diverse cultures before their university studies seemed better equipped to embrace and accommodate cultural variations and in comparison had different expectations. Their previous experiences helped them become more open and willing to understand that different practices and norms are acceptable across cultures. This mindset facilitated smoother interactions and a greater capacity to adapt to unfamiliar cultural contexts. The emphasis on cultural awareness and empathy in the findings relates to CAT's concept of perceived costs and rewards of accommodation. By understanding and respecting cultural differences, individuals can make more informed choices about how to accommodate their communication style to others.

The findings suggest that prior exposure to cultural diversity can serve as a valuable asset in multicultural academic settings. Students with such experiences may be better prepared to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication, showing greater flexibility, empathy, and understanding of cultural differences. These traits can help reduce

potential conflicts and create a more inclusive environment for international students and their Dutch counterparts.

“(...) just try to be understanding. I feel like people need to just understand that sometimes things are done a bit differently in different places and that's OK.”
[5:UAE]

This quote shows the importance of cultivating an understanding and accepting mindset towards cultural differences. Prior exposure to diverse cultures can instill this perspective, enabling individuals to navigate cultural nuances more effectively and reducing the likelihood of conflicts arising from misunderstandings or clashes in cultural norms and practices.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Next after presenting the problems in this research, the strategies to the solutions will be introduced.

4.6 Adapting Communication Styles

To resolve the differences in communication styles identified as an area of conflict, the study highlighted the usefulness of the “sandwich method” for providing feedback. This approach, one example to provide feedback, involves starting with positive comments, followed by constructive criticism, and concluding with positive remarks. Using this balanced method can help make feedback more relatable and easier to accept for those not used to blunt or direct communication styles.

Additionally, the findings suggest that emphasizing the benefits of direct communication, more typically identified with Dutch culture, such as clarity and efficiency,

while also encouraging a degree of adaptability to individual preferences, can help understanding between parties with contrasting communication styles. This type of accommodation aligns with the CAT, since it suggests that individuals may converge toward or diverge from the communication styles of others. The different strategies represent efforts to find a middle ground between different communication styles, aligning with CAT's principles of convergence and divergence.

The data revealed the importance of empathy and cultural awareness when navigating communication differences. As one participant stated,

“They could be more empathetic. (...) So I'm from the South from the states. So we kind of prioritize feelings over efficiency.” [1:American]

This quote highlights the need for Dutch students to be more considerate of cultural variations in communication preferences.

Several participants discussed the effectiveness of the sandwich method in mitigating conflicts arising from direct feedback. One participant shared,

“(...) we had to learn the sandwiching method. (...) where you say something nice and then you say the thing that you think needs improvement and then you say something nice again (...) it definitely helped because (...) you also get feedback from your other teammates at the end of the module. And the fact that they knew that it was kind of a requirement to adhere to this workshop, they held to it. But I don't think they were very hurt about having to adhere to it.” [1:American]

This quote illustrates the effectiveness of the sandwich method in making direct feedback more relatable and less hurtful.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that empathy and cultural awareness are essential for effective cross-cultural interactions. As one participant stated,

“(...) I need to be a bit more open to other cultures because I was also very much like this is what I know and this is how I want it to be. But then I also am like well I am in a different country here.” [3:German]

This quote highlights the importance of embracing cultural differences and adapting one's communication style accordingly.

Another participant emphasized the importance of balanced feedback, stating,

“(...) personally think it's very important to when you discuss something that you not only share what has been bad, but also kind of say something good (...)” [14:German]

This quote reinforces the value of the sandwich method in providing constructive feedback while also acknowledging positive aspects.

Overall, the findings suggest that adapting communication styles through methods like the sandwich approach, emphasizing the benefits of directness while accommodating individual preferences, and fostering empathy and openness to cultural differences can enhance mutual understanding and mitigate conflicts arising from contrasting communication styles.

4.7 Inclusive Language Practices

To address the issue of language use, which emerged as a significant area of conflict, working on an inclusive communication environment where all team members consistently

use English was highlighted as an important strategy. This practice ensures that international students are fully included in discussions and can participate effectively, without being excluded due to language barriers.

While adopting a common language, which is common amongst all the students, like English may require more time and effort initially, the findings suggest that this approach ultimately leads to better results and a more cohesive team dynamic. By ensuring that all team members can fully understand and contribute to discussions, the quality of collaboration and decision-making is enhanced, leading to more effective solutions.

The data revealed situations where the use of Dutch language during group discussions led to the exclusion of international students, hindering their participation and creating resentment within the team. One participant shared their experience, stating:

“I wasn't involved at all because they would just be speaking Dutch. It was a more time efficient way of solving the problem. But people held grudges because of it because they didn't listen to me and they didn't listen to her or they didn't listen to them. Because they just said this is the best solution we're going to do this, but in the end when you start listening to everyone, you get better solutions, but it took more time.” [1:American]

This quote highlights the negative impact of language barriers, where international students felt excluded from the decision-making process and unable to contribute their perspectives, leading to resentment and suboptimal solutions.

Furthermore, participants recognized the importance of establishing a consistent language policy from the outset to prevent such conflicts. As one participant stated:

“If they all Only communicated with each other in English from the very beginning.

I feel that things would have gone better.” [4:Spanish, Luxemburg]

This quote highlights the belief that adopting a common language like English from the start can facilitate smoother communication and collaboration within multicultural teams, preventing misunderstandings and conflicts arising from language barriers.

While the inclusive language approach may require additional time and effort initially, the findings suggest that it ultimately leads to better results by ensuring that all team members can fully participate and contribute their diverse perspectives. By fostering an environment of inclusivity and open communication, teams can leverage the strengths of their cultural diversity and work more cohesively towards shared goals.

4.8 Flexible Working Methods

The findings highlighted the importance of openness and flexibility when working with different working methods across team members. It is crucial to encourage an understanding that various approaches can be effective, rather than sticking to a single method.

Establishing a clear plan from the start of the project, with well-defined expectations and objectives, helps manage diverse working processes and ensure alignment within the team. By setting clear guidelines and expectations, teams can effectively navigate their differences and use the strengths of various perspectives to achieve common goals.

The data revealed the need for adaptability and a willingness to compromise when faced with contrasting working styles. As one participant stated,

“I think that's also important that internationals forget that they're in another country and they get very stuck to their ways. I think also you have to give and

take.” [6:Spanish]

This quote emphasizes the importance of international students recognizing that they are in a different cultural context and must be open to adapting their approaches, rather than stubbornly sticking to their familiar methods.

Another participant repeated the value of flexibility, stating,

“I feel like it's depending on the situation, but it's always good to be open to a new strategy. Yeah, just focusing on one. But if you're open to any different strategies, you can use two or three different strategies, then it could work, and later on, it will be easier for you to implement one of those strategies when needed, because you're used to it.” [16:Indonesian]

This quote highlights the benefits of remaining open to multiple strategies and working methods, as it can facilitate easier adaptation and implementation of different approaches as needed.

The findings suggest that by fostering an environment that encourages openness, flexibility, and a willingness to compromise, teams can effectively navigate the challenges posed by diverse working methods. Establishing clear expectations and objectives from the beginning, while remaining adaptable to different approaches, can help teams leverage the strengths of various perspectives and work cohesively towards shared goals.

4.9 Leveraging Cultural Exposure

“(…) just try to be understanding. I feel like people need to just understand that sometimes things are done a bit differently in different places and that's OK.”
[22:UAE]

Supports the point made about students with prior exposure to cultural diversity being more flexible, understanding and facilitating smoother cross-cultural communication and collaboration.

This quote reflects an open-minded perspective that different cultural practices and norms are acceptable variations, rather than judging them as right or wrong. This mindset of cultural awareness and acceptance aligns with the benefits of having prior exposure to diverse cultures before university. Students who have already navigated cultural differences likely develop greater understanding that practices can vary across cultures, which is reflected in this quote's message of “things are done differently in different places and that's OK.”

This open and non-judgmental attitude towards cultural diversity can help reduce potential conflicts stemming from misunderstandings or perceived clashes between cultural norms. It promotes a more inclusive environment where different perspectives are respected.

By encouraging students with international experiences to share insights like this quote, it can foster empathy and understanding among team members from different cultural backgrounds. Hearing firsthand accounts of the importance of flexibility and open-mindedness when navigating diversity can shape team dynamics in a positive way.

Overall, this quote exemplifies the valuable perspective students with prior cultural exposure can bring. Their ability to accept cultural variations without judgment, as expressed here, can create a more cohesive and inclusive team environment when working across cultures. Sharing this mindset helps prevent cultural differences from becoming points of conflict.

5. Discussion

The findings to answer the research question: How do variations in cultural dimensions, impact communication dynamics and potential conflicts between international students and their Dutch peers? provide valuable insights into the cultural differences that can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts between international students and their Dutch colleagues. By integrating communication theories and cultural frameworks, a deeper understanding of the identified conflict areas and the proposed resolution strategies can be achieved.

5.1 Main Findings

The direct communication style characteristic of Dutch culture emerged as a primary area of conflict, aligning with the principles of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). As Rogerson-Revell (2010) explains, "According to research studies, convergence may increase perceived attractiveness, intelligibility, and interpersonal involvement of the speaker" (p. 434), meaning that people are motivated to adjust their communication to become more similar to or different from their colleagues. In this case, the directness of Dutch students' communication style was very different from the indirect approach preferred by international students from high-context cultures, leading to perceptions of bluntness or harshness. A problem that was often mentioned during the interviews.

A solution for people being too direct, suggested several times by the interviewees was the sandwich method of giving feedback. The general definition of the sandwich method is giving "feedback as a specific negative statement surrounded by two positive ones." Furthermore, their study compared the above-mentioned strategy to corrective or no feedback and "found support for the effectiveness of sandwiching as a relevant corrective piece of information between two general positive statements" (Prochazka et al., 2020). In addition, as stated by Almaududi Ausat et al. (2023), "emphasizing the benefits of direct communication, such as its clarity and efficiency, while encouraging a degree of adaptability to individual preferences, can enhance mutual understanding and facilitate effective collaboration within culturally diverse teams."

Language use also turned out to be another significant point of discussion, with Dutch students occasionally going back to speaking Dutch during group discussions, unintentionally excluding non-Dutch-speaking international students. This behavior can be understood through the lens of CAT, as Hawa et al. (2021) note, “findings showed that the students used it mostly in clarifying and understanding the instructions of materials or topics, explaining unfamiliar vocabularies and idiomatic phrases, and explaining the differences and similarities of English pronunciation” (p.1107). By consistently using a common language, such as English, teams can minimize communication barriers and promote a more inclusive and collaborative environment, aligning with the principles of CAT and helping with effective intercultural communication.

The findings related to different working methods and approaches to project execution, influenced by diverse cultural backgrounds and educational experiences, highlight the potential for conflicts and challenges in finding a project strategy that works for everyone. In line with Burgoon (2015) this area of conflict can be understood through the lens of the Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT), which proposes that deviations from expected behaviors, especially nonverbal communication, can significantly influence interpersonal outcomes.

The broader cultural differences identified, such as time management, and interpersonal interactions, further contribute to the observed misunderstandings and conflicts. These differences can be understood through the lens of cultural frameworks, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2011) and the high-context/low-context cultural framework (Hall, 1976). Hofstede's cultural dimensions, including can help explain the observed differences in attitudes toward hierarchy and interpersonal interactions. However, as Hofstede (2011) notes, with different cultures, there are differences in value systems, leading to different approaches to the cultural dimensions. These variations influence how societies or diverse project groups handle inequality in power, control uncertainty, prioritize individual versus group goals, and value competitiveness versus cooperation. Furthermore, according to Kittler et al. (2011) the high-context/low-context cultural framework, can shed light on the importance of indirect communication in high-context cultures, aligning with the challenges faced by international

students in adapting to the direct communication style of Dutch culture. As Hall (1975) words cited by Hofstede (2011) explain, “HC communication, in contrast to LC, is economical, fast, efficient, and satisfying; however, time must be devoted to programming (to be high context)” (p.101).

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute significantly to our understanding of intercultural communication in educational settings, particularly in the context of Dutch and international student interactions. These implications expand on existing theories and frameworks.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

As mentioned above, the research extends CAT by demonstrating how cultural differences in communication styles (such as direct vs. indirect) can lead to misunderstandings. It shows that convergence in communication style is not always straightforward, especially when deeply ingrained cultural norms are involved.

Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT)

The study enriches EVT by illustrating how cultural differences in working methods and project execution can violate expectations, leading to interpersonal conflicts. This expands our understanding of EVT beyond nonverbal communication to include task-oriented behaviors in multicultural teams.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

The findings provide empirical support for Hofstede's theory in an educational context, particularly in how the differences are manifested in group dynamics and project management approaches. However, the dimensions are from 1976, society has changed a lot since then. Therefore the focus of some dimensions may limit aspects of cultures (Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007).

High-Context/Low-Context Cultural Framework

The research demonstrates the practical implications of Hall's framework in multicultural educational settings, showing how communication style preferences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.

Intercultural Competence Models

The study contributes to the development of intercultural competence models by identifying specific areas of conflict and potential strategies for resolution in multicultural educational environments.

5.3 Practical Implications

The research findings have several real-world applications that can inform practice and policy in educational institutions.

Curriculum Design

Universities can incorporate intercultural communication training into their curricula, focusing on the specific areas of conflict identified in this study. This could include workshops on direct vs. indirect communication styles, language use in multicultural teams, and diverse working methods. This will not only be helpful for academic settings, but also for work and travels.

Orientation Programs

International student orientation programs can be enhanced to include sessions on Dutch communication styles and academic expectations, while also educating Dutch students about potential cultural differences they may encounter.

Group Work Guidelines

Academic institutions can develop guidelines for multicultural group work that address the identified areas of conflict. These guidelines could include strategies for inclusive language

use, managing different working styles, and addressing hierarchical preferences. To address the conflict arising from different working methods, the proposed resolution strategy of encouraging openness and flexibility from all team members is essential. As Appelbaum and Shapiro (1998) state, effective managers or, in this case, project groups should “set direction through the formulation and implementation of strategic direction and to get results through aligning people to focus on agreed objectives” in order to be more successful as a team.”

Feedback Mechanisms

The study's findings on the effectiveness of the sandwich method for feedback can be incorporated into faculty training and student workshops to improve communication in multicultural settings.

Language Policies

Educational institutions can implement policies that promote inclusive language use in group settings, ensuring that all students can fully participate in discussions.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

To address broader cultural differences, the proposed resolution strategy of addressing hierarchical preferences through early discussions and setting mutual expectations is crucial. By openly discussing and respecting each other's cultural backgrounds and preferences, teams can minimize potential destructive conflicts and work more effectively together. As supported by Appelbaum and Shapiro (1998): “To manage multicultural groups more effectively, managers need to be aware of cultural differences, they should communicate and show respect to other cultures, avoid stereotyping, and be empathetic to other cultures. In addition, issues should be defined from the point of view of both cultures. The focus should be on accommodating all unique cultures. Mechanisms that discover the underlying cultural differences can be used to better manage cultural differences.” Universities can develop and implement conflict resolution strategies specifically tailored to address cultural misunderstandings in academic settings.”

Peer Mentoring Programs

Institutions can establish peer mentoring programs that pair international students with students who have prior intercultural experience, fostering mutual understanding and support. Additionally, leveraging the experiences of students who have prior exposure to different cultures before or during their time at university can help create a more inclusive and understanding group environment. Encouraging these students to share their experiences and insights into cultural diversity can work with empathy and promote a more cohesive team dynamic. As suggested by Stahl et al. (2010), “Cultural diversity and differences can be an asset in teams, rather than a liability, and understanding these processes can enhance the benefits of diversity in organizations.”

Industry Partnerships

Universities can collaborate with multinational companies to provide students with real-world experiences in multicultural team settings, better preparing them for global workplaces.

These practical implications can help educational institutions create more inclusive and effective learning environments for both international and domestic students, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and preparing students for success in an increasingly globalized world.

5.4 Future Research

Future research could further explore the effectiveness of the proposed resolution strategies in different cultural contexts and educational settings. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate the long-term impact of implementing these strategies on team dynamics, academic performance, and overall student satisfaction. Moreover, as cultural diversity continues to increase in educational institutions, it is essential to further refine and adapt intercultural communication strategies to address emerging challenges and promote effective collaboration

among students from diverse backgrounds.

5.5 Limitations

The study has several limitations. The findings may not be generalizable due to a limited sample size and lack of diversity in the sample. The results are specific to the educational setting and may not apply to other contexts. The study focuses on short-term interactions and does not consider long-term effects.

5.6 Conclusion

The research provides valuable insights into the cultural differences that can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts between international students and their Dutch colleagues. By integrating communication theories and cultural frameworks, the study offers practical strategies to address these conflicts and promote effective intercultural communication and collaboration. Future research should continue to explore and refine these strategies by using different and/or more theories to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of diverse educational environments.

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Appendix:

Appendix 1: Logbook

Date	Where did I search?	Search string	Number of hits relevancy	Link
10.05.24	Google Scholar	Hofstede's cultural difference	7	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13562510902898825?casa_token=T9mSyzaEhSsAAAAA%3A_LnEPe_yv4ESJ8w0hQ4KYQBC-RghEARb3arRUHzjhYqTLefoRC3bBIc3UjkJASWOqufT0P7QzQUb
20.05.24	Science Direct	diverse teams globalization	4	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0090261600000127
09.06.24	consensus	Is communication accommodation effective in reducing conflicts?	4	https://asianpublisher.id/journal/index.php/kendali/article/view/99
09.06.24	consensus	what is the sandwich method when giving feedback?	3	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0023969020301429?via%3Dihub#sec0075
10.06.24	Research gate	Intercultural communication	8	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350064024_INTERCULTURAL_COMMUNICATION_AND_CONFLICT_RESOLUTION
15.06.24	Google Scholar	Expectancy violations theory	4	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9781118540190.wbeic102
15.06.24	Google Scholar	communication accommodation theory	5	https://sonar.ch/documents/306425/files/2005_galloisogaygiles_communicationaccommodationtheory.pdf
15.06.24	Science Direct	sandwich method feedback	2	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0023969020301429?via%3Dihub#sec0075
20.06.24	Google Scholar	high vs. low context culture	3	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6793(199809)15:6%3C507::AID-MAR2%3E3.0.CO;2-A?casa_token=HKxlSk1CDNkAAAAA:NwL_-ZKlfrpsLEILixJmePz1s0nMjU62f3Pjj3gKMtPVoHKRCVUTivqyYM5wAiwj3E9fcdY0hs_n3VbM
29.06	consensus	how can communication accommodation theory help understanding cultural	2	https://saudijournals.com/media/articles/JAEP_45_192-200_c.pdf

29.06.2 4	consensus	differences? how can communication accommodation theory and expectancy violation theory help understanding cultural differences?	2	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1470595811425630
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Appendix 2A: Consent form

I am conducting a research study as part of Communication Science, focusing on exploring cultural misunderstandings and conflicts experienced by international students in the Netherlands. Your participation in this study will involve sharing personal experiences and perspectives related to cross-cultural interactions.

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into how cultural differences influence communication and interpersonal dynamics between international students and individuals from Dutch backgrounds. By understanding these experiences, we aim to identify strategies for improving intercultural communication and reducing conflicts in multicultural settings.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. All information shared during the interview will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Your name and personal identifying information will not be disclosed in any publications or reports resulting from this study.

The data collected from this study may be used for academic research purposes, such as thesis writing, presentations, or publications. However, your identity will remain anonymous, and no individual participant will be identified in any research outputs.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reasoning and without consequences.

Informed Consent:

By agreeing to participate in this interview, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided in this consent form. You consent to voluntarily participate in the study and agree to share your experiences and insights related to cultural misunderstandings and conflicts.

Appendix 2B: Interview questions:

- Have you read and understood the consent form and the information about the project?

Demographic/Basic questions:

- What is your gender?
- How old are you?
- What is your nationality?
- In which countries have you been living?

- Have you had previous experience living or studying in a multicultural environment? How would you describe it?
- How comfortable are you communicating in English?

Main question:

- Can you share a specific misunderstanding/conflict that happened in English involving one or more Dutch persons where you felt that cultural differences played a role? Please describe what happened and who was involved.

Follow-up Questions:**Incident Details:**

- Who were the individuals directly involved in this incident? What were their cultural backgrounds?
- How were the individuals related to each other (e.g., colleagues, classmates, friends)?
- What was the nature of the misunderstanding or conflict that occurred?

Cultural Aspects:

- In what ways do you believe cultural differences contributed to this incident?
- Can you identify specific cultural norms or values that clashed during this situation?
- Were there differences in how authority or leadership was perceived and enacted by those involved?

Conflict Resolution:

- How was the conflict eventually resolved, if at all?
- Did the approach to resolving the conflict differ based on cultural perspectives? If so please elaborate.

Learning and Reflection:

- What did you personally learn from this incident about cultural differences? Do you know whether the other party learned something from it as well, please elaborate on their point of view as well.
- Have there been any changes in your behavior or communication style as a result of this experience?

Additional Topics:

- How did each party express themselves during the conflict (e.g., directness, nonverbal cues)?
- Were there any assumptions or expectations of cultural differences that were not met?
- Did the incident highlight differences in decision-making processes or time orientation?

Appendix 3: Use of AI

During the preparation of this work the author used Consensus in order to search for relevant articles for the study. Furthermore, the country comparison tool from Hofstede-insights.com was used to design informative graphs and comparing countries according to their cultural dimensions. After using the tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the work.