

# **Differences in national grading cultures as a potential obstacle to student mobility: a comparative case study of the Netherlands and Germany**



**Bachelor Thesis**

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## Abstract

The purpose of the thesis is to contribute to already existent literature regarding higher education and student mobility. By revealing differences in national grading cultures the following main research question becomes relevant: *“To what extent do differences in grading cultures between the Dutch and the German higher education systems hinder the potential transition of German students, who hold a Dutch degree, to a subsequent education or employment career in Germany?”*. The question gains importance due to the reason that more and more German students start to study in the Netherlands although it is claimed that the conversion of Dutch grades to German ones is not beneficial for those who want to return to Germany for education or employment.

In order to answer the research question a dual comparative case study is employed. Differences in grading cultures derive out of the nation’s grading system and excellence orientation. Therefore, a qualitative assessment of already existent data was done to clarify the differences in the German and Dutch higher education systems as well as the differences in excellence orientation. A dual comparative case study does not only allow using qualitative assessments but also quantitative ones. For this reason, a survey among German students studying at the University of Twente was conducted to confirm the existence of differences in grading cultures by the subjective view of German students studying in the Netherlands. The outcome of the qualitative and quantitative assessment showed that differences in the Dutch and German grading cultures do hinder a potential return of German students, holding a Dutch degree, to Germany especially in the education sector.

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## Abbreviations

BFUG	Bologna Follow-up Group
BSc	Bachelor of Science
CICB	Center of Intercultural Competence
DS	Diploma Supplement
CBS	Centraale Bureau voor de Statistiek
EACEA	The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EILC	Erasmus Intensive Language Course
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

ESU	European Student Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HBO	Hogere Beroepsopleiding
MSc	Master of Science
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NC	Numerus Clausus
Nuffic	Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education
PhD	Postgraduate academic degree
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
THES	Times Higher Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO-CEPES	UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
UT	University of Twente
VWO	Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs

# 1. Introduction

Although the implementation of the Bologna Process should have been “revolutionary for cooperation in European higher education” (Bologna Process, 2010), a often made complaint of German students studying in the Netherlands is that it appears to be difficult to obtain high marks while this is needed to return to higher education or employment in Germany. This shows that in spite of similar structures and tools to compare degrees national higher education systems and awarding of grades are not uniform so that questions like “Is it possible to compare degrees with different contents, levels of difficulty and grading systems among different countries fairly?” and “Do subsequent higher education committees and employers assess foreign and domestic degrees objectively in consideration of different grading cultures?” arise.

Therefore, on the basis of the Dutch and German cases, this Bachelor thesis intends to reveal that differences in national higher education systems in terms of grading culture, grading system and excellence orientation, is one of the reasons that hinder student mobility.

## 1.1 Europe of Knowledge: the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna Process

*“Higher education plays an essential role in society, creating new knowledge, transferring it to students and fostering innovation” (European Commission, 2012a).*

In Europe, educational issues are under the responsibility of nation-states and they appear to be among the most important political affairs (Keeling, 2006). Due to the fact that national governments face the same challenges and problems in the higher education systems, they are encouraged to work together by European initiated programmes: the Bologna process to reform higher education in Europe and beyond, and the Europe 2020 Strategy to facilitate jobs and growth within the European area (Keeling, 2006; European Commission 2012b).

After the Lisbon Strategy failed because of its non-binding character, the Europe 2020 Strategy will be better monitored. The core aims of the Strategy are that at least 75% of the employable population have a job, that the EU’s GDP investment in Research and Development rises up to 3% and that by 2020 40% of the 30-34-year-olds have completed the third level of education (European Commission 2012b). Staying competitive and innovative in Europe can only be achieved by good education so that it becomes necessary to reform Europe’s universities and to support them with structural funds. Still, higher education systems stay autonomous (European Commission, 2012b).

The Bologna process started in 1999 and 29 European nation-states signed the Bologna Declaration to establish the “European Higher Education Area”. By signing the Bologna Declaration the European countries agreed upon similar higher education policies binding themselves to six objectives to create the EHEA: similar degrees, a common credit point system, issues to promote student mobility, tools to assure quality and a European dimension (Jakobi & Rusconi). In 2006, the EHEA comprised 47 European nation-states, including the European Commission and several organizations operating at the European level like student representatives, quality assurance agencies and institutions of higher education (Keeling, 2006).

As soon as the EHEA was established, significant higher education reforms took place to make different European degrees comparable and European students mobile. First of all, in order to create a common basis, the three cycle degree system was introduced: Bachelor, Master and PhD. The common use of study credits, known as the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS), makes it possible for students to move between countries, higher education systems and study programmes (Keeling, 2006). Other tools to support the recognition of foreign degrees and qualifications are the Diploma Supplement and the Transcript of Records, which provide information about the higher education system the degree holder came from (European Commission, 2012d). Thus, the specific aim of the Bologna process is to facilitate international student mobility as well as cross-border employability by similar structures and degrees (EACEA, 2012). Although the Bologna Process is based upon intergovernmental agreements without legally binding obligations, the

acceptance of a European dimension in national education issues to reform the higher education systems is the most permanent one (Jakobi & Rusconi).

After the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, national education ministries were not solely in charge anymore. In order to make sure that the decided steps upon the summits are implemented as well as to facilitate progress in priority areas, the EHEA makes use of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) together with national representatives. Besides the European Commission also the Council of Europe, the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Students Union (ESU), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), UNESCO-CEPES, Education International and BusinessEurope are official representatives of BFUG (Bologna Process, 2010). The current work-plan (2009-2012) includes seven working groups:

- Social Dimension
- Qualifications Frameworks
- International Openness
- Mobility
- Recognition
- Reporting on the implementation of the Bologna Process
- Transparency mechanisms

(Bologna Process, 2010).

The EHEA is often connected with mobility, the most desirable aim of the Bologna Process. But mobility of students, graduates and professors is still hampered by various obstacles. The BFUG working group on mobility found out that the main reasons for not going abroad are the financial and social situation, study delay, problems with recognition of results, limited language skills and administrative hindrances (EACEA, 2012).

## **1.2 Recognition and value of degrees, credits and grades**

The issue of degree and qualification recognition is among others one of the weaker aspects within the EHEA due to the reason that there are still higher education institutions that do not use recognition tools like the ECTS, Diploma Supplement or learning agreements (Bologna coordination group on mobility, 2009).

In fact, it is still doubtful whether it is possible to fairly transfer obtained credit points, grades, degrees and qualifications from one higher education institution to another. National higher education cultures and backgrounds cannot easily be replaced by common structures so that there are differences in grading systems and excellence orientation. It seems that the influence of national grading cultures upon student mobility and the situation of students who need foreign degrees recognized is still problematic, which might also be the reason for the low student mobility rate. The incoming and outgoing mobility rate of students inside the EHEA is less than 10% and even less than 5% in some participating countries (EACEA, 2012).

Earlier studies also state that there is still a problem in the field of recognition because of differences in cultural backgrounds.

Sullivan (2010) introduces the debate about whether grades and degrees obtained in a foreign country are properly translated in the home country when students participate in student mobility programmes like Erasmus or Socrates. Differences are likely to occur due to different societal and cultural backgrounds in different higher education systems (Sullivan, 2010).

In order to support this statement, the author compares the higher education systems in Britain and in Sweden and finds out that assessment techniques and educational culture are different and that especially foreign students could be at a disadvantage. The ECTS system does not regard the fact that foreign students come from completely different assessment techniques, goals of education and curricula. Therefore, Sullivan claims that the ECTS system needs more transparency for foreign

students and that the introduction of ECTS qualitative transcripts could indicate the student's true ability (Sullivan, 2010).

To deepen the argument of Sullivan, that cultural background and society influence the student's approach of learning, the authors Dahlgren et al. (2009) strive to prove that students' approaches to learning are dependent on assessment techniques and judgment criteria.

To do so the authors conducted a survey and found out that there is a positive relationship between grading systems and assessments to the extent that multi-step grading systems influence the assessment task construction.

The survey was conducted at different universities in Sweden, which shows that already within the higher educational system of one country large differences exist. How can it be possible then to find workable solutions for the whole EHEA (Dahlgren et al., 2009)?

A more general explanation of the use of the ECTS is provided by Karran (2004), who suggests a criterion based system to create greater consistency at the national and institutional level especially if the credibility of the academic staff shall be guaranteed. Although a common valid definition of the ECTS grading system is developed from excellent (A) to fail (F), it is proven that universities in different countries award excellent marks and sufficient grades differently. Thus, those who choose universities where it is relatively easy to get excellent marks have a clear advantage over those students who choose universities where it is relatively difficult to get excellence marks (Karran, 2004).

### **1.3 Research questions and thesis outline**

The above mentioned articles show that a lot still needs to be done to harmonize national higher education systems and to guarantee fair treatment of students who hold foreign grades and degrees.

According to the German/Dutch case this becomes more and more important due to the ever increasing number of German students in the Netherlands: 5252 in 2003 and 24 750 in 2011 (Eurodata 2006, p.21; Nuffic, 2011). This means that about 18% of all German students who study outside of Germany (about 115 500 in 2009) go to the Netherlands for primary and secondary higher education (Statistisches Bundesamt Wiesbaden, 2011). The situation at the University of Twente looks as follows: in total 9341 students are enrolled at the UT, of whom 1315 (=14.07%) are of German nationality, following a Bachelor or Master programme (University of Twente, 2012).

Due to the significant number of German students studying in the Netherlands, the primary interest of the study is to reveal whether differences in the Dutch and German grading cultures hinder German students holding a Dutch degree to return to Germany for a Master or employment without problems so that the main research question appears to be:

***“To what extent do differences in grading cultures between the Dutch and the German higher education systems hinder the potential transition of German students who hold a Dutch degree to a subsequent education or employment career in Germany?”***

The higher education systems of Germany and the Netherlands and the situation of German students studying in the Netherlands will be analyzed. To answer the research question it is first of all important to show the differences between the German and Dutch higher education systems in terms of excellence orientation, grading culture and grading system. Therefore, two subsequent questions are relevant:

1. To what extent are these two countries excellence driven?
2. To what extent are differences in the German and Dutch grading cultures and grading systems an obstacle to student transition?

In order to support the findings of the literature review and to investigate whether German students who begin to study in the Netherlands perceive that the different grading systems and grading cultures



will hinder their potential transition to a Master degree or employment in Germany, a survey among German students at the University of Twente has been conducted. Therefore, the third sub-question is:

3. To what extent do German students at the University of Twente perceive differences in grading cultures between the two higher education systems and do these hinder their potential transition into a Master programme or job in Germany?

The thesis is based upon the question to what extent German students who hold a Dutch degree are hindered to return to Germany for a Master or employment career.

In order to give the study a methodological framework, it is first of all explained which research design, sample technique and data collection method is used.

Chapter 3 is going to provide the study with the theoretical framework including the concepts of student mobility, the internationalization process, culture, grading culture and grading system as well as the theory of excellence orientation. The chapter ends with the relevant research model and assumptions. In chapter 4 the results of the conducted research to answer the first and the second sub-questions are presented and in chapter 5 the results of the student questionnaire are displayed. In chapter 6 the assumptions are discussed which were established in chapter 3. Chapter 7 provides an overall conclusion and an answer to the research questions will be given. The study ends with a discussion.

Thus, this thesis aims to contribute to the already existent body of literature in the field of higher education and student mobility. But the focus upon the Dutch/German case with a significant survey among German students studying at the University of Twente has not been done yet and is especially valuable for German students studying in the Netherlands since the same hindrance factors raised by differences in grading cultures are perceived.

## 2. Methodology

In this chapter the methodological part of the study will be outlined in order to ensure a scientifically correct framework. In general, a dual comparative case study design is used to show the differences of the German and Dutch higher education systems. The following sub-sections will shed light upon the chosen research design, the case selection and sampling as well as data collection and data analysis. In the last sub-section the limitations of the study are identified.

### 2.1 Research design

Having introduced the main purpose of the study, which is to investigate whether differences in the German and Dutch higher education systems hinder student mobility or not, this part of the paper will give an overview about the necessary methodological background to answer the main research question with its relevant sub-questions. According to Babbie (2004) this research combines two purposes: exploration and description and will be of qualitative and quantitative nature.

In order to answer the research questions, the research is based upon a dual comparative case study design, taken at one point in time, to reveal the differences in the German and Dutch higher education systems. The overall aim here is to identify the strategies and tools used to make a smooth transition from one higher education system to another as well as employment transition possible and whether these tools are helpful to overcome differences in grading cultures. Although the EHEA participants, among them Germany and the Netherlands, are under peer pressure to implement reforms in their higher education systems to facilitate student mobility, traditions and behavior manners in grading cultures cannot be changed easily, which will be further outlined in chapter 3.5.

The higher education systems of Germany and the Netherlands will be compared by means of carefully selected criteria. This is done in two ways: In order to answer the first sub-question “*To what extent are these two countries excellence driven?*” a comparison of the excellence orientation of higher

education institutions in Germany and the Netherlands is made, based on Ruben's (2007) different theories to explain excellence orientation: the resource/reputational perspective and the client-centered model. These theories will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent chapter. Another important factor in excellence orientation is which graduate characteristics are important to future employers both in Germany and the Netherlands. The information will be derived by the use of unobtrusive research methods<sup>1</sup>. The second sub-question "*To what extent are differences in the German and Dutch grading cultures and grading systems an obstacle to student transition?*" will be answered by a comparison of the German and Dutch grading practices. Here again the main source of information will be derived by the use of unobtrusive research methods which are official documents of government institutions and secondary sources of already existent data and statistics.

The third sub-question "*To what extent do German students at the University of Twente perceive differences in grading cultures between the two higher education systems and do these hinder their potential transition into a Master programme or job in Germany?*" will be answered by the use of a quantitative approach, i.e. a survey among students studying at the University of Twente. The perception of students is rather subjective instead of objective so that the results are not scientifically based but rather based upon individual views of German students who study in the Netherlands.

Reasons for employing a dual comparative case study design are that the research is limited to two cases and that it is possible to base evidence upon qualitative and quantitative research methods, which is important to take the results of the survey into account. The survey is based upon one case, i.e. the University of Twente, with German students following a Bachelor or Master programme.

The next section clarifies why the cases were chosen and which sampling techniques were used.

## **2.2 Case selection and sampling**

The Netherlands and Germany have been chosen on the basis of the purposive sampling approach which according to Babbie (2004) means that units of observation are selected on the researcher's judgment (Babbie, 2004, p. 193). The two cases are interesting because of the significant differences in their higher education systems with a special emphasis upon their differences in grading systems and grading cultures (the way grades are awarded). What these differences look like will be further highlighted in chapter 4. On top of that, many German students study in the Netherlands so that the study is of valuable importance for them. Further, also personal interests play an important role here. In order to find out whether German students who are studying in the Netherlands also perceive that differences in higher education systems and grading cultures could hinder a potential transition to a Master degree or employment in Germany, it has been decided to do a survey among German students who are studying at the University of Twente. The sample size is restricted to German students following a Bachelor or Master degree. In order to reach as many students as possible the snowball sampling technique was applied. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique where respondents are asked to further spread the survey among proper units of analysis (Babbie, 2004, p. 193).

## **2.3 Data collection**

With regard to data collection, this study primarily use qualitative data, consisting of official government documents, already existent data and statistics and reports published by the European Commission and national education ministries. Besides, this study also relies upon other important sources such as scientific articles, books and official webpages. This kind of information is derived from databases like "GoogleScholar", "Picarta" and "Jstor" as well as from the World Wide Web. With this type of data collection it becomes possible to answer the first two sub-questions.

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<sup>1</sup> The counterpart of unobtrusive research is obtrusive research where the unit is aware of the fact being studied like in surveys or interviews (Babbie, 2004, pp. 332-359).

Next to desk research also a quantitative data collection method is applied. This data collection method is of obtrusive nature because the individuals to be surveyed are aware of the fact that they are studied. The type of the survey is a questionnaire, electronically provided to the students. The advantages of an online survey are that costs are low and the response rate is relatively high due to the reason that nothing has to be sent back. Further, the survey is online at every point in time and the transformation of results into a statistics program is relatively easy and efficient.

The questionnaire is created and published on a site called “enquetemaken.be”. In order to reach as many students as possible the link to the questionnaire was published on social websites like “facebook.com” and “studi-vz.net”<sup>2</sup> and e-mails were sent around via the Blackboard<sup>3</sup> mailing lists. On top of that, the faculty coordinator of the “European Studies” programme sent around e-mails via the university mailing lists and last but not least announcements were distributed in public places and German students were asked personally. As already mentioned above also the snowball sampling technique was applied. When the students follow the link of the questionnaire they get information about what this study is about and why their support is needed by filling in the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 30 questions sub-divided into six parts and is fully conducted in German.

The first part of the questionnaire deals with general information about the respondents such as gender, age, nationality, study course, language of instruction and level of degree. The second part deals with the respondents’ motivation to study at the UT and to what extent they are satisfied with their chosen study course. The third part deals with the students’ awareness about the differences in the grading cultures which includes the differences in the grading systems, the satisfaction with the Dutch grading system and how often which grade is given. This part of the survey is the most important one due to the reason that it gives an insight into how students perceive the grading culture at the University of Twente. In the fourth part of the survey the respondents are asked to rank their chances of a possible transition from the Dutch higher education system to subsequent education or employment in Germany. The fifth part deals with the evaluation of student mobility among different higher education systems and in the last part the respondents shall indicate what according to them the main problems of different higher education systems are<sup>4</sup>.

The questionnaire is composed out of open-ended questions, close-ended questions with already pre-given answers and the possibility to choose for “yes” or “no” as well as the Likert-scale with the answer possibilities of “Strongly agree = 5” to “Strongly disagree = 1”. As many questions as possible were deployed in a matrix scale in order to make the survey quick and easy answerable for the respondents. Open-ended questions are nonetheless necessary to get an insight into the people’s view without pre-defined answers. Due to the reason that the focus of the survey research lies upon two groups, Bachelor and Master students, it is required to use contingency questions, which are questions that intend to reach only some respondents, becoming visible by a response to another question (Babbie, 2004, p. 263).

The responses of the survey research are transferred into a data matrix called SPSS to analyze the outcome. In total 60 respondents answered the questionnaire whereas 59 were counted as valid since one of the respondents did not fill in the whole questionnaire. The answering time frame was limited to two weeks, which were the last two weeks of the summer vacation so that the response rate was relatively high. Due to distribution limitations it was only possible to reach students from 15 out of 52 study programmes offered at the UT. Most of them study European Studies, followed by Psychology and International Business Administration. Thus, more students who follow a study course in English, instead of following a study course in Dutch, participated in the survey, which does not reflect the real population at the UT. 49 of the respondents follow a Bachelor programme and 11 respondents follow a Master programme.

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<sup>2</sup> Social websites can be used to reach many people at one time since people are organized in groups. Important are groups like “University of Twente”, “Flats in Enschede” or “Lift Enschede”.

<sup>3</sup> Blackboard is the online portal of the University of Twente where students can subscribe for subjects, courses etc.

<sup>4</sup> The whole questionnaire can be found in the annex.

## **2.4 Data analysis**

In order to answer the first two sub-questions the necessary data to compare the two higher education systems is mainly derived from websites of national education ministries, sites of famous newspapers and national higher education institutions. Relevant information was selected, analyzed and compared.

The results of the questionnaire are analyzed with the statistical programme SPSS. After the necessary information was transformed into measurable variables the answers of the respondents were analyzed by creating tables showing frequencies, descriptives and cross tabulations. The questions that were composed according to the Likert-scale were analyzed by using the mean of the answers the respondents indicated. The questions of the questionnaire are consistent with the purpose of this study to find out whether German students studying in the Netherlands perceive differences in grading cultures as a potential obstacle to return to Germany for education or employment. As mentioned above the questionnaire is divided into six parts and every part is analyzed question by question to get a specific overview about the respondents' rankings; to get a more logical structure the order of the parts is slightly different than in the actual questionnaire. In general, the respondents were interested in the study and evaluate it as an important issue to write about.

## **2.5 Limitations and shortfalls of the study**

The review of official documents and statistics makes the data reliable and valid given the fact that the sources where the data come from are trustable. For the scope of this study academic articles that focus upon higher education and obstacles to student mobility were used. The topic that is going to be investigated is not studied extensively yet so that it was difficult to find relevant articles. As already mentioned above, many authors recognize differences in grading systems and higher education systems as a potential obstacle for student mobility but the problem of different grading cultures has not really been explored yet. It seems that persons in charge assume that the introduction of tools to compare different degrees solve the problem of differences in higher education systems. But besides the outcome of the student survey, which will be described more extensively several chapters below, also perception and experience show that differences in grading cultures is not considered in tools like ECTS system, Diploma Supplement and Transcript of Records.

This study is limited to two cases, which are the Netherlands and Germany, and the comparison of their higher education systems so that it might be difficult to generalize for other higher education systems and the respective grading cultures. On top of that, it could even be difficult to generalize for the Dutch/German case due to the reason that not all differences in the way German federal states handle the higher education system will be taken into account. But in general the chosen research design strengthens the validity and reliability of the study. According to Shadish et al. (2002) intensive qualitative case study designs "rule out threats to internal validity" (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 500) so that time-based threats like history and maturation are not a problem here due to the reason that this study takes place at one point in time.

According to the used survey several limitations may occur. First of all, web-surveys often result in low response rates because it could be difficult to motivate the participants to continue until the end when no one is pushing them. E-mail surveys on the other hand could be considered as spam and might thus not be answered. Further, it cannot be guaranteed that a person does not fill in the questionnaire twice unless some "cookies" are installed to recognize the IP-address of the respondents. Another problem could be the computer-technique in itself due to the reason that loading the site of the questionnaire could take too long or the survey is not displayed correctly so that respondents do not fill in the questionnaire (Wiersma, 2012). On top of that, it cannot be ruled out that the wording of the questions could have influenced the respondent to choose the option which is in the opinion of the respondent most wanted or expected by the researcher. Thus, the survey may lack validity.

Lastly, the time frame where the survey was taken lay within the summer vacation so that it became inevitable to also spread the link on social websites to reach enough students. Further, most of the respondents did not study in Germany so that they answered the questions intuitively.

However, reliability is secured by the fact that all respondents get the same set of questions. Due to the reason that all German students in the Netherlands face the problem of different higher education systems the outcome of the student survey is generalizable for the given sample. Still, the result of the student survey cannot be taken to generalize to a broader scope of students outside the Netherlands. Regarding the employment sector it would have been necessary to interview German employers to get to know how employers think about German students with a Dutch degree and whether they have the same chances or even better chances than German students with a German degree to get accepted for employment in Germany, which leaves room for a follow-up study.

### **3. Theories and concepts**

In this part of the paper the relevant theories and concepts will be termed to answer the research question and the relevant sub-questions. The theoretical framework gives an overview about the importance of this study and provides ground for the analysis of the empirical findings. First, a general overview about student mobility, the internationalization process and common tools to recognize grades and degrees will be given to get to know which steps are already taken to ensure a fair recognition of grades and degrees. Thereupon, the theoretical framework of excellence orientation is specified as well as the concept of grading system which may have an influence upon grading culture. The chapter concludes with the research model and relevant assumptions.

#### **3.1 Student mobility**

Student mobility can be defined as academic mobility taking place within the students' secondary or tertiary education. Two types of mobility can be differentiated: following a whole study abroad (vertical mobility equal to degree mobility) and following a part of the study abroad (horizontal mobility equal to ECTS mobility) (ESU, 2008). Besides these two types of student mobility also EU programmes and brain mobility can be mentioned in this regard. EU programs are established to facilitate student, post graduate and teacher mobility whereas brain mobility initiates the process of brain drain due to the reason that a country cannot make enough opportunities in the own higher education system available (ESU, 2008). The focus of this study lies upon those groups of mobile students who follow a whole degree abroad as well as upon brain mobility given the assumption that highly qualified German students may go to the Netherlands due to the reason that their study of preference is limited to a specific amount of places.

One of the core objectives of European education policies is facilitating mobility and the target is that by 2020 at least 20% of higher education degree holders have done a study abroad or participated in student mobility programs to go abroad for at least 3 months. Mobility within the EHEA shall strengthen the awareness of cultural and socio-economic differences and facilitate employability (EACEA, 2012). However the greatest obstacle to student mobility are the recognition of degrees and grades awarded abroad as well as funding and access to a foreign system (ESU, 2008). The types of recognition relevant here are the proper implementation of the Diploma Supplement and the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention<sup>5</sup>. In order to give incentives for students to study abroad and to make this experience academically valuable, national governments and higher education institutions need to fully implement both tools.

Other reasons why student mobility is important are that students are attracted by high quality universities and study programmes that are not available in their country. Remarkable is that students often go to neighboring countries or similar language countries (e.g. German students go to Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland and Dutch students go to Belgium). Student mobility in the EHEA becomes important because students get new insights and ideas, cultural experiences and a mutual understanding so that the European dimension is better promoted and facilitated (Teichler, 2007).

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<sup>5</sup> The Lisbon Recognition Convention is the main legal text to ensure a fair recognition of degrees and qualifications obtained abroad. Firstly adopted in 1997 it will fully be implemented at the end of 2012 (EHEA, 2010).

The process of internationalization will clarify the importance of student mobility.

### 3.2 Internationalization process

One of the most frequently used definitions of internationalization is the one of Jane Knight: “Internationalization is the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2003)<sup>6</sup>. Internationalization however should not be confused with globalization, which is the process of socio-economic and political forces to make higher education more international (Wächter, 2008).

Twenty years ago, internationalization was seen to be similar as student mobility, which changed rapidly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century though. As a key discourse of European higher education policies, internationalization is now subject of five terms used in Europe:

1. As discussed above, student mobility is mostly connected with internationalization. By going from one country to another country an international dimension is set up.
2. The second term is recognition, observed as an “international activity”. Without recognition student mobility would not be possible and thus no physical international act takes place which is the transition of one country to another.
3. Another example of internationalization is curricular reform that is to offer study programmes other than in the language of origin, foremost English. Other forms are joint degree programmes like the Double-Diploma and international studies like European Studies or International Law.
4. A more unknown process of internationalization is transnational education where not the student goes abroad but education is offered transnationally.
5. The last process of internationalization in the EHEA is international recruitment and the promotion of study programmes abroad to attract students.

The whole process of internationalization is part of the Bologna Process to create the EHEA (Wächter, 2008). But internationalization is not only a process to strengthen the tools of the Bologna process but also to foster economic and political integration. Concerning economy, higher education can be seen as a private good that needs to be traded because countries are more and more linked with each other. Concerning political integration, cultural and social influences must be considered. Intercultural understanding is a strong asset in today’s world (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

### 3.3 Common tools to recognize grades and degrees

As already shortly explained above certain tools are implemented to facilitate the recognition of grades and qualifications within the EHEA. These tools are the ECTS system, the Transcript of Records and the Diploma Supplement.

The *ECTS system* aims to increase transparency in higher education in terms of teaching and learning methods across Europe, to make the recognition of different studies easier and the transfer of learning experiences between higher education institutions possible, which simultaneously promotes student mobility. Quality assurance and curriculum design is also an important factor gained through the system. All higher education institutions that use the ECTS system publish the content of their courses, the workload a student needs to pass the course and the overall requirements of the course on their websites to facilitate transparency. Further, credit points express the required workload to gain

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<sup>6</sup> Published in Wächter B. (2008). *Internationalisation and the European Higher Education Area*. Academic Cooperation Association. See Knight J. (2003). *Updating the Definition of Internationalization*. International Higher Education.

one credit, which normally ranges within 25 and 30 hours for one credit. Still, higher education institutions are autonomous and the last decision about ECTS interpretation remains with them. The ECTS system has become the central tool in the Bologna Process in order to get a similar basis of the different national systems to compare them with each other (European Commission, 2012f).

The *Transcript of Records* is mainly used when students go abroad for a certain period of time to give the student credit for the courses taken abroad. It states the student's achievements, the taken courses, the obtained credit points as well as the grade obtained for a specific course. A transcript is the student's official copy of the academic record. All courses taken must be filled into the transcript regardless of being passed or not. Thus, besides the ECTS system the Transcript of Records is an important tool to recognize academic achievements (European Commission, 2012f).

The last tool for grade and degree recognition is the *Diploma Supplement (DS)*. The Diploma Supplement is the most important tool, since it gives information about the degree the holder achieved, in terms of content, status, nature, level and context, and is handed out together with the higher education diploma (European Commission, 2012d). To become more specific, the DS is the answer to changing higher education and qualification systems. More and more students become mobile so that the fair recognition of degrees and qualifications become a worldwide problem. Without a proper translation tool, the true value of a degree obtained in a foreign country will not be recognized. With the introduction of the DS fair judgments and transparency are ensured (European Commission, 2012d). In order to guarantee a common standard, the countries use a DS template, which is a common work of the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO. A detailed description of the national education system is provided by the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs). In the EHEA every graduate shall get a DS automatically and without any costs (European Commission, 2012d).

Having defined why student mobility is facilitated by the EHEA as well as having outlined the tools to recognize grades and degrees, the theory of excellence orientation will be described now.

### **3.4 Excellence orientation**

#### **3.4.1 Theory**

It might be difficult to find and establish universal valid criteria to measure differences in excellence orientation of higher education institutions due to the diversity of the educational landscape. One attempt is made by Birnbaum (1983) who divided diversity into seven categories: systemic diversity (differences in the composition of institutions in a higher education system), structural diversity (based upon differences in the legal and historical background of institutions), programmatic diversity (differences in what is offered by institutions), procedural diversity (differences in the way knowledge is communicated and access to research faculties offer), reputational diversity (based upon perceived differences in prestige of institutions), constituent diversity (refers to student diversity within institutions) and value and climate diversity (differences in cultural activities and social engagements) (van Vught et al., 2010).

Next, diversity can be classified in two crucial aspects, which are internal and external diversity. Internal diversity describes differences within institutions concerning teaching methods whereas external diversity describes differences between higher education institutions (van Vught et al., 2010). For the purpose of this paper external diversity is the most important one as well as differences in the prestige of institutions in a higher education system. Due to the reason that access to the higher education institution as well as the amount of tuition fees may play an important role for the decision of German students to study in the Netherlands or to return to Germany for education, also these criteria are taken into account. For this reason the models of Ruben (2007) to measure excellence orientation become relevant because the models contain all criteria that are important for the purpose of this study.

According to Ruben (2007) higher education institutions are the cornerstone of the communities' and nations' cultural, economic and intellectual properties and enrich the lives of the students not only personally but also professionally. But during the last decades economic, political and socio-demographic changes took place that the higher education institutions have to comply with (Ruben, 2007). Therefore, it is required to set up certain criteria to evaluate the quality of the higher education institutions as well as the assessment of student life, administrative issues, services and achievements in organizational issues (Ruben, 2007).

In total there are three models but only two are relevant here because the third model (strategic investment model) just indicates budgetary issues which are not relevant for the purpose of this study:

1. The *resource/reputational perspective* that includes the rankings of a higher education institution, its achievements and the performance of its students in the subsequent faculties (Ruben, 2007, p.5).
2. The *client-centered model* that is based upon access to the higher education institution, the satisfaction of the students, the amount of tuition fees, and the overall quality of education. In short, the focus lies upon excellence in higher education (Ruben, 2007, pp. 5-6).

It seems that most higher education institutions set high value on the first model due to the reason that it shows their external reputation. However, only if a higher institution combines and achieves high scores in all three models does it become possible to talk about an excellently orientated university (Ruben, 2007). Thus, a classification of Dutch and German higher education institutions consisting of seven dimensions including several indicators per dimension is proposed (Table 3).

### **3.4.2 Measurement of the theory**

In this study the first and the second models will be relevant because they refer to performances of students as well as to access to higher education. The relevance of these two models emerges out of the question whether for instance German students go to the Netherlands because of the relatively low access requirements. Based on these theories one can expect a comparison of the Dutch and German higher education institutions. The criteria to do so are the rankings of a higher education institution, its achievements, the access to the higher education institution, the amount of tuition fees and the overall quality of education, sub-divided according to the two models.

The performance of students in subsequent faculties and the satisfaction of students will be subject of the survey among German students studying at the University of Twente since it is difficult to find reliable information about these criteria without doing a student survey among all German and Dutch students. Subsequent data about German students studying in Germany could also be an incentive for a follow-up study.

The following table gives an overview about how these criteria are measured so that it becomes possible to evaluate and compare the excellence orientation of the two systems:



**Table 1: Measurement of the criteria**

Concept	Model	Criteria	Indicator
Excellence orientation	Resource/Reputational perspective	The rankings of the higher education institution	Low or high rankings
		The achievements of a higher education institution	Awards; attractiveness for international students
		The performance of students in subsequent faculties	Frequency of degree with “cum laude”
	The client-centered model	The access to the higher education institution	Permission requirements or no permission requirements
		The satisfaction of students	Satisfaction with content, organization, quality, requirement of the study
		The amount of tuition fees	Low or high
		The overall quality of education	Rankings; Satisfaction of students

To find out whether Dutch and German higher education institutions are ranked low or high, the Shanghai ranking list will be consulted due to the reason that the list ranks the countries regarding the criteria mentioned above. Awards of higher education institutions are Nobel Prizes as well as Field Medals. The amount of tuition fees is indicated by low or high study fees. Low study fees are as in the case of the majority of the German federal states no study fees. Study fees can be an indication for excellence orientation because one might expect that high study fees result in better quality of education at the higher education institution. However, it might be difficult to compare the Dutch and German higher education institutions by means of study fees since there are different policies regulating the issue. The frequency of degrees with “cum laude” indicates the performance of students in subsequent faculties. The more students gain a degree with “cum laude” the higher the excellence orientation of a higher education system is because the system pushes for high grades. Satisfaction of students indicates the overall satisfaction with higher education in one of the two countries.

Having clarified the theory of excellence orientation, the concepts of culture, grading culture and grading system will be discussed now.

### 3.5 Culture

A general definition of culture is that “culture is the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, 2012). It means that people have to learn, besides from their biological heritage, how to behave in a group in an acceptable manner. This knowledge is provided from one generation to another and only marginally changed by environmental influences. The difficulty here is that a lot of different cultures and cultural heritages exist especially within Europe so that people do not know all cultural behaving manners and specialties. One every-day example is that showing the thumb held upwards in Western countries means that everything is fine whereas in Greece it means a rude gesture (CICB, 2012). Thus, intercultural awareness and sensibility is an important feature when being abroad and studying or working in an international environment.

Students who go abroad experience a different culture, a foreign language and foreign people. When students participate in the Erasmus programme they most likely have the possibility to do an Erasmus Intensive Language Course (EILC) before they actually start studying. The EILC provides the students with the possibility to learn the language of the country of destination as well as to get familiar with the culture (European Commission, 2012e). Students taking the whole degree abroad have to prepare themselves and mostly they do not know the culture of education in the respective country. If a student comes from an individualist cultural perspective of education helping others is not desired whereas actively participating in discussions is highly valuable. The collectivist perspective holds these things the other way around (Education, 2012).

### 3.6 Grading culture

It is hardly possible to find a universally valid definition of grading culture due to the reason that it has not been explored yet or it was not taken as a potential obstacle to student mobility into account. But regarding what culture is, it becomes possible to say that grading culture can be seen as the influence of national higher education culture upon the university staff in which way grades are awarded. The national higher education culture may be influenced by the level of excellence orientation in a country which may be high or low so that awarding good grades is required or not as well as by the grading system because in some systems only whole numbers are awarded and in others also decimal numbers. This includes giving grades according to the view “very good work equals best grade” up to the view “being perfect is generally not achievable” so that the best grade cannot be awarded.

### 3.7 Grading system

The Bologna Process did not introduce a standardized grading system within the EHEA so that there are a variety of them. In fact except for four countries that use the same grading systems most European countries have their own grading scales. In the table below a selection of grading systems will show the significant differences among them.

**Table 2: Selection of significant grading systems within the EHEA**

Country	Grade	Percentage	Translation
Austria <sup>1</sup>	1	100-90%	Excellent
	2	89-80%	Good
	3	79-64%	Satisfactory
	4	63-51%	Sufficient
	5	50-0%	Insufficient
Bulgaria <sup>2</sup>	6	100-92%	Excellent
	5	91-75%	Very Good
	4	74-59%	Good
	3	58-50%	Average
	2	49-0%	Weak
Ireland <sup>3</sup>	A	100-85%	Excellent
	B	84-70%	Very good
	C	69-55%	Good
	D	54-40%	Pass
	E	39-0%	Fail
Moldova <sup>4</sup>	10		Excellent
	9		Very good
	8		Good
	6-7		Satisfactory
	5		Sufficient
	1-4		Insufficient

<sup>1</sup>Source: The Austrian Education System, 2012

<sup>2</sup>Source: Invest Bulgaria, 2004

<sup>3</sup>Source: Education in Ireland, 2011

<sup>4</sup>Source: Education System of Moldova, 2003

A grade is awarded according to the student’s academic knowledge in a given subject (Allen, 2012) and as it becomes visible in table 1, grades can take different forms and percentages. Grades can be assigned in letters (A, B, C, D, E and F) like the grading system in Ireland, as a range from 1-10 like in Moldova or in decimal numbers like 1.0 to 4.0, with words (excellent, sufficient, fail) or in percentages. Some universities also use the Latin words “Summa cum Laude” or “Magna cum Laude” to describe a degree with honors. As shown by the means of the Austrian and Irish grading systems there is also a difference in the percentage of passing a course. In Austria the student needs to achieve at least 50% whereas the student in Ireland only needs to achieve 40% to pass a course. Thus, grading systems can also be differentiated in requirement levels (Karran, 2005).

A potential solution to compare the different grading systems could be the ECTS grading scale introduced by the European Commission.

**Table 3: ECTS grading scale**

ECTS Grade	% of students achieving the grade who pass the course	Definition
A	10	<b>Excellent</b> – outstanding performance with only minor errors
B	25	<b>Very Good</b> – above the average standard but with some errors
C	30	<b>Good</b> – generally sound work but with a number of notable errors
D	25	<b>Satisfactory</b> – fair but with significant shortcomings
E	10	<b>Sufficient</b> – performance meets the minimum criteria
FX		<b>Fail</b> - some more work required before the credit can be awarded
F		<b>Fail</b> - considerable further work is required

Source: Karran, 2004, p. 4

According to Karran (2004), this system does have several shortcomings. First of all, some countries use grading systems that could make a transformation into ECTS difficult so that a proper calculation and a fair recognition are hindered.

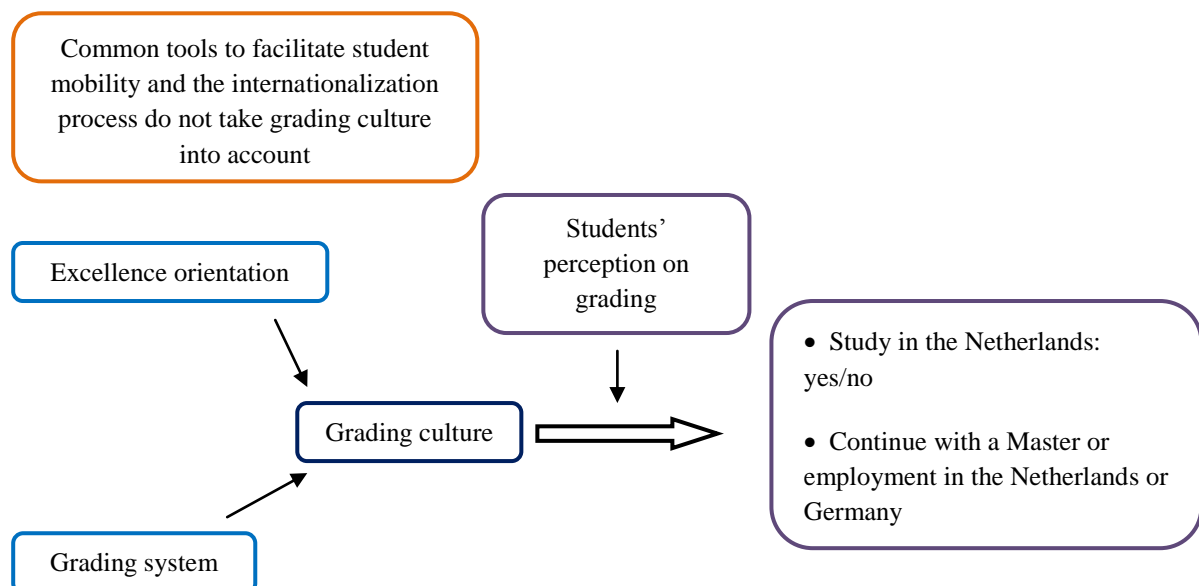
But even more serious is the problem of criterion referenced grading systems that compare the student’s grade with the particular standard of a given course. This means that if all students pass with a very low score, 10% of them will nevertheless reach the outstanding performance of the ECTS grade “A” (Karran, 2004). On the other hand, if a student obtains a high grade but is evaluated against other students who also achieve high grades, the particular student may only get the ECTS grade “C”. Another problem is that it is difficult to fairly convert grades and degrees obtained by another university due to the reason that in a certain country for example 14% get an honors degree whereas in another country only 8% do so in the same study programme. On top of that, the possibility to achieve excellence marks also varies within study programmes (Karan, 2004).

Thus, differences in study contents, evaluation processes and grading systems can result in unfair treatment that cannot be ruled out by an ECTS grading scale so easily.

Having clarified all relevant concepts and theories it becomes possible to set up the research model upon which the research is based.

### 3.8 Research model

**Figure 1: Research model**



The purpose of the study is to reveal that differences in grading cultures between the Dutch and the German higher education systems are a potential obstacle to student mobility. This is done with the help of the above shown research model. The level of excellence orientation in a country and the grading system influence the grading culture in a higher education system. This may not only have serious implications upon the education sector but also upon the employment sector. The problem here is that differences in grading cultures are often not considered by common tools like the ECTS system, the Diploma Supplement or the Transcript of Records to facilitate student mobility and the internationalization process. The one who suffer are among others also German students, who are holding a Dutch degree, who want to return to Germany for education or employment because higher education institutions as well as future employers mostly do not know that there are differences in grading cultures which might lower the chances for German students. Students do have different perceptions regarding grading but it may influence the decision of German students to actually start studying in the Netherlands and when started studying in the Netherlands to stay there or to return to Germany for higher education or employment.

Based on the research model several assumptions became relevant which are outlined in the following section.

### **3.9 Assumptions**

There are a variety of different grading systems in Europe and although technical tools like the ECTS system, Transcript of Records, the Diploma Supplement or the ECTS grading scale are introduced to fairly convert grades and degrees obtained in another country, the differences in grading cultures are not taken into account. A general assumption is that differences in the excellence orientation of countries lead to differences in grading practices. This means, if a country is highly excellence orientated good grades are likely to be given to increase the external reputation of higher education institutions. In a less excellence orientated country, in contrast, good grades are not the most important factor and subsequently less frequently given. If we assume that Germany is a highly excellence orientated country whereas the Netherlands is not, one could make the assumptions that:

- (1) *“If Germany is a highly excellence orientated country, then the push for good grades will be high”*
- (2) *“If the Netherlands is a less excellence orientated country, then the push for good grades will be low”.*

Further, students who are not satisfied with a particular grading system or the way grades are awarded may not stay in the respective country. Therefore, relating to the scope of this study other relevant assumptions are that

- (3) *“German students who return to Germany for higher education are most likely not satisfied with the Dutch grading culture”*
- (4) *“German students who stay in the Netherlands for higher education are most likely satisfied with the Dutch grading culture”.*

An answer to the first and second assumptions can be derived from the results of the analysis and comparison of the Dutch and German higher education systems in terms of excellence orientation, grading culture and grading system. The third and fourth assumptions can be answered with the outcome of the questionnaire.

## **4. Excellence orientation and grading practices in Germany and the Netherlands**

The aim of this part is to compare the Dutch and German higher education systems. To do so, a short overview about the historical background and foundations as well as the number of universities and polytechnics and the number of students will be given. Further, the two systems will be described

regarding the Diploma Supplement, ECTS system and Transcript of Records to get to know which actions are already taken to facilitate the transition of German students. In the next step the systems are compared in terms of the rankings of the higher education institutions, by its achievements, the access to higher education, by the amount of tuition fees and by the overall quality of education to get to know to what extent these two systems are excellence driven. Thereupon, the excellence orientation of Dutch and German employers is going to be clarified. After answering the first sub-question the Dutch and German higher education systems are compared by means of grading culture and grading system.

#### **4.1 Introduction: system overview**

Higher education in the Netherlands and in Germany has a long historical tradition. In the Netherlands higher education and the first establishment of a higher education institution dates back to the sixteenth century at which the University of Twente was established in 1961.

The higher education in the Netherlands is binary, comprising universities based upon research and science, offering Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes and the universities of applied sciences, offering practically orientated Bachelor programmes and sometimes also a Master. In total there are 13 universities, including three technical universities, and 43 HBO institutions (Government of the Netherlands, 2012).

In the Netherlands, the national government is responsible for higher education in terms of funding, quality control, structure and governance control as well as the general amount of tuition fees<sup>7</sup>. In general the Dutch higher education system follows the idea of egalitarianism in excellence orientation, which means that every institution gets the same amount of funding as well as that every applicant, regardless of social backgrounds, gets the chance to start studying in the Netherlands if all requirements are met. Due to the reason that every institution is funded equally by the government, the overall quality of higher education is relatively high. Further, based on legal and historical foundations, only a limited number of study programmes have entrance requirements since there are very strict selection procedures to start secondary education to earn university entrance permission.

In the winter semester 2008/2009, 604 217 students were enrolled in Dutch higher education institutions, of whom 220 504 students were enrolled in a programme offered by a university (CBS, 2012).

The first establishment of a German university, in contrast, dates back to the fourteenth century, pointing at a long history of higher education in Germany. In Germany, higher education institutions are seen as the main contributor to innovation and growth. Currently there are 394 higher education institutions, separated in 104 universities, 189 universities of applied science, 51 colleges of art, 30 colleges of Public Administration, 14 colleges of theology and 6 colleges of education (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2009).

The German government is only responsible for general valid policies regarding higher education institutions as well as for funding. Higher education is rather regulated by the sixteen federal states individually. Like in the Netherlands a student is required to possess the university entrance diploma to be accepted for a study programme. In contrast to the situation in the Netherlands higher education institutions in Germany are very selective since only a limited number of institutions is funded so that capacity problems may occur whereas primary and secondary education is free of charge and available for everyone, at least in the public sector. Tuition fees are also regulated by the federal states and currently only two federal states have regular tuition fees. The other federal states decided to collect only contribution fees to cover administrative costs. Due to the reason that not all institutions are funded equally by the state and that most of them do not have tuition fees this may result in a loss of quality in education since there are not enough resources to offer students well equipped research facilities or enough personnel. However, the decision to offer free education was made to give all applicants the chance to study regardless of social backgrounds.

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<sup>7</sup> The amount of tuition fees can vary for a second Bachelor or Master degree as well as for some exceptional study programmes.

In Germany more than 1.996 million students were enrolled in the winter semester 2008/2009. About two thirds of the students were enrolled at a university and less than 29% of all students were registered at a university of applied science (Federal Research of Education, 2009).

Since the implementation of the Bologna Process, the higher education systems in Germany and the Netherlands have undergone significant changes.

In Germany, nearly all courses have been converted to the Bachelor/Master system by the beginning of the winter semester in 2011/2012. Merely 2 300 out of 15 300 study courses are not adjusted yet and those mostly belong to state qualifications. The universities of applied sciences already changed their systems completely. Thus, the ECTS system in Germany is nearly adopted at all higher education institutions. Depending on the different federal states in Germany, one credit point equals more or less a workload of 30 hours and per year 60 credits must be obtained (Bavarian State Ministry of Sciences, Research and Arts, 2006).

Since 2005 all graduates in Germany get the Diploma Supplement, which is for free and provided without an extra request. Another important step towards recognition of degrees and qualifications is the ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention<sup>8</sup>, which is especially important for German students studying abroad (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2012).

In the Netherlands all higher education institutions introduced the Bachelor/Master system. With regard to the ECTS system, higher education institutions in the Netherlands demand a workload of 28 hours to get one credit and each year 60 credit points have to be achieved (Government of the Netherlands, 2012).

The Netherlands also decided that all graduates get the Diploma Supplement free of charge and provided without an extra request (Nuffic, 2012a).

Thus, both the Netherlands and Germany fully implemented all necessary tools to facilitate student mobility by recognizing grades and qualifications obtained abroad. The higher education institutions in both countries make the content and requirement of courses visible for their students and also the workload for obtaining one credit point lies within the acceptable framework of 25-30 hours. Thus, the formal requirements are fulfilled so that no problems for student mobility should result out of this.

But still also the excellence orientation of the two countries plays a role since excellence orientation may influence grading practices which is not considered by the different tools, which will be further outlined in the following chapter.

#### **4.2 The excellence orientation of the two systems (Sub-question 1)**

In order to answer the first sub-question the Dutch and German higher education institutions are compared by means of Ruben's (2007) theories, that is, the resource/reputational perspective and the client-centered model. The resource/reputational model will indicate the external reputation of German and Dutch third-level education in terms of the rankings of higher education institutions, its obtained awards and the attractiveness for international students. The client-centered model however indicates the excellence orientation of the two higher education systems. The indicators to do so are the access to higher education, the amount of tuition fees and the overall quality of education. Due to the reason that it is difficult to get reliable information about the performance and satisfaction of students without taking a student survey these criteria for excellence orientation are subjects of the questionnaire taken among German students studying at the University of Twente. In the following the two systems are compared step by step along the criteria. The chapter will conclude with an overview about excellence orientation in the employment sector.

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<sup>8</sup> For information about the Lisbon Recognition Convention see chapter 3.1.

## 4.2.1 The resource/reputational perspective

The resource/reputational perspective indicates the external representation of higher education institutions. In order to get to know whether the Dutch and German higher education institutions have a low or a high external representation the institutions are compared along a carefully selected ranking list and achievements.

### Reliability of ranking lists

There are different approaches how to rank universities based upon the used ranking methodologies. The differences emerge out of the definitions of quality and the measurement processes. For this reason, rankings differ according to the approach that was used. Commonly spoken high ranks mean high quality whereas low ranks mean low quality. But there is no common definition of quality and how much weight which quality criteria have in different ranking approaches. In the THES ranking approach for instance quality is measured by means of teaching quality and research impact whereas the Shanghai ranking list evaluates universities by the number of Nobel Prizes. The problem is that often it is not clear which criteria are used to rank universities but still such ranking lists have much influence upon the quality of a higher education institution. But to measure the quality of all universities objectively and adequately is relatively unrealistic (The Ranking Forum of Swiss Universities, 2012).

### External reputation of Dutch and German higher education institutions

After a short introduction about how rankings are made and the problems emerging out of this, the rankings of the Dutch and German universities will be compared with the help of the Shanghai ranking list. The Shanghai ranking list was chosen due to the reason that the used criteria are consistent with the excellence orientation criteria listed by Ruben (2007). The Shanghai ranking list ranks universities by quality of education, quality of faculty, research output and per capita performance. The quality of education is indicated by the frequency of winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals (alumni<sup>9</sup>), with a weight of 10%. The quality of faculty is indicated by the frequency of winning Nobel Prizes<sup>10</sup> and Fields Medals<sup>11</sup> (staff), with a weight of 20%, and by the frequency a researcher is cited, with a weight of 20%. The research output is measured by the number of published papers in Science and Nature between 2007 and 2011, with a weight of 20%, and by the number of papers indexed in the Citation index in 2011, also with a weight of 20%. The last criterion, per capita performance, is indicated by the academic performance of an institution per capita<sup>12</sup>, with a weight of 10% (ShanghaiRanking Consultancy, 2012a).

The Shanghai ranking list evaluated and compared in total 1200 universities and listed up the best 500 universities. The top university in the world with a total score of 100 is the Harvard University.

In total, four German universities are ranked among the top-100 universities whereas in the Netherlands two universities are ranked among the top-100 universities. The best German and the best Dutch university together hold position 60, with a total score of 30.5. The University of Twente also holds a position among the top-500 universities, ranked on a position between 300 and 400 (ShanghaiRanking Consultancy, 2012b).

Dutch and German universities are nearly ranked the same. The best German and the best Dutch university hold the same position (53) with a total score of 30.5. Further four German universities are ranked among the top-100 universities whereas in the Netherlands two universities are ranked among the top-100 universities. But when the numbers of higher education institutions in Germany, which are 394, including 104 universities, are compared to the number of Dutch higher education institutions, which are 56, including 13 universities, it becomes visible that Dutch universities are ranked slightly higher. This becomes even more visible in the total ranking: 7 out of 13 Dutch universities have a

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<sup>9</sup> Alumni are those who hold a Bachelor, Master or doctoral degree, in a time period from 1911-2010

<sup>10</sup> Fields are: Physics, Chemistry, Medicine and Economics, taken in a time period from 1911-2010

<sup>11</sup> Field is Mathematics

<sup>12</sup> It is calculated by the five mentioned indicators divided by the registered full-time academic staff (Shanghai Ranking Consultancy, 2012a).

position among the top-500 universities whereas 37 of 104 German universities have a position among the top-500 universities. This can be explained by the fact that Dutch universities in general get better funding than German ones. In Germany only the universities that score the highest ranks in internal ranking lists get additional funding.

The listed German universities do have a relatively high score on alumni that win Nobel Prizes and Field Medals. The top four German universities have an average score of 24.45. The staff of the universities winning a Nobel Prize or Field Medal has a score of 21.85 on average among the top four universities. The number of researchers cited is slightly smaller with an average score of 18.95 whereas the average score of published papers in Science and Nature is high with 25.28. The highest average score is achieved by the number of papers indexed in the Citation index, which is 46.38. The best two Dutch universities on contrary have an average score of 21.55, 15.15, 29.4, 24.1 and 47.45 in the respective fields. The University of Twente however does not score in winning Nobel Prizes or Field Medals at all. The highest score of 31.1 can be found in the field of papers indexed in the Citation index (ShanghaiRanking Consultancy, 2012b).

Thus, with regard to the achievements of Dutch and German universities it can be said that the higher education institutions perform more or less similar in winning Nobel Prizes and Field Medals (alumni), the frequency of published papers in Science and Nature and the number of papers indexed in the Citation index. German universities perform better on the number of gained Nobel Prizes and Field Medals by university staff whereas Dutch universities score higher on the frequency researchers are cited.

With regard to this one can say that Dutch and German universities do have a relatively high external reputation although it must be taken into account that the Shanghai Ranking list ranks universities on a limited set of criteria which might result in unreliable outcomes and the chosen indicator does not reflect the quality of all higher education institutions in the Netherlands and Germany.

Now the attractiveness of Dutch and German institutions for international students will be observed.

### **Attractiveness of Dutch and German higher education institutions for international students**

Due to the internationalization process in the higher education area, students become mobile all over the world. In 2008, 3.34 million students studied in a country that is not their country of origin. Germany hosted 245 522 international students and holds the third position in the world after the United States and the United Kingdom. 37 395 students come from Asia, 3304 from the US, 12 501 from Russia, 23 881 from Turkey and 168 441 students come from somewhere else, mostly from other European countries. Less than 1% of foreign students come from the Netherlands to Germany (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). But in 2008, 18 972 of about 103 000 German students studying abroad went to the Netherlands for higher education, which is 18.42%. The most preferred country of German students is Austria, which is favored by 19.44% (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2011).

Most of the international students want to study in Germany because they are of the opinion that it would improve their career opportunities (81%). More than two-thirds of the students expect to gain specialist knowledge and 64% of foreign students are attracted by an internationally accepted foreign degree. 54% also mention the good reputation of German universities, 53% that Germany is an advanced country regarding technology and 37% appreciate that it is possible to study without tuition fees. Just 13% of international students are attracted because their degree is fully offered in English (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2011).

In 2008/2009 56 131 of all international students in the world were enrolled at Dutch higher education institutions, which is 6.8% of the total student population in the Netherlands. The majority of international students in the Netherlands come from Germany. Students from China and from Belgium are making up the second and third largest groups of international students with 3.4% and 2.16%. Around 4100 international students come from Bulgaria, Greece, the UK, Italy and France (Nuffic,



2012b). In 2008, 18 115 Dutch students went abroad. Most Dutch students go to the UK (5577), Belgium (4877), the United States (1839) and Germany (1593) (Nuffic, 2012b).

The main reasons for international students to go to the Netherlands are the introduction of English in a variety of study programmes as well as the general openness towards the English language. Another factor is that tuition fees are not as high as, for example, in the US or the UK and because of the fact that Dutch universities have a high external reputation and good rankings in international ranking lists. For German students especially low permission requirements to Dutch higher education institutions are an incentive to go to the Netherlands (Eurogates, 2012).

With regard to this one can say that the Netherlands and Germany are very attractive for international students due to the high external reputation. The Netherlands is especially interesting for German students and subsequently most international students in the Netherlands come from Germany. The main reason for this may be the low access requirements, which will be further outlined in the following section.

#### **4.2.2 The client-centered model**

The client-centered model indicates the excellence orientation of higher education institutions in a country. This is done by the access to the higher education institution, by the amount of tuition fees, and by the overall quality of education.

##### **Access to the higher education institution**

In Germany not all upper education graduates who formally have the permission to start studying are able and allowed to study what they want. The majority of study programmes upon Bachelor, Master and doctoral level do have certain requirements the applicants have to fulfill. The permission line is called “Numerus Clausus (NC)” and is applied if demand exceeds supply. This means the more students are interested in a study programme the higher the NC is. The NC ranges from 1.0 to 4.0 set up in 0.1 steps. The selection of applicants takes place according to the 20-60-20 rule. 20% of the best applying students get a place, 20% get a place that waited longest calculated by the amount of semesters that they have waited and 60% of available places are awarded by internal institution regulations (StudiumRatgeber, 2012). Additionally to the NC, permission to a study programme also requires working experience, grades in specific areas, tests or interviews (abitur-und-studium.de, 2012).

Study programmes that always have an NC are medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry and pharmacy and applicants have to apply via the *Stiftung für Hochschulzulassung* that supports the universities by accepting suitable applicants (NC-Werte.info, 2011).

If a student decides to continue with a Master a very good average score in the Bachelor degree is required. In general the NC for a Master ranges from at least 2.0 to exceptionally 3.0. The normal minimum limit is 2.5. If a Bachelor student does not achieve the required NC a lot of universities also offer waiting semesters for a Master (OAK, 2009).

In the Netherlands, in contrast, higher education entrance requirements are not calculated by a passing line rather every school graduate with a university-entrance diploma has the possibility to study. Only the popular study programmes medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry and life sciences are restricted to a certain number of available study places. The average score of the university-entrance diploma decides about permission to these study programmes but places are also given by lot so that all students have equal chances to get a place in restricted study programmes (Studieren in Holland, 2012).

Due to the reason that there are no entrance requirements, students need to get the “propedeuse”, which indicates that the student passed all courses of the first study year or at least shows a positive tendency that the propedeuse will be achieved. Otherwise the student gets a negative study advice, which can lead to the exclusion of the study programme and the student not being allowed to study anything similar or equal to the first study programme, again (VU University Amsterdam, 2012).

International students need to show that their university-entrance diploma is equal to the Dutch VWO Diploma; otherwise specific courses have to be taken to catch up. Further, international students need sufficient knowledge in English and Mathematics as well as proficiency of the Dutch language if their study programme is given in Dutch. The subjects of medicine or more generally all study programmes that are restricted in the Netherlands normally can't be taken by international students (VU University Amsterdam, 2012).

In order to do a Master in the Netherlands the applicant needs a completed Bachelor degree. The average score of the successfully achieved Diploma is important for some Master programmes mostly in the fields of economics, management and life sciences. The acceptance line here ranges from an average score of 7.0 to 7.5 whereas the acceptance line of 7.5 is only required in some exceptional cases. In general, a Bachelor degree gives automatic access to a Master programme (MastersPortal.eu, 2012).

### **Amount of tuition fees**

In Germany the federal states decide by themselves whether study fees are introduced or not. Study fees are differentiated between regular tuition fees and the contribution towards the university. Contribution towards the university includes administration costs, social costs and a ticket to use trains and busses in the respective federal state.

Currently two federal states have regular tuition fees they are Lower Saxony and Bavaria both with about €500 per semester. Thus, fourteen federal states do not have regular tuition fees at first-cycle and second-cycle degrees. On a Master level tuition fees could vary from €650 up to several thousand Euros per semester, which is decided by the higher education institutions individually (Studis Online, 2012).

The contribution fee must be paid at every higher education institution. In general, the student contribution ranges from €40 to 300€ per semester. Students always need to pay the contribution to become a member of the university's student union, to be insured and to cover the costs of administrative issues.

Although most of the federal states do not have tuition fees anymore, long-term students need to pay €500 up to €800 per semester. Students are classified as long-term students if they need more than two extra years to finish their studies (Studis Online, 2012; Studieren.de, 2012). An overview about the study fees in the federal states of Germany can be found in the annex.

In the Netherlands, in contrast, there are two types of tuition fees, which are statutory tuition fees and institutional tuition fees. Statutory tuition fees apply to all EU/EEA students whereas institutional fees apply to non EU/EEA nationals. In 2012/2013 the tuition fee for EU/EEA students is €1.771 per year for full-time and €1.558 per year for part-time, both at Bachelor and Master level. For very few Master programmes several thousands of Euros have to be paid. The tuition fee for non-EU/EEA citizens varies within higher education institutions and study programmes. At the Bachelor level institutional fees range from about €6.000 to €11.000 per year and at the Master level it ranges from about €14.000 to €18.000 per year (Universiteit Utrecht, 2012).

From the study year 2012-2013 onwards an additional tuition fee will be raised if a student does not finish the study course in normal length plus one year. Every extra year it takes to finish the degree an additional fee of €3.000 will be added to the normal statutory tuition fee (Universiteit Utrecht, 2012).

### **Overall quality of education**

The outcome of the comparison shows what was already mentioned above. In Germany only a part of higher education institutions is funded, which may result in lower capacities of the institutions so that it becomes necessary to introduce the NC to select appropriate candidates more strictly. On the other hand, the strict selection process may result in giving those applicants a chance who best fit upon the study programme so that students are more enthusiastic and drop-out rates are lower. Thus, permission to German study programmes may result in excellence orientation because only the best of all applicants get the chance to study at the respective higher education institution.

Only in two federal states regular tuition fees as well as contribution fees must be paid whereas in the other federal states just contribution fees must be paid. This regulation results in load removal of

students but now the national government must support the higher education institutions more actively. Otherwise the quality of education will suffer, increased by personnel and capacity shortage. Up to now, German higher education does have a high external reputation, but brain drain, initiated by excellence orientation in the selection process has already started (Frank, 2012).

Higher education institutions in the Netherlands, in contrast, do have a relatively high amount of tuition fees but it is still more easily affordable than studying in the UK or the US. Thus, Dutch institutions have more capital to offer enough personnel, space and research facilities to the students. On top of that, selection of students take place after a study has started to give everyone an equal chance. The Netherlands is known for the high quality and internationality in the education sector. Students who obtain a Dutch degree are performing very well throughout the world. In the Netherlands quality is achieved by common national regulation and quality assurance (all university study programmes outweigh minimum standard). An advantage of Dutch higher education is that students are continuously encouraged to solve problems individually and in group-work, so that Dutch students are well prepared for future employment (TU/e, 2012). Further, besides the Shanghai ranking list, several other ranking lists rank Dutch universities among top universities in the world, too (TU/e, 2012) and the majority of students are satisfied with the way the study programmes are organized (Berkens-Soo, 2010).

#### **4.2.3 Excellence orientation in the employment sector**

The employment sector in the Netherlands and Germany is also composed differently as a result of demand and supply as well as historical traditions.

In the Netherlands prospective employers consider activities besides the study as the most important criterion and rank it higher than good grades. Activities are, for instance, commitment in a social association as chairman/chairwoman or in sport clubs. The second most important criterion is the motivation of the student and a relevant part-time job besides the study. General characteristics of the student which are, for instance, efficiency, working attitude or self-confidence and openness are the third most important criteria. Students themselves think that activities besides the study result in greater personal development and extra jobs just to earn money or the improvement of grades are not regarded as important. But due to the reason that an extra study fee was introduced for every extra year needed to finish a study, students cannot do a lot of activities besides the study anymore since it will cost too much money. Up to now, Dutch companies do not know how to react to this development (Nu.nl, 2012).

In Germany, in contrast, the expectations regarding the qualities of graduates must be differentiated between small to medium-sized companies and large consulting firms. Small and medium-sized companies do not solely take graduates with the best grades but also consider international experience, commitment and additional qualifications as important. In large companies where a lot of graduates apply for a job, solely graduation marks are compared. If a student with a relatively bad graduation mark applies for a job, the applicant will be kicked out of the application process without looking for other qualifications or qualities. When this method of selection is applied, also graduates with a good graduation mark compared to other students of the same faculty are thrown out due to the reason that other applicants with a lower educational standard obtained better graduation marks (Unicum, 2012).

Thus, Dutch companies and personnel managers select applicants regarding their personality and commitments besides the study as well as the motivation to do a job whereas German companies and personnel managers mainly select applicants regarding their graduation mark. This is one of the easiest methods to throw out a variety of applicants but this method also results in the rejection of highly motivated and qualified graduates.

#### **4.2.4 Chapter Conclusion**

With regard to the corresponding sub-question “*To what extent are these two countries excellence driven?*”, it can be said that both countries are excellence orientated in different ways.

According to the resource/reputational perspective the universities of both countries are ranked on top places. Although German and Dutch higher education institutions perform more or less similar in winning Nobel Prizes and Field Medals (alumni), the frequency of published papers and the number of papers indexed in the Citation index, German universities perform better in winning Nobel Prizes and Field Medals (staff), whereas Dutch universities perform better in the frequency researchers are cited. Further, Germany does attract more international students than the Netherlands although only a minority of German study programmes is given in English.

Regarding the client-centered model, German higher education institutions as well as Dutch higher education institutions are excellence orientated. In Germany there is the NC to select applicants very strictly due to capacity shortage. Not all study programmes are equally popular among first-year students so that especially popular study programmes have capacity problems. This results in brain drain since students still want to study popular study programmes so that other possibilities need to be found. One possibility is to go to the Netherlands where study programme limitations are not as strict as in Germany; selection rather takes place after the first year of study has been completed. If not enough credit points are obtained it is possible to exclude the respective student from the study course. Although tuition fees only have to be paid in some parts of Germany it seems that this has not resulted in a loss of quality of education yet since German universities are still ranked high on ranking lists. However, if study fees have to be paid, as it is the case in the Netherlands, it may be easier to offer students well equipped personnel and research facilities so that external reputation may be ranked higher by international students.

The Dutch grading culture is a positive factor for graduates with a Dutch degree who want to work in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands it is hardly possible to achieve the highest grades available which is according to the philosophy of the companies not a problem. But if a German student, holding a Dutch degree wants to work in Germany the conversion of Dutch grades to German grades is rather a disadvantage for German students since a low graduation mark means exclusion from the application procedure. The greatest advantage of German students is that an international degree is obtained which might result in a second look of the personnel manager.

The German student will not only experience difficulties at the German labor market but also when returning to Germany for a Master or a PhD since the minimum requirement for a Master in Germany is a Bachelor degree with a graduation mark of at least 2.5, mostly higher, and only in exceptional cases 3.0.

Thus, differences in the excellence orientation in Germany and the Netherlands might create potential obstacles to an efficient transition of German students in the Netherlands to Germany. Further, it was shown that German higher education institutions are very selective due to capacity shortage whereas Dutch higher education institutions are less selective. To what extent this outcome has an influence upon the grading culture will be revealed in the following section.

#### **4.3 Grading practices in Germany and the Netherlands (Sub-question 2)**

As mentioned above the Dutch and German higher education systems will be compared in terms of grading culture and grading system. Due to the reason that grading culture on its own is difficult to measure, grading culture is combined with the grading systems so that it becomes possible to show the differences in terms of grades used.

### 4.3.1 Grading culture/Grading system

#### Grading practice in the Netherlands

The grading scales in the Netherlands are similar in all Dutch education levels. Unchanged for decades it is based on a numerical scale from one to ten, grade one equalling a very poor performance and ten an outstanding performance. In this grading scale only integral numbers are given, which means that giving for instance a “bad” eight (= 7.6) or a “good” eight (= 8.4) is not possible since all decimal places are rounded up. In order to pass an examination, the student needs to achieve at least 5.5, which is rounded up to a six and means that two thirds of the exam is correct. In the Dutch grading system it is virtually not possible to achieve the grades ten or nine since it was decided in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the grading system was introduced, that a ten equals absolute perfection, which is seldom possible (Nuffic, 2011). As indicated in table 4, only 0.5% of the students achieve a ten and 2.5% achieve a nine. The majority of the students score a six or seven (= 71%). The grade eight, which indicates a good performance, is scored by 15% of the students and subsequently 11% of the students do not pass an examination by scoring the grades five or lower. If the student reaches an average of eight during the study course it is possible to get a degree with “cum laude” (Nuffic, 2006).

Thus, in the Netherlands it is very difficult to achieve the best grades possible. Especially in oral presentations, open question examinations or dissertations the personal judgment of the professor hardly results in a grade higher than eight. In multiple choice question examinations however, where the grade is given compared to the result, it is possible for highly committed students to achieve a nine or a ten (Nuffic, 2006).

**Table 4: Grading system in the Netherlands**

Grade	Grade	Percentage	Description
10	9.5 – 10.0	0.5%	Excellent
9	8.5 – 9.4	2.5%	Very Good
8	7.5 – 8.4	15%	Good
7	6.5 – 7.4	37%	More than sufficient
6	5.5 – 6.4	34%	Sufficient
5	4.5 – 5.4	7.5%	Insufficient
4	3.5 – 4.4	2%	Strongly insufficient
3	2.5 – 3.4	0.5%	Very strongly insufficient
2	1.5 – 2.4	0.5%	Poor
1	1.0 - 1.4	0.5%	Very poor

#### Grading practice in Germany

Within the German grading system, grading scales differ among the education levels. As shown in table 5, in school the scale ranges from one to six, one indicating a very good performance and six indicating an insufficient performance. The numbers one to four describe the passing level whereas five and six are considered as failing grades. In upper school the grading scale is converted from zero to fifteen points where fifteen points indicate an outstanding performance and everything below five points indicates insufficiency. The scale is phased in three point phases indicating one performance, which means that fifteen, fourteen and thirteen points is an outstanding performance, twelve, eleven and ten points a good performance and so on. The University scale is similar to the scale used in lower education but stepped in decimal numbers, respectively 0.3 points above and below the best and the lowest grade in which six is not considered.

**Table 5: Grading system in Germany**

Grades			Description
Lower Education	Upper Education	University level <sup>1</sup>	
1	1+	15	Very good
2	1	14	
3	1-	13	
4	2+	12	Good
5	2	11	
6	2-	10	
	3+	9	Satisfactory
	3	8	
	3-	7	
	4+	6	Sufficient
	4	5	
	4-	4	
	5+	3	Insufficient
	5	2	
	5-	1	
	6	0	

Source: Universität Bremen, 2011

Compared to the Dutch grading culture the grading culture at German higher education institutions is more or less the other way around. In Germany very good grades, ranging from 1.0 to 1.7, are given relatively often so that most of the students get a good or very good degree. In the majority of study programmes like psychology, social sciences, and political sciences but also physics, biology and chemistry more than 80 percent of the students get at least a good grade in examinations, presentations or dissertations (Statistisches Bundesamt Wiesbaden, 2010). This mainly results from the mentality of old professors (mid-60s) who want to reduce the burden of the new systems for the students as well as of professors in general who do not want to get a bad reputation or suffer the pressure of having to defend their given grades. In law programmes however getting a sufficient grade nearly equals a very good performance because law students are judged more strictly (Friedmann & Verbeet, 2011).

With regard to the previously outlined grading systems and grading cultures in the Netherlands and Germany it can be concluded that there are significant differences. In the Netherlands the grading scale ranges from one to ten points, counted as whole numbers and ten as the best achievable grade. In Germany, in contrast, the grading scale ranges from one to five, including one-third steps and one as the best achievable grade (in some higher education systems it is even possible to achieve 0.7). These differences make a proper translation from one grading system to another quite difficult, which is aggravated by the fact that there is no commonly defined conversion table. The translation of Dutch grades to German grades is rather individually defined by the higher education institutions, which will be further explained below.

### Grade conversion

As described above, in the Netherlands it is hardly possible to achieve a nine or a ten. But the advantage of this system is that good students will get better marks than the majority of the students' population in the Netherlands. 18% of the students score an eight, a nine or a ten whereas more than 70% get the grades six or seven. This means that good performance in the Netherlands is valued and recognized. In Germany however, the majority of students get a good grade or even a very good grade so that being a diligent student is not valued since nearly all students are performing, according to the percentage a grade is given, in a very good manner. Thus, students who obtain a degree from a German higher education institution experience "grade inflation", which means that a good grade has no value anymore. It seems that even a qualification with "cum laude" or "summa cum laude" obtained in Germany is nothing special anymore (Friedmann & Verbeet, 2011).

For this reason, a Dutch degree with "cum laude" says much more about a student's true value than an equivalent degree obtained in Germany since apparently being outstanding in the Netherlands is much

more difficult than apparently in Germany. But one also has to keep in mind that only a few students get a Dutch “cum laude”, which will be shown in chapter 5.

With regard to the conversion of Dutch grades to the German system one has to admit that a fair transition of grades is not always guaranteed. Due to the reason that in the Netherlands a ten is seldom awarded but in Germany the achievement of a 1.0 or 1.3 is not unusual it would be unfair if a ten is treated like a German 1.0. An attempt how Dutch and German grades could be converted is described in Table 6.

**Table 6 Grade transfer from the Netherlands to Germany**

ECTS grade <sup>1</sup>	ECTS Definition	German grade <sup>2</sup>	Dutch grade <sup>3</sup>
A	Excellent	1.0 / 1.3	9 (10)
B	Very good	1.7 / 2.0	8
C	Good	2.3 / 2.7	7
D	Satisfactory	3.0 / 3.3	6
E	Sufficient	3.7 / 4.0	5.5 - 6
FX	Insufficient	5.0	5

<sup>1</sup>Source: Karran, 2004, p.4

<sup>2</sup>Source: Universität Bremen, 2012

<sup>3</sup>Source: University of Twente, 2009/2010

This conversion table is rather positive for students who decide to switch from the Dutch higher education system to the German one. The best achievable Dutch grade nine equals the best achievable German grade 1.0. Still, it is not clear whether a Dutch nine should be treated as a German 1.0, 1.3 or even as 1.5

At some German universities and study programmes, a Dutch ten is even considered to be a German 0.7, a nine to be 1.0, an eight a 2.0 and so on. Another difficulty is that in Germany decimal numbers describe the student’s performance whereas in the Dutch grading system only whole numbers are given.

On top of that, the differences in the performance of the students in the respective study programmes must be taken into account as well as the percentage of students achieving a grade. The absence of a universally valid conversion table results in the problem that some German institutions convert Dutch grades advantageously for German students who want to go back for education whereas others do not do so.

Thus, it remains difficult to fully compare the two different grading systems with each other.

### 4.3.2 Chapter Conclusion

With regard to the corresponding sub-question “*To what extent are differences in the German and Dutch grading cultures and grading systems an obstacle to student transition?*”, it can be said that the differences in the German and Dutch grading cultures and grading systems might create obstacles for an efficient transition of German students from the Netherlands to Germany.

First of all, the differences in the grading cultures have been shown, which means that the best achievable grades nine and ten in the Dutch grading system are not given often whereas in Germany very good marks are relatively often awarded. This problem is strengthened by the differences in the grading systems. In the Netherlands only whole numbers are awarded on a scale from one to ten whereas in Germany also decimal numbers are awarded with 0.1 to 0.3 steps on a scale from one to five. The differences in the grading cultures and the differences in the grading systems make a fair and objective grade conversion nearly impossible. On top of that, it is not possible to introduce a common conversion table since higher education institutions decide how to convert grades on an individual basis. Further, it can be said that the level excellence orientation in a country does influence the grading practice in a higher education system. In the Netherlands the grades nine and ten are hardly ever awarded which is accepted as a part of the Dutch higher education system and high grades are not necessary as it is the case in Germany. A detailed discussion of this phenomenon can be found in chapter 6.

## 5. Survey results

During the last decades more and more German pupils and students have been going to the Netherlands for higher education. The reasons to do so vary as well as the results students want to get through their decision to leave their home country. Some students just want to gain international experience or just want to study abroad whereas other students think to have an advantage compared to German students with a German degree. As mentioned above internationalization is highly appreciated in a globalizing world as well as the mastering of several languages and cross-cultural understanding, which might explain the increasing number of mobile students. But still the question arises whether grades and degrees obtained in a country other than the home country are properly recognized if the student wants to return for education or employment. Therefore, this part of the thesis deals with the results of the student survey where German students studying at the University of Twente are questioned about how differences in grading cultures are perceived and to what extent these differences are evaluated as potential obstacles for a transition into a Master programme or job in Germany. To do so, first the general outcomes of the questionnaire will be discussed and thereupon the specific analysis of the results will be outlined. A detailed result of the statistical outcomes can be found in the annex.

### 5.1 General outcomes of the survey

In total 60 respondents answered the survey completely. 59 were counted as valid since one of the respondents did not complete the whole questionnaire. 32.20% of the respondents are male and 67.80% are female. Due to the reason that selection of the samples took place before the questionnaire started, all respondents are of German nationality, including one respondent with German/Dutch nationality. The majority of respondents study European Studies, followed by Psychology, International Business Administration and Public Administration. It was difficult to reach German students of technical studies since access to the mailing lists of these faculties was denied. Nevertheless, respondents came from 15 out of 52 study programmes offered at the UT. 81.36% (= 49 respondents) of the students follow a Bachelor at the UT and respectively 18.64% (= 11 respondents) follow a Master. Due to the reason that mostly students following a track given in English were reached, 71.2% of the students follow a study programme in English and only 28.80% in Dutch. Most of the students who participated in the survey were in the 6<sup>th</sup> semester of their study (33.9%) and respectively most respondents are 21-23 years old (57.63%), followed by students aged 24-26 (33.90%) and students aged 18-20 (6.78%). Table 7 provides a short overview regarding the question why students wanted to study at the UT:

**Table 7: Why students chose to study at the UT**

Gaining international experience	71.19%
Unique Campus-Flair	47.46%
Quality of education in the Netherlands is expected to be higher than in Germany	42.37%
Numerus Clausus as an obstacle to study in Germany	30.51%
Study course is not offered in Germany	20.34%
High reputation of the UT	18.64%
An international degree increases the chances to be accepted for a Master or employment in Germany	15.25%
Students just wanted to study in the Netherlands	13.56%
Living close to the UT	11.86%
Waiting for a study place in Germany	-

Remarkable is that only 15.25% expect that an international degree increases the chances to be accepted for a Master or employment in Germany and that quite a lot of students started to study at the UT because they just wanted to study in the Netherlands or are living nearby. Other reasons for the respondents are that the study course is in English and because it is assumed that every Dutch degree holder earns the permission to do a Master in the Netherlands.



## 5.2 Analysis of the survey

### 5.2.1 Satisfaction with the chosen study programme

As described above, German students who study at the University of Twente have various reasons to do so. But in order to find out whether the students who decide to study at the UT are satisfied with their chosen study programme the respondents are asked to rank their satisfaction with the quality of study, content, organization and requirements on a scale from one to five. This ranking derives from the client-centered model according to Ruben (2007), which indicates the student's satisfaction as an important factor to measure the excellence orientation of a higher education institution.

- 55.93% of the students indicate the quality of study as satisfying, whereas
- 58.62% of the students indicate the content of study as satisfying.
- In contrast, 34.48% of the students indicate the organization of study as neither satisfying nor unsatisfying and 37.93% as satisfying.
- Only 44.83% of the students indicate the requirement of study as satisfying.

In every category at least one respondent is highly dissatisfied and about eight respondents are highly satisfied within all categories. Quality of study is ranked highest, which is consistent with the decision of students to study at the UT because the quality of education in the Netherlands is mainly perceived as being higher than in Germany. Student satisfaction with the chosen study programme is more or less the same on Bachelor and Master levels. In general, the respondents are satisfied with the chosen study programme. Students may be slightly more dissatisfied with the requirements of study because it is quite difficult to obtain the highest achievable grades nine and ten.

**Figure 2: Satisfaction of students with the chosen study programme**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Quality of study	59	1,00	5,00	3,9492	,85951
Content of study	58	1,00	5,00	3,7069	,85857
Organisation of study	58	1,00	5,00	3,6034	,93545
Requirements of study	58	1,00	5,00	3,5000	,97782

Satisfaction with the quality of education in the Netherlands can also be seen by analyzing where the respondents studying at Master level obtained the Bachelor degree. Only 27.3% (= 3 respondents) of the Master students completed the Bachelor in Germany and 72.7% (= 8 respondents) completed the Bachelor in the Netherlands. It shows that most of the German students who did a first-cycle degree in the Netherlands decide to stay in the Netherlands. But it must also be taken into account that German students who obtained a Dutch degree were maybe not good enough to be accepted for a Master programme in Germany.

### 5.2.2 Potential transition from the Netherlands to Germany

This phenomenon can also be observed when the respondents are asked about a potential transition from the Netherlands to Germany. When students following a Bachelor degree are asked about their future plans the following results emerge:

- 35.6% of the respondents want to stay in the Netherlands for a Master, whereas
- 25.4% want to return to Germany for a Master.

Interesting to observe here is that one respondent wants to work in the Netherlands after the Bachelor whereas three respondents want to work in Germany. In total, eight respondents want to do a Master neither in the Netherlands nor in Germany, which is quite much compared to the overall number of respondents since the quality of education in the Netherlands is perceived as high so that leaving the Netherlands might result in quality loss.

On Master level, in contrast,

- none of the respondents want to do a PhD in Germany, whereas
- 9.1% of the respondents want to do a PhD in the Netherlands after finishing the Master study;
- 45.5% of the respondents want to work in the Netherlands, whereas
- 36.4% of the respondents want to work in Germany.

One respondent indicates to just work anywhere after the completion of the Master programme. Thus, students who decide to do a Master in the Netherlands most likely stay in the Netherlands for further education or employment.

When Bachelor students are asked to give an explanation about their future plans a variety of reasons is mentioned. The respondents who want to go back to Germany for education state that a Master in Germany increases the chances for employment in Germany and some of the respondents fear that a Master in the Netherlands is not recognized in Germany since the Master in the Netherlands just takes one year and not two as in Germany. Another factor is money. Study fees as well as general living costs in the Netherlands are much higher than in Germany. Other reasons to do a Master in Germany are that the programme is most likely given in German, which is good to get to know technical terms in German, as well as the expectation to get better grades and a better relation of effort and results than in the Netherlands. Two respondents also expect a higher quality of education in Germany.

In contrast, the respondents who want to stay in the Netherlands for a Master mostly mention that a transition from the Dutch higher education system to the German higher education system is hindered or only seldom possible due to differences in the grading systems and a bad recognition of Dutch grades. Other reasons are that the quality of Dutch education is perceived as high and that a Master in the Netherlands just takes one year so that coming into employment is reached faster. Further reasons are the good perspectives of the Dutch working environment and the better regulated Dutch system. Another perspective is internationality in the Netherlands as well as the simple fact that some study programmes are not offered in Germany.

Master students who want to stay in the Netherlands mostly do so because they already have a job or relevant work experience in the Netherlands whereas Master students who want to go to Germany after their education mention better work and living conditions and high chances to find a job there.

Thus, it becomes possible to say that the respondents of the questionnaire are relative clearly divided into two groups. One group consists of German students who want to stay in the Netherlands because of the better quality of education and because they do not think that they will be accepted for a Master in Germany resulting out of the different grading systems and consequently do not even try to apply for a Master in Germany. The other group consists of German students who want to return to Germany for higher education because they fear that a one-year Dutch Master will not be recognized in Germany and because of lower study costs. However, the same quality of education is expected. A lot of students also expect to get better grades in Germany due to the reason that effort is awarded with high grades.

Concluding one could say that German students at the UT do perceive differences in grading cultures and grading systems as an obstacle to return to Germany and that many students think it could be easier to obtain high grades in Germany than in the Netherlands.

### **Value of Dutch degree**

When the respondents are asked to evaluate whether a Dutch degree is more valuable than a German degree when applying for education or employment, most of the students are undecided (47.5%), followed by those disagreeing (33.9%) and those agreeing (18.6%). Due to the reason that most of the students give an explanation regarding their choice, the respondents who are undecided are considered more as proponents of having an advantage over German students with a German degree than opponents.

**Figure 3: Having an advantage with a Dutch degree**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	11	18,6	18,6
	no	20	33,9	52,5
	maybe	28	47,5	100,0
	Total	59	100,0	100,0

The students who do not think to have an advantage over German students with a German degree do so because international experience, studying in a foreign country and having the courage to go abroad is nothing special anymore since nearly every study programme, both in the Netherlands and in Germany, offers the possibility to go abroad for at least one semester. Further, in Germany good grades may be the most important criterion to be accepted for a Master or employment, which cannot be achieved in the Netherlands so that German degree holders are in a better position. Other reasons are that a Dutch degree simply may be regarded as being less valuable than a German degree in Germany and grade conversion may be unfair.

Proponents, in contrast, mainly state that international experience and learning several languages may be an advantage. However, having an advantage or not still heavily depends on the future higher education institution or employer.

Here it becomes obvious again that German students studying in the Netherlands are unsure about their chances to return to Germany for education or employment because they fear that Dutch grades are not recognized or unfairly converted so that students with a German degree do have an advantage compared to Dutch degree holders especially when applying for a job. The other part of the respondents assumes that an international degree should be more valuable than a domestic one.

#### **Application for a Master or employment in Germany**

If the respondents studying at Bachelor level are asked whether they already applied for a Master programme in Germany the result is that 12.5% (= 6 respondents) did apply whereas 87.5% did not apply. Of those who already applied 10.4% (= 5 respondents) are accepted. It must be taken into account that only respondents studying in the 6<sup>th</sup> semester are relevant here since in the third year students normally have to make a decision for the future. Further, although six of the respondents applied for a Master in Germany, fourteen respondents did not, which shows that the above mentioned reasons are relevant here: quality of education in the Netherlands, internationality and a one-year Master in the Netherlands. However, the success rate of those respondents who applied for a Master in Germany is quite high, which shows that it is possible to go from the Dutch higher education to the German one.

With regard to working in Germany, that is, doing an internship or traineeship, 16.9% (= 10 respondents) indicated they had already applied for it in Germany and 11.9% (= 7 respondents) of these applications were successful. The results show that if a German student with a Dutch degree applies for education or for work/internship/traineeship in Germany most likely the student will be accepted. However, it must be taken into account that it is not known which Master programmes or jobs the respondents applied for, if the question of having or not having an NC was involved, and whether it was a large company or a small one. Further, only a small part of the sample applied for a Master or a job in Germany so that the results may be unreliable.

#### **The chances to go to Germany for a Master or employment with a Dutch degree**

The sub-questions of question 25 resemble a mixture of the introduced tools to facilitate student mobility and how German students rank their chances to be accepted for a Master or employment in Germany.

Students agree with the assumption that there is no fair grade conversion among the two grading systems. The tendency even shows that the majority of students strongly disagree with the statement that Dutch grades are converted fairly to German grades ( $\mu = 1.9$ ). This outcome was expected because German students studying in the Netherlands assume that fair grade conversion will not be possible.

Most of the respondents completing a Bachelor degree at the UT do not expect to have high chances to be accepted for a Master in Germany. The outcome is consistent with the above mentioned reasons why the students want to stay in the Netherlands for a Master ( $\mu = 2.89$ ).

In contrast, the respondents who follow a Master degree at the UT show a tendency to agree with the assumption that they could have done a Master in Germany if they had wanted to do so ( $\mu = 3.8$ ). It is interesting to mention that three respondents who obtained a Bachelor degree in the Netherlands strongly agree with the assumption whereas only one German degree holder strongly agrees. The outcome may not be reliable since it is not known whether the German Master students completing a Master at the UT also applied for a Master in Germany.

Showing a tendency towards agreeing, the majority of the respondents neither agrees nor disagrees with the assumption that the introduction of the ECTS system and Diploma Supplement increases the chances to be accepted for a Master ( $\mu = 3.27$ ). Fifteen respondents do not have an opinion about the issue. The younger respondents, aged 18-20, do have another opinion about the issue than the middle-aged and older respondents since the majority of them already applied for a Master in Germany or the Netherlands and will perceive the functionality of the ECTS and Diploma Supplement as more important.

Getting good grades is perceived as important in the education sector as well as in the employment sector in Germany. However, good grades are ranked as very important when a student applies for a Master programme in Germany because personal qualities and activities besides the study are not important in the application procedure ( $\mu = 4.45$ ).

When a graduate applies for a job in Germany other qualities might be important as well so that the importance of good grades is ranked lower in the employment sector than in the higher education sector ( $\mu = 3.69$ ). Again, the rankings of the respondents are consistent with the given explanations above.

Further, the respondents evaluate a Dutch degree ( $\mu = 3.75$ ) as more valuable than a German degree ( $\mu = 3.14$ ) when applying for a job in Germany, which is more or less consistent with the general view that students assume to have an advantage with an international degree especially in the employment sector.

The same is true when students apply for a Master or employment in Germany with Dutch grades. In the education sector more respondents think that Dutch grades lower their chances ( $\mu = 3.11$ ) than in the employment sector ( $\mu = 2.5$ ).

**Figure 4: Possible transition from the Netherlands to Germany**

Question 25	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a fair grade conversion	55	1,00	5,00	1,9091	1,12666
BSc: good chances to do a Master in Germany	46	1,00	5,00	2,8913	1,19682
MSc: would have had good chances to do a Master in Germany	10	1,00	5,00	3,8000	1,22927
ECTS & Diploma Supplement	44	1,00	5,00	3,2727	1,08614
Good grades most important for Master in Germany	53	1,00	5,00	4,4528	,72234
Good grades most important for employment in Germany	56	1,00	5,00	3,6964	,82945
Dutch degree means high chances in German employment sector	53	1,00	5,00	3,7547	,80636
German degree holders have better chances in German employment sector	50	1,00	5,00	3,1400	1,10675
Dutch grades lower chances for Master in Germany	51	1,00	5,00	3,1176	1,32132
Dutch grades lower chances for employment in Germany	53	1,00	5,00	2,5283	1,18652

The reasons to choose the options reflect the assumption of the thesis. Due to the reason that the Dutch grades nine and ten are only seldom awarded and that there is no common conversion table from Dutch grades into German grades and vice versa, Dutch graduates who want to return for education to Germany are dependent on the way higher education institutions convert the grades, which can be positive but also very negative for the applicants. One respondent mentions that the chance to be accepted at a famous university in the United Kingdom may be higher than to be accepted at a German university. This problem will be intensified by the availability shortage of Master places in Germany so that even German graduates do not have a guaranteed place. Other respondents also mention that the introduction of the Diploma Supplement and ECTS system is helpful for a potential transition but a disadvantage regarding grade conversion will always remain. Regarding the employment sector opinions vary from “German employers do not only have a look upon grades” to “German employers do not know the differences in the two grading systems and how grades are awarded and employers will not make an effort to understand these differences”.

### 5.2.3 Awareness about the differences in the grading culture

Having examined how the respondents evaluate the chances to go from the Netherlands to Germany with a Dutch degree, the focus lies on the respondents’ awareness about the differences in the grading culture.

#### The Dutch grading practice

If a student who goes abroad to study does not know that there are different grading systems it might happen that the student is not satisfied with the system.

The majority of respondents agree to have known that there is a different grading system in the Netherlands whereas eleven respondents did not know it at all ( $\mu= 3.36$ ).

But even more respondents are satisfied with the grading system although it could be an obstacle to a potential transition from the Netherlands to Germany ( $\mu= 3.69$ ).

In contrast, a widespread opinion among German students is that the grades earned do not stand in relation to effort and time a student has spent to get the grade ( $\mu= 2.95$ ) and nearly every respondent

strongly disagrees with the assumption that it is relatively easy to get high grades in the Netherlands compared to other higher education systems ( $\mu = 1.85$ ).

Further, it is not assumed that good grades are important for education or employment in the Netherlands ( $\mu = 3.1$ ). However, the importance of high grades is evaluated much higher for education and employment in Germany since the respondents expect that in the Netherlands other qualities are important, which have been acquired besides the study. In the Dutch education sector the grading culture is taken into account so that most Master programmes are not restricted at all or require an average score of just 7.0 up to 7.5.

The ranking of the respondents show that the majority was aware of the fact that there are different grading systems and most of them are satisfied with the Dutch grading system. However, the Dutch grading culture makes it impossible to achieve high grades so that students may feel treated unfairly and consequently rank the possibility to get high grades in the Netherlands compared to other countries as relatively low.

**Figure 5: Awareness about the differences in the grading culture**

Question 11	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Grading system goes from 1-10 and not as in Germany from 1-6	58	1,00	5,00	3,3621	1,61895
Satisfaction with Dutch grading system	59	1,00	5,00	3,6949	1,27650
Grades equal effort	58	1,00	5,00	2,9483	1,06660
Relatively easy to get good grades in NL	59	1,00	5,00	1,8475	1,04739
Good grades most important in NL	59	1,00	5,00	3,0847	1,30368

### Allocation of Dutch grades

That it is relatively difficult to obtain high grades in the Netherlands, meaning a disadvantageous conversion of Dutch grades to German ones, also can be seen by means of the respondents' rankings of the allocation of grades<sup>13</sup>.

The majority of respondents evaluate the grades ten and nine as hardly ever awarded ( $\mu = 4.48$ ), whereas the grades nine and eight are rarely awarded ( $\mu = 3.14$ ).

With a majority of 66.67% the respondents claim that the grades seven to eight are often awarded ( $\mu = 2.04$ ), but not as often as the grades seven or six ( $\mu = 1.4$ ).

Very often the grade six is awarded since 5.5 is rounded up ( $\mu = 1.86$ ) and relatively often students do not pass an examination with a grade below 5.5 ( $\mu = 2.49$ ).

The allocation of grades reflects the assumption that due to the Dutch grading culture, the best achievable grades ten and nine are hardly ever awarded whereas the majority of students achieve a seven or six.

**Figure 6: The allocation of grades in the Dutch system**

Question 15	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Grades 10-9	58	1,00	5,00	4,4828	,75490
Grades 9-8	58	1,00	5,00	3,1379	,78245
Grades 8-7	57	1,00	5,00	2,0351	,62578
Grades 7-6	58	1,00	5,00	1,4138	,62223
Grades 6.5-5	57	1,00	5,00	1,8596	,78918
Below 5.5	57	1,00	5,00	2,4912	,82641

<sup>13</sup> 1= very often; 2= often; 3= rarely; 4= very rarely; 5= hardly ever

### **The Dutch degree with “cum laude” and the German degree with “summa cum laude”**

Due to the reason that in the Netherlands a degree with “cum laude” can be achieved by students who completed their study with an average score of eight or higher, normally only a minority of the students will get a degree with “cum laude” since the allocation of grades shows that only an outstanding number of students is able to do so. But of the respondents who participated in the survey, ten respondents (= 16.9%) will get a degree with “cum laude”. Eight of them are studying at Bachelor level and two of them are studying at Master level. The high number of graduates with “cum laude” can be explained by the fact that the majority of respondents come from non-technical studies where it might be easier to get grade eight or higher. Thus, this result might be unreliable since students of other technical studies might have more problems to obtain a degree with “cum laude”. For this reason it might be difficult to say something about the performance of students in subsequent faculties at the University of Twente, which is indicated by the frequency of degrees with “cum laude” according to the client-centered model of Ruben (2007). However, compared to the overall number of respondents, ten outstanding performances are rather high.

Another aspect of differences in grading cultures is that the Dutch “cum laude” is not seen as being completely equal to the German “summa cum laude” by the respondents ( $\mu = 2.97$ ). Both terms indicate the highest achievable degree in the two countries. Twelve respondents strongly disagree with the assumption that it is equal and ten respondents fully agree with the assumption. Thus, there is no consensus among the respondents, which can be traced back to the above mentioned problem that the questions are answered intuitively since only three respondents already studied in Germany. But most of the respondents think that it is rarely possible to achieve a Dutch degree with “cum laude” and that the differences in the grading systems make it impossible to compare the degrees with each other (an average of eight equals the Dutch “cum laude”, which equals a German 2.0, that is not enough to achieve “summa cum laude”).

#### **5.2.4 Evaluation of student mobility between the two systems**

When the respondents are asked to rank how they perceive student mobility within the higher education systems nearly all respondents fully agree that the Numerus Clausus in Germany leads to brain drain since a lot of students do not fulfill all requirements to be accepted for higher education in Germany ( $\mu = 4.22$ ).

However, brain drain may also be interpreted as NC flight due to the reason that some students study abroad because of no other choice. When a student wants to go back to Germany for employment it may happen that the employer mentions exactly this as a reason to go abroad.

Considering the assumption that the grading systems within the EHEA should be harmonized to guarantee student transition from one country to another without problems a great majority of the respondents fully agree ( $\mu = 4.22$ ). Interesting to mention here is that one respondent has a rather radical view about this. According to the respondent differences in grading systems are responsible for Europe’s uniqueness, which should be preserved. The result was expected due to the reason that most of the respondents mention differences in grading systems as a potential obstacle to successfully return for education or employment to Germany or more generally to the country of origin.

Although most of the respondents demand a common grading system throughout Europe, fewer respondents strongly agree with the assumption that differences in the grading systems between Germany and the Netherlands hinder a potential transition of German students studying in the Netherlands from the Netherlands to Germany ( $\mu = 3.63$ ). Thus, students are also of the opinion to have an advantage with an international degree compared to German degree holders.

**Figure 7: Student mobility within the higher education systems**

Question 27	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
NC in Germany leads to brain drain	50	1,00	5,00	4,2200	,99571
Common grading system throughout Europe	57	1,00	5,00	4,2281	1,21034
Different grading systems hinder transition of German students studying in NL	51	1,00	5,00	3,6275	1,34106

### 5.2.5 Core problems of differences in higher education systems

The most interesting part of the questionnaire is the one in which respondents were asked to give their opinion about the core problems of differences in higher education systems.

The majority of the respondents perceive differences in the grading systems as a core problem. In the Netherlands only whole numbers are given without 0.1 steps as in Germany so that it might be difficult to compare the grades. Thus, the qualities of German students studying in the Netherlands are less valued than the qualities of German students in Germany since they achieve higher grades in Germany where it is not uncommon to get the best achievable grade for a good work. For instance, German students in Germany easily get good grades in Psychology or social sciences whereas in the Netherlands it is nearly impossible to achieve a higher grade than eight. Another respondent mentions that the number of credit points should reflect requirements in study courses in Germany and the Netherlands more accurately. At the UT most courses equal five credit points whereas in Germany the same courses could equal two credit points or twelve.

Other respondents see the core problems in the organization of the study programmes. There are differences in content, length and requirements of the same studies in Germany and the Netherlands (e.g. European Studies, Psychology), which is still the case even after the implementation of the Bologna Process. Further, it is indicated that it might be difficult for higher education institution personnel as well as for employers to understand another higher education system with another grading system and especially employers do not know the qualities of foreign degree holders compared to the domestic German ones, which may result in worse employment perspectives.

Core problems are also seen in the German higher education system itself. There is too little financial support for higher education institutions in Germany and available Master places are not fully occupied because of the bad distribution of students upon available space so that students who do not fulfill all requirements are refused without a chance to catch up with the requirements. On top of that, one respondent mentioned that a transition from the Netherlands to the UK is not as problematic as going to Germany, which is another clue indicating the internal problems of the German higher education system.

Other problems are that brain drain takes place and that different countries cannot judge the qualities of another higher education system. One respondent also suggests a solution to the problem which could be the introduction of a quality control agency throughout the EHEA to monitor and harmonize the quality of education.

Thus, the core problems recognized by the survey participants mainly fits into the purpose of this study namely that differences in higher education systems, including excellence orientation, grading culture and grading system, could hinder student mobility since German higher education personnel and employers do not fully understand and recognize the differences in grading cultures and a common conversion table does not exist.

## 5.3 Chapter Conclusion

With regard to the corresponding sub-question “*To what extent do German students at the University of Twente perceive differences in grading cultures between the two higher education systems and do these hinder their potential transition into a Master programme or job in Germany?*”, it can be said that in general, although the majority of the German students who participated in the survey never



studied in Germany before, differences in grading cultures are perceived as obstacles regarding a potential transition into a Master programme in Germany. Regarding the employment sector, however, most of the respondents assume to have an advantage with a Dutch degree compared to German students with a German degree because of qualities like international experience and the high quality of Dutch higher education institutions.

Many respondents studying at Bachelor level do not even try to apply for a Master in Germany due to the reason that the conversion of Dutch grades to German ones will lower their qualities because differences in grading cultures are not taken into account. The questionnaire does not give an answer to the question whether the respondents really want to stay in the Netherlands because they evaluate the quality of education higher in the Netherlands than in Germany or because they fear they will not be accepted in Germany if they try.

The respondents give answers according to personal and intuitive judgments as well as stating what they have heard about the experiences made by German friends studying in Germany. It results in doubts about the Dutch higher education system because it seems to be easier to obtain high grades in Germany than in the Netherlands so that Dutch graduates will have a disadvantage on the German education and employment sector.

Apart from that, the majority of respondents who want to stay in the Netherlands for education and also for work, differences in grading cultures are perceived by all respondents and every respondent has to struggle with them at least when they have to explain the Dutch grading system to employers who are not coming from the Netherlands.

Although the majority of respondents is satisfied with the Dutch grading system, the quality of education and the higher education system in itself, they are dissatisfied with the Dutch grading culture because of the fact that the best achievable grades nine and ten are hardly ever awarded. Students do not perceive the Dutch grading culture as a problem when they plan to stay in the Netherlands for education or employment but it is perceived as a problem when they want to return to Germany.

According to the resource/reputational model, more outstanding students participated in the questionnaire than expected. Ten out of fifty nine respondents will graduate with “cum laude”, which shows a high performance of students at the UT and subsequently that it is not impossible to be an outstanding student. But respondents also mentioned that even graduates with “cum laude” are not regarded as outstanding students in Germany since in worst cases an average of eight equals a 2.0 in Germany, which just means “good”. Famous universities in the UK accept good Dutch students with pleasure whereas in Germany good Dutch students may be refused. This could be evidence for internal problems in the German higher education system.

Regarding the level of satisfaction of respondents at the UT it can be stated that students at the UT are satisfied with the content, organization, quality and requirement of the chosen study, which according to Ruben (2007) is another important criterion of excellence orientation of a higher education institution. It could be an argument in favor of the fact that German students chose the UT because of its high quality of education and not because of the NC in Germany and the relatively bad reputation of the German education system, regarding availability of study places and too many students for too little space.

All in all, the conclusion of this part is that German students studying in the Netherlands are reluctant to return to Germany for education or employment. However, the decision to study in the Netherlands or in Germany is always personally influenced by circumstances like Numerus Clausus, offer of study programmes, length of study or language of instruction. But the differences in grading systems and grading cultures and the fact that grade conversion may result in unfair treatment in the German education and employment sector are truly perceived.

## 6. Assumptions and reality

Having analyzed and compared the Dutch and German higher education systems along the level of excellence orientation, the grading cultures and grading systems and having analyzed the results of the student survey, it becomes possible to discuss the assumptions formulated in chapter 3.

The assumptions were derived from the theory and it will be interesting to see whether the assumptions, with regard to the outcome of the analysis part, can be confirmed or not.

*Assumption 1: If Germany is a highly excellence orientated country, then the push for good grades will be high.*

With regard to the outcome of this study it can be said that the German higher education system is very selective which means that students need to get good grades to be accepted for a Bachelor or Master programme as well as for employment in Germany. The high selectivity mainly derives from limited capacity at higher education institutions as well as from the high number of applicants applying for a job. Due to the reason that selectivity can be a sign for excellence orientation, according to the models of Ruben (2007), which is especially the case in Germany, also the grading culture must be adjusted. For this reason, the push for good grades is high. Otherwise, German students or graduates will not have a chance at the German education and employment sector. Thus, assumption one is confirmed and can be found in practice.

*Assumption 2: If the Netherlands is a less excellence orientated country, then the push for good grades will be low.*

If we have a look upon the results we see that the Dutch higher education system is not very selective. In general every school graduate with a university-entrance diploma has the possibility to study. The same it is in the employment sector where prospective employers do not solely compare graduation marks but also have a look upon activities besides the study and qualities, which could be important for the job. Thus, although the Netherlands is an excellence orientated country, since the external reputation of higher education institutions is considered as very important, it is not a selective one. In the Netherlands, in general, it is not necessary to only get very good grades neither in the education sector nor in the employment sector. For this reason, the second assumption is partly confirmed: it is an excellence orientated country but excellence is not defined about the selection process so that the push for good grades is lower than in Germany.

*Assumption 3: German students who return to Germany for higher education are most likely not satisfied with the Dutch grading culture.*

The third assumption can be confirmed. Throughout the analysis we got to know that most of the students who want to return to Germany for higher education do so because they expect to get higher grades at German higher education institutions and a better relation of effort and results. The German students who came to the Netherlands for higher education often did not know that there is another grading system and grading culture. Thus, students may not be satisfied with the Dutch grading practice so that they want to return to Germany for higher education.

*Assumption 4: German students who stay in the Netherlands for higher education are most likely satisfied with the Dutch grading culture.*

The fourth assumption cannot be confirmed this easily. First of all, most of the students who stay in the Netherlands do so because it is expected that a transition from the Netherlands to higher education or employment in Germany is not possible due to differences in grading cultures. Further, the equality of education in the Netherlands is perceived as high so that most of the German students do not stay in the Netherlands because they are satisfied with the Dutch grading culture, rather because of other reasons. Thus, it can be assumed that the Dutch grading culture is accepted but not regarded as satisfying because best achievable grades are hardly ever awarded which may result in that students

feel treated unfairly and that effort is not awarded. However, students are mostly satisfied with the Dutch grading system, which should not be confused with the Dutch grading culture.

All in all, it becomes possible to say that differences in the excellence orientation of a country lead to differences in grading practices and that differences in grading practices are perceived by mobile students as a potential obstacle to go to another country for higher education or employment with a foreign degree.

## 7. Conclusion

This chapter is going to present the main findings of the study and which conclusions can be drawn out of it. This study focused on the differences in the Dutch and German grading cultures and to what extent these differences may hinder a potential transition of German students who hold a Dutch degree, to subsequent education or employment in Germany. Up to now existent literature mainly focuses on the tools implemented by the Bologna Process to ensure a smooth transition from one higher education system into another. But it has not been taken into account yet that also differences in grading cultures may hinder a fair conversion of grades. Differences in grading cultures are highly present in the Dutch and German higher education systems.

### The research questions

The aim of this study was to answer the main research question which is:

*“To what extent do differences in grading cultures between the Dutch and the German higher education systems hinder the potential transition of German students who hold a Dutch degree to a subsequent education or employment career in Germany?”*

To answer the main research, three sub-questions became relevant which are:

1. To what extent are these two countries excellence driven?
2. To what extent are differences in the German and Dutch grading cultures and grading systems an obstacle to student transition?
3. To what extent do German students at the University of Twente perceive differences in grading cultures between the two higher education systems and do these hinder their potential transition into a Master programme or job in Germany?

The found results by answering the three sub-questions simultaneously provide an answer to the main research question.

### Theoretical framework

It was shown that excellence orientation of higher education institutions is difficult to measure due to the diversity of the educational landscape. An attempt was made by Birnbaum (1983) who divided diversity into seven categories and by van Vught et al. (2010) who classified diversity in two crucial aspects: internal and external diversity. For the purpose of this study external diversity (differences between higher education institutions) and differences in the prestige of higher education institutions were taken into account. Criteria like access to the higher education institution and the amount of tuition fees became relevant because they may influence the decision of German students to stay in the Netherlands or to return to Germany for higher education. The two models of Ruben (2007) do contain all relevant criteria which are the resource/reputational perspective and the client-centered model.

Regarding culture it was shown that within Europe a lot of different cultures exist which makes it difficult to understand and accept every one of them. When students go abroad they also perceive a different culture not only in every-day live but also in the education sector. It was difficult to find a universally valid definition of grading culture but regarding what culture is it can be said that grading culture can be seen as the influence of national higher education culture upon the university staff in which way grades are awarded. Differences in grading systems derive from different historical traditions.

The focus of this research lied upon excellence orientation due to the expectation that the level of excellence orientation in a country reflects the grading culture in a higher education system. Therefore, four assumptions were deployed to test this expectation. It came out that the majority of assumptions could be confirmed: the level of excellence orientation influences the grading practice in the higher education system and it may be that mobile students who are not satisfied with the grading culture in another country return to their home country.

In order to conduct this study and to apply the theory to the Dutch and German higher education systems two types of data sources were used: secondary analysis of already existent literature and an online questionnaire. With this type of data collection an answer could be given to the three sub-questions.

### **Sub-question 1**

It was shown that both countries are excellence driven in different ways. Concerning the resource/reputational perspective one can say that the Netherlands and Germany are very attractive for international students due to a high external reputation. Compared along ranking lists, achievements and attractiveness of Dutch and German institutions for international students, it came out that the higher education institutions perform more or less similarly. In order to determine the achievements of Dutch and German universities, the Shanghai ranking list was chosen among a variety of ranking lists because the criteria used to rank universities are most consistent with the purpose of this study. It became clear that the best Dutch and German universities perform equally in winning Nobel Prizes and Field Medals (alumni), the frequency of published papers in Science and Nature and the number of papers indexed in the Citation index. A difference was found in winning Nobel Prizes by staff, where German universities perform better, and the frequency researchers are cited, where Dutch universities perform better. Another result is that both countries attract a high number of international students compared to the overall study population.

As a next step the two higher education systems were compared according to the client-centered model. Thus, the differences in access to the higher education institutions, the amount of study fees and the overall quality of education were observed. It was shown that it is much more difficult in Germany to get access to higher education institutions. Due to the reason that not all German institutions receive funding, not enough space can be offered for all applicants, so that a strict selection process of applicants must be applied. Every year the Numerus Clausus is calculated for every study programme when there is more demand than supply. The average score of the university entrance diploma must meet the demands of the NC to be immediately accepted. Otherwise applicants have to wait or find something else. Due to the reason that the NC is quite high especially for those study programmes that are favored by applicants, brain drain occurs. In the Netherlands there are no university entrance permissions in most cases so that many German students go to the Netherlands for higher education. Access restrictions may be a sign for excellence orientation because only the best applicants get a chance to study but otherwise it could also be an indicator for saving money. Further, only two federal states in Germany do have regular tuition fees added to the contribution fee every student in every federal state has to pay whereas in the Netherlands study fees are regulated by the government. Study fees may be a sign for excellence orientation because in this way, universities can offer greater research facilities and more personnel.

Regarding excellence orientation in the employment sector it can be said that German employers mostly require good grades to be accepted whereas Dutch employers also consider activities besides the study as being important.

## **Sub-question 2**

It has been shown that differences in the higher education systems in Germany and the Netherlands are a potential obstacle to student transition. In the categories, grading culture and grading system, significant differences were observed. In the Netherlands the grading scale ranges from one to ten, counted as whole numbers and ten as the best achievable grade. In Germany, in contrast, the grading scale ranges from one to five, decimal numbers are given and one as the best achievable grade (sometimes even 0.7). The grading culture also shows significant differences. At Dutch higher education institutions it is nearly impossible to achieve a nine or a ten because it has been part of the grading system since its introduction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Germany, in contrast, professors often award the best achievable grades 1.0 to 1.7, sometimes because of attitude and sometimes because professors do not want to defend a bad grade.

## **Sub-question 3**

With regard to the third sub-question most of the results were expected. The questions of the survey were a result of the conceptual and theoretical framework to come to general valid conclusions based on the purpose of the study. The general outcome of the survey is that the respondents perceive differences in grading cultures as potential obstacles to return to Germany for education or employment with a Dutch degree. As argued in the analysis, the students are in general satisfied with quality of study, content of study, organization of study and requirements of study. Due to the reason that it is rather impossible to achieve high grades in the Dutch system, German students nevertheless try to so that respondents are slightly more dissatisfied with the requirements of study. The result that German students in the Netherlands are satisfied with education can also be concluded from the fact that most students, doing a Master study at the UT, also obtained a Bachelor degree in the Netherlands. This trend is continued when Bachelor students are questioned about future plans. Although the students are aware of the fact that they will not get as high grades as in Germany, most of the students want to stay in the Netherlands for education instead of going back to Germany for a Master.

In the answers to the following question of the questionnaire it became apparent that the majority of students assume not to have an advantage compared to German students having a German degree especially not when applying for a Master in Germany whereas slightly more students expect to have an advantage with an international degree when applying for a job in Germany.

When the students are questioned about their chances to return to Germany for education or employment the outcome showed that the widespread assumption among German students who study in the Netherlands is that grades are converted unfairly and that the obtained Dutch grades will not show the true value of a student. Further, Dutch grades especially lower chances for a Master in Germany and even the implementation of the ECTS system and Diploma Supplement is not ranked as very helpful.

The same outcome could be observed by awareness about the differences in the grading cultures. Although the students are satisfied with the Dutch grading scale, students do not agree with the assumption that grades equal effort and that it is relatively easy to get good grades in the Netherlands compared to other education systems. The ranking of the allocation of grades strengthens the assumption that German students studying in the Netherlands do have problems to obtain high grades in the Netherlands and that the students evaluate it as a potential obstacle to return to Germany. On top of that, the highest achievable Dutch degree “cum laude” is not evaluated as equal to the highest achievable German degree “summa cum laude” due to the reason that the conversion of grades leads to differences in being excellent. Another outcome was that students agree with the assumptions that the NC in Germany leads to brain drain, a common grading system should be introduced throughout Europe and that different grading systems hinder the transition of German students studying in the Netherlands.

## Main Research Question

The outcome of the survey reflects the outcomes of the Dutch and German higher education systems as well as the excellence orientation of the two countries. Significant differences in the excellence orientation, grading culture and grading system, lead to potential obstacles to returning to higher education in Germany, if the graduate holds a Dutch degree. These differences are also perceived by German students, studying in the Netherlands, themselves so that most of the students stay in the Netherlands for education and even for employment. Reasons to stay in the Netherlands vary from the high quality of education on Master and PhD level and from a good employment situation to the reluctance of students to try to return to Germany or from truly observed and measurable differences in the grading cultures, which make a transition difficult and in some cases even impossible. All in all it can be said that German students perceive problems when they want to return to Germany because of the Dutch grading culture.

## 8. Discussion

This thesis focused upon an interesting research topic that is not much explored yet and it was a fair indication of what is going on. Especially in a time where student mobility is facilitated and gains more and more importance, proper tools to recognize grades and degrees are required. Within the EHEA common policy implementations like the ECTS system, the Diploma Supplement, Transcript of Records and an ECTS grading scale, introduced by the European Commission, shall guarantee a smooth and fair transition from one higher education system to another as well as to find a job throughout Europe. However, in this study it is found out

- that common tools do not take differences in grading cultures into account;
- that it is not easily possible to return to the German higher education or employment sector with a Dutch degree;
- that the excellence orientation of a country influences the grading practice in the education sector;
- that differences in national grading systems hinder a fair conversion of grades which is especially obvious regarding the Dutch/German case;
- and that differences in grading cultures are perceived by students themselves as an obstacle to a potential transition from one higher education system to another.

These outcomes should be used as an incentive for policy makers at EU, national and institutional level to think about alternatives that also take differences in grading cultures and grading systems into account. In order to create a fair and objective basis it should be considered to harmonize the grading systems throughout Europe. If a central European grading system would be established, obtained grades can be compared more easily and the quality of obtained degrees would be more transparent for future employers. A central European grading system would also include a centralized grading practice which means that grades are not awarded according to the excellence orientation of a country rather according to commonly defined criteria.

Although interesting results were found, the study leaves room for further research opportunities. The idea to investigate the differences in Dutch and German grading cultures resulted out of the fact that existing literature did not give an answer to the issue. The restriction to the two cases emerged due to the fact that a comparison of the grading cultures of all EHEA participants would exceed the scope and time limitations of this paper. For this reason, the outcome is not generalizable with respect to other grading cultures and grading systems. Thus, one incentive for a follow-up study would be to extend the scope of the research question to the whole EHEA.

Further, the questionnaire was restricted to German students studying at the UT. Of course, it would have been nice to also interview German students at other universities in the Netherlands to get to know whether all German students studying in the Netherlands have the same opinion about differences in grading cultures.

In order to prove the assumption that Dutch and German employers do have a different opinion about excellence orientation and to get to know which applicants do have a chance to get the job, another incentive for further research could be to interview German and Dutch employers.

On top of that, the excellence orientation of German and Dutch higher education institutions were compared in terms of the models according to Ruben (2007) and the Shanghai ranking list. During doing research for the comparison it was found out that excellence orientation can be measured by a variety of indicators so that different outcomes might be possible if a follow-up study with different criteria is done.

Further research could also be more specific in the variables which were brought up in this study. It would be interesting to further go into detail about different perceptions of younger and older students as well as differences on Bachelor and Master levels. Therefore it is required to sample more specifically and search for younger students and students studying at the Master level. A disadvantage of the study was that the collection of data took place during summer vacation, which should be taken into account in a follow-up study.

Next, it would be nice to re-do this study every few years to observe differences in mobile students going abroad, the number of German students studying in the Netherlands and the perception of differences in the grading cultures. Some day grading scales could be unified as well as content and evaluation of study programmes so that differences in grading cultures are not perceived as an obstacle anymore.

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## Annex

### 1 Study fees in the federal states of Germany

Federal State	First-cycle degree	Second-cycle degree	Contribution to the university	Long-term students
Baden-Wuerttemberg	–	Defined by university	€40 - €120	–
Bavaria	€300 - €500	–	Student contribution and semester ticket, defined by university	–
Berlin	–	–	€136 - € 246	–
Brandenburg	–	–	€217	–
Bremen	–	–	€214	€500, after 14 <sup>th</sup> semester
Hamburg	–	€375	€299	–
Hessen	–	–	€50 + semester ticket	–
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	–	–	€127	–
Lower Saxony	€500	–	€75 + semester ticket	€600 - €800, after 4 <sup>th</sup> semester above regular length of study
North-Rhine Westphalia	–	–	€99 - €240	–
Rheinland-Pfalz	–	€650	€180	€650, after 4 <sup>th</sup> semester above regular length of study
Saarland	–	–	€155	–
Saxony-Anhalt	–	€500	€63	€500, after 4 <sup>th</sup> semester above regular length of study
Saxony	–	€300 - €450	€75 - €220	–
Schleswig-Holstein	–	–	€112	–
Thuringia	–	–	€156	€500, after 4 <sup>th</sup> semester above regular length of study

Source: Studis Online (2012); Studieren.de (2012)

## 2 Questionnaire

### *Unterschiede in Bildungssystemen hindern studentische Mobilität*

Vielen Dank, dass du dir die Zeit nimmst, an dieser Umfrage teilzunehmen.

Im Rahmen meiner Bachelorarbeit untersuche ich, wie deutsche Studenten an der Universität Twente die kulturellen Unterschiede bezüglich der verschiedenen „Benotungskultur“ wahrnehmen und inwiefern eine mögliche Rückkehr in das deutsche Hochschulsystem (Master) oder in den deutschen Arbeitsmarkt beeinträchtigt wird.

Die Umfrage nimmt nicht mehr als 5-10 Minuten in Anspruch und deine Antworten werden absolut anonym behandelt.

### Allgemeine Fragen zur Person und dem Bildungshintergrund

1 Geschlecht

- Männlich  
 Weiblich

Fragen, die ausschließlich für Bachelorstudenten bestimmt sind, sind durch rote Schrift zu erkennen.

2 Alter

- 18-20  
 21-23  
 24-26  
 Other (specify) : \_\_\_\_\_

Fragen, die ausschließlich für Masterstudenten bestimmt sind, sind durch blaue Schrift zu erkennen.

3 Nationalität: \_\_\_\_\_

4 Was studierst du an der Universitaet Twente (z.B.: Public Administration, Psychology, Creative Technology, etc.)?  
\_\_\_\_\_

5 Was ist deine Unterrichtssprache?

- Englisch  
 Niederländisch

6 Auf welchem Level studierst du?

- Bachelor  
 Master

7 Wo hast du deinen Bachelorabschluss gemacht?

- Deutschland
- Niederlande
- Anderswo

8 Im wievielten Semester bist du? \_\_\_\_\_

### Motivation ein Studium in den Niederlanden zu beginnen

9 Warum hast du dich dafür entschieden, an der Universität Twente zu studieren? (Mehrere Antworten sind möglich)

- Wegen des guten Rufs der Universität
- Ich schätze die Qualität eines Studiums an niederländischen Universitäten höher ein als an deutschen Universitäten
- Einzigartiger Campus-Flair
- Ich möchte internationale Erfahrung sammeln
- Ein internationaler Abschluss erhöht die Chancen auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt und die Chance auf einen Masterstudienplatz in Deutschland
- Aufgrund des Numerus Clausus konnte ich in Deutschland nicht das studieren, was ich wollte
- Mein Studiengang wird in Deutschland nicht angeboten
- Aufgrund der unmittelbaren Nähe zu meinem Wohnort
- Ich warte auf einen Studienplatz in Deutschland
- Ich wollte einfach in den Niederlanden studieren
- Other (specify) : \_\_\_\_\_

10 Wie zufrieden bist du mit deiner Studienwahl?

	1(Gar nicht zufrieden)	2	3	4	5(Sehr zufrieden)
Qualität deines Studiums	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inhalt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anspruch	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Bewusstsein über die verschiedenen Benotungskulturen

11 Dieser Teil befasst sich mit deinem Bewusstsein über die verschiedenen „Benotungskulturen“.

Deine Antworten können von 1 (Ich stimme gar nicht zu) bis 5 (Ich stimme voll zu) reichen.

	1	2	3	4	5	Keine Meinung
Ich war mir vor dem Beginn meines Studiums an der UT darüber im Klaren, dass die Benotungsskala von 1-10 reicht und nicht wie in Deutschland von 1-6.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich bin mit der Benotungsskala 0-10 zufrieden.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass die Punkte die man bekommt, den Leistungsstand der Arbeit widerspiegeln.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass es im Gegensatz zu anderen Bildungssystemen vergleichsweise einfach ist, gute Noten in den Niederlanden zu erhalten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass für eine Zulassung zu einem Master in den Niederlanden und für eine spätere Beschäftigung in den Niederlanden gute Noten das ausschlaggebende sind.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



12 Ich werde meinen Abschluss an der Universität Twente mit „cum laude“ machen.

- Ja
- Nein

13 Ich denke, dass der höchst mögliche niederländische Abschluss mit „cum laude“ gleichsetzbar mit dem höchst möglichem deutschen Abschluss „summa cum laude“ ist.

- 1 (Ich stimme gar nicht zu)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 (Ich stimme voll zu)

14 Wie begründest du deine Entscheidung?

---

15 Wie schätzt du die Vergabe der Punkte ein? (Kreuze zutreffendes an)

	Sehr häufig	Häufig	Selten	Sehr selten	So gut wie nie
Die Punktzahlen 9-10	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die Punktzahlen 8-9	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die Punktzahlen 7-8	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die Punktzahlen 6-7	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die Punktzahlen 5.5-6	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nicht bestanden (5 Punkte oder weniger)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Möglicher Übergang von den Niederlanden nach Deutschland

16 Was sind deine Zukunftspläne?

Nach meinem Bachelorabschluss möchte ich:

- Einen Master in Deutschland machen
- Einen Master in den Niederlanden machen
- In Deutschland arbeiten
- In den Niederlanden arbeiten
- Other (specify) : \_\_\_\_\_

17 Was sind deine Zukunftspläne?

Nach meinem Masterabschluss möchte ich:

- In Deutschland promovieren
- In den Niederlanden promovieren
- In Deutschland arbeiten
- In den Niederlanden arbeiten
- Other (specify) : \_\_\_\_\_

18 Ich begründe meine Entscheidung damit, dass

---

19 Denkst du, dass du mit einem niederländischen Abschluss einen Vorteil gegenüber deutschen Studenten, die in Deutschland ihren Abschluss gemacht haben, hast?

- Ja
- Nein
- Vielleicht

20 Ich begründe meine Entscheidung damit, dass

---

21 Ich habe mich bereits um einen Masterplatz in Deutschland beworben.

- Ja
- Nein

22 Ich bin zu einem Masterstudium in Deutschland zugelassen.

- Ja
- Nein
- Vielleicht

23 Ich habe mich bereits um einen Arbeitsplatz (Praktikum, Traineeship) in Deutschland beworben.

- Ja
- Nein

24 Ich habe in Deutschland einen Arbeitsplatz (Praktikum, Traineeship) erhalten.

- Ja
- Nein
- Vielleicht

25 Die nächsten Fragen handeln von einem möglichen Übergang von den Niederlanden nach Deutschland.

1 = Ich stimme gar nicht zu

5 = Ich stimme voll zu

	1	2	3	4	5	Keine Meinung
Ich denke, dass die Umrechnung von niederländischen Punkten in das deutsche Notensystem meine in Holland erbrachten Leistungen fair widerspiegeln würden.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<u>Bachelorstudenten:</u> Ich denke, dass ich gute Chancen habe einen Master in Deutschland zu machen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<u>Masterstudenten:</u> Ich denke, dass ich gute Chancen gehabt hätte einen Master in Deutschland zu machen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ich denke, dass die Einführung von dem „study credit point system“ (ECTS) und dem „Diploma Supplement“ meine Chancen für einen Master in Deutschland akzeptiert zu werden erhöht.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass für die Zulassung zu einem Master in Deutschland gute Noten das Ausschlaggebende sind.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass für eine spätere Beschäftigung in Deutschland gute Noten das Ausschlaggebende sind.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass ich mit einem niederländischen Abschluss (Bachelor und/oder Master) gute Chancen auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt habe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass Studenten mit einem deutschen Abschluss (Bachelor und/oder Master) gute bis bessere Chancen auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt haben.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wenn ich mich für einen Master in Deutschland bewerbe, haben meine niederländischen Noten einen negativen Einfluss auf meine Erfolgchancen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wenn ich mich in Deutschland auf einen Job bewerbe, haben meine niederländischen Noten/niederländischer Abschluss einen negativen Einfluss auf meine Erfolgchancen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26 Warum denkst du so?

---

**Einschätzung bezüglich studentischer Mobilität zwischen den beiden Bildungssystemen**

27 Der letzte Teil geht um deine Einschätzung bezüglich studentische Mobilität zwischen den beiden Bildungssystemen.

1 = Ich stimme gar nicht zu

5 = Ich stimme voll zu

	1	2	3	4	5	Keine Meinung
Die Exzellenz-Orientierung des deutschen Bildungssystems (Numerus Clausus) lässt vielen deutschen Studenten, sowohl auf Bachelor-Niveau als auch auf Master-Niveau, keine andere Wahl, als nach Ausweichmöglichkeiten zu suchen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass die Benotungsskalen im Europäischen Hochschulraum vereinheitlicht werden sollten, um so den Transfer von Studenten innerhalb Europas bestmöglich zu gewährleisten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass die unterschiedlichen Benotungssysteme ein Problem für deutsche Studenten in den Niederlanden sind, die nach Deutschland zurückkehren wollen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28 Ich begründe meine Entscheidungen dadurch, dass

---

### Zum Schluss...

29 Was sind deiner Meinung nach die Kernprobleme bei unterschiedlichen Bildungssystemen?

---

30 Abschließende Bemerkungen:

---

### 3 Statistical outcomes

#### Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Female	40	67,8	67,8	67,8
Valid Male	19	32,2	32,2	100,0
Total	59	100,0	100,0	

#### Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 18-20	4	6,8	6,9	6,9
Valid 21-23	34	57,6	58,6	65,5
Valid 24-26	20	33,9	34,5	100,0
Total	58	98,3	100,0	
Missing System	1	1,7		
Total	59	100,0		

#### Degree

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Bachelor	48	81,4	81,4	81,4
Valid Master	11	18,6	18,6	100,0
Total	59	100,0	100,0	

**Language**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid English	42	71,2	71,2	71,2
Valid Dutch	17	28,8	28,8	100,0
Total	59	100,0	100,0	

**Semester**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Semester 1	4	6,8	6,9	6,9
Semester 2	6	10,2	10,3	17,2
Semester 3	10	16,9	17,2	34,5
Semester 4	2	3,4	3,4	37,9
Semester 5	7	11,9	12,1	50,0
Valid Semester 6	20	33,9	34,5	84,5
Semester 7	3	5,1	5,2	89,7
Semester 8	2	3,4	3,4	93,1
Semester 10	2	3,4	3,4	96,6
Semester 11	2	3,4	3,4	100,0
Total	58	98,3	100,0	
Missing System	1	1,7		
Total	59	100,0		

**Level of Degree \* Country where Bachelor degree is obtained Crosstabulation**

		Country where Bachelor degree is obtained		Total	
		Germany	Netherlands		
Degree	Master	Count	3	8	11
		% within Degree	27,3%	72,7%	100,0%
		% within CountryObtainedBachelorDegree	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		ee			
		% of Total	27,3%	72,7%	100,0%

**Future plans of Bachelor students**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Master in Germany	15	25,4	31,3	31,3
	Master in the Netherlands	21	35,6	43,8	75,0
	Working in Germany	3	5,1	6,3	81,3
	Working in the Netherlands	1	1,7	2,1	83,3
	Other	8	13,6	16,7	100,0
	Total	48	81,4	100,0	
Missing	System	11	18,6		
Total		59	100,0		

**Future plans of Master students**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	PhD in the Netherlands	1	1,7	9,1	9,1
	Woking in Germany	4	6,8	36,4	45,5
	Working in the Netherlands	5	8,5	45,5	90,9
	other	1	1,7	9,1	100,0
	Total	11	18,6	100,0	
Missing	System	48	81,4		
Total		59	100,0		

**Degree \* Advantage compared to German students with German degree Crosstabulation**

		AdvantageDegree			Total	
		yes	no	maybe		
Degree	Bachelor	Count	9	17	22	48
		% within Degree	18,8%	35,4%	45,8%	100,0%
		% within AdvantageDegree	81,8%	85,0%	78,6%	81,4%
		% of Total	15,3%	28,8%	37,3%	81,4%
Master		Count	2	3	6	11
		% within Degree	18,2%	27,3%	54,5%	100,0%
		% within AdvantageDegree	18,2%	15,0%	21,4%	18,6%
		% of Total	3,4%	5,1%	10,2%	18,6%
Total		Count	11	20	28	59
		% within Degree	18,6%	33,9%	47,5%	100,0%
		% within AdvantageDegree	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
	% of Total	18,6%	33,9%	47,5%	100,0%	



**Semester \* ApplicationGermany Crosstabulation**

		ApplicationGermany		Total
		yes	no	
Semester 6	Count	6	14	20
	% within Semester	30,0%	70,0%	100,0%
	% within ApplicationGermany	100,0%	33,3%	41,7%
	% of Total	12,5%	29,2%	41,7%
Total	Count	6	42	48
	% within Semester	12,5%	87,5%	100,0%
	% within ApplicationGermany	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
	% of Total	12,5%	87,5%	100,0%

**Application for a Master in Germany**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	6	12,5	12,5	12,5
	no	42	87,5	87,5	100,0
Total		48	100,0		

**Admission for a Master in Germany**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	5	10,4	10,4	10,4
	no	38	79,2	79,2	89,6
	maybe	5	10,4	10,4	100,0
Total		48	100,0		

**Application for a job in Germany**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	10	16,9	16,9	16,9
	no	49	83,1	83,1	100,0
	Total	59	100,0	100,0	

Admission for a job in Germany		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	7	11,9	11,9	11,9
	no	49	83,1	83,1	94,9
	maybe	3	5,1	5,1	100,0
	Total	59	100,0	100,0	

**Application for a job \* Degree Crosstabulation**

			Degree		Total
			Bachelor	Master	
WorkingGermany	yes	Count	6	4	10
		% within WorkingGermany	60,0%	40,0%	100,0%
		% within Degree	12,5%	36,4%	16,9%
	no	% of Total	10,2%	6,8%	16,9%
		Count	42	7	49
		% within WorkingGermany	85,7%	14,3%	100,0%
	Total	% within Degree	87,5%	63,6%	83,1%
		% of Total	71,2%	11,9%	83,1%
		Count	48	11	59
Total	% within WorkingGermany	81,4%	18,6%	100,0%	
	% within Degree	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	
	% of Total	81,4%	18,6%	100,0%	

**Degree with Cum Laude**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	10	16,9	16,9	16,9
	no	49	83,1	83,1	100,0
	Total	59	100,0	100,0	

Admission for a job in Germany * Degree Crosstabulation			Degree		Total
			Bachelor	Master	
AdmissionWorking	yes	Count	3	4	7
		% within AdmissionWorking	42,9%	57,1%	100,0%
		% within Degree	6,2%	36,4%	11,9%
		% of Total	5,1%	6,8%	11,9%
	no	Count	43	6	49
		% within AdmissionWorking	87,8%	12,2%	100,0%
		% within Degree	89,6%	54,5%	83,1%
		% of Total	72,9%	10,2%	83,1%
	maybe	Count	2	1	3
% within AdmissionWorking		66,7%	33,3%	100,0%	
% within Degree		4,2%	9,1%	5,1%	
	% of Total	3,4%	1,7%	5,1%	
Total	Count	48	11	59	
	% within AdmissionWorking	81,4%	18,6%	100,0%	
	% within Degree	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	
	% of Total	81,4%	18,6%	100,0%	

#### Degree \* Degree with Cum Laude Crosstabulation

			CumLaude		Total
			yes	no	
Degree	Bachelor	Count	8	40	48
		% within Degree	16,7%	83,3%	100,0%
		% within CumLaude	80,0%	81,6%	81,4%
		% of Total	13,6%	67,8%	81,4%
	Master	Count	2	9	11
		% within Degree	18,2%	81,8%	100,0%
		% within CumLaude	20,0%	18,4%	18,6%
	% of Total	3,4%	15,3%	18,6%	
Total	Count	10	49	59	
	% within Degree	16,9%	83,1%	100,0%	
	% within CumLaude	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	
	% of Total	16,9%	83,1%	100,0%	

**Dutch “cum laude” can be seen as equal to German “summa cum laude”**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly disagree	10	16,9	16,9	16,9
disagree	12	20,3	20,3	37,3
neither	19	32,2	32,2	69,5
agree	6	10,2	10,2	79,7
strongly agree	12	20,3	20,3	100,0
Total	59	100,0	100,0	

N	Valid	59
	Missing	0
Mean		2,9661
Std. Deviation		1,35145
Minimum		1,00
Maximum		5,00