

# The Challenges of Internationalization from Foreign and Local Students' Perspectives: The Case of Management School

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The purpose of this qualitative case study is to discern the issues pertaining to different dimensions of internationalization from the perspectives of both foreign and local students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 foreign, and 13 local students. The results show that there is a dissonance between policy makers and implementers, and the students themselves on "what a truly international higher education organization" in fact is. Moreover, the results suggest that asymmetrical aims of local and foreign students endanger fulfillment of the academic, social, and cultural rationales behind internationalization. Fulfilling the rationales of internationalization depends not only the adaptability of foreign students to local conditions but also on the priorities, choices and level of commitment of local students, administrative staff, and faculty members to the imperatives of internationalization.

Key words: higher education, internationalization, foreign students, study abroad, management of internationalization

Being one of the top issues on the agendas of higher education organizations (HEOs), internationalization has increasingly been gaining the attention of educational researchers. Several scholars elaborated on the concept of internationalization (e.g., Enders, 2004; Deem, 2001; Huisman, Maassen, & Neave, 2001; Teichler, 1999, 2004), and advanced political, economic, academic, cultural, and social rationales behind internationalization (e.g., Healey, 1998; Shepherd, Monk, & Fortuijn, 2000; Haigh, 2002), and

documented the approaches to internationalization (e.g., Denman, 2001; Knight, 1999; Kondakci, Van den Broeck, & Devos, 2006; McBurnie, 2000).

It can be argued that macrolevel horizontal analyses dominate the current literature on internationalization in higher education. Macrolevel horizontal analyses on internationalization of higher education share one or a combination of the following qualities: (a) conceptualizing internationalization as a macrolevel policy issue; (b) focusing on traditional destinations of foreign students that are economically developed, Anglophone countries with Anglo-Saxon higher education systems; (c) focusing on academic issues and leaving less room for other issues such as social and managerial issues; and (d) focusing on the perspectives of foreign students only. These horizontal analyses have helped to identify the boundaries of internationalization in higher education. Nevertheless, previous empirical and conceptual analyses have been criticized for leaving behind several blind spots in the

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discussions of internationalization (Enders, 2004).

Vertical analyses on the level, context, and scope of analysis are essential in order to reveal the complexities of internationalization. First, there is a need for more microlevel analyses focusing on implementation of internationalization process and experiences of the students, academics, and administrators in the process. In the literature, there are several organization-level analyses. However, all of the organizational level analyses are not necessarily microlevel analyses. In some cases these analyses address policy issues (e.g., Stromquist, 2007). The microlevel perspective advanced in this study does not simply analyze the process of internationalization at the level of organization. Rather, it suggests covering the experiences of the real owner of the process, namely foreign and local students, academicians, administrative staff, and top management members. Such analyses are likely to help us to better understand the evolutionary stages in students' experiences (Grey, 2002).

Second, there is a need for analyses with a broader scope, covering multiple dimensions. In the literature, there is a general agreement that foreign students are disadvantaged (Devos, 2003; Ultsch & Rust, 2001). However, there is little interest in revealing the underlying reasons of the disadvantaged position of foreign students. Some scholars suggested the failure of foreign students to adapt to host HEO's study environments as source of disadvantage (Wende, 1996; Ledwith & Seymour, 2001; MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003). Some other scholars suggested that foreign students are disadvantaged because their English language skills are limited (Collingridge, 1999; Fortuijn, 2002). However, cultural, social, and daily life experiences of foreign students have attracted the attention of scholars to a relatively lesser extent. More importantly, previous analyses tend to analyze these dimensions as fragmented and mutually exclusive issues. With the exception of the work of Tamaoka, Ninomiya, and Nakaya (2003), which investigated the factors affecting foreign students' satisfaction in Japan, there is little interest in revealing the interplay among multiple dimensions pertaining to foreign students' experiences. Hence, previous analyses yield only a partial picture regarding foreign students' experiences.

Third, there is a need to analyze students' experiences in the non-Anglophone and non-traditional destinations of

foreign students. The majority of studies and comments focus on traditional destinations of foreign students such as the USA, the UK, and Australia. These countries share common characteristics such as having Anglo-Saxon higher education systems, speaking English, and having developed economies. On the other hand, a limited number of studies in non-Anglophone settings try to address the issue as a major policy issue. For example, Murphy (2007) analyzed the case of Mexico. However, recent developments in different parts of the world suggest that the phenomenon of internationalization cannot be confined to economically developed Anglophone countries with Anglo-Saxon higher education systems. Reasons such as political developments and a decline in the attractiveness of the USA as a destination for higher and post-graduate education (Lee & Rice, 2007; McCormack, 2005), regional and inter-country cooperation (e.g., cooperation among Asia-Pacific countries) (Li & Bray, 2007; Pokarier, 2006), unionization and regional agreements for student exchange in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region (Denman, 2001; Huisman & Wende, 2004), and the increasing demand for higher education as a result of fast economic growth in Asia-Pacific countries (e.g., China, India, and South Korea) suggest that analyses on internationalization of higher education cannot be limited to countries that speak English, have Anglo-Saxon higher education systems, and have developed economies. Hence, there is a need for more empirical analyses on foreign students' experiences in economically developing, non-Anglophone and non traditional destinations of foreign students.

Finally, there is a need to investigate both foreign and local students' perspectives comparatively. Studies in the literature tend to report the experiences of foreign students and ignore those of local students, even though the internationalization context is formed by these two groups of students together. Foreign and local students' need to interact, cooperate, and share a common context on campus. This study is one of the first attempts to cover the perspectives of both local and foreign students comparatively.

The four points mentioned above suggest that there is a gap in the literature on the internationalization of higher education. New analyses on students' experiences considering these four points simultaneously may help to capture the complexities of internationalization. Such

analyses might give insights into the underlying reasons of the problems in academic, social, and cultural interactions among the students in international HEOs. As a result, HEOs and policy makers might be able to get clearer insights into the degree to which the academic, social, and cultural rationales of internationalization are being met. In the literature there are seldom analyses on social interaction, and academic and cultural exchange between foreign and local students. In addition, macrolevel analyses do not yield concrete suggestions to HEOs for implementing their internationalization strategies. Internationalizing HEOs are confronted with problems in the student enrollment process, the teaching-learning process in the classroom, student services, and transactional processes related to management of internationalization. How these problems emerge and what solutions are provided to these problems is instructive for HEOs in implementing their internationalization process. Exchanging such experiences in implementation of internationalization with other internationalizing HEOs is a major step to developing an implementation theory of internationalization.

Considering the limitations of previous research, the purpose of this study is to discern academic, social, cultural, and managerial issues in internationalization from the perspectives of both foreign and local students in a non-Anglophone country. For this purpose, we first analyzed the perspectives of these two groups of students in terms of an ideal international HEO and their assessments on the internationalization level of their current school, the Vlerick Leuven-Ghent Management School (VLGMS). Subsequently, we explored the issues pertaining to the academic, social, and cultural experiences of the students. Finally, the study revealed issues related to management of the internationalization process from the perspectives of the students.

## Method

This study was designed as a qualitative case study. The basic qualities of case study design make it suitable for studying multiple dimensions of internationalization. It is believed that in settings where contextual conditions are pertinent to the phenomenon under inquiry, the case study method proves to be an appropriate design choice. Unlike an

experiment, which separates the phenomenon from its context, case study strategy is effective in capturing the social phenomena with its different dimensions and the interconnectedness of these dimensions in a specific context (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 1994). On the other hand, qualitative research has increasingly been proving its worth in studying social phenomena (Patton, 2002). Social phenomena are not concrete, but are the projections of human imagination (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Qualitative research techniques are powerful in capturing human imagination because they enable direct involvement of the researchers in pursuit of the meaning of social phenomena.

### *The Case*

This study was conducted at the VLGMS, which is located in Flanders, Belgium. The region of Flanders is located in the north part of Belgium and contains a Dutch speaking Flemish population. The region is located at the crossroads of the north-south and east-west axes in Europe. It is one of the most densely populated and economically developed regions in Europe. In addition to these qualities, the geographical proximity of the region to the European Union's capital, Brussels, has made its universities some of the most attractive destinations for foreign students recently in Europe.

The VLGMS operates in three different campuses, two of them are located respectively in Ghent and Leuven, Belgium and one of them is located in St. Petersburg, Russia. The VLGMS was founded with the mission of promoting postgraduate executive management education in Belgium in 1953. In 1980, it entered into a consolidation period of institutionalizing its programs within its parent university, Ghent University. This phase continued until 1988 when it became a semi-autonomous institution. In the early 1990s, the second consolidation period started, and continued until it gained autonomy from Ghent University. During the same period the VLGMS merged with Katholieke Universiteit Leuven's related departments. Being backed by two powerful and historic universities of the country is a strength for the VLGMS. Currently there are around 400 students enrolled in MBA and master programs at the School. Since its foundation, the HEO has been able to attract students from more than 53 different countries. The School has over 10,000 active alumni in 75 different

countries.

The VLGMS offers seven MBA programs in its three campuses. Only one of these programs is in Dutch. Besides, the School offers four master programs in general, marketing, and finance management.

The VLGMS follows a unique strategy in research as well. Although VLGMS has declared interests in 10 knowledge domains, it has specified three basic spearheads in which it concentrates its research. In the documentation of VLGMS, a spearhead is defined as a domain in which VLGMS has gained particular competence and on the basis of which it wants to differentiate itself. *Corporate Social Responsibility, Doing Business in Europe, and Technological Venturing* are the three research spearheads of the VLGMS. The doctoral programs of the VLGMS are embedded in its parent universities.

In 1998, VLGMS stated its ambition of figuring among the top management schools in the world. Recently VLGMS succeeded in climbing up in the rankings of the Financial Times (ranked 32 worldwide in executive education) and of the Economist (its full-time MBA programs are ranked 22 worldwide). VLGMS holds three main international accreditations: the American Association of Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the British Association of MBAs (AMBA), and the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) quality labels.

The VLGMS has been able to establish and sustain collaborative activities with several international schools located in different parts of the world.

Finally, the VLGMS is involved in several social responsibility projects worldwide. Among several of these projects, the Xavier Institute of Development Action & Studies (XIDAS) in Jabalpur, India is an interesting example. XIDAS aims to contribute to the development of rural regions by providing research, project assessment, training courses, and coaching to new projects.

These entire accomplishments make VLGMS an outstanding management school. Being located in an economically developed but small and non-Anglophone country, which is not a traditional destination of foreign students, and being able to attract fee-paying students from all over the world, are some of the qualities making its internationalization strategy of interest to us. The School welcomed this study as part of its ongoing effort to improve the quality of their educational processes and

internationalization. It would be only fair to mention that this research took place some years ago (2002) and that in the meantime the School has made a lot of progress in its internationalization strategy.

### *The Participants*

A purposeful sampling strategy was used in selecting the informants. The unequal number of foreign and local students forced the researchers to follow two sub-strategies of purposeful sampling. Concerning foreign students, all foreign students were invited to the interviews. The ones who responded positively were interviewed. Concerning local students, a snowball technique was followed in selecting the informants. Table 1 depicts the detailed list of the informants of the study.

Table 1  
*Informants and Their Country of Origin*

Country of origin	Number of student
Bangladesh	1
Canada	1
China	5
Colombia	1
Greece	1
Philippines	1
Poland	1
Portugal	2
Slovakia	1
Spain	1
Taiwan	2
The Netherlands	1
Turkey	2
UK	1
USA	1
Belgium	13
TOTAL	35

### *Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis*

Interviews were conducted in order to collect the data.

A semi-structured interview guide that involves questions about the students' perception of the internationalization in the VLGMS and their academic, social and cultural experiences was developed. "What do you think about the curriculum you are offered?" "What kind of problems have you experienced until now?" "What kind of problems have you experienced because of cultural differences" are some of the questions asked to the students.

We carried out the data analysis process according to data reduction, verification and display procedure (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, before transcription, we listened to the recordings. Subsequently, we transcribed the recordings verbatim. These two steps increased our familiarity with the data. Second, we coded the transcriptions. The following codes illustrate the codes used in coding process: *Aca-teaching staff* (+) is a code referring to the academic dimension which indicates positive perceptions about teaching staff; *Soc-intperint* (-) is a code referring to the social dimension which indicates negative perceptions of interpersonal interaction. Finally, we identified the common themes and we wrote the results in a narrative report.

In the results section of this study, four abbreviations were used in displaying illustrative quotations for the themes. They are: FSMS, Foreign master student; FSMBA, Foreign MBA student; LSMS, Local master student; LSMBA, Local MBA student.

## Results

We organized the results of this study in two main sections (see table 2). The first section covers the themes on definition of an ideal HEO and their assessment of internationalization level of the VLGMS. The second section presents themes on academic, social, managerial and cultural issues from the perspectives of both foreign and local students.

### *Ideal International HEOs and the Internationalization of VLGMS*

*Ideal internationalized HEO.* During the interviews we asked both foreign and local respondents to describe a truly international HEO. Definitions of both foreign and local students suggest a critical mass of foreign students and

faculty, academic content covering international topics, and cultural diversity within the school as three essential qualities of a truly international HEO. Concerning cultural diversity, both groups of students implied that such diversity is desirable when it is harmonious and promotes cross-cultural understanding and learning rather than perpetuating ethnocentric tendencies. The students believe that these qualities are essential for creating an environment in which everyone can equally benefit from the academic programs provided. One of the students said, "[In a truly international HEO] foreign students also have the feeling that they learn what the others learn. There is no advantage for one nationality" (LSMS).

Table 2  
*Common Themes Pertain to Student Experiences in the Context of Internationalization*

Common themes	Issues
Elements of an ideal international school	Foreign students & faculty
	International content
	Cultural diversity
Internationalization level	Lack of diversity
	Meeting expectations
	Mindset change
	Facilities and design
Academic processes	Shift in the study environment
	Teamwork
	English language skills
	Content of the programs
Social interaction	Bounded social interaction
	<i>Local students' lifestyle</i>
	<i>Local students' orientation</i>
	<i>Language preference of local students</i>
Cultural interaction	<i>Lack of managerial support</i>
	Cultural mismatch
	Lack of recognition of cultural differences
Managerial processes	Student services
	Student representation
	Using local language in common

*Internationalization of the VLGMS.* We also asked the respondents to assess the internationalization level of the VLGMS. For this purpose we gave an ideal definition of international education to the respondents and asked them if they find it at the VLGMS. Out of 35 students, 32 students made critical remarks about whether the ideal definition existed at the VLGMS. Their reports indicated that the VLGMS still had a long way to go in its internationalization process.

The students advanced different reasons behind this perception. First of all, both groups of respondents indicated a lack of diversity as one of the reasons. They indicated that small numbers of foreign students and foreign faculty weakens the international character of the School. Secondly, the respondents indicated that the School was not ready to meet all of their expectations. Students stated that they had developed their expectations mainly based on the brochure of the VLGMS. However, arriving at the VLGMS the reality was not the same as the expectations they had built up on the basis of the brochure. It is essential to note that foreign and local students advanced different types of expectations. Foreign students' expectations were centered around an international character, academic processes, and extracurricular activities whereas local students' expectations centered around career issues. Third, both foreign and local students indicated the need for mindset change on the part of the local administrative and academic staff members to operate on a higher international level. Students believe that operating with a local mentality weakens internationalization at the School. Foreign students expressed the sentiment that local administrative and academic staff members have difficulty in switching their minds from a local orientation into an international orientation. They believe that this leads to lack of awareness about internationalization. Students expect every staff member (administrative and academic) to emanate an international attitude in their practices. One student said "I do not feel that they [academic staff] really are hard on it. Especially in the courses, the cases they gave and the texts they teach...because they sometimes gave texts in Dutch and it is a very serious issue" (FSMS).

Finally, the respondents indicated that some facilities reflect a local understanding and do not promote diversity. Limitations on the use of ICT facilities and a lack of language support systems in ICT for the characters of Asian languages are some of the issues highlighted by the students

concerning the facilities. According to the students, the design of these facilities reflects local traditions. For example, the AZERTY keyboards are used only in some Western European countries. A Chinese student expressed the feeling that students coming from different parts of the world may confront problems in ICT facilities. The School expects foreign students to adapt to its local design rather than designing itself according to diverse students.

### *Academic, Social, Cultural and Managerial Issues*

*Issues in academic processes.* The findings suggested four issues in the academic experiences of the students. First of all, the students implied shifting the study environment as a challenge in their academic experiences. Foreign students expressed some discomfort with the teaching and interaction styles of the teaching staff. In particular, they expressed their desire for more personal interaction with the teaching staff. Secondly, concerning participation in the classes, foreign students hinted that they made limited contribution to classes. They tend to be followers rather than actively participating, advancing comments or asking questions in the classes. They indicated that shifting the study environment perpetuates other personal obstacles curbing their contributions to the classes (i.e., hesitating to stand out). One student from Taiwan said,

...because 30 people are Belgian, and they feel like "ok here she comes again". For me it is something I want to express...to make them know that there are other realities and other ways of working and thinking. That's a bit hard (FSMS).

Local students reported their observations on the lack of contribution by foreign students to the sessions. They attributed the reason for foreign students' limited contributions to low academic performance. One student said, "The second is performance, as I said there have been some people [foreign students] that are not ready for the MBA" (LSMBA).

Secondly, teamwork emerged as another important issue in academic processes. The expressions of the interviewees suggest that teamwork in multinational/multicultural classes is a complex issue which has social as well as academic connotations. The interviewees suggest that local students prefer to form nation-based homogenous

teams. Obviously, foreign students do not have this choice. Foreign students indicated that this tendency of group formation leads to the feeling of being a minority in teamwork, as the following quotation illustrates,

They [local students] are very similar and if you think in a different way then you are always wrong. It is a bit [of a] luxury to think differently. In such situations I give up. Sometimes I insist if I really disagree with the things that they [local students] do...sometimes it works, sometimes it does not. But I do not want to be the devil in the group. Most of the time I give up (FSMS).

The interviews suggest that the preference of local students concerning teamwork is related to their beliefs about the low academic skills and capacity of foreign students. As indicated in the previous theme above, local students distrust the academic skills and the capacity of foreign students. Locals implied that foreign students are accepted to the School through a biased enrollment process because of the desire to improve the international character of the School and to get international accreditations. This is one of the reasons why local students ask for personalized teamwork assessment. The following quotations illustrate the perspective of local students about the academic performance of foreign students,

The only thing I will suggest which I know did not happen until now is better screening of international students because they only use a letter and a GMAT and compared with other universities it is not strict at all. It is easy to get in for foreign students (LSMBA)

There is also the general idea that international people are allowed into the program just because of their internationality, because it is good for the VLGMS credit and not because they are really excellent people (LSMS).

Thirdly, English language skills emerged as another issue in academic processes. At the VLGMS, in nine Masters and MBA programs, out of eleven, the language of instruction is English. Besides this, English was accepted as the official language of several administrative processes (i.e., meetings, documentation). Both groups of students indicated that the use of English as a common language was still problematic. However, two groups of students

highlighted different problems related to English as the common language.

First of all, both foreign and local students indicated that English language skills of different groups at the School had to be improved. Interestingly foreign students complained about the low English language skills of foreign students as well as that of academic and administrative staff. Foreign students stated that foreign students speak with different accents that make communication difficult. Secondly, both foreign and local students indicated that low English language skills hinder the academic processes, as indicated in the following quotation,

As far as I heard from the Asians they feel like they are a bit hindered by not feeling comfortable speaking in a group in a language they do not [speak] that well or easily in... some students do not understand their questions. It is too bad. So I think for some students the level is not sufficient to really cooperate in the class. In a sense, it hinders the acquisition (LSMBA).

In addition, foreign students mentioned the wide use of the local language in field practice and term projects. In those cases they had to rely on their local peers. They stated that in these cases their learning is a secondary learning process because they were not directly involved in Dutch language dominated field practices and projects. One foreign student said,

I really feel uncomfortable when I am not involved in the practices...In the second project we are in groups of seven. That was an issue. Now there are interviews but we are not participating, but we could not even try because our colleagues said "those people prefer to do it in Dutch". That's the way they work (FSMS).

Contrary to this perspective, local students expressed the feeling that the problem is related to the English language skills of foreign students. They indicated that the problem, to a large extent, was caused by the low English language skills of foreign students. Local students expressed the feeling that incidences like using examples and case studies in Dutch are minor practices and over exaggerated by foreign students.

Finally, the content of the programs emerged as another issue in terms of the academic processes. Foreign and local students emphasized the need to adapt the content

of the programs. However, in their assessments, foreign and local students expressed different aspects that need to be adapted. Foreign students purely concentrated on the international relevance of the content of the programs. Foreign students indicated that the programs reflect a limited international focus. The frequency of local examples given by teaching staff, the local cases taught in the programs and projects in local companies foster this belief on the part of foreign students.

On the contrary, local students' evaluations of the content do not concentrate on the international character of the programs. They complained about the theoretical content, demanding character of the programs and missing aspects of the programs (i.e., creativity training, hard science courses) as sources of discomfort with the content of the programs.

*Issues in social interaction.* Social interaction is another important dimension of study abroad which may facilitate or hinder academic acquisition. In this study the respondents pointed to the bounded nature of social interaction between foreign and local students. This type of interaction suggests that foreign and local students create their social territories and each group of students tends to homogenize in these social territories. One foreign student said, "I work with a group of six when there are other five Belgian students they really sit together, sometimes they are bothered (if) there is someone else because they cannot speak Dutch" (FSMS).

The interviewees suggested several common underlying reasons behind bounded social interaction. First of all, local students' lifestyle emerged as a reason behind lack of interaction between foreign and local students. The respondents stated that local students live in other cities in Belgium and in their free time (i.e., vacations, weekends) they go home. Therefore, they miss the chance of meeting foreign students for a free time activity. As a result, foreign students tend to group together for such activities. Secondly, local students are academically oriented. Their primary concern is accomplishing academic tasks rather than forming social relations with foreign students. Their priority focuses on coping with the intensive and challenging nature of the program. Foreign students interpreted this attitude of local students as unwillingness to interact with them. One foreign student stated, "But I mean on personal interaction it

is the other problem... [whenever] talking to those people they can be colleagues but they cannot become friends because they are so much distant and reserved ... You cannot reach them" (FSMS).

Third, local students claimed that foreign students go through adaptation problems. They claimed that these problems limit foreign students' ability to integrate into life in Belgium including the School context. Consequently, social interaction between foreign and local students is hindered. Local students find foreign students to be slow adapters, shy and introvert. Two local students said that,

I have the impression that they do not feel really comfortable here, they feel sometimes isolated and that's normal because they are alone here. They do not have their friends and so on...I have the impression that they do not do a lot to come to us, so we have to make a lot of efforts to go to them, and we understand that, I am really motivated to do so but not everyone [is] (LSMS).

Sometimes it seems that they [are] apparently not integrated very well throughout the year and they are very anxious about it and in the end sometimes they [have] very strange reactions in groups, maybe we do not understand [them] (LSMS).

Fourth, the students indicated English language skills as another issue behind bounded social interaction. However, foreign and local students highlighted different dimensions of the language issue. Local students indicated that the low mastery level of the common language by foreign students as one of the reasons behind bounded social interaction. Local students claimed that foreign students from particular national backgrounds have low mastery levels of the common language and they feel more comfortable in socializing with each other rather than interacting with other students. Whereas, foreign students claimed that language preferences of local students is the reason behind bounded social interaction. Foreign students indicated that local students prefer to use Dutch in social contexts. This pattern of language preferences perpetuate further the bounded social interaction between foreign and local students, as the following quotation illustrates,

But it is what I told you before we are [a] minority, we are five people so even if you want [to], it is sometimes impossible because they always switch to



Dutch they [are] always speaking Dutch and I feel lots of times excluded (FSMS).

Finally, foreign students indicated a lack of managerial support for improving social interaction between local and foreign students. Typical initiatives and practices in international HEOs were at their infancy at that time in the School. For example, intercultural events were not so frequent in the School. Besides this, the idea of having an active international student organization was being discussed on the board of the School. Foreign students believed that the management of the School had to take measures to foster the awareness of local members about the international character of the School. They suggested more frequent use of English both in academic and social contexts, publishing the School magazine in English and more use of English in the website of the School as some managerial measures to improve social interaction in the School.

*Issues in terms of cultural differences.* The results showed that cultural differences between foreign and local students are evident in the School. As foreign students perceive Belgian culture as closed and inflexible, Belgian students perceive foreign cultures as reserved and introvert. The perceptions of the students about the opposite culture suggest that there is lack of recognition of cultural differences on the part of both foreign and Belgian students.

The findings suggest that lack of recognition of cultural differences leads to treating every student the same way. Students, local and foreign ones, and staff have to learn that the 'expressions' they use, have sometimes a completely different impact dependent upon the nationality of the student. Confronted with local customs, some foreign students do feel shocked. The following quotation from a Chinese student indicates the problem of lack of cultural recognition between foreign and local students, "...You shouldn't use hard words against others when you are not familiar with each other...I was very angry with such comments" (FSMBA).

The results of the study showed that foreign and Belgian students do not attribute equal importance to recognition of cultural differences. Interview results with Belgian students indicate that they have limited understanding about the challenges of their foreign peers concerning living and interacting in a different culture. In

fact, Belgian students implicitly or explicitly stated that their priority revolves around accomplishing academic tasks rather than developing an understanding of other cultures. This explains why foreign students advanced the impression of a lack of recognition of cultural differences on social interaction while Belgian students advanced the impression of cultural differences in terms of contributions to academic processes including classroom discussions and teamwork.

*Issues in managerial processes.* The respondents highlighted several issues related to managerial and organizational aspects of the School. First, both foreign and local students indicated services for foreign students (i.e., accommodation, guidance in visa procedures, municipal registration) were ill-structured. The respondents implied that foreign students rely on the help of their Belgian friends and individual professors. Although there was the program coordinatorship mechanism to deal with their problems, foreign students demanded the help of higher level staff (program directors) to tackle the problems related to student services. On the other hand, local students did not express similar demands. This is possibly related to different reasons such as being comfortable with the program coordinatorship mechanism, being familiar with the procedures and practices in their own country, and not having frequent problems related to student services. Their demands focused on career services, an issue which is not directly related to internationalization. Local students hinted that their basic concern is finding a good job.

Second, levels and types of student representation was found to be ineffective by both foreign and local students for two reasons. First, it was indicated that almost all of the student representatives were local students. Secondly, the students criticized the way that there was not a clearly defined role for the representatives. One student representative said,

For the student representative, my function was not really pointed out as being representative towards the School but more towards the students....It was not my function to observe the class and cooperate with the program coordinator or program director but I do it anyway. Sometimes some people are just too afraid or do not really dare to go to [the program director] or [the program coordinator] to say anything ....They

come to me and they say “you should go to [the program coordinator] and tell her that” (LSMS).

Finally, foreign students demanded more top management intervention for ensuring more frequent use of the common language, English, in common contexts such as social events (e.g., alumni events), the school magazine, and the school website. In contrast, local students were comfortable with policies and practices of the School related to language issues. This is related to the fact that they are in a good command of the common language, English. Only one of the local students stated the need for language translation services.

These managerial issues suggest that moving to a country that does not have a long-tradition of receiving foreign students, settling down and becoming ready for an academic experience is a challenging task unlikely to be accomplished without the organized support of the host institution.

## Discussion

This study was conducted at the VLGMS, one of the most prestigious management schools in Europe. The VLGMS pursues a worldwide internationalization strategy. It has campuses in different countries; it has earned three international accreditation standards; it is ranked among the top schools worldwide in the Financial Times and Economist rankings; it is involved in social responsibility projects in developing countries. In addition to these qualities, the VLGMS challenges one of the conclusions of Huang’s (2006) study that HEOs in China, Japan, and The Netherlands attract foreign students from neighboring countries. The VLGMS exhibits a strong ambition to recruit students from Asia-Pacific countries and the USA. The management of VLGMS believes that students from these countries may bring a cultural diversity to the School, which is particularly valued in management education. These specific qualities and practices of the School should be considered in discussing the results of this study.

### *The Ideal International HEO*

The students’ definition of an ideal HEO and their

assessment of VLGMS’ internationalization level give important insights into the satisfaction of the students in the context of internationalization. In this study the students indicated international content, cultural diversity and existence of foreign students and foreign faculty as the common defining standards of international HEOs. In other words, for the students, an international HEO is not one that only provides quality academic provisions but is also one that is populated with foreign students and foreign faculty. Cultural diversity as a defining criterion for international HEOs suggests that the physical existence of foreign students and foreign faculty is not enough to make a HEO international. Rather, both local and foreign constituencies are expected to function harmoniously in order to create fruitful diversity for both foreign and local students.

The students’ assessments about the internationalization level of the VLGMS suggest several other insights about the satisfaction of the students. First, a real international HEO needs to keep a balance of the foreign and local student population. Programs dominated by local students and leaving few seats to foreign students are likely to create a disadvantageous environment for the foreign students because in such cases local students tend to prefer to work and interact with each other. In addition, the students expect a certain number of foreign faculty in their programs. This indicates the students’ expectations to see different perspectives, theories and practices in management science. This expectation of foreign students is normal because they have career ambitions to get a job in international companies.

International reputation (i.e., taking place in international rankings) and ensuring high international standards (i.e., getting international accreditations) are not enough by themselves for fulfilling the satisfaction of foreign students. International reputation and high standards function as a means of attracting the students to the School. However, the satisfaction of the students largely depends on what they experience during their study. As suggested by the results of this study, academic provisions with local academic staff in a well designed physical environment is not enough to constitute a truly international HEO. Balanced foreign and local student numbers, foreign faculty and harmonious cultural diversity are essential defining characteristics of internationalized HEOs. In our case, between 2002 and the present, the School took this advice on board and these

suggestions seriously and invested heavily in creating a truly international environment.

The findings of our research suggest also that the attitudes of the academic and administrative staff form another element in the students' assessment of internationalization. The students expect the staff to be fully aware of the problems and opportunities raised by attracting students from another cultural background. Overall, the students hinted that the success of a HEO in internationalization process depends on switching the minds of its members from a local orientation into an international one and creating harmony between diverse students and the faculty population while ensuring a high quality of academic provision. Although methodological choices of this study limit the comparability of the results to those of Tamaoka et al. (2003), both studies are parallel in showing that academic experiences are important but not the sole aspect in judging the satisfaction of foreign students in their study abroad experience.

### ***Academic Processes***

The results of this study document the impact of internationalization on four basic dimensions of academic processes, and suggest some insights into the reasons for the disadvantaged status of foreign students in relation to the academic processes.

First, several scholars have indicated that the most immediate impact internationalization on foreign students is changing the study environment (e.g., Ledwith & Seymour, 2001; MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003; Wende, 1996). However, the literature reports little on the impact of changing the study environment. The results of this study showed that foreign students may have problems with teaching and the interaction styles of teaching staff. It is likely that foreign students are struggling more with the teaching styles and interaction patterns of the teacher than showing active involvement in the teaching process. In one-year study programs, the students have little time to adapt to the local study environment.

Similarly, educational traditions may have an impact on interaction with the teachers. In many societies the teacher is a prominent figure. The validity of what the teacher says or does is seldom questioned. This is totally different from what management schools are trying to do in

the classroom. Open discussions and challenging the view of the teacher are practices difficult to do for students with this background. As the results of this study also showed, many students with this background tend to reserve their alternative perspectives because of the fear of standing out in the group.

Second, the exchange between foreign and local students is one of the academic rationales of internationalization (Healey, 1998; Knight, 1999; Shepherd et al., 2000). This study shows that bringing foreign and local students together results in some challenges to the accomplishment of academic rationales of internationalization because the exchange of ideas, bringing different perspectives, and enriching discussions in teamwork are not always accomplished. Students are basically pragmatic in their approach to their studies. For example, local students' immediate purpose is to finish the study successfully rather than getting the perspective of students from different national and cultural backgrounds. Hence, local and foreign students tend to form their own homogeneous groups for teamwork. Sometimes local and foreign students are forced to form mixed groups. However, in this case, foreign students are scattered in different groups and local students dominate the groups. As suggested by several informants in this study, foreign students in these groups tend to reserve their contributions, reflecting practices peculiar to their own cultures.

The results suggest two novel insights on the issue of language in study abroad in a non-Anglophone country. First, it is interesting that foreign students (Anglophone and non-Anglophone ones) are also uncomfortable with their foreign peers' English language skills.

The foreign students did not mention an impact in relation to not being able to speak Dutch upon their academic performance, although it had an impact during some company visits. In some of these companies, local people speak Dutch. As a result, they could not benefit from these practices. For example, in a survey in a supermarket, they could not conduct interviews with the customers of the supermarket.

Finally, feedback about the international flavor of the academic practices differs between foreign and local students. Foreign students mention that there was a strong emphasis upon local content and asked for an increase of international cases. In contrast, local students did not

advance such criticisms or expectations. Perhaps this is related to the fact that foreign students expect top positions in international companies after getting their degrees, while most local students expect top positions in local companies.

The issues in the four domains of academic practices suggest that any internationalizing HEO needs to make some compromises in regards to foreign students, local students and academic staff. First, it is essential to inform foreign students about the study environment in the host country including assessment procedure, teaching styles, teaching materials, interaction patterns between students and teachers. The HEOs may install an online video recorded in a real teaching session on the website of the school in addition to the traditional printed brochures. Second, some measures need to be taken toward local students. It is evident that local students are not aware of their foreign peers' problems in relation to changing the study environment and language problems in projects and field trips. Considering all of these problems, the HEOs need to inform local students about these issues and give them the idea that they are going to study in an international HEO. Similarly, local faculty members need to take into account the foreign students' problems related to changing their study environment and language in projects and field trips. Likewise, faculty members need to consider the fact that teamwork may not run smoothly between foreign and local students. Accordingly, faculty members can encourage both foreign and local students to cooperate in teamwork, motivate foreign students to participate in classroom discussions, despite language problems, and redesign the content of teaching to include international topics, cases and examples.

### ***Social Interaction***

The results of this study suggest that social interaction between foreign and local students is limited. Social interaction, developing an understanding of otherness, and nourishing an international identity are suggested as some of the rationales of internationalization (Knight, 1999). However, social interaction between foreign and local students in most cases fails, which leads to the feelings of exclusion among foreign students (Ledwith & Seymour, 2001). This study suggests some insights on the reasons of limited social interaction. Orientation and priorities of local

students are suggested as two of the reasons behind limited social interaction between foreign and local students. Local students feel more comfortable speaking their native language. When foreign students join the group they have to force themselves to speak another language. More importantly, local students have a fear of humiliating foreign students in conversations because they do not know friendship patterns of different cultures. For example, they do not know which jokes are acceptable, and which are not for foreign students. Hence, they try to avoid this risk by interacting with home-country peers only.

Limited social interaction between local and foreign students is not always about personal preferences. Local students' life-style limits the interaction as well. Next to that, intensive academic tasks coupled with the local students' focus upon academic performance also limit the potential for social interactions.

All of these issues underline the importance of taking some essential measures for facilitating social interactions between foreign and local students. As suggested by foreign students in this study, the School management may encourage the students both to establish an international student organization and to organize more intercultural events. Although it is difficult to intervene with the life-style of local students, the School management can encourage local students to coach a foreign peer at the onset of the study period. This would facilitate adaptation of foreign students, help them with daily life issues, and form the basis for social exchange between local and foreign students. Tamaoka et al. (2003) also suggested having a good friend will help the cultural adaptation of foreign students. However, it is difficult to ensure continuity with these practices. Internationalizing HEOs need to develop institutionalized measures ensuring continuity for social interaction. Sponsoring an active international student organization is an example of such measures.

### ***Cultural Differences***

Internationalization of higher education is suggested as a way to develop respect for cultural diversity and counter-balance the homogenizing effects of globalization on national cultures (Knight, 1999). The results of this study suggest that one has to be very careful because the theory-in-use indicates that there are some limitations to cultural

interaction in practice. A cultural mismatch can exist between local and foreign students. This finding would not be interesting if both foreign and local students did not attribute similar negative qualities to the opposite culture. In our case, some foreign students described the host country's culture as closed and inflexible. Some local students used similar labels for describing foreign students' cultures. Both groups of students perceive the others as closed or introvert. Attributing negative qualities to the opposite culture breeds the detachment of the two groups of students, and hinders cooperation for academic purposes. In such cases, as MacKinnon and Manathunga (2003) stated, local culture remains dominant and foreign students' "capacity to contribute to the class from their experiences is greatly diminished, as are their learning opportunities" (p. 131).

### ***Managerial Processes***

In the literature managerial responsibility of the internationalizing HEOs is seldom highlighted by the scholars in their analyses on the students' experiences. However, the HEOs are responsible from building sound managerial and organizational measures for ensuring equal conditions for both local and foreign students. It is important to note that these practical issues are more challenging for foreign students in a non-Anglophone country, which has a limited tradition of receiving foreign students. When the institutionalized services are missing, foreign students tend to satisfy their needs through various uninstitutionalized ways (i.e., peers supports, help of a professor). Evidently, these obstacles can have some negative implications on the academic performance, social interaction and motivation of foreign students. Hence, the HEOs need to ensure institutionalized service for issues in and out of the campus. In addition, internationalizing HEOs need to make their international character more prominent by promoting English language use in common settings and selecting foreign students, in addition to the local one, as the student representatives for each program it offers.

In our case, the strategy of the School toward developing these services was an emergent one. Based on daily practices, emergent needs and problems, the School was able to identify the problems and needs of the students, craft solutions to these needs and finally institutionalize these solutions. Although an emergent strategy was not

effective in the short run (because of one year study programs), in the long run, the emergent strategy of the School was successful because it was flexible enough to identify and respond to emerging needs of the students. Rather than offering ready made services, which in most cases are not necessary, the School tailors the services needed by the students. This strategy of the School is instructive for internationalizing HEOs in non-Anglophone countries, which are not traditional destinations of foreign students.

### **Conclusions**

The results of the study suggest several insights into the issue of internationalization in higher education. First of all, the presumption that all HEOs are international is misleading. The VLGMS investigated as a case in this study has three international accreditations, ranked among top schools in the world and is able to attract students from all over the world. However, the statements of the students suggest that the School had to optimize many things to become even more international. This indicates a dissonance between policy makers on the one hand and the students on the other hand on "what a truly international HEO is." The policy makers and implementers invest in accreditations, rankings, and physical design. These are factors important to increase the reputation of HEOs and get the attention of the international educational community. Next to that the HEQs need to take some steps in order to make the study abroad experience for their students satisfactory. They have to invest heavily in facilitating open interactions between local and foreign students, facilitating sound interaction between professors and students, and improving the international content of the courses. Besides these, they need to breed harmonious cultural diversity in their campuses. Similarly, they are expected to get their local academic and administrative staff behind the internationalization process.

In addition, the study documented the obstacles in accomplishing academic, social, and cultural rationales of internationalization. This study suggests that local and foreign students develop asymmetrical aims for their studies. Foreign students hold a dual aim of gaining knowledge and expanding their cross-cultural experience. In contrast, local students hold a singular aim of securing academic

performance. Familiarity of local students with the educational system, social life and dominant culture in their home country gives them advantages over foreign students. Their advantageous position affects their priorities and choices in academic, social and cultural experiences during their study. They perceive their foreign peers to be incompetent; they prefer to work with their local peers in homogeneous teams; they prefer to speak their local language; and they don't attribute importance to international content. These choices and priorities lead to polarization of both foreign and local students in homogeneous territories. As a result, accomplishing several basic rationales of internationalization (i.e., accomplishing a cross-cultural learning and awareness, collating good practices, exchanging of ideas in heterogeneous groups, and developing skills and attitudes for functioning in an internationalized world, etc) is endangered. Hence, unlike the common arguments in the literature which imply that accomplishing rationales of internationalization depends on foreign students' adaptability, this study suggests that it also greatly depends on the priorities and choices of local students as well. Hence, in addition to encouraging foreign students to participate in academic and social processes (Ledwith & Seymour, 2001), it is essential to increase the awareness of local students about the international character of the HEOs. Besides this, teaching staff are expected to implement effective classroom management practices in order to deal with diversity. Such practices will help teaching staff to use inclusive teaching strategies, encourage foreign students to participate in the classes, promote collaboration between foreign and local students, and encourage forming mixed groups for teamwork.

We do not claim that accomplishing the rationales of internationalization is possible only by implementing classroom-level strategies. A general mistake in internationalization is related to the tendency of HEOs to recruit some foreign students into traditional programs in order to add some exotic tones to these programs. HEOs with such programs are described as "hybrid" organizations (Haigh, 2002, p. 52). Internationalization in higher education demands non-traditional programs designed by considering the needs of international students, offering international content, fostering diversity and facilitating intercultural understanding.

Another insight suggested by this study is related to

institutional accountability of internationalizing HEOs. There is a presumption that internationalization works automatically without any intentional managerial intervention. This approach ignores the academic, social, and cultural dimensions of internationalization. More importantly, this approach pushes foreign students into disadvantageous positions, and risks the potential for academic, social, and cultural exchange between foreign and local students. Institutional accountability requires the HEOs to assume responsibility of academic, social, and cultural wellbeing of both foreign and local students equally.

This study showed that internationalization requires assuring objective standards (i.e., accreditations, rankings, certain number of student population, international content, etc.) as well as subjective qualities (i.e., commitment of organizational members and harmonious diversity). These conclusions imply that solid management approaches are essential in designing and implementing an internationalization process. These approaches are essential for tackling the technical and human side of an internationalization process. Mobilizing financial resources to foster greater diversity of students and faculty, ensuring mastery of the common language of both local and foreign participants, getting the commitment of academic and administrative staff to the process are essential steps to be taken by the HEOs. These steps are likely to facilitate the accomplishment of the rationales of internationalization.

Several reasons make the insights derived from the VLGMS case valuable. First, the School is pursuing a worldwide internationalization strategy. It is trying to attract students from all over the world and particularly from Asia-Pacific countries. It is also trying to retain its strong ties with its alumni in this region. The motivation of these efforts of VLGMS is not a simple economic one. As a management school, the VLGMS is trying to attract students from these countries in order to bring cultural perspectives and management practices of these countries into its classrooms. The region inhabits the biggest developed (i.e., Japan) and fastest growing (i.e., China, India, South Korea) economies. These experiences are of tremendous educational value for management schools. Management schools are trying to build ties in different forms, ranging from joint programs with local HEOs to opening campuses in the region. In addition, recent data suggests that the tendency of foreign student flows is changing to the disadvantage of the

USA and to the advantage of Australia (McCormack, 2005). Europe is expected to be another attraction point of study abroad in addition to the traditional destinations, the USA, UK, and Australia. The flow of students from the Eastern countries to Europe is likely to grow. Hence, the exchange of Asian and European experiences of internationalization is becoming important in informing communities of higher education in these two regions. In the literature there are several national-level analyses on the issue of the internationalization of higher education in the Asia-Pacific region, mainly in regards to Australia, China, and Japan (e.g., Horie, 2002; Huang, 2006; Li & Bray, 2007). In addition, Tamaoka et al. (2003) conducted a microlevel analysis focusing on students' experiences in Japan. However, European experiences at the micro level have remained relatively less analyzed. This study, as a microlevel analysis, exchanges several insights from a European experience of internationalization with the wider world.

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Received August 31, 2007

Revision received February 25, 2008

Accepted July 9, 2008