

Integration between Dutch and international students: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic



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Summary

The main topic of this research is integration between international and Dutch students and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on this. Social integration can be defined as the level on which students adapt to the student culture at the University of Groningen, but also how students adapt outside of the learning setting. The goal of this research is to discover in what ways the pandemic influenced integration in Groningen. The study is based on a qualitative research method using interviews and a critical literature review. The sub-topics covered are the factors that influence integration in general, difficulties with integration before and during the pandemic, online education, and the future of integration when the pandemic will come to an end. From the results, we can conclude that mixed housing with Dutch and international students can be beneficial for integration, but also has a downside as we see a divide between Dutch and international students. Another result is that integration is not dependent on the language proficiency of Dutch or international students, but the insecurities of Dutch students to speak in English. Furthermore, the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic made integration harder than it was before the pandemic because of the online and hybrid education, the lack of face-to-face contact and the closure of public places. Recommendations for future research is to discover on which level the lack of social integration during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the mental health condition of students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

All over the world, the number of students that have a desire to study abroad keeps rising. Students want to study abroad because it brings multiple benefits. For example, it contributes to professional and personal development, they learn foreign languages and improve their language proficiency and it helps them prepare for living and working in a globalized world (Reinold, 2018). But also, universities can benefit financially and academically from international students. For example, in the case of Dutch universities, students from outside the EU pay higher tuition fees and therefore this group accounts for extra revenues for universities. On top of that, international students contribute to improving the quality and the reputation of the university because of competition between universities for the best students (Reinold, 2018).

At the University of Groningen, 24.3% of the students are international (RUG, 2020a). The different backgrounds of students can cause problems and challenges when they adapt to their host country and the university environment (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Merola et al, 2019). Also, housing, personal characteristics and the university play an important role in social integration between international and Dutch students. In this research, social integration can be defined as the level on which students adapt to the student culture at the university, but also outside of the learning setting (Rienties et al, 2012; Tinto, 1975). For example, this implies making friends, sharing accommodation with fellow students and active participation in a student association, but also having success in their studies (Kraemer, 1997; Wilcox et al, 2005). Several studies have shown that the integration of international students with local students has a positive effect on the students' satisfaction, academic success, and adaptation to a foreign country (Merola et al, 2019).

However, In February 2020, the first infection of COVID-19 was detected in the Netherlands. What was not known by then, is that eventually, this pandemic stood in the way of social integration between students. The pandemic went through several phases (Figure 1; Roller, 2020), where in the first phase, a few weeks after the first infection, the Netherlands went into lockdown. This meant that every Dutch citizen had to obey the precautions taken by the government such as no visitors at home, working from home, a curfew, and travel restrictions (Rijksoverheid, 2021a). Also, on the 16th of March, the University of Groningen closed its doors. That implied that every student had to take online classes immediately which limited the face-to-face contact between students. During the third and fourth phases, more integration was possible as public places opened up again and hybrid teaching was possible (Rijksoverheid 2021a; RUG 2020b). However, soon at the end of phase four, the infection rate went up and the Netherlands was in lockdown again (Coronadashboard, 2021; Rijksoverheid, 2021c). Social integration between students in these times was difficult if not impossible (Altissimo, 2020; Rijksoverheid, 2020a; Roller, 2020).

1.2 Research Problem

Even though social integration between students brings possible challenges, such as problems with speaking a second language and housing for international students, the COVID-19 pandemic made it for a great amount of time impossible for students to integrate with other students in Groningen because of the restrictions set by the government. The pandemic has been through several phases (Figure 1) where, in phases 1 and 2, little to no integration was possible. In phases 3 and 4 (Figure 1), more integration was possible as public places opened up again.

This research aims to discover how COVID-19 restrictions affect social integration between international students and Dutch students while studying at the University of Groningen. Because this research is centered in Groningen, it is important to find out which challenges international students and native students faced with regards to integration and the COVID-19 pandemic and in what ways the University of Groningen can help these students. The research explores different experiences from international and Dutch students on how they dealt with the restrictions.

The main question of this research is: *How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced social integration between international and Dutch students studying in Groningen?* The following sub-questions will help to answer this central question:

- 1) *What are the main factors that influence integration between native and international students in Groningen?*
- 2)
 - a) *In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic make integration difficult?*
 - b) *How did the associated online teaching at the University of Groningen impact integration between students?*
- 3) *What do students expect from integration possibilities in Groningen when restrictions will end?*

1.3 Structure of Thesis

The structure of this thesis will be as follows: At first, a critical literature review is executed by analyzing existing literature about the topic. Key themes are defined using literature, and articles will be discussed and compared with each other. A conceptual model is designed to visualize the relations between important themes. After this, the methodology section will explain what research method is used and how the researcher collected and determined the quality of the data. Subsequently, the researcher explains how the data is used and analyzed. The ethics of the research will also be explained and discussed. Accordingly, the results of the data will be presented through several chapters and will be linked to studied literature. All sub-questions will be answered in the results section. In the conclusion, the main research question will be answered, and a summary and a reflection of the research will be given. Furthermore, recommendations for future work will be presented and discussed.

Chapter 2: Theory

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In this research, social integration is defined as the level on which students adapt to the student culture of the host country, at the university and outside the university (Rienties et al, 2012; Tinto, 1975; Christie & Dinham, 1991). Closing friendships with other students and participating actively in student life are an important part of social integration (Kraemer, 1997; Wilcox et al, 2005). The definition of an ‘international student’ in this research is a student that decides to follow a study (or a part of) at an educational institution in a country that is not their home country (Den Boon, 2021). In this research, the educational institution is the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

Social integration between Dutch and international students then implies that contacts have been formed between the two groups of students. Taking classes together, but also meeting up with them outside the learning setting are indicators for the social integration between students.

2.1.1 Adjustment and language proficiency

First, it is important to examine factors that may influence integration. For international students that come to Groningen, it can be difficult to adjust to a new culture. The term adjustment is used to indicate whether a student senses specific problems in their new college environment (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). What can also play a role in integration is that international students are unfamiliar with the new culture, customs, and the norms and values of the host country. Because of this, students can clash with each other and do not feel connected (Rienties & Nolan, 2014).

Another stressor for integration between Dutch and international students can be their language proficiency. If students are not fluent enough in the language of the host country or English, it will affect the communication between local students and international students and therefore, making friends and understanding their study will be hard (Zhang & Zhou, 2010).

2.1.2 The housing situation

It might be that because of problems with communication, international students reach out to other students that are from the same home country and often socialize and stay together in student housing. Staying together with students with the same culture and language limits the communication between different students even further (Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Regarding student housing, international students often like to live nearby their school and sports facilities, often on the campus of the university (Nijënstein et al, 2014). But when all these international students live on the universities’ campuses, there is no integration with the students living in the city center and in that way, they do not broaden their networks with other students (Nijënstein et al, 2014).

What might also affect integration, is that the international student often doesn’t get accepted in a Dutch student house. In the Netherlands, it happens a lot that student houses are meant for ‘Dutch students only’. According to the Dutch students, the main reason for this is the language barrier, because when students are at home, they do not want to speak English the entire time. But international students disagree with this statement. Even when an international student can speak Dutch, international students still do not get accepted (Van Kampen, 2021; Luiten, 2018).

2.1.3. The University

Other than housing and language, the University can play an important role in social integration between students. According to Tinto (1975; 1993), social integration with fellow students is important for the success in the students' academic careers as it prevents dropouts during the programme. Working in mixed groups and being guided by so-called mentor groups can help students integrate with fellow students. Hence, the university is an important meeting place for social integration between students (De Boer & Winter, 2014). The goal of these mixed working groups is that students learn to integrate with native as well as international students, which develops skills that can be helpful when working in an international environment. However, it can also lead to dissatisfaction, as opinions on challenges within the working groups can differ, or group members do not participate as active as other members (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2017).

On top of this, being at the university can give students information about other social activities that are happening outside of the learning environment. Through meeting and talking to other students in between classes and in the halls of the university, students become more aware of extracurricular activities such as student associations and events (Christie & Dinham, 1991).

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid teaching was introduced at the University of Groningen. This meant that face-to-face contact had to be limited and online education was the norm for a great amount of time. Online education could lead to some difficulties for integration between students, as students are not as active in the online classes and refuse to turn on their cameras. When working in groups, students teamed up with students they already knew beforehand and ended up not making any new connections (Lakhal et al, 2020). But also, students likely struggle with the feeling that they are isolated in their rooms and suffer from the lack of face-to-face contact with teachers and peers, because of online education (Bowers & Kumar, 2015). Research has shown that the pandemic hurt students' academic performance, which is expressed in lower grades, trouble with concentration, and not feeling connected (Cellini, 2021).

2.1.4. Student life

In Groningen, participating in student life is a popular way to meet fellow students and establish friendships as there are many student- and study associations, sports clubs, and bars. Joining associations, clubs and going to events such as welcome weeks, allows Dutch and international students to connect and integrate with other students during their period of residence in a student city like Groningen (Enchinas, 2016; RUG 2021). That these activities outside the learning environment bring benefits for students, is confirmed by Christie and Dinham (1991). They state that activities outside the learning environment, such as student associations and sports clubs, are important for social integration between students, especially in the first year of their student life. Forming ties with other students is important, as research of Tinto (1975), has shown that students who have strong connections with other students are more likely to complete their program than students that have weaker connections. Yet, from 2020 onwards, the COVID-19 pandemic stood in the way of the possibilities for making new connections.

2.1.5 The COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic can be identified in four different phases. Figure 1 shows a timeline of these phases with their associated events that had a major influence on the life of students in Groningen. In the first stage, where not much was known about the pandemic, the government's main task was to respond to the pandemic (Roller, 2020). From the 16th of March in 2020, the University of Groningen had to close its doors and offered online education. This had a major impact on students, as other public places such as sports clubs and bars were also closed (Rijksoverheid, 2021a). Incoming international students faced difficulties as the pandemic influenced the inflow of international students because there was little to no exchange of students possible because of the closure of borders and problems with applying for visas and loans. Many international students decided to go in self-quarantine or return to their home countries (Slump & Roerdink, 2020).



In the second phase, universities and other businesses were following the government's advice to stay closed, and students were continuing to study from their homes to manage social distancing (Roller, 2020). However, after some time, there were some possibilities for relaxation of some measurements such as opening up bars and cafes (Rijksoverheid, 2021a). During this phase, the University of Groningen introduced hybrid teaching. This meant that most education was offered online, but with in-person small-scale classes or working groups where possible (RUG, 2020b). Unfortunately, the infection rate went up and a second lockdown came into force. A curfew was introduced which obliged every citizen in the Netherlands to stay in their homes between 9 PM and 4:30 AM. The goal of the curfew was to minimize social contacts which limit the spread of the virus (Rijksoverheid 2021a; Rijksoverheid, 2021b).

Phase 3 was all about the recovery and reopening of businesses, while still adhering to the measurements taken. The government sought possibilities for relaxing some of the restrictions such as ending the curfew and opening up public places. As can be seen in Figure 1, this was a process of several months in the Netherlands (Roller, 2020; Rijksoverheid 2021a).

In the fourth phase, the highly restrictive measures have almost been abandoned in the Netherlands (Roller, 2020; Rijksoverheid, 2021a). The 1,5-meter distance rule did no longer apply, and the University of Groningen could provide on-site lectures and workgroups under the condition of a maximum of 75

Figure 1: Timeline of events COVID-19 pandemic in NL (Rijksoverheid, 2021a; RUG, 2020b)

students. This meant that students could socialize and integrate with others again. However, quickly after the relaxation of the restrictions, the infections increased rapidly (Coronadashboard, 2021). The restrictions of 1,5-meter distance, wearing a facemask and the closure of public places came into force again (Coronadashboard, 2021; Rijksoverheid, 2021c).

2.2 Conceptual Framework

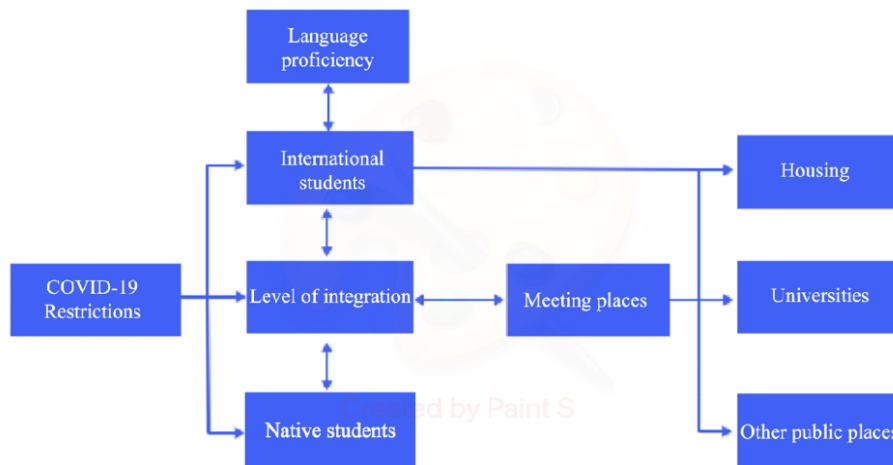


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

In Figure 2, several factors that influence the level of integration are presented. This conceptual model helps to gain a better understanding by showing links between the most important factors that influence integration and students during a pandemic. As the world is burdened by COVID-19 at times of this research, the pandemic and its restrictions have a direct influence on international and native students. Because of the pandemic, international students did not come to the Netherlands or return to their home countries for some time (Slump & Roerdink, 2020). The restrictions influenced both international and native students as there was limited face-to-face contact possible because of online education and the closure of public places (Rijksoverheid, 2021a). Accordingly, these factors influence the level of integration between native and international students. Furthermore, meeting places are an important factor for integration between students. An important meeting place for students is the University. It is a place to communicate and to study with other students (De Boer & Winter, 2014).

But due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the university is not accessible for students as well as other public places like sports clubs, and bars where students interact (Rijksoverheid, 2021a). The factor 'housing' is directly influenced by international students and is one of the important meeting places for students. When a group of international students live together, separated from Dutch students, they will not broaden their networks and get less in contact with native students. But when an international student lives in a house with students with native backgrounds, this will improve integration between the two groups because they feel more part of the Dutch student life (Koster, 2018). On the other hand, in some cases, international students are not accepted in Dutch student houses by Dutch students, so they don't get the chance to live with native students (Van Kampen, 2021; Luiten, 2018)

Furthermore, language proficiency is an important factor for international and Dutch students. If an international student does not speak the native language or when Dutch or international students do

not have a significant level of the English language, it affects communication with other people and because of that, the integration between students will be hard. Contrary, when there is no integration, or it is not possible, international, and Dutch students will not blend and do not improve their language proficiency (Zhang & Zhou, 2010).

2.3 Hypotheses

The first expectation of this research is that the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions had a negative influence on the integration between international and native students. The second expectation is that when in early Spring 2022 restrictions will end, international students expect that integration will be better. To see if these expectations can be confirmed, interviews will be conducted.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Qualitative research approach

Based on the nature of the sub-questions, a qualitative approach is used to collect primary data. A quantitative research method is not useful here, because this research has a very specific target population. This approach, using interviews as the data collection instrument, is useful to capture participants' experiences, opinions and how participants react to a certain situation. In-depth, open questions were asked that allowed for broad but detailed answers that include different experiences and perceptions of the participants. This increases the validity of the research, as the interviewer aimed to develop a deeper understanding by asking the participant for clarification and allowing the interviewee to steer the direction of the interview (McLeod, 2014; Pressbooks, n.d.). In Chapter 4, answers to the sub-questions 2a, 2b and 3 can be found. Sub-question 1 will also be answered in Chapter 4 through literature and is justified by the obtained qualitative data from the interviews.

3.2 Methods of data collection

To recruit international participants, social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook were used. However, not much interest was shown from international students on these platforms. Therefore, some international acquaintances were approached and by word-of-mouth communication, the number of suitable participants increased rapidly. For recruiting Dutch students, classmates, and friends from different faculties of the University of Groningen were approached. All follow an international bachelor's degree at the University of Groningen and both the international and Dutch students are at least in their third year. These students are most suitable because they follow courses together with international or Dutch students and were a student at the University of Groningen during all the phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once recruited a participant, a proposal for a time and date was made. When agreed on a time and date, the interview took place online, at the University of Groningen or in the Forum Building in Groningen. These locations were suitable for conducting interviews because these were familiar and neutral places for both Dutch and international students.

In total, 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 international and 8 Dutch students who belonged in the target group. These semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility because questions were adapted during the interview depending on the answers of the interviewee, as each participant may have a different opinion on the topic (Adams, 2015). All interviews lasted between 15 and 20 minutes each and were recorded using a mobile phone which all interviewees agreed upon. Characteristics of all interviewees can be found in Table 1.

| Interviewee: | Dutch/International: | Male/Female: | Study year: | Faculty of: |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | International | Female | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 2 | International | Female | 3 | Science & Engineering |
| 3 | International | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 4 | International | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 5 | International | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 6 | International | Female | 3 | Economics & Business |
| 7 | Dutch | Female | 5 | Economics & Business |
| 8 | Dutch | Female | 3 | Economics & Business |
| 9 | Dutch | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 10 | Dutch | Male | 3 | Economics & Business |
| 11 | Dutch | Female | 3 | Economics & Business |
| 12 | Dutch | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 13 | International | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 14 | International | Female | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 15 | Dutch | Female | 3 | Medicines |
| 16 | Dutch | Female | 3 | Economics & Business |

Table 1: Characteristics of the 16 interviewees

What limited the research is that 16 interviews were conducted while aiming at 20. Because interviews had to be conducted during an exam week there was a lack of interest of students to participate in an interview. After the exam week, there was not much time left for conducting more interviews due to time pressure. However, because of putting in more effort to reach a higher number of interviewees, enough interviews to answer the sub questions were conducted. All interviewees had different, but also shared experiences with integration between students, which made the data diverse and complete enough and allowed the researcher to discover patterns in the answers of the interviewees.

3.3 Data analysis

Once an interview was conducted, the interview was transcribed immediately. These transcripts were then printed and analyzed by hand. This meant that the interviews were read thoroughly and by using a coding scheme, important and reoccurring themes were labelled and highlighted. This showed the most important subjects and quotes. After this, the researcher was able to compare these subjects with the answers and opinions of other interviewees. In this way, the obtained data was organized and structured. Some questions from the interview guide could be answered with ‘yes’ and ‘no’ (Q1, Q4, Q6, Q10, Q11 & Q14). These questions are shown in Table 2 and helped to draw conclusions from these answers. For the questions that allowed for elaboration, answers were structured following the coding scheme. It was interesting to see if the main themes drawn from the interviews correspond or differ from the existing literature to confirm or deny the research its expectations. In the end, the goal of this analysis is then to find suitable answers to the research questions with the most important findings and reoccurring themes. The figures, tables, interview guide and all transcripts of the interviews can be found in the appendices (Appendix A to H).

3.4 Ethics

During the personal data collection, the interviewer accounted for a friendly, welcoming, and safe environment for the participants in which they can share their personal experiences and beliefs (Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009). The role that the researcher and the participants play is important for the quality of the data collection. The researcher/interviewer is neutral, whereas the participants share their specific experiences which form the content that needs to be studied by the researcher. The division of roles is hereby uniform and constant (Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009).

The researcher/interviewer is Dutch, female and student. This can influence the research in a way that the understanding of the experiences of international students might be hard to understand or to identify with. However, the researcher follows an international bachelor’s programme, which involves

a lot of communication and cooperation with international students. That way, the researcher is an insider and understands the experiences of international students better than an outsider.

Moreover, the participants are not required to answer each question the interviewer is asking. At the start of each interview, the interviewer asked permission to touch upon sensitive subjects. The interviewer aimed to let the interviewee feel comfortable during the whole interview and not feel pushed in any way. Respecting the privacy of the participants, complete anonymity will be ensured, and the research results were only used for educational research purposes. Another important ethical point is ensuring the health of the participants concerning COVID-19. Participants could choose between an online or in-field interview because of the situation. This granted the possibility to stay at home if they felt more comfortable with that.

Chapter 4: Results

After the data was analyzed, different opinions on integration and the integration during the pandemic came to light. To present the answers of the interviews in a comprehensible way, Table 2 shows the results of the questions that allowed the interviewees to answer with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’. In the following paragraphs, there will be referred back to this table and the rest of the results will be presented.

| Interviewee: | Dutch/International: | Q1: Integration | Q4: Language proficiency | Q6: Housing | Q10: Online education | Q11: Difficulties with integration | Q14: The University |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | International | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 2 | International | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| 3 | International | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| 4 | International | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| 5 | International | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| 6 | International | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 7 | Dutch | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| 8 | Dutch | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 9 | Dutch | No | Yes | Neutral | Yes | No | Yes |
| 10 | Dutch | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| 11 | Dutch | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 12 | Dutch | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 13 | International | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 14 | International | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 15 | Dutch | No | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 16 | Dutch | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

Table 2: Answers of interviewees to closed questions

4.1 Factors that influence integration

When asked whether the participants integrate with Dutch or international students, it revealed a dichotomy between two groups, which can be seen in Figure 3 and Table 2 (Q1). Namely, 7 out of the 16 interviewees indicated that they do not integrate with Dutch or international students, from whom 2 are international students (Interviewees 2 & 13, Appendix F) and 5 are Dutch students (Interviewees 7, 9, 12, 15 & 16).

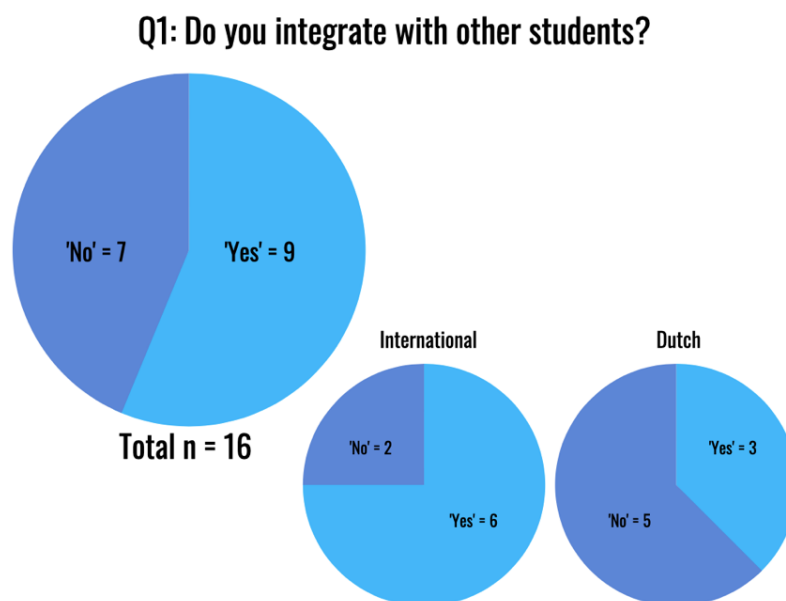


Figure 3: Answers to Q1: 'Do you integrate with other students?'

The reasons for the students that do not integrate with other Dutch or international students are more or less the same for everyone; they already have their existing friend groups, and because of this, they did not feel the urge to make more friends, or as interviewee 9 and 13 stated that ‘it just did not happen’. Interviewee 9 shared his experience:

“I am open for it, but it just didn’t happen for me. But I have a feeling that in general, internationals feel the same about it. They often make other international friends and stay in their own bubble too, I think.” (Interviewee 9)

According to the interviewees, integration can best take place in several ways. The first way is through the University. By having classes, workgroups, and tutorials together, Dutch, and international students tend to have a chat together and get to know each other as supported by the literature of Spencer-Oatey & Dauber (2017). However, interviewees 8 and 13 mentioned that the university can do more in terms of helping students with integration between students such as introducing ‘buddy systems’ to help a student out by pairing up a Dutch and an international student so that they can have one-on-one help. This statement is supported by Zhou et al. (2008); introducing a buddy system, or a structured peer-pairing programme is a good tool to improve integration between students.

On the contrary, interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 & 12 (Table 2, Q14) think that the University of Groningen does enough to help students to integrate by organizing mandatory mixed-working groups, first-year mentor groups and events. Working in small groups and being forced to work together on group projects, can have a positive effect on integration (Rienties & Nolan, 2014).

A new factor that impacts integration arises from the interviews. Namely that the level of integration is dependent on the personal characteristics of an individual. According to interviewees 1, 12, 16, after some time, it is up to the students themselves to take the initiative to integrate with other students and that integration should not be pushed in any way. Each participant has a different opinion on and experience with integration between students. For example, interviewees 4 and 6 make clear that it can be personal whether the person is interested in integration between students.

On top of this, it became clear that the housing situation of students can positively help integration as 13 interviewees agree with this (Table 2, Q6). Housemates often become friends and learn from each other, as interviewee 3 indicates that he learned a lot about Dutch habits. But also, interviewee 6 met new people through her Dutch housemates as she went with them to parties and met many Dutch people. Therefore, mixed student housing has a positive effect on integration which corresponds with the literature of Koster (2018). Interviewee 3 agrees with this:

“By living together, you become friends with the persons you live with and share everything”
(Interviewee 2)

But in Groningen, it is not straightforward to find a house immediately as an international student. Many Dutch student houses do not accept international students as their housemates. What is interesting, is that according to all Dutch interviewees, the main reasons for this are the language barriers and the differences in cultures of the housemates. They do not feel comfortable speaking English when at home (Interviewee 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15 & 16). This statement is in line with the literature from Van Kampen (2021) and Luiten (2018). A Dutch student that lives in a Dutch student house explains:

“A lot of Dutch students, including myself, rather have other Dutch housemates instead of international housemates. That has to do with differences in culture and language. I don’t feel comfortable enough, and my housemates feel the same about this. But I do think it sad for the international people that they often can’t find a house that soon... At least, that is what I hear”

(Interviewee 16)

Contrary to the literature of Van Kampen (2021) that many internationals have trouble finding a house, all interviewed international students succeeded in finding a house. Interviewee 1, 2, 3, & 4 started their residence in university housing in Groningen (SSH), but they could only live there for 1 year. After this, they had to find new housing themselves (Interviewee 1, 2, 3, 4). International interviewees 1, 2 & 4 recognized the ‘Dutch students only’ phenomenon and found it sometimes hard to find a house, but eventually found a suitable home with Dutch or international housemates. Many of the international interviewees (Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6) live together with Dutch housemates, and all agree that living together with Dutch students brings many benefits for integration between students which is supported by the literature of Koster (2018). A male international student experiences many benefits by living together with Dutch students:

“Having a conversation with a Dutch person, in a place you are comfortable, even though you’re not speaking in Dutch, gives you the opportunity to see them as a person better rather than that he or she is just a face at the University. And to get to know the culture better by the food, but also understanding the habits of Dutch people when it comes to cleaning the house, or just having someone to turn to if you struggle with certain things, like Dutch websites or something. That’s so valuable!”

(Interviewee 3)

Another factor for integration that is mentioned by the interviewees 2, 6, 9, 12, 15 & 16, is that the nightlife in Groningen is good for integration opportunities. By going to bars and disco’s, students get to meet a lot of other students and often have an informal chat with them. This is in line with the literature of Christie and Dinham (1991) and Enchinas (2016), that activities outside the university contribute to more integration between students. According to six students (Interviewee 1, 2, 4, 13, 15 & 16), student associations are important for socializing with other students. Both international and Dutch students that have their studies as a common interest, can join these associations that organize social events which can help with meeting new people. In Groningen, there is a lot of choice in student associations that are a part of the university (RUG, 2021).

Furthermore, 9 out of 16 interviewees indicated that language is a very important factor that often influences integration (Interviewees 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 & 16). What is interesting and does not comply with the studied literature of Zhang & Zhou (2010), is that mainly the international students (Interviewee 3, 4, 5, 8, 11 & 14) implied that it is not the level of English that impacts integration, but the willingness of the Dutch to speak in English when there is an international student around. Often, international students notice that the Dutch aren’t always willing to speak English. But a major part of the interviewed international students can understand the reasons of the Dutch to not speak in English, such as difficulties with English and not feeling comfortable when speaking a foreign language. This can be confirmed by 6 out of the 8 Dutch interviewees (Interviewees 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 & 16) who indicated that they often experience anxiety and insecurities when speaking English because they think they do not master the language enough and do not often speak in English. The following student is insecure about her level of English:

“I was quite insecure about my level of speaking English. In my opinion, I was not able to have a good conversation with another student because I was not fluent enough in English, I sometimes don’t know how to react to a question or something. I am still not able to, I think, but that’s also because I don’t speak English very often. And this leads again to the lack of integration during my studies.”

(Interviewee 7)

4.2 COVID-19 restrictions and integration

The answer to the question of whether the COVID-19 pandemic made integration more difficult seems straightforward, but it is interesting to see what effects this pandemic has on the overall integration between students. As can be seen in Figure 4, four restrictions had a substantial impact on students’ social lives. The curfew, the closure of public places, the online education and the maximum number of visitors allowed at home were the restrictions that were mentioned often. The majority of the interviewees (Interviewee 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16) point out that the closure of public places harmed their social lives. Interviewee 3 explains:

“The closure of bars impacted my social life the most. Beforehand, going to bars was a thing that me and my friends did like three to four days a week, go clubbing, especially in the first year. But because of the closure, we lost a social space where we would meet, also with Dutch people.” (Interviewee 3)

Especially the closure of bars seemed to have a major impact on the students because they lost their most common meeting place where you could easily integrate with other students, in line with the literature of Enchinas (2016), that going to events, bars or clubs allows students to meet other students.

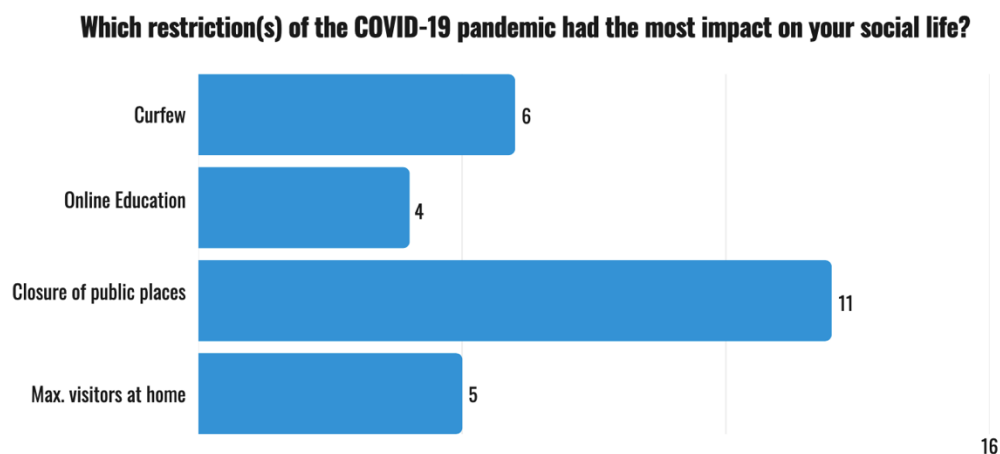


Figure 4: COVID-19 restrictions with major impacts on students

On top of the closure of public places, the curfew also had a significant impact on students as 6 interviewees (Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 12) point out that the curfew, which came into force on the 23rd of January and ended on the 24th of April, had an immense impact on their social life. The curfew that was active in the Netherlands obliged everybody to stay in their homes from 9 PM to 4:30 AM (Rijksoverheid, 2021b). Because of this, the nightlife in Groningen was completely shut down. What becomes clear from the interviews, is that during the day, students are busy with school and have jobs, but at night, they meet up with friends or go out. Because of the curfew, none of this could take place anymore. Interviewee 2 shares her frustration:

“There was a curfew at like 9 PM, so you couldn’t really throw a party, because my friends had to go home after dinner. That was so annoying, because you couldn’t really do things at night, even though that is a very social time. Because you couldn’t really see somebody. During the day, you have to study, and you might have a job, so the evening would be the time to hang out. But that was not possible!” (Interviewee 2)

Besides the curfew, there was also a restriction that limited the visitors at home. At its worst, in January 2021, the maximum number of visitors allowed at home was set at 1 visitor per household, which meant that students were allowed to welcome only 1 person at their homes (Rijksoverheid, 2021a). Interviewees 1, 2, 7, 11 & 12 thought that not being able to see all of their friends, was incredibly hard. The last restriction that had a significant impact was the closure of the university, which implied online and hybrid education. Interviewees 7 & 8 stated that not going to university anymore caused them to miss their daily routine and felt that they were stuck at home for a long time. Interviewees 10 & 13 missed the contact with other students between lectures.

While looking back at the active restrictions during the interviews, interviewees realize during the interview that the COVID-19 pandemic had an immense impact on their social lives and think it was a difficult time for being a student. It was palpable that many interviewees felt frustrated and disappointed.

Other than what already is being said, an interesting effect of the restrictions is that many international students returned to their homes and parents because of the insecurities that the pandemic brought. But also, Dutch students moved back home for some time. An international student did not see her Dutch friends for months:

“I think the biggest factor that impacted integration is that all the Dutch people that study in Groningen were at home, with their parents. So, I did not see my Dutch friends for months. I think if they were here in Groningen, it would have been so different. Because they simply were not here.”
(Interviewee 1)

Like (Lakhal et al, 2020) noticed in their research, students teamed up with students they already knew beforehand, because it was hard to meet new people. Interviewee 8 can relate to this since she only kept in contact with students she already knew beforehand. This happens also outside the university. An international interviewee indicates that it was very hard to integrate with new people:

“It made it very hard. I had lots of Dutch acquaintances, but only 2 good Dutch friends. If you have a party at your house and invite 10 people, it doesn’t matter if you are good friends or not. But if you have dinner with 3 people, I will not invite my Dutch acquaintances. So, by not making new friends, it completely ruined my integration.” (Interviewee 4)

But not only negative experiences were shared; a Dutch interviewee (Interviewee 7) found another way to integrate during the pandemic. Through her online job during the pandemic, she had to work with international students and spent a lot of time with them. She became friends with her colleagues after some time.

4.3 Online education

When asked about the COVID-19 pandemic and what influence the associated online and hybrid teaching had on integration, mostly negative experiences were shared. Almost all interviewed students, except for interviewee 7, made clear that the online education made integration harder than it was before the pandemic. This was also the case for the students who never had problems with integration between students before the pandemic (Table 2, Q11). Studying from home, having online workgroups, and the fact that students were not able to see each other in real life are factors that made integration almost impossible during the pandemic. However, a male international interviewee got a sense that during the online classes and workgroups, students were more willing to talk:

“But I do think, I did get a sense that people were more willing to talk, also I think because they had nothing else to do? And I can understand that if you are in a lecture hall, it is really imposing to talk to someone.” (Interviewee 3)

This statement can be confirmed by Interviewee 7. She indicated that, for her, online education had a positive effect on integration with international students. According to her, the reason for this is that the threshold to approach a student online is lower than it would be in real life. During the online education, she didn't have to approach a student in real life to talk to them, but she would send them a message. Suddenly she was working with and talking to people from all over the world through the internet. However, she understands that online education might not have positive effects on everybody.

This becomes clear when conducting more interviews. Except for interviewee 7, all interviewees indicate that the lack of face-to-face contact limited integration enormously between Dutch and international students. On top of that, during online workgroups, interviewees 11 and 16 noticed that students didn't show interest in each other and had their cameras off most of the time. They indicate that because of this, online education was quite boring, and they became less motivated.

4.4 Future integration

Even though the future of the COVID-19 pandemic is uncertain, some students (Interviewee 3, 5, 6, 10, 13 & 14) expect that when restrictions are over, the integration between students will become easier. Also, five interviewees (Interviewee 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6) indicated that they want to go out more than they did before the pandemic and put more effort into meeting other students. They expect that contacting other students will be easier, as students are more willing to talk to people because they have been in the same circle of friends for a long time and have the desire to meet new people after the pandemic.

Contrary, 4 interviewees (Interviewee 9, 11, 12 & 15) state that not much will change when restrictions will be over because third-year students already have enough friends and do not have the desire to meet new, other students. Interviewee 2 mentioned that it takes time to get used to 'freedom' again. Talking to people and going to university can be quite exhausting:

I have to get used to the freedom again, also with school, everything is on-site again. That was intense! I was getting used to sitting in my room all day, and now I am busy again. The first weeks were kind of exhausting, because I also had to talk to people again! (Interviewee 2)

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Main Results

In this last chapter, the major findings and meanings of the results will be discussed. It appears from the research, that one of the main factors that have a positive impact on integration is the University of Groningen. Many interviewees stated that the University is an important place to meet other students. Interviewees made it clear that they integrate with other students because the University of Groningen often facilitates mixed working groups with both Dutch and international students. This follows the literature from Spencer-Oatey & Dauber (2017) and literature from Rienties & Nolan (2014), who stated that facilitating mandatory mixed working groups can be of great benefit for integration between students as well as the development of the students' skills in communicating with people from different backgrounds. However, two interviewees (Interviewees 8 & 13) indicated that these mixed working groups are not enough to help students to integrate and that the University of Groningen should introduce 'buddy-systems'. Zhou et al. (2008) share this opinion as they state that buddy systems are a helpful tool to improve integration between students. In contrary to these statements, interviewees 1, 4, 6, 12 & 16 (Table 2, Q14) made clear that the university does enough to help students integrate and that after some time at the university, it is up to students themselves whether or not they want to mix with other students.

Apart from the university, it can be confirmed that activities outside the learning environment are valuable for integration between students. Public places in Groningen such as cafes and bars, but also student associations and sports clubs are popular meeting spots for students. The literature of Christie and Dinham (1991) and Enchinas (2016) argue that participating in activities outside the university can be useful to establish friendships, which the majority of interviewees agree with.

A factor that can be both positive and negative for integration between students is housing. As becomes clear from the literature of Koster (2018) and the interviews is that for international students, living together with native people brings many benefits for integration. However, housing can hurt integration as Dutch students do not always accept international students as their housemates ('Dutch only') which is also recognized by interviewees 1, 2 & 4 (Van Kampen, 2021; Luiten, 2018). Reasons given by Dutch interviewees for this matter are differences in culture and language. Interviewees 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15 & 16 do not feel comfortable speaking English when at home.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 made integration between students more difficult in a way that students were not allowed to meet with each other because of the restrictions such as the curfew, the maximum number of visitors allowed at home, the closure of public places and the online and hybrid education (Rijksoverheid 2021a; Rijksoverheid 2021b). Students were not able to see their friends often, let alone to be able to meet new people. On top of this, an important limitation for integration between students was online education. Daily routines and face-to-face contact were absent, and students were stuck inside their homes which made them feel frustrated, which is in line with the literature from Bowers and Kumar (2015) that the feeling of isolation is a reason for students to feel disconnected from teachers and peers, which makes them feel dissatisfied. However, not all interviewees have negative experiences with online education as one interviewee (Interviewee 7) indicates that she got in touch with more international students than before the pandemic.

Students point out that, when restrictions are over, the social integration between students will become easier because they will meet new people by going out more, and other students are more willing to

start conversations. On the contrary, some students indicated that they think nothing would change with regards to integration between students before the pandemic.

5.2 Significance of Results

The answer to the first sub question: *What are the main factors that influence integration between native and international students in Groningen?* is that the University of Groningen, activities outside the university, such as going to bars and joining student associations and sports clubs, positively impact integration between Dutch and international students. A factor that can affect integration is language, as Dutch students are insecure about their level of English. What becomes clear from the research, is that there is a downward spiral regarding the housing situation in Groningen and the links with social integration between students. International students suffer from the ‘Dutch only’ phenomenon (Van Kampen, 2021; Luiten 2018). The Dutch students give reasons for not accepting international students as their housemates such as not feeling comfortable speaking English at home and that different cultures might cause problems. In the end, this enforces the insecurities of the Dutch that are insecure about their level of English but do not try to overcome their insecurities as they get out of the way to get in contact or live together with international students. Therefore, there are no issues found regarding the language proficiency of students, as researched by Zhang & Zhou (2010), but issues occurred regarding the anxiety of the Dutch to talk English.

To answer the second sub question: *In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic make integration difficult?* it became clear that students suffer most from the restrictions such as the curfew, the maximum number of visitors allowed at home, the closure of public places and the associated online education. The main reason why these measures made student life hard was primarily the lack of face-to-face contact. They were not able to see friends and felt isolated, disconnected, and frustrated.

The answer to the last sub question: *What do students expect from integration possibilities in Groningen when restrictions will end?* is that there is a divide between students who indicate that they will put more effort into social integration once the restrictions are over, and students who indicate that integration between students will not change compared to the situation before the pandemic. The first group of students think that everybody is more willing to meet and talk to other people because they have been isolated for a long time, which is in line with the second expectation of this research. The second group think that not much will change because these students are in their third study year, which make they have found their friends, and because of this, are not planning to meet more people.

Based on the qualitative analysis of interviews and through literature, we can conclude that the answer to the main research question is that the pandemic had a negative influence on integration. Because of the restrictions set by the Dutch government (Rijksoverheid, 2021a), the associated online education and lack of face-to-face contact, students’ integration was hard or not possible at all. This is also in line with the first expectation of the research.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

What limited the research, is that the COVID-19 pandemic has not been around for a relatively long time, in a sense that not much research has been done on this topic. This resulted in a lack of academic literature on the effects of the pandemic on social integration between students. However, enough qualitative data and literature were collected to find suitable answers to the research questions. To make up for this lack of academic literature, Dutch government and newspaper websites were used that described recent developments about the pandemic.

Another limitation is that due to time pressure and lack of interest from students for an interview, 16 interviews were conducted while aiming at 20. However, the answers of the participants were of high

quality because some answers were different, but also shared opinions on the topic were identified, which made the data diverse and made patterns visible. It also helped that all interviewees were enthusiastic about the topic of the research, as all interviewees could identify with the difficult situation students were in during the pandemic. All were eager to share their opinions and experiences with integration during the pandemic.

Based on these conclusions, some recommendations for future research can be made. It is interesting to see how the pandemic develops and if the effects of the pandemic on integration change in the future. Should the pandemic take more time, it is advisable to pay more attention to the mental health condition of students and see if there are links with the level of social integration between students. Also, universities or local governments should pay more attention to helping students with social integration, but also with possible struggles such as loneliness during times of a pandemic. Students, not just in Groningen, suffer immensely from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and it is important to raise awareness on this topic.

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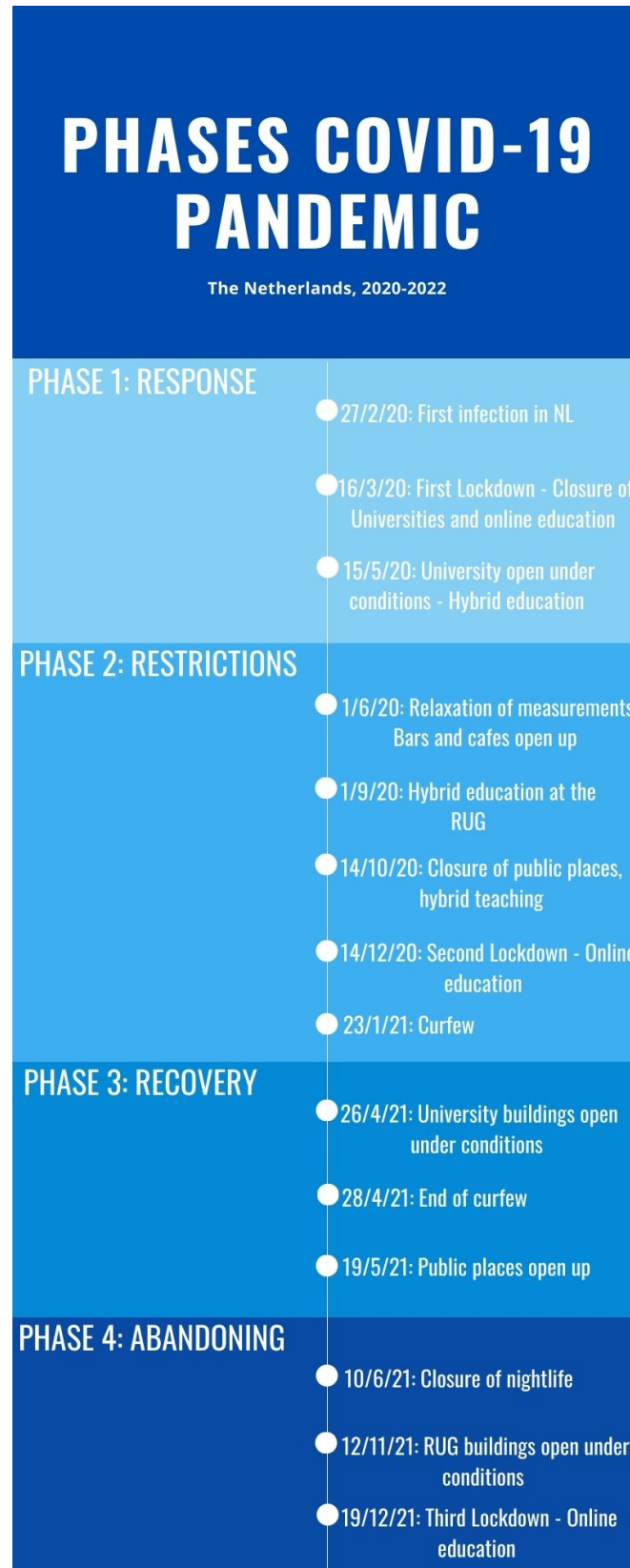
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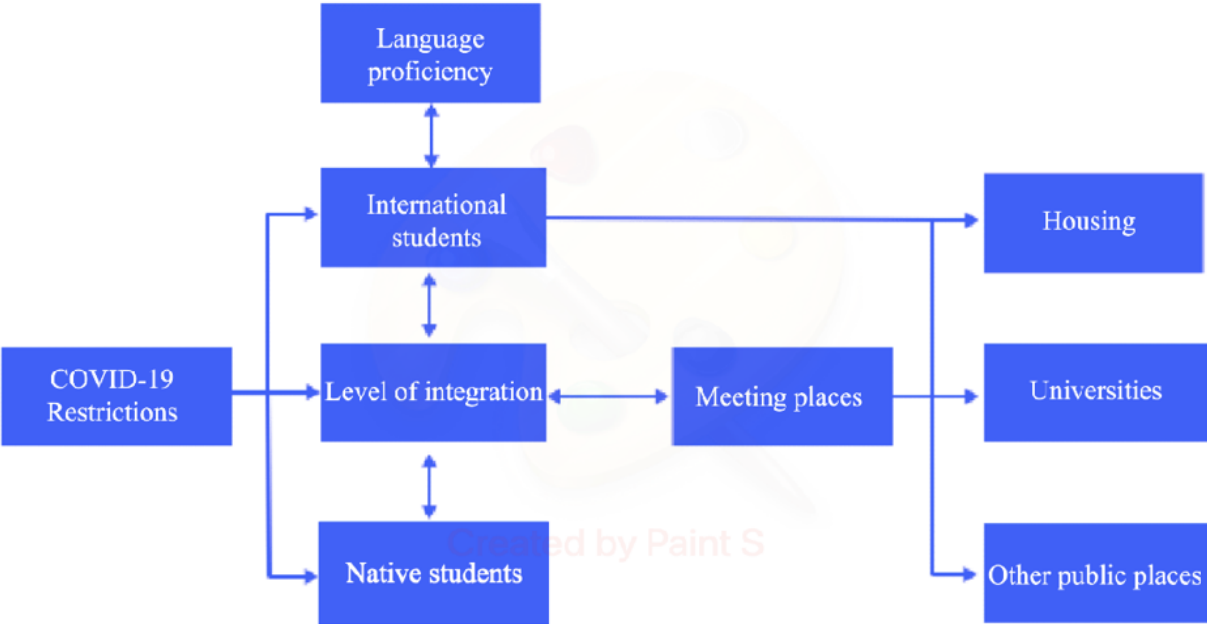
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Appendices

Appendix A: Figure 1 – Timeline of events of COVID-19 pandemic in NL



Appendix B: Figure 2 – Conceptual Model



Appendix C: Table 1 – Characteristics of the 16 interviewees

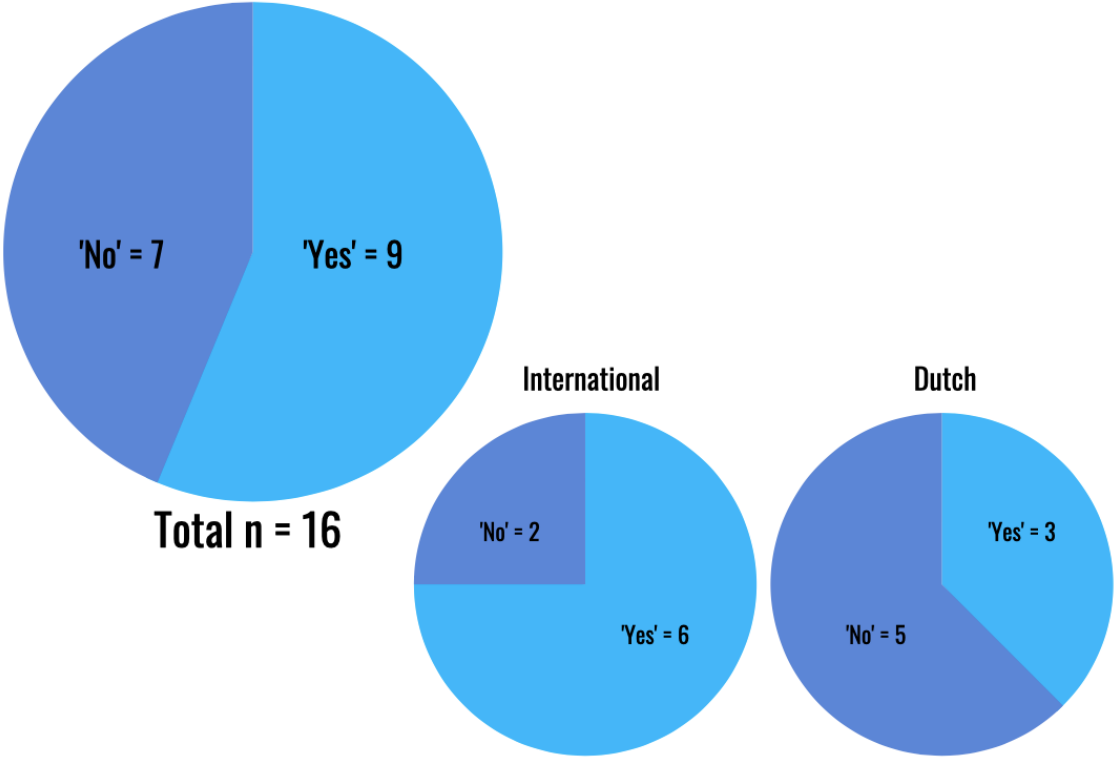
| Interviewee: | Dutch/International: | Male/Female: | Study year: | Faculty of: |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | International | Female | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 2 | International | Female | 3 | Science & Engineering |
| 3 | International | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 4 | International | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 5 | International | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 6 | International | Female | 3 | Economics & Business |
| 7 | Dutch | Female | 5 | Economics & Business |
| 8 | Dutch | Female | 3 | Economics & Business |
| 9 | Dutch | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 10 | Dutch | Male | 3 | Economics & Business |
| 11 | Dutch | Female | 3 | Economics & Business |
| 12 | Dutch | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 13 | International | Male | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 14 | International | Female | 3 | Spatial Sciences |
| 15 | Dutch | Female | 3 | Medicines |
| 16 | Dutch | Female | 3 | Economics & Business |

Appendix D: Table 2 – Answers of interviewees to closed questions

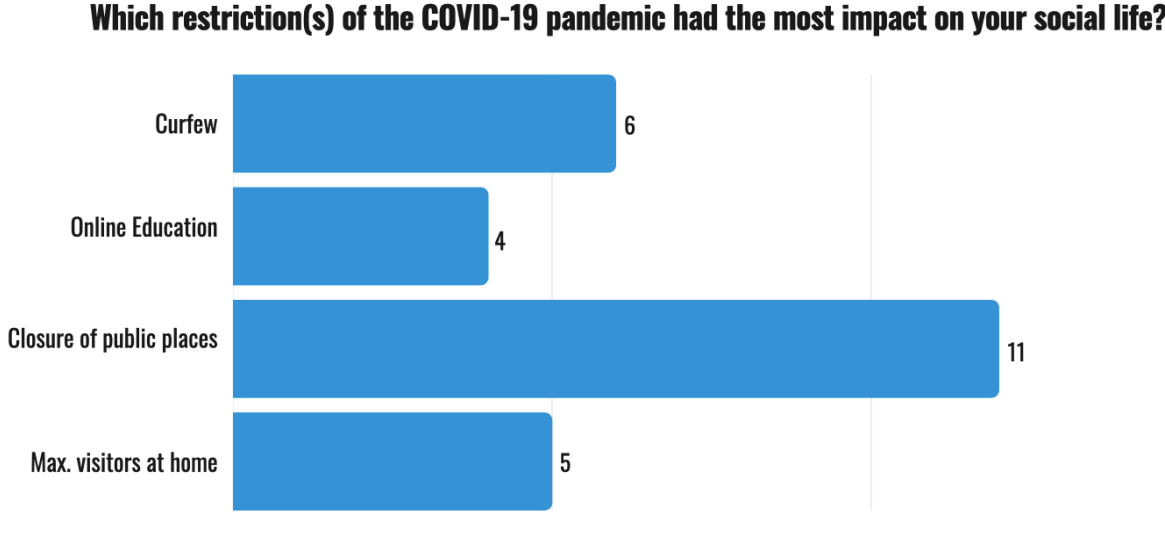
| Interviewee: | Dutch/International: | Q1: Integration | Q4: Language proficiency | Q6: Housing | Q10: Online education | Q11: Difficulties with integration | Q14: The University |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | International | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 2 | International | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| 3 | International | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| 4 | International | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| 5 | International | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| 6 | International | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 7 | Dutch | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| 8 | Dutch | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 9 | Dutch | No | Yes | Neutral | Yes | No | Yes |
| 10 | Dutch | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| 11 | Dutch | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 12 | Dutch | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 13 | International | No | Neutral | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 14 | International | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 15 | Dutch | No | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 16 | Dutch | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

Appendix E: Figure 3 – Answer to Q1: ‘Do you integrate with other students?’

Q1: Do you integrate with other students?



Appendix F: Figure 4 - COVID-19 restrictions with major impacts on students



Appendix G: Interview guide

Interview questions:

Note that questions can differ between participants since semi-structured interviews have been conducted

Introduction

- Thanking the interviewee for participating, introducing myself, ask the participant to introduce her/himself
- Explain the research
- Some questions to get to know each other
- Exit question: Are you at least in the third year of your study?
- Ethics: If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, or you want to stop, that's totally fine!

Core questions:

Factors that influence integration

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?
2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?
3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?
4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?
5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?
6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?
7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Impact of COVID-19 and the associated online teaching on integration

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?
9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?
10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

Difficulties with integration before and during COVID-19

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?
12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

Expectations of integration after COVID-19

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?
14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?
15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

Closing questions:

16. Do you have anything to add?
17. Was everything clear, do you have questions for me?

Appendix H: Transcripts of interviews

Interview 1: Female, international, 3rd year student at Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Date: 24-10-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

Yes, I do. I have a couple of Dutch friends, not many, but still. In general, when I am with Dutch students, I feel very integrated to be honest. Specifically, in our programme (HGP), students are very open to be with anybody, so it is easy. I also speak a little bit of Dutch, and in general I have very good experiences with integration. However, how older Dutch people get, the worse experiences I get. But in Uni, there are no problems and Dutch students speak English when there is an international student around, so that's nice.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

(Above answer is 'yes')

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I think through group projects and student associations. It is nice that these associations are often mixed. With regards to working groups, if we can choose our own groups, I am always with my three international friends, but the Uni sometimes say it have to be mixed groups, two Dutch and two international students. I think that is a very nice way to integrate with Dutch students. I think that is also good for the Dutch students.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

No, I think English is perfectly spoken in the NL, I don't know any Dutch or international student that does English in such a poor way that it affects integration.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

I think Uni-places are nice, but also bars with activities are always fun to go to. But in general, other people's houses. So, if people that you know have Dutch friends, and you go to a party, it is so easy to integrate, and I know a lot of Dutch people through them. But bars are also popular. And learning committees! That is actually how I met all my Dutch friends. They are supergood, and I think this is the best way to integrate for first-year students. Because we are coming here all alone, but it is also nice for the Dutch people because it is such an easy way to make international friends and not staying in their Dutch bubble.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

I used to live in an international student housing, which was nice because I met a lot of other international students, but no Dutch people. When you have to move out, because you can only stay there for one year, you generally end up with a Dutch housemate and I think this brings benefits. But Dutch student houses often don't want international student, I don't know why, but this does not make it easy to live with Dutch people... Even if you speak Dutch! But I now ended up with 1 Dutch housemate.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

What they do with the LC's and the work groups is enough. At some point, I think it is up to the students themselves with housing, making friends. I think the Uni does enough.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

I think the restriction of the maximum visitors at home. Also, I live with a girl who studies medicine and has to be in the lab often, so I had to be super careful because you don't want to bring COVID to people who work with patients and stuff like that. So that had also an impact. And of course, the closure of bars. However, I went back home for a few months to Italy, and the restrictions here were nothing compared to what was happening in Italy, we could literally not leave our houses. I saw nobody for like 4 months. And because of the situation in Italy that I was used to, I was so scared to get COVID and was super careful. So, when I moved back here, it felt like I had so much freedom here because here the restrictions were less strict. But to conclude, before COVID I saw like thirty people a day and then when COVID came around I only saw my housemate and that was it, also because of the curfew. So of course, integration was not possible at that time.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

I think the biggest factor is that all the Dutch people that study in Groningen were at home, with their parents. So, I did not see my Dutch friends for months. I think if they were here in Groningen, it would have been so different. Cause they simply were not here. And also, I must say, my Dutch friends had a different view on COVID than I had. I had the experiences in Italy, and I was super careful and took the restrictions very seriously, and it felt like the Dutch people were judging me a bit for that. Like for example, they did not wear their facemasks while I did, and they kind of judged me for wearing a mask. So I think that impacted the relationship I had with them because of our different views that we had developed.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

Yeah, a 100% percent! For me, integration was very hard because the people I had to pair up with online, did not really care and were not interested. The online education made it, for me, way harder.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

Even though I had not many difficulties, there might be one thing. I had to get used to the way Dutch people interact. The way of interacting here is way different than in Italy, for example, the Dutch give very short answers to questions. They are like; OK, whereas I would say: Yes, thank you so much!! Then I got the feeling like they did not like me. I just had to get over that and think, we are just different in the way we react. And of course, the weather, when it rains here, plans don't get cancelled, which I like. Until COVID, I did not see many difficulties. But with COVID, I realize that things were getting a lot harder.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

Yes!

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

My Dutch friends are sadly all on exchange now, and since the pandemic and since I am back here in Groningen. I did not make many new Dutch friends. I don't know why, because I want to and it does not matter to me who I am friends with, Dutch or international. But it just did not happen. I also want to get better in speaking Dutch, so it would be nice to have more Dutch friends! I am not much of a party-person, so I don't go out to bars and go out like the Dutch do, but I try to go out more now.

14. Can the level of integration be improved at the University of Groningen?

No, as I mentioned before, I think after some time, it is up to the individual whether they want to integrate with other students or not.

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I think they play a role, definitely, but I think what they do now is enough for now. Mixed work-groups and the first-year introduction groups help students to integrate a lot, I think.

Do you have anything to add?

Maybe one thing, when you go out in the city center, it is harder to meet Dutch people because they are with an only Dutch association, and they don't really mix with other students. It would be nice if they would, because it seems like they do not want international students in their group, I don't know why.

Interview 2: Female, international, 3rd year student at Faculty of Engineering

Date: 26-10-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

Not really, I think. I lived in the first year of my study in an international student house with internationals from all over the place, and I just kind of stuck with our friend group, so I just did not integrate that well with Dutch students I think.

2. (If the above answer is ‘No, ...’) Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I did not think of it when I came here. Like I didn't want to necessarily integrate with Dutch people. I just wanted to see which friends I would make. Before coming here, I went to an international school in Hungary, so most of my friends were international in high school, so I feel like finding international friends was not that hard for me.

Follow-up question: So, you didn't necessarily want to integrate with Dutch people, but didn't you want to get to know the culture?

I think I would've been nice. Now that I am reaching the end of my study, I regret it a little bit, but it is not something that bothers me. It just did not come across my path.

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I think living together is a very important one. You become friends with the persons you live with, since you live together, you share everything. And also, student associations are very important, I think. Especially when they organize events and go for drinks, I think that is great. But I didn't do that. The study association of my study is more study-oriented instead of going out and make friends.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

No, I've never experienced that. Everybody here speaks English really well. I don't speak Dutch, so I sometimes do not understand what is being said. But that's my fault I think, I've never took Dutch classes.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

Yeah, most students of my class of chemical engineering are international, so that's a great place to meet other students. And you do the same study, so you already have a common interest. But in Groningen, the Forum building is also a great place to meet other students and to hang out with them. I did go to the city center, but I don't meet many new people there. I go with my friends I already have, so there is no need to meet new people. Sometimes I run into people, and we talk, but it does not escalate in something more.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

I wouldn't say it is the most important factor, but I definitely thinks it helps a lot to make friends. After one year I had to move from the international student house to another, and me and my friends from the first international student house wanted to look for a house together. But this was really hard. Also

because a lot of housing don't accept international students, it was extra hard because of this. And then COVID happened, and I had to move out of the big student house and went home, because I did not want to be alone. So I gave up on the whole housing thing because I wasn't in Groningen. I thought, I will figure it out, later. And then, someone I knew (from the international student house) sent me a message with; I have a house for you and some friends. And I was like: Yes!! And within two days, the house was ours. And then I came back in August because I had some classes on campus again.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

I think they do, but they are not that important, I think. It is up to the students whether they want to integrate with other students. But I think the University organizes events and they have student associations, so they help students enough with integration.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

The curfew, definitely. Because there also was a rule that you could only have 4 people visiting your house, but there was a curfew at like 9pm, so you couldn't really throw a party, because my friends had to go home after dinner. That was so annoying, because you couldn't really do thing at night, even though that is a very social time. Because you couldn't really see somebody. During the day, you have to study, and you might have a job, so the evening would be the time to hang out. But that was not possible

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

I think it was the online education because you didn't get to see the people from your class. At least I knew people from my class because I already met them the first year, I can't imagine how it is like for people that started their study during COVID. That's so sad...

So, I am glad I started one year earlier. So yeah, the online education and the fact that you couldn't see people impacted integration the most I think

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

Maybe integration was possible, but indeed, it made it way and way harder. It was just a really bad time for integration.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

I don't think I really tried to integrate, but it also threw me off because of some experiences. Because say there is a group of Dutch people in a class having a conversation, and me and my other international friend would walk in and joined, a lot of the time I experienced that they kept talking Dutch to each other. I didn't understand what was being said and I would walk away because I couldn't be a part of the conversation. This happened a few times and I don't know, it threw me off. And I don't know why that is, I wouldn't do it if it was the other way around, I think. Before I went to Groningen, I only had international friends, so we already had a common language, so I had never experienced this before, the international vs. Dutch.

Follow-up question: And did you asked if they maybe could talk English when you're around?

I could've asked, but I didn't feel like it. But the thing is, when I talk to one person of that group, they are so nice, and I would never think they would do that when they're in a group. But I think, integrating in a group is just very hard. Being friends with them one on one is no problem at all.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

Definitely, the online education and the restrictions set in the Netherlands did not help.

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I am planning on going to parties more! I don't have any other expectations, but I think it went all very fast, like from very strict measures to freedom or something. I have to get used to the freedom again, also with school, everything is on-site again. That was intense! I was getting used to like sitting in my room all-day, and now I am busy again. The first weeks were kind of exhausting, because I also had to talk to people again!

Follow-up question: And did you meet any new people since everything is open again?

No, not necessarily new people, but I picked up old relationships again. Because we didn't see each other in such a long time, that it felt like a new relationship with people from my class for example. I wasn't very close with them, but it is nice to see them again and talk to them.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

I don't know, I think the Uni already does a pretty good job. For example, in my study, it is mostly group work. And that's a great way to meet people and stuff! It is even better when you are assigned to a group instead of picking out people yourself, because then you really have to work with people you don't know that well and people have to talk English. Integration is then fairly easy.

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

As I said, the university does a good job and I think it is up to the individual whether they want to integrate further or not. Also, the student associations really help with this, and they are also a part of the uni. If you are open for integration, you certainly can!

Interview 3: Male, international, 3rd year student at Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Date: 27-10-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch students?

I think I used to try to a lot more. But I think I try to integrate less now. I think in my first year of my study, there was a lot of emphasis on trying to integrate with people. So we had the LC's, the learning committees, that was really good for my integration because I was speaking to Dutch students, going to places where Dutch student would go all the time, but that was only really the first half semester that that happened. And now, in third year, because we established friend groups I suppose, I feel like there is less pressure to integrate, if that makes sense. And I think other students are in a similar situation.

In the UK, you have like tons of social activities that you can join in the first week of your study, and you drop out of the things that you're not interested in. Here, you have two introduction weeks: the Keiweek and ESN week, I didn't go to Keiweek because I didn't know what it was. But ESN week I did go to and that was like only internationals, so the only time I really met Dutch students was with the course.

I am a member of the student association (IbnBattuta), but I don't know why I am still paying because I never went to any of the activities!

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

(Above answer is 'yes')

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I think for international students, broadly, or at least the ones that I know, were a quite wary around Dutch students, were a bit nervous because we are guests in your country, fundamentally. But Dutch people are very nice, all Dutch students are wonderful, that was amazing to me. They are willing to talk and are just nice. But we are still I think a bit nervous of new people, when you are an international student you kind of put yourself in a position of being international the rest of your life, or it feels that way to me. Unless you're in a situation where you must integrate, where integration is like the only way to pass a course for example, there is less of a reason to integrate. Especially given that we're in Groningen, a big student city, you walk around the streets, and you hear people talking English, even if their first language is Dutch. When we had the LC's that was nice because we had to integrate, to pass the introductory course we had to work together with Dutch students. I think the University should do this in any study. I initially was skeptical about LC's, I thought it was such a waste of time. But looking back on it, the social activity of being able to talk with people you don't know, was so valuable.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

There are a couple of people in lectures who I noticed that are not so willing to speak English. But as you said to me before the interview, that you were nervous about your level of English, and I don't know why you would say that, like, I can't speak Dutch at all. So I think if students come with an open mindset, they would come so far. If I was given the opportunity to learn Dutch better, I would try and integrate with more with Dutch students now. But I think that also very difficult to do, especially when

you're only somewhere for like a few years. But I'd like to think that the students at the RUG are very open minded and willing to speak English, but I also know a few that don't and I understand it, but they are wrong.

Follow-up question: Have you ever experienced that you were the only international in the classroom and students kept on speaking Dutch?

Well, I have to say that I am very vocal in classes, I think people tend to switch to English even if I am the only international there, and that sometimes makes me feel quite bad, but I also appreciate it. But I also know that some of my friends have other experiences with that. Like if they turn up, everyone keeps speaking Dutch, and that it is like a conscious burden to switch to English. Again, I can understand, because if I were in the UK, I wouldn't want to speak another language than English, and I think Dutch students can think the same about this? I also think that groups of international students can be more exclusionary than Dutch students themselves. It goes both ways ofcourse.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

Any, as long as people have to interact, would be my simple answer. But the university is a great one, but also the market is a good place for integration! I bought some cheese the other week, and the market vendor there is just really nice. I go there quite a lot, because I am addicted to cheese. Because I try and speak Dutch to them, we integrated a little bit. They want me to speak Dutch and that's a really good opportunity to integrate further into Dutch society with just going to the cheese van once in two weeks. That's so good, because to really have to integrate. Whereas in a big student house, where I lived the first year, you don't really have to integrate because the 354 they are all internationals, and none of them speak any Dutch.

Follow-up question: So, do you think, when you have to speak Dutch at some places, you eventually learn some Dutch and are able to integrate more?

Well, yeah that's my experience, I also know other people that would be so intimidated by that and then have a really horrible time as a student here. So, I guess it always have to be some kind of balance being pushed into integrating with Dutchies and being comfortable as an international as well. For me, the balance is great, because I like to be pushed to integrate. But for others, this doesn't work.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

Well, that's interesting, because this is the first year that I actually live with Dutch people. And this year, by living together with people you will automatically understand them better, we do like a nightly cooking thing where we try to make a bit of food. But having a conversation with a Dutch person, in a place you are comfortable, even though you're not speaking in Dutch, gives you the opportunity to see them as a person better rather than that he or she is just a face at the University. And to get to know the culture better by the food, but also understanding the habits of Dutch people when it comes to cleaning the house, or just having someone to turn to if you struggle with certain things, like Dutch websites or something. That so valuable! And again, the balance is important. I live with two Dutch and two internationals, that's just great.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

I think you always can do better, but I don't know how. The LCs are just really great and helpful. I think in order to do more, you have to get all Dutch students on board, to integrate the other way around as well, but I think that's really tricky. For Dutch students, they are encouraged to stay in the Netherlands, so you might want to integrate with international less than if you were studying abroad for example. I think you guys are missing out there, but I would be also missing out if I only integrated with international students.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

I was going to say curfew initially, it was a really major measure, but in my hometown, it didn't impact me that much. There I would just stay at a friends' house until 4:30. But the closure of bars impacted my social life the most. Beforehand, going to bars was a thing that me and my friends did like three to four days a week, go clubbing, especially in the first year. But because of the closure, we lost a social space where we would meet, also with Dutch people.

- **Follow-up question: But did you make new Dutch friends by going out?**

Well, I made Dutch friends at the university, and then go with them to the city center and they often brought someone extra. It's just a social space to interact, not necessarily to meet new people. And I'm quite shy as well, so that's a bit difficult.

- **Follow-up question: You also mentioned that people were going home because of Corona, did you ever feel lonely?**

Yeah sometimes, but because my international friends came from all over the world, there was always someone there that I could meet up with. Mostly people that were from the inside of Europe returned home, but that gave me the chance to make friends with people from America, Africa, and Indonesia for example.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

Definitely, the limited face-to-face contact and the online education made integration impossible in my opinion.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

It did make integration harder because you simply didn't speak to people face-to-face. Or you could attend an online pub-quiz, but that was really depressing... But I do think, I did get a sense that people were more willing to talk, also I think because they had nothing else to do? And I can understand that if you are in a lecture hall, it is really imposing to talk to someone.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

I think the hardest thing was not living with Dutch students, because then the first social groups you formed, weren't with Dutch students. But I guess the student house where I lived (the big one), was such a social space where you could bring anyone over and being welcomed immediately, that was very unique.

Follow-up question: And was getting used to the Dutch culture a difficult thing?

When I first came here, I thought like I can go home whenever I want to because I'm English. But the biggest thing was not coming to the Netherlands but returning to the UK. Because the culture here is different, but there aren't very huge differences from mine, like the climate for example. I think the differences are in small things, like the 'afvalpas'. That was so weird to me, but there were many little things like that. But I noticed a big difference when I returned home for the first Christmas, I felt like I didn't belong in England anymore and that was horrifying. Because I was going to the UK and tried to talk to people and went to cafes and smiled to people and that being a weird thing! That was the hardest thing. In the UK, we have very dry humor and here my humor became more optimistic. When I talk to my family, the end of the joke is when you say something sad, but here you have to make it like more hearted at the end. But the first thing I noticed, is that when I crossed the streets to say hello to a friend, and he was like, what are you doing, are you all right? That's something you do not do in the UK, you only nod or something like that.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

Like I said, for the major part of students I think it did make integration more difficult, but I can imagine that some students found it easier to speak up online rather than in real life.

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I think the being stuck at home for a long time means that everyone is a bit more willing to talk to people. I am hopeful for the future, and the future students coming to Groningen will feel the same way as I did about integration, but I also think that there is a group of people that its primarily integration was online. And that's so sad, not being able to talk to people in real life. But I also think that they have learned to integrate in a different way, and maybe feel closer to their peer students, than outside students.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

No, I think they do a good job with the earlier mentioned learning groups. It depends heavily on students if they are willing to integrate, I think.

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

Same answer as before. Organizing learning groups already helps, I think.

Interview 4: Male, international, 3rd year student at Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Date: 27-10-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

Yes, in the first year a lot, because in the first course, you kind of had to. There were a lot of Dutch people there and in the LCs. I am also Jewish, so I go to the synagogue, and I meet people through the debate club that I am a member of. But last year, like little to none at all honestly. In the course and in the debate club I feel like I have less Dutch interaction, but then in other places, out and about, like the student association, I feel like I have more interaction with Dutch people. So, it depends on when and where.

2. (If the above answer is ‘No, ...’) Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

(Above answer is ‘yes’)

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

That’s a good question, I think associations are important. Because you have something in common of course, but also through the study. And I guess also living with Dutch people, but I don’t think it is as important. Because most people live in like student houses, and then you have like 1 or 2 Dutch people that you are very close to. But I think it is more important to have like 10 Dutch acquaintances than having one good, Dutch friend.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

Oh yeah, I think language is very important, but it is not about language proficiency. Dutch people can speak English very well, it is about 98% of the time not about level of English, it’s more about the threshold that people are willing to speak English. When it is one on one, they will speak English. When it is one international and two Dutch, they will speak English, but the higher the number of Dutch, like a 100 Dutch people and one international, then they are of course not speaking English just because of you. So, it is more about where people’s threshold is, cause if you reach that threshold, then you are out of it.

Follow-up question: When do you notice that threshold the most? At the University or someplace else?

That completely depends. Like in peoples home, it often will be like 4 or 5 people, and in university, I think more, like 6 or 7, and I think in associations like 8 or 9. I think that’s definitely the hierarchy. Official things, like universities has probably the highest threshold, then associations, after that people just talking at university, just casually and then lastly, at home, doing social things.

Follow-up question: And do you then say something to these people?

No, I would almost never. I have a bit of a native speaker guilt, because I am from the US. It is one thing to say that to someone who is from Bulgaria or something, it never worked that way for me because I never had to learn another language, I just show up and you will all most likely speak in my language. So that’s just difference and I feel guilty enough to not say anything about speaking English or something. I might be persistent about English, like I refuse to being left out, but there was a thing in an introduction activity of an association and they switched to Dutch, I wouldn’t let them give up on

me either. And if I understood something, I just replied in English and talked back in English so I refused to be sidelined. I could never, as an American, ask them to only speak English.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

Like I said, I think living together and student associations are good for meeting new people. But yeah also the University, that is where it all starts ofcourse.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

I live in a house in Vinkhuizen, a Dutch girl and a German girl selected me, this went all through Facebook but when you go on Facebook, you almost get exclusively international students interested, so I've done a house search on Facebook maybe four times now, and we never said 'internationals only' and I would like to have a Dutch person, so we're pretty neutral. But a Dutch person almost never reacts on Facebook, it always like 100% internationals that reply. And now the Dutch girl is on Erasmus in France, so now the house is completely international.

Follow-up question: Sometimes you hear the other thing around; like Dutch student houses don't want international students. Have you experienced that sometime?

When I first moved here, I went into the SSH housing, because that was the easiest thing to do. So, the only time I actively searched for housing it was in my second year during corona, and indeed, many advertisements say like; Dutch only, but I also had many other options. So, in practice, it didn't affect me actually.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Well, I think the LCs are already very nice. I think the whole university should apply such first-year groups. However, I don't understand that Keiweek and ESN week are two different things, but that's not something from the university, I think. They should mix it!

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

The closure of universities and public places. Up to the first three blocks of the first year, I was learning Dutch, and I had a lot of motivation to learn Dutch. But because of COVID-19 I just stopped, I lost my motivation. And now, in the third year I regret it. That's my goal, to regain my Dutch.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

I think the lack of face-to-face contact made that integration was almost impossible. So that, I think.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

It made it very hard. I had lots of Dutch acquaintances, but only 2 good Dutch friends. If you have a party at your house and invite 10 people, it doesn't matter if you are good friends or not. But I you have dinner with 3 people, I will not invite my Dutch acquaintances. So, by not making new friends, it completely ruined my integration.

Follow-up question: And why didn't you make more Dutch friends before?

Well, my best friends are from my dorm in the SSH housing. So, they happen to be internationals. In the geography course, I honestly feel a bit of a divide. Dutch people go home often, they have a different sense of humor, are more serious. In Groningen in general, I don't feel a very strong divide, but I do think that when I see a Dutch person, I automatically feel a lesser connection than I see an international student for example.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

Only in situations where Dutch people would speak Dutch to each other. But this does not dominate my experience, I am still very surprised how willing and able Dutch people are to speak in English. But still, cases exist when this was not the case.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

Yes, definitely. You just do not meet new people.

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I want to meet more people, and rebuilt connections I lost during the pandemic. Whether they are Dutch or international, it really doesn't matter to me. And I will go to the city center a lot more.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

I don't think it has to be improved on the university itself, just like I said, maybe apply these first-year groups in every faculty?

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I think expanding the introduction weeks would help a lot. Give students more time to integrate with fellow students.

Do you have anything to add?

Yeah, one thing, I am sometimes shocked that internationals feel such a barrier to integrate with Dutch people. I feel like experiences differ so much between students. But I think it is also a personal thing. I am a very positive person; nothing is never very negative in my opinion.

Interview 5: Male, international, 3rd year student at Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Date: 29-10-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

In the course, since there were mostly Dutch people, I made some Dutch friends and I thought they were really cool. But still, it was sometimes a bit separated, the Dutch had their own things going on and internationals also. But overall, I made a couple of Dutch friends.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

Yeah, definitely. If I am studying in a foreign country, I want to get to know the people who live there and learn about the culture and stuff like that. But circumstances matter, for example when you have a Dutch group of people, they are not immediately going to speak English just for me, so when this happens, internationals go together, and Dutch go together.

Follow-up question: And did you experience that often? That people were not willing to speak English.

No, not in the classroom, but when there is a party or something, besides school, they are most likely to talk in Dutch, because it is just more natural for them to speak in their own language. But I would do the same, I think! It is not necessarily a bad thing, but it sometimes hinders my integration with Dutch people. And when I asked if they could talk English, most of the time they were really cool about it and switched to English immediately. And the Dutch speak English fluently!

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I think at the University, with the LCs and stuff like that. I think that's the place where I met most of my Dutch friends. They organized activities where I could bond with fellow students. But other than that, the social stuff like the student association, parties, I think that's the best way

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

I don't think the level of English is the problem, I think the Dutch do not feel comfortable enough with speaking English...

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

I first joined a football club, it was a club with like all international students, and people obviously have similar interests, so it is very easy to make friends there. Other than that, I think bars and the campus are important places. In the break between the lectures everybody has a chat. You also get to know people there. But in bars, I don't think I really made real friends, it was more like having a short chat with somebody you recognize. We just meet random people there.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

It was a mess to find a house! At first, I was moving around in air bnb's for two weeks or so. After that, I finally found a house with other students. But the international student houses are great to meet a lot of people. But my house was mixed with Dutch and Internationals, but I had a bad experience because my house doesn't specifically have a common area. You can't sit anywhere with your

housemates, that hindered me from like socializing with my housemates. So, to be honest, I am not that close with them. I still live here though, I have a lot of other friends

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Yeah, I think it plays a role, because it is an important meeting place for students. Like I said, when there is a break between lectures, you sit with other students and have a chat with them. And the first-year groups are important for integration.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

The bars closing, there was a curfew and you couldn't go to bars, that was definitely the biggest one. But also football stopped at some point, I really missed to get out to play football. So that was hard too.

- **Follow-up question: Did you still see friends at that time?**

Yes, we did. We set up small gatherings at somebody's house, but it was like a really repetitive thing, always doing the same thing. But we saw each other much less than before of course.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

Definitely the lack of face-to-face contact because you simply were not able to meet up!

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

For me, it was really boring, staring at your laptop and try to follow a class. For example, when you join a breakout session, no one talks, so that's so weird and awkward. The online teaching was well-organized, but there's only so much you can do, it's just annoying.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

I feel like Dutch people live in their own bubble actually. They don't really care I think.

- **Follow-up question: And why do think that is? Because of the culture maybe?**

Yeah, I think so, and also when they want to have fun, I don't think they want to speak English all the time and want to talk to someone that is similar to you and has the same language. But I am not quite sure to be honest.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

Sure. Like I said, it all starts with the face-to-face contact which wasn't possible.

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

Well, I expect to meet more people, because my friends in Groningen tell me that it is quite good, there are parties again! They meet more new people, so yeah, I think that will be great when I am back. I am so excited to meet new people and be able to talk to them face-to-face again.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

The University tries hard to improve integration. They really try to make the students interact with each other. The university does enough. It then depends on the student her/himself, like being open for integration. It's up to yourself!

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I don't actually think they can do more than they already try to do.

Interview 6: Female, international, 3rd year students at Faculty of Economics and Business

Date: 9-11-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

Yes, I have my uni-friends and other friends. And I met them during my first year of the study, in the Spaa group. We went to classes together and met every now and then. And of course, hockey, my whole team is Dutch. I am part of a commission there. And I also speak Dutch! And I also work in a Dutch restaurant, that's also nice.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I came here and I wanted to learn the language and wanted to integrate and make Dutch friends. Because why would you want to go to a country and not wanting to get to know the people and the language? I do have a Hamburg-group here, some friends from home, but none of them speaks Dutch and don't do anything to get to know the culture. That's so sad actually and I told myself from the beginning that I am not going to be one of them!

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I think via sports because you have a team there and get very close. But it's also about the personal characteristics, I think. It depends on if you show interest, also if you want to get to know the language it helps! I had it a few times as well, when a friend brought me to a party with Dutch people, I kind of felt guilty that they had to talk in English just for me, that felt not good.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

In general, Dutch speak English very well. However, one time, I had a hockey coach here that was so bad in English, I barely understood his English because it was so bad, and he would just say everything in Dutch! But it also helped me learn, but I also answered in English, so I taught him a little bit of English as well. For me, from home, we never expect people to learn German because it is so difficult. But here, they all said to me that I had to learn Dutch. For me it was probably easier because German and Dutch are not that different. For others I can imagine that it can be very hard. But for sure, it had a positive effect on my integration. It's just funny that Dutch assume that you are going to learn the language

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

I think sports clubs, parties and the Uni!

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

I live together with one Dutch girl and two international girls. We do a lot of things together, but we also have our own friend groups, but we try to do some things together and we speak English at home. But sometimes I speak Dutch with the Dutch girl now! And I met a lot of Dutch people through her, when she brings me to parties and stuff. So yeah, this definitely has an influence.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

I don't think they do a lot, but maybe they do, and I've never heard about it? I know they offer language courses. And I do notice when we have to work in groups, they always try that these groups consist of Dutch and International students. I think that's nice. I personally didn't miss anything, because I had hockey and stuff, but I think for some it might find it useful if the university had taken more action.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

The curfew. This restriction took so long, everything that was planned got cancelled. And I always have a lot of stuff planned in the evening, because that's when students have time. At night, you gather with friends and see people, and none of that took place.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

Well, I think it is just that you couldn't see the people you are friends with. So obviously, that makes integration impossible.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

I hated the online education. Exams were fine, they were a bit easier but the tutorials, it was such a sad time actually. You were always in your room. Also, the group work was difficult, and you didn't know the people. This also made me less motivated. But I did meet new people, but I never saw them again in real life. So, I didn't really connect with them.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

Not really, but I do get a lot of World War jokes and people imitate me because I have a German accent, which makes me feel uncomfortable sometimes, but other than that not really! I've always felt welcome, and since I speak Dutch even more.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

Yes!

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I think that integration will be much easier then. Everybody is in the city and going out. And I also I think that's where you meet a lot of people. And I think that Dutch people also like to meet people that are not in their own bubble.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

Yeah like I said, they could do more, but I don't know exactly what they should change. I think make mixed-working groups mandatory?

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I think they don't have a big role now, and I think it is also up to the students!

Interview 7: Female, Dutch, 5th year student at Faculty of Economics and Business

Date: 9-11-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

No, not much, really. I think I tried it a little bit during my studies, because there were a lot of internationals, especially during my master last year. So, I worked together with them during working groups and stuff. But I also met international students through my job at the University. One of my colleagues is actually a friend right now. But that's it for my integration, I think!

Follow up question: And the integration at your work, do you think you were kind of pushed to integrate? And do you think that helps?

Yes, in some way, because you were classified to work with a non-Dutch person to keep the balance, I think. And because I had to integrate, I did, and I think that's nice, and it improved my English of course.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

During my bachelor's programme, not really, but that's mainly because I was quite insecure about my level of speaking English. In my opinion, I was not able to have a good conversation with another student because I was not fluent enough in English, I sometimes don't know how to react at a question or something. I am still not able to I think, but that's also because I don't speak English very often. And this leads again to the lack of integration during my studies. Looking back, I realize that the internationals don't mind if you speak English fluently, as long as you try haha!

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I think in the classroom during practicals or something. In smaller groups you are more able to interact with international students and form groups, I think. But what happened, is that Dutch students teamed up with each other and international students teamed up with each other also. So, you still had two groups. But I think by this working groups, you meet new people.

Follow-up question: And student associations? In your case EBF?

I don't think there are many internationals active in this association, I never met them there, but I don't know actually. But this can also be because I already had my friends there that I already knew, so that matters, I think. But I am sure that internationals join the associations, and I think that's good!

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

In my case, yes. I don't have a feeling I can speak English well enough to properly integrate with other students, so that's on me, I think.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

I think the University buildings. But I also know that they sometimes organize events in 'het Noorderplantsoen', but I never went there. And in the city center, that's possible I think, but again, I never met internationals there. And maybe internationals go to other pubs and bars than the Dutch

people do? And in my case, when I am at a party, I do not feel comfortable with speaking English, I just want to enjoy myself and have some drinks with my existing friend group if that makes sense.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

I think it can play a role in improving integration, yes. But what I see is that Dutch houses don't always want international students when they are looking for a new housemate. I can understand that, because you want to feel at ease in your house, and I don't want to speak another language then. For me, it already takes a lot of effort to speak English, let alone that I have to speak English at home!

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Yeah, I think the Spaa groups can help, these are first-year mentor groups within my study. These groups consist of both Dutch and international students, but I think they can organize these groups differently. For me, it was just something I had to do, it was quite boring, and you never did fun stuff with the group. It was quite individualistic. However, some groups became quite close with each other, but that wasn't the case for me. I think, if they would organize some fun events, it will become nicer!

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social life?)

That you couldn't see that many people anymore, so the visitors at home for example. I kind of forgot which restrictions were active actually, it is some time ago haha! I remember that I first, I kind of liked the lockdown, I finally had a study break! But of course, after some time, it wasn't fun anymore. But the closure of the University also caused troubles, my daily routine was just completely gone.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

I think the online education, but maybe I am an exception in this, but I kind of liked it. I think because of this, I integrated more with international students because I wouldn't have to approach students in real life to talk to them, I could just send them a simple message! This was so easy, and suddenly I was working together with students that came from all over the world, people that I've never met before. That was really nice, and for me, the threshold was way lower to approach an international student. And in normal times, you kind of have to know a person a bit when you want to work together, but that was not the case anymore. But I can understand that this was not the case for everyone.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

I think it is for many students, but as I just explained, I kind of liked it!

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

No, besides the language problem I mentioned, not really. And also, the international students often have formed their own little groups already, so I didn't want to intervene in this. But this is also the other way around I think that Dutch people have their own friend groups. Looking back, I maybe wish I tried to integrate more, because it is actually really nice and interesting to know people that come from other places.

12. (If the above answer is ‘Yes, ...’) Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

(Above answer is ‘no’)

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I think that if more people had the same experiences with the online education as I had, the threshold to approach people in real life is now lower, because making contact online was easy. I hope that I finally dare to approach people in real life. And maybe I will meet with the people in real life, that I met online! I already did that once; it was really nice!

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

Yes, as I mentioned before, organize the SPAA groups in a different way to make it more fun would definitely help I think!

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

If they make the events more interesting to go to, then I think they would really help integration more than they already do.

Interview 8: Female, Dutch, 3rd year student at Faculty of Economics and Business

Date: 13-11-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

Yes, I do, in the first year I had classes on campus and about half of the students in class were international. And often you had to form groups to make an assignment or groups were already made by the teachers. This way, you met a lot of international students and had to work with them. I don't necessarily feel the urge to meet international people, but I am always open to it!

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

(Above answer is 'yes')

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

Well, at the student association they have several commissions which you can join, and these are often mixed with Dutch and internationals. And they also organize social events, so that's a good option, I think. But also, when going out, there are a lot of possibilities to meet international students. But personally, I don't meet many internationals in the city center, because I already have my existing friend group. But I do have a German friend that I met at my study who I actually see a lot and when I go to a party with her, I meet new international people, because she has a lot of German friends.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

Yes, definitely. I know that there are a lot of Dutch people that want to continue speaking their own language, because that's easy to do. And because of this, I feel like they don't integrate that much with international students. But the internationals that are in Groningen, speak English fluently, so that's not the problem, I think.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

Maybe the park or something? But I don't think you actually mix with international students there, but there are a lot of Dutch and international students visiting the park when the weather is nice. So maybe if you want to, you can. And maybe at sports clubs?

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

Yeah, it does, I think. But I live in a house with 9 Dutch girls, and what's difficult here is that once you start with 1 international, this person might feel left out a bit because the rest of the house is Dutch. Personally, I am totally open for an international housemate. In my case, it is just that my housemates don't really feel the same. I think they do not feel comfortable with speaking English in their home all the time. And maybe little things, like differences in culture, that that might clash. People from Spain have dinner at 9, can you imagine!

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

I think they do a good job, for example looking at mixed working groups. They actually look at the backgrounds of people when they divide the class into groups. I think that is very important. And they also have first-year mentor groups, that's where I met my German friend.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

I think the online education, also because my routine was completely gone. You were just stuck at your home for such a long time, that had definitely the most impact.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

Because education was online now, you were simply not able to see other students in real life. Real life contact is so much nicer than having to talk to somebody through a laptop, in my opinion. And I think because of this online education, you only kept contact with people you already knew than when you actually went to the campus, where you can have a chat with anyone.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

Yes, sure! Like I said before, I missed face-to-face contact.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

No not many, the only thing is that internationals also form groups with other international students, so there isn't really a mix of Dutch and internationals in such groups. But when you get invited for a party by a German friend group for example, everyone really tries to get to know you. So that's nice.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

(Above answer is 'no')

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

Well, I am going on exchange this year, I hope, and it would be very nice to meet new people there. And maybe to reach out to international students that come from the country what I will visit, to ask them what to expect and if they have tips for me. That would be nice.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

Well, maybe the University could introduce like a buddy-system. That you get paired up as a Dutch person with an international to help them out if they have problems or something. That's a nice way to integrate and to help students, I think. Maybe have dinner together or something like that.

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I think they can help, by introducing buddy systems!

Interview 9: Male, Dutch, 3rd year student at Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Date: 17-11-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

No, but I would've liked it. But in the two years I live in Groningen now, I've had not many interactions with international students. But in the LCs during the first year, that was the only year that I actually had interactions with my class, there I had some international friends. But when you have to work in groups, most time you pick your own group members, and that way you stay in your own bubble of friends, which are in my case Dutchies. It's just easier. And sometimes I talk to some international people while going out, but that's not more than small talk. But a friend of mine had many international friends, so when he throws a party, I meet international people through him.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I am open for it, but it just didn't happen for me. But I have a feeling that in general, internationals feel the same about it. They often make other international friends and stay in their own bubble too, I think. They often also have a lot in common.

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I think it happens when people find a common interest. So, when they are doing things, they both like. I don't know if this is always the case at the university, but this is a good starting point to actually meet each other. But for real integration, I think that sports, parties, or events are good ways to get to know each other.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

I think that it is hard for internationals to learn Dutch in the first place. But I do think that when Dutch people talk English for a while, they get weary after some time. I do experience that myself, I sometimes get tired of the translating Dutch into English in my head, it takes energy to do that. Then it is easier to be around Dutch people, you know. So, definitely, it has an influence on integration, because in the end, I think that Dutch people prefer to speak their own language.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

Dutch and International students bump into each other on campus, but that is not the best place for integration, I think. Maybe parks, squares, but I don't see that often. But I think the night life in Groningen is the best way to meet people. Have drinks with them and have a chat. And sometimes I talk to international girls on tinder, but often that doesn't work out!

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

I live in a Dutch student house. And I don't necessarily want to live with internationals, because I think I will feel more comfortable speaking Dutch in my house.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

I don't think that people are really encouraged to integrate on the university, and I think it will be a good thing that the university plays a bigger role in this. Such as mixed working groups where there has to be a mix of Dutch and international students. And maybe an expansion of the first year LCs? But I don't know how that has to be organized.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

The curfew, I had the feeling that I was locked up at my own house. In combination with the closure of shops, you feel very restricted in many aspects. And the closure of the pubs and bars was of course also not the nicest thing.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

The most important thing is the closure of public places because you simply would not see other people as much anymore.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

To be honest, I didn't think it was the worst thing. Watching lectures from your room was quite nice. But of course, sometimes I missed going to the university, just going out. And online group projects were sometimes hard, because you weren't able to sit down with your group members to make appointments and set deadlines for example. That was sometimes annoying. So yeah, integration was definitely harder in general, I think.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

Apart from the different language, not really actually. I think it was just me that wasn't very open to integrate with other people.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

(Above answer is 'no')

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I don't think a lot will change after the pandemic. Everyone still has their own existing friend groups. I also think that Dutch and international students don't go the same clubs. Except from the working groups, that are on campus now, you have a better chance to meet international people.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

I think it can, but apart from mixed working groups, I don't know how they should organize this.

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

Same as earlier, it is hard to organize and up to the students I think!

Interview 10: Male, Dutch, 3rd year student at Faculty of Economics and Business

Date: 17-9-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

Yes, I do integrate with international students. I do not have many international friends I have really contact with, but I do have a German friend who is really nice, and we always decide to do projects together. However, outside my study International Business I do not integrate that much.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

(Above answer is 'yes')

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I noticed in my first year when many of my classes were still on campus, I had way more contact with my classmates. Additionally, in our first year we had the same class for an entire year which created a better band. Integration should not be forced, because some people are already satisfied with what they have. However, for the people that are seeking for integration, there should be physical activities they can attend.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

Yes, sometimes I can be a bit insecure about my English in a conversation. Especially, with some international students who master the language very well. I realize after a conversation that I would have talked more when I spoke in my native language. I think many others have this feeling too, especially with some whose English is very bad.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

I think bars and clubs are nice ways to integrate, not only between international and Dutch, but for all students. It is a casual meeting place, and you can leave whenever you want. The raw awkward edge, when first meeting people, might disappear.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

Yes, many Dutch student houses mention that they do not accept Internationals. Because of this many Internationals end up in studios or in big international flats. This makes integration with Dutch students more difficult. Personally, I think I would not feel comfortable living with international students because you have to speak English all the time! I think that will be exhausting for me.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Yes, groups tend to choose each other in my studies. Thus, when choosing your group, I tend to choose my Dutch friends and the South Korean students tend to choose each other. In some of my courses we cannot choose because you can learn from your group mates from all over the world because everyone has a different set of norms and values and because of that you can get a different view on a case. In that way they also ensure more integration between students.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

I think not a specific restriction impacted my social life, but it was the whole situation together. First, not going outside and seeing everyone on zoom. After that we could see each other but only in small groups. At that moment you do not really think about how impactful it was. However, when you think about what you could have done it is disappointing. But we've made the best out of it!

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

For me it was not going to campus. In online groups you do not have talks after class about unnecessary things. You talk about the course and when you are done you stop the call. Thus, not seeing each other in person impacted integration for me.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

A 100% per cent. It is just terrible.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

Yes, Dutch students can be really distant against Internationals. They think they are a bit weird. For example, when you are cycling and an international is cycling really slow, you think ughhh. If we as Dutch people would come to a different country, the people would help us immediately to feel comfortable.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

Yes, everyone was scared in the beginning and many internationals went to their parents in the foreign country. For everyone it was difficult to meet new people because everything was closed.

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I think the integration will rise. The student association of my faculty can organize parties again and, in that way, you can meet new people. Additionally, if classes are on campus, you also integrate more than online classes. One time I had to overcome 2 gap hours and me and 2 other girls from my class had a drink in the canteen and she told me about her home country and the corruption there and it was so cool to hear her story. If we were in front of our laptops, I would not have had that conversation.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

In my opinion, the university really tries to stimulate integration with workgroups and parties. However, you cannot force people who do not want it. Dutch students are reluctant so they will not show up on those parties and stick with their own friends.

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

Yes, students have to socialize eventually on their own, but the university can set up activities that they can attend to give them a helping hand.

Interview 11: Female, Dutch, 3rd year student at Faculty of Economics and Business

Date: 22-11-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

Yes, I do. During study projects and within my job as a mentor at the RUG.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

(Above answer is 'yes')

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I think it can best take place within social meetings between students, not within study groups/group project. Students need to voluntarily want to get in contact with international students. I don't think integration is something that needs to be pushed.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

Yes, I do. I think Dutch students find it scary to speak (e.g.) English to international students, because they are insecure about their proficiency level. The better they are able to express themselves, the more they will be likely to start a conversation with other students. So yeah, definitely. But I've never experienced that an international spoke English poorly!

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

I think study-related social activities, like fundraisers, visits to companies, etc. These are places where you meet a lot of new people!

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

Yes, I do. Housing plays a big role in the student life in The Netherlands. But most Dutch student houses do not accept international students, because of the language barrier, which I can understand. Also, most Dutch students just find it easier to choose a Dutch person, because so many Dutch people are always looking for a new place.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Yes, I do. They can for example provide room to host events related to different studies. But apart from that, I don't think they have to do more.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

The restriction on the number of people that could come visit you in your home. That really limited my contact with friends!

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

In short, the restrictions regarding the closure of the University and the online tutorials as a result. In addition, also the many cancelled events. Everybody was just stuck at home for a long time and was not able to see other students, so yeah that impacted integration a lot.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

Yes, totally! The online tutorials caused a lot of barriers to come in contact with fellow students. It was difficult to come in contact because the cameras were off most of the time and you were not able to talk to each other! It was a really hard time for me.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

Yes, sometimes it was difficult because of the different work ethic between the multiple cultures of students. Sometimes, students are just so different, and I think this is mainly because of the culture differences. Dutch people can be very lazy sometimes, whereas international students have a lot of discipline, that's something I notice.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

Yes, I do. I think people find it harder to start a conversation with new people, because of the distance you're supposed to keep. This is something we had to get used to! And I also think people are not used to bigger groups of people anymore, so bigger events might scare them more than they did in the past and maybe not show up as much as before.

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I think new students will try hard to make new friends and integrate, but the students who have lived here since before the pandemic will not try very hard to integrate with international students because they already found their friends, I think.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

Yes, I think it can. Even though most international students are very open to contact with other students, most Dutch students are not. It is easier for Dutch students to speak Dutch, so during group projects they will be likely to work in groups with only Dutch students. This makes it even harder for international students to participate in Dutch culture/Dutch student life. So maybe through mixed-working groups?

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I think they can, but the students have to be willing to participate as well. It should not feel mandatory for students.

Interview 12: Male, Dutch, 3rd year student at Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Date: 22-11-2021

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

In my life outside study, I do not integrate that much with international students. I live with Dutch students and my friends are Dutch, so in everyday life I am surrounded with Dutch students only. With my study, I integrate a bit with international students. For example, in seminars, because international students are in the group, or when there's a group project with international students.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

In my everyday life, not so much. I like the fact that I can talk Dutch with my friends. I think it would take me more energy when I have to speak English to my friends. On the other hand, it would probably become easier to speak English when I do it more often. And there are also international students that can speak Dutch. However, I still do not have the desire to integrate. I think it is interesting to integrate more with international students, but not on a regular basis.

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

On campus. Because international and Dutch students both are on campus and can meet each other there easily. This already happens during seminars and tutorials, but it could be more with other activities. I don't know what these activities should look like though. A lot of students would probably not go to non-study related activities, so I don't know if that would work. Maybe there could be more emphasis on integration in tutorials of the first-year students.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

Yes. For me, the language is a huge barrier in integrating with international students. I find it hard to speak English and easy to speak Dutch. I prefer to talk Dutch with my friends and the people I am surrounded with.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

Definitely study. From my experience, I can conclude that Dutch and international student do not put in much effort to get in touch with each other, especially Dutch students in my opinion. Study is the main place where contact between international students and Dutch students is really necessary, for group assignments for example, and where contact is established between the two groups. I think that is important for integration.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

Yes. I think that if Dutch and international students would live together, there would be more integration between students. Then, Dutch students would know more international students and international students would know more Dutch students. However, a lot of Dutch students, including me, prefer to live with Dutch students only. But if it would happen more often, integration would go better, I think. I also know that it is more difficult for international students to find housing. A lot of student houses do not want international students in their house. But that's also because of the language and differences in culture, I think.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Yes and no actually. Yes, because they organize events and first year groups that are meant to meet people. But other than that, I don't think they do much because it depends on the students if they want to integrate or not.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

The limitation of people we were allowed to see, and I think the curfew and that the clubs were closed. I simply was not able to see other people! And because the student life takes place mostly at night, meeting with friends and going out, the curfew made this impossible.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

All students could see each other less because of online classes and because the university was closed. Dutch and international students also saw each other even less than usual. That made integration even more difficult than it already was. I think especially a connection between international and Dutch students was more difficult to make because the main reason they saw each other, study related projects, was gone.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

Yes! You were not able to see other people.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

No. I did not integrate that much with international students before COVID-19. I did not integrate with international students because I did not feel the need to integrate. Therefore, I did not experience difficulties.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

(Above answer is 'no')

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

Now the restrictions have partly ended, I find that it is nice to see students in real life again. Not only seeing Dutch students, but also international students. I expect that the integration between Dutch and international students will go back to the way it was before Covid: integration through study, but not outside study.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

Yes, because the university is the main place all students meet each other. However, I do think that it is mainly the mindset of students: they must want to integrate with each other. So, it is up to the individual itself, I think.

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I think the university could put more emphasis on integration, for example in tutorials or other activities for students.

Interview 13: Male, International, 3rd year student at Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Date: 13-01-2022

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

I integrated more with international students while it took me some time to establish contact with Dutch students. I still don't have many Dutch friends or 'acquaintances'.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

Of course, I would like to integrate more with Dutch students since one major part of studying abroad, like I am doing right now, is settling in and learning about cultural things. But it just didn't happen I think.

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

One possibility is working together on group assignments and go to classes together, like meeting each other in a university context. But it is also nice to go out or organizing trips together of course, like outside of the university context. But to be able to do that, you have to meet people, and I think this will happen mostly at the university.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

To a certain extent the language can be a barrier but if people feel comfortable speaking the language there won't be a problem. I think people who don't yet feel comfortable speaking English all the time should still try harder since English is the university/programme language and it is necessary to be able to speak it. Not only for integration, but also to succeed in your program.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

Places to eat and sit together during breaks at the university are important, but also study spaces such as study rooms that can be used for group work can be of great benefit. But also the city center and sports clubs!

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

Housing is definitely one of the spots where people meet. That's why equal access and a transparent process to find housing would help a lot! Living together brings so many benefits for integration you can't even think of.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

I think the university not only plays an important role but has a responsibility to create conditions in which students can integrate well. These conditions can relate to activities/events offered or the organization within faculties such as study associations.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

The closing of public buildings and areas had the biggest impact I would say because it meant no

possibilities for meeting people randomly, or using university study spaces or spending time with other students in a university context outside lecture/seminar times. This was all not possible.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

Integration could still happen online but then only with people that you already met before. So, because of restrictions it was impossible to really meet new people, so I guess everybody stucked to their group from before the restrictions and were not really able and open to meet new people.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

I think this is definitely true for lectures, where there would be close to zero interaction between students themselves. Maybe in seminars or more practical formats, integration worked a little better since you had more contact with fellow students.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

I found it difficult to integrate with Dutch students even before the pandemic. One reason but not the only one is probably the language barrier. On the other hand, before the pandemic I was still settling in and getting used to everything during my first semester. But that wouldn't have mattered if the integration had been really easy.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

I think the restrictions just added to the difficulties. If you had not made friends by the time the restrictions came, it would become even more difficult. And I think online formats of certain events didn't really work out for meeting people the first time, at least I could imagine there would be less participants in these events (from Ibn Battuta for example).

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I hope it will improve because there are more options to use university spaces (also the sports facilities), since they opened up again, so there's integration possible between students.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

From what I have experienced, it definitely can. I think many international students feel the same. I don't know exactly what they could do but definitely pay more attention to new international students. And maybe introduce buddy-systems?

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

As I said before, the university could provide more options for exchange. For instance, the faculty associations could organize more events suitable for internationals so that they feel more integrated and also represented by the association.

Date: 18-01-2022

1. Do you integrate with Dutch students?

At the moment, I do. However, it did seem harder at first. Harder compared to the international students, of course. That does not mean students that are from a country far away, for me, the difference was even visible when comparing with students from bordering countries. On the other hand, I see the cultural difference when it comes to the openness to meet new people. With that, I am trying to say that lack of integration in the beginning might be due to the Dutch being generally more introverted, in my opinion.

2. (If the above answer is ‘No, ...’) Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch students?

I did actually, but it just did not happen that much. In the first year I tried, but as I said, there are differences in culture that made it difficult, I think.

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I believe at the beginning of the program in year 1, the introduction week hosted in Groningen should have had more group activities and should’ve been longer in general. Since the first impression and first ‘touch’ with a new environment is very important. When I first started studying in the UK, I really liked their concept of about 2 weeks being mostly introductory and full of opportunities to get to know the first-, second- and third-year students. Especially since our courses have such a large number of students, University could pay more attention to this. Maybe it was different with others, but it took me quite some time to meet people outside of my scheduled ‘Learning Group’. However, all these activities are now harder to realize because of the restrictions in the Netherlands... I also liked how sometimes I had to do the group assignments with students I don’t know, because when that was not the case, we would usually just form a group that is also a friend group.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

Absolutely. However, most of the students at RUG speak very good English no matter where they are coming from. When it comes to the Dutch language, it also plays a role since most of the people enrolled in the same program are Dutch. I have heard many times even from my Dutch friends that it’s less convenient to have a group of Dutch friends with one International as then everyone needs to speak English. Even though everyone speaks it very well so I am not sure why that is the case...

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

Places that are important for integration are campuses, outside of the lecture halls and quiet parts of the libraries of course. But also cafes, clubs and similar places where students generally go to entertain. That’s where you meet a lot of new people, I think.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

Housing generally, no. However, since the accommodation is so hard to find in Groningen, which is also the case in many other cities in the Netherlands with a very high number of students, many

available room vacancies preferred Dutch tenants for their housing. This surely could play a role in the integration between students, and it leads to international students not feeling welcomed.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Not a big role but... it could definitely have some influence! How, I have already touched upon earlier, but I think providing more time for first-year students to integrate. Also, I think the most important thing for the University is to teach and enable students' productivity, so honestly I could understand them not trying super hard to influence this part of the student life.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

I was not based in the Netherlands throughout the whole pandemic because I returned home for some time, so I might have a different experience than others that were there the entire time. In Croatia, we did not have any strict restrictions, only 3 or 4 months in the beginning of the pandemic. Then, not being able to go to restaurants or cafes or some events, it was convenient just to hang out with friends at my/their place. This somehow made close friends even closer, but other acquaintances less likely to become friends with. Also, it was harder to meet new people, which we were all so used to. Afterwards, it was pretty much normal in Croatia so I do not see it influencing my social life. However, because of often strict restrictions in the Netherlands, it was more difficult for me to move back there soon, find work and reunite with the friends I have there.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

Of course, social life and being able to network is a huge part of the student life. Covid restrictions are primarily decided so that all interactions are put to a minimum. Not being able to attend events, enjoy clubbing, and most of the time even go to the campus to see your colleagues, of course made it harder for students to make friends and/or just communicate in person, as it is a lot more different than chatting online. This surely made students lonelier than in a situation without the measurements taken. As previously mentioned, it was also surely harder to meet other people outside of your friend group.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

Of course, I honestly cannot think how it would not. Even though I personally do not know anyone in that situation, I am very sure that the generation that started studying online in September 2020 had quite a difficult time with integrating with other students, especially, the shier and more introverted ones. Online education made integration harder as lectures halls were also one of the meeting places where students could integrate with each other.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

As I mentioned before, for me, it was difficult to integrate with Dutch students because of a difference in culture with regards to the openness of students, I think.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

I do agree that it did make it more difficult. The limited face-to-face contact, the online education and the closure of public places made it so hard!

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I am going to the Netherlands again soon and I really hope to see the city more vibrant and with many social events. I hope to see students looking forward to their 'freedom' and making the most of it by joining these events as we cannot be sure how long we have left until the next lockdown. Anyhow, I will do my best to make the best out of the freedom!

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

I hope that I am wrong, but since I cannot see the post-pandemic period to be soon. One day, after COVID-19 as asked, the integration between students could be achieved with some cultural exchange events for example. Just because I am comparing this with my experience in the UK, there could be more in-course gatherings at the beginning of the program, for Christmas and/or the end of the program.

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

As previously said, it can play a (minor) role in this.

Interview 15: Female, Dutch, 3rd year Medicine student

Date: 20-01-2022

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

No, only in tutor groups and group projects. Outside that, I don't have much interactions with international students to be honest.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

Not necessarily. I think the main reason for this is that I already have a super fun Dutch friend group. I hang out with them most of the time, so I don't really need to make any other international friends.

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

In my case group projects make me get to know international students, and I may be more likely to reach out to them. Also, study associations and committees are usually helpful since they organise events where you can meet other students. This is good for integration I think because you have a common interest and makes starting a conversation easier.

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

Possibly for students in studies which are in Dutch, but in my study, everybody is quite proficient in English at this point, so it should not be too big of an issue. Personally, I never had problems with speaking English or something. I think the Dutch are in general quite good in English, and the internationals that come here also master English good enough.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

Definitely small work groups, cafés, nightlife in the city. I used to meet some fellow students there when nightlife was still available, but unfortunately, this isn't possible anymore.

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

Yes, Dutch student houses often put "Dutch students only" in their messages looking for housemates on Facebook. I have heard that it is difficult for international students to find homes with housemates who are Dutch. I live in a Dutch student house with 8 other girls, and we also prefer Dutch students only. This is because of differences in culture. Accepting Dutch girls is just easier for everyone. I have housemates that don't speak English often, so when an international would be living with us, the international student has to speak Dutch in my opinion. Instead of the other way around.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Could be, but I think in the end, Dutch and internationals' private lives are just too different to become really good friends. The universities can organize events and stuff, but in the end, it is about spending time together outside of the uni, right? I think that does not happen often in my environment.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

I think not being able to go out to bars and clubs, and not being able to meet new people in public places. I think everyone will have the same answer to this question? It's just that you are not able to because of the restrictions.

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

The same as I said before, not being able to meet new people, you had to stick with people you already know. Which wasn't that hard for me personally, but if you wanted to meet new people, this is a big issue.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

Definitely! I was just sitting in my room behind my desk all day. However, because I study medicine, I could go the physical lectures again after some time. This made me realize that I was so lucky to be able to get out of my house!

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

No, but I was not looking for it anyway. So, I can't really say anything about this I think.

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

(Above answer is 'no')

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I think that especially for the students who arrived here during COVID integration it will improve because they aren't used to the freedom here. But for me, no not much since I am not planning to meet international student or something...

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

I think it can, but I am not the right person to say something about this. But if I have to give suggestions; maybe organize like an introduction week before studies start at the beginning of the studies? Or make 'de KEIweek' more approachable for new international students?

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

Yes, by connecting them during study activities or maybe by organizing events? Although the major part still lies with the students themselves of course.

Interview 16: Female, Dutch, 3rd year student at Faculty of Economics and Business

Date: 20-1-2022

1. Do you integrate with Dutch/International students?

No, not much. Honestly, I think only when we have to work together during working groups at the University. Outside study, I don't meet up with international students, but I do with my Dutch friend group.

2. (If the above answer is 'No, ...') Do you have the desire to integrate with Dutch/International students?

When I am at the university sometimes. Mostly because they have the same interest or may help me studying. With respect to casual occasions, I do not feel the desire to integrate with international students that often.

3. How do you think integration between students can best take place?

I think that the best way integration can take place is just with having small talk. Just talking to each other and getting to know each other in an informal way in between lectures is the best way I think! Apart from that, maybe in the nightlife in Groningen? That's where I have small talk with strangers haha!

4. Do you think language proficiency can affect integration between students?

Yes, personally, speaking in a language which is not your native language may bring some difficulties. I think that these difficulties stop many people from starting a conversation. I have experiences this often. I think I am too insecure about my level of English to start a conversation with an international student. Which I think, is quite sad because I really believe I could be friends with them.

5. Which types of meeting/public places do you think are important for integration between students?

I think casual types of meetings for people with the same interest are important for integration. So I think maybe sports clubs or at student associations are ideal places for integration! Here, small talk will be very easy, and you will definitely have something to talk about since everyone is there for the same interest. I experience that with student associations myself too, when we have drinks or something, starting a conversation with other students is so easy!

6. Do you think housing plays a role in integration between students?

Yes, living together gives a necessity to starting a conversation. Therefore, I think this will positively affect the integration. But, a lot of Dutch students, including myself, rather have other Dutch housemates instead of international housemates. That has to do with differences in culture and language. I don't feel comfortable enough, and my housemates feel the same about this. But I do think it sad for the international people that they often can't find a house that soon... At least, that is what I hear.

7. Do you think the University plays a role in integration between students?

Yes, definitely, it brings people with the same interests from all parts of the world together. And the working groups are really good for integration, I think.

8. Which restriction(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic had the most impact on your (social) life?

For sure, the closure of restaurants and social events for me. You couldn't meet up with friends or meet new people!

9. In what ways did the restrictions impact integration between students the most?

Due to the restrictions, all meeting points for meeting new people disappeared like a said. As a result, integration was not possible because everything shifted online or was closed.

10. Do you feel that the associated online education made integration more difficult between students?

Yes, because I see the university as a good meeting spot. Since this was closed and people were not able to meet each other integration became harder and during the online education, for example, people did not turn on their cameras. So you could not see other faces, that was so hard in my opinion.

11. Did you experience any difficulties with integration with Dutch/International students before the pandemic? If so, what difficulties?

No, I could integrate as much as I want with other students. Like I said, I did not integrate that much with other students, and I am already in my third year, but if I wanted too, I definitely could!

12. (If the above answer is 'Yes, ...') Do you feel that the restrictions, in general, made integration more difficult than before the pandemic?

(Above answer is 'no')

13. What are your expectations of integration between Dutch and international students now that restrictions have ended?

I really hope future and 1st. or 2nd year students will be able to integrate with other students again. And I think it will happen when everything opens up again.

14. Can the level of integration between students be improved at the University of Groningen?

I think that people of the same nationality are still mainly integrating with each other. Even though we have working groups, I think that the level of integration can indeed be improved at the university. How? That is so difficult I think... I really need to think about that. But I don't think it is up to the university.

15. Do you think that the University of Groningen can play a role in helping students to integrate with Dutch/International students?

I think they are already organizing many activities to increase the integration. Therefore, I don't think the university can play a larger role in the integration. I think it is more up to the students themselves.