

**Language Accessibility and National Identity in Dutch Universities: Student Perspectives
on the Balanced Internationalisation Bill**

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Table of Contents:

ABSTRACT	3
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	4
<i>Scientific Relevance of the Study</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Social Relevance of the Study</i>	<i>7</i>
CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	9
<i>Policy Feedback Theory</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Linguistic Nationalism</i>	<i>12</i>
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	15
<i>Research Paradigm</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Data Collection</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Categorisation of Student Groups</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Inductive Approach</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Semi-structured Interviews</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Data Analysis</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Research Ethics</i>	<i>18</i>
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS	19
<i>Aggregate Dimension I: Internationalisation and Educational Value</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Second-Order Theme I: The value and challenges of English-taught programs and internationals.</i> 20	
<i>Aggregate Dimension II: Opinions on Policy Execution and Purpose</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Second-Order Theme I: Critique on the impact and implementation of the WIB</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Second-Order Theme II: Housing crisis - perceptions and recommendations</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Aggregate Dimension III: National Identity, Integration, and Exclusion</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Second-Order Theme I: Integration challenges and political motives</i>	<i>25</i>
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	28
<i>Results Interpretation</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Practical Implications</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research</i>	<i>33</i>
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION	34
REFERENCES	35
APPENDICES	42
<i>Appendix A</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Interview Script</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Appendix B</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Gioia table (simplified)</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Appendix C</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Consent Form</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Appendix D</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Sample of Participants</i>	<i>52</i>

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the proposed Balanced Internationalisation Bill (Wet internationalisering in balans, WIB) in the Netherlands through the perspectives of national, international and mixed-background students in higher education. The policy aims to decrease the number of English-taught programs and to strengthen Dutch as the main scientific and educational language in the country. Thus, it aims to address claimed issues of classroom overcrowding and housing crisis, as well as to strengthen Dutch national identity. This research investigates how students perceive and interpret the potential educational changes, accessibility and integration challenges, stemming from the proposed WIB. Utilizing Policy Feedback Theory and the concept of linguistic nationalism, as well as the Gioia methodology, the study adopts a qualitative approach and considers the data gathered through 15 interviews with student representatives of the three categories: nationals, internationals, and nationals with an international background. Findings suggest overall student oppose to the policy, with explicit concerns regarding potential limited academic diversity, decreased quality of education, and lack of international collaboration and inclusivity. Participants questioned whether the policy would be able to solve the issues it claims to address and doubted the necessity of its implementation. The study also highlights the need for inclusive policymaking and consideration of diverse student perspectives to avoid unintended negative consequences for Dutch higher education.

Keywords: WIB, Policy Feedback Theory, linguistic nationalism, national students, international students, national students with an international background.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, more and more students have decided to complete their higher education (HE) abroad, in search of better, yet accessible education (Netz, 2021). Research reveals that the Netherlands are among the most popular countries in Europe, along with Germany for Bachelor's, and Germany and France for Master's degrees (Eurostat, 2024). During the past decade, the intake of international students in higher education in Dutch universities has grown significantly. Statistics show that from the academic year 2013/14 to 2023/24, the intake of internationals has increased by 122% (CBS, 2024a). This trend could be explained by the high quality of education in Dutch universities, as well as the fact that numerous programs are provided in English, making them preferred by and accessible to international students (Enders & Westerheijden, 2014). Nevertheless, the number of Dutch students enrolled in HE still prevails over the number of international students by an extensive margin. To be exact, in the academic year of 2022/23 the international students in HE amounted to *122, 220*, compared to *821, 000* Dutch students (CBS, 2024a; CBS, 2024b). Even though Dutch students clearly outnumber the internationals, data on the share of Dutch-taught vs English-taught programs reveals that since 2017, the primary language of higher education has shifted from Dutch to English for postgraduate studies, such as Master's degrees. In 2017, 10% of Master programs used to be taught in English, compared to 66% in Dutch and 24% provided in both languages (Favier & Wijssenbeek, 2023, p. 4). In 2023, 76% of Master programs were taught exclusively in English, compared to 14% in Dutch and the remaining 10% in both languages (Favier & Wijssenbeek, 2023, p. 4). The faculties of Law, Philosophy, Education and Psychology currently have the most Master's programs provided in Dutch, whereas faculties of Science, Social Sciences and Business have the most programs in English or English and Dutch (Radboud University, 2025; Tilburg University, 2025a). The increase in English-taught programs could be explained by the EU project to promote education as internationally oriented, rather than country-specific (European Commission, 2025). The main idea of this approach was to introduce initiatives such as Erasmus or the International Student Mobility (ISM) in Europe which highlighted the numerous benefits of HE abroad, while also convincing universities of the advantages of internationalizing their educational systems (OECD, 2024). The ISM aimed to enhance graduates' skills, multicultural effectiveness, and employability in the international labour

market, as well as provide universities with international perspectives and ideas to drive innovation in research and education (Van Mol et al., 2020; Zimmermann et al., 2020).

There are several positive outcomes, stemming from the internationalisation of the Dutch higher educational system, part of the EU project. For example, the exchange of diverse perspectives, insights and more specifically feedback contributes to the improvement of educational quality (Shayery et al., 2022). In addition, offering high-quality education, in a language accessible to both Dutch and foreign students, leads to financial gains for the Dutch government. For instance, the annual tuition fee for one non-EU/EEA Master student at Radboud University could range from €13,413 (Master program: Biblical Exegesis) to €24,840 (Master program: Global Environment and Sustainability) (Radboud University, 2025). Moreover, an internationalized HE enables the Netherlands to participate in the global educational arena, leveraging partnerships among researchers globally, which could contribute to innovative discoveries and numerous gaps in existing literature being filled (Shayery et al., 2022).

Despite these significant advantages, the internationalisation of HE in Dutch universities has brought a number of debates concerning the role of language and national identity in the educational system. The prevailing focus on English-taught Master's programs seemed to worry the local population and politics, as concerns regarding preserving Dutch as a main educational and scientific language started to rise (Fong, 2024). Moreover, the recent political movements across Europe, such as the ISM or EU internationalisation project, might have further enhanced the Dutch's desire to strengthen their national identity (Minkenberg, 2013). Therefore, echoing the population's concerns and aiming to preserve and reinforce Dutch as the primary research and educational language, the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture, and Science recently proposed the Balanced Internationalisation Bill (Wet internationaliseren in balans, WIB) (Fong, 2024; Ministerie van Onderwijs & Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2024). The bill contains several responsibilities delegated to Dutch universities, such as ensuring staff's proficiency in Dutch, adjusting the recruitment processes accordingly, decreasing the number of English-taught programs and reducing the intake of international students. The policy argues that by adhering to these practices, claimed issues such as lack of student housing and overcrowded university classrooms, will be resolved (WIB, 2024). In addition, the bill states that its main purpose is to provide high-quality education to Dutch students in their native language, establishing Dutch as

the main scientific and educational language in the country (WIB, 2024). This is also accompanied by encouraging internationals to study the local language and recognize the culture in order to motivate them to remain in the country in the long term, contributing to its labour market (Ministerie van Onderwijs & Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2024). The current study focuses on the potential individual- and group-level impact of the bill and aims to understand how such changes in higher education may impact different student categories. In addition, the research will assess whether students understand the bill's reasoning and whether they believe it can solve the challenges it claims to address. In order to provide insights into these inquiries, the following research question has been developed:

“How do different student groups perceive and interpret the potential educational changes proposed by the Balanced Internationalisation Bill (WIB) in Dutch universities?”

In order to gain further insights and build the basis for answering the research question, Policy Feedback Theory (PFT) by Pierson (1993) and the concept of linguistic nationalism (Fishman, 1999) will be utilized. These can help analyse and explain the potential outcomes of the WIB, the role of language, as well as student reactions to the newly proposed policy regulations. In addition, to help answer the research question and capture the different layers of its complexity, the following sub-questions have been developed:

1. *“What are student opinions on the role of language in their education, and do they expect the proposed WIB to affect their access to learning opportunities?”*
2. *“Do students recognize claimed issues such as overcrowded classrooms and housing crisis and do they agree that reducing the number of international students will effectively address these issues?”*
3. *“How do students perceive the potential impact of the WIB on their academic experiences and future career prospects?”*

Scientific Relevance of the Study

This study contributes to understanding the tensions between internationalisation of higher education and the opposing nationalistic political current, proposed by the Dutch

government in the context of the Balanced Internationalisation Bill. To examine these tensions in practice, the research considers the invaluable perceptions of three student groups, namely nationals, internationals, and nationals with an international background. Thus, the study addresses a significant gap in literature. To clarify, differences between national and international students have been researched before, suggesting that representatives of each category cope with different obstacles during their HE (Raja et al., 2021). For example, international students are often found to face greater challenges in the context of social integration, identity change and adaptation, discrimination, etc., in comparison to nationals (Lee & Rice, 2007; Raja et al., 2021; Ward et al., 2009). However, there is still very limited research focused on the third category - nationals with an international background. For example, current literature addresses how such individuals face challenges, stemming from social exclusion and perceptions of "foreignness," although these individuals are legally considered nationals (Maruyama, 1998). Therefore, the study highlights tensions, arguments and perceptions of those who would be directly affected by the bill if it gets implemented, namely students. Therefore, this research bears significant scientific relevance, as its findings reflect the broader debate surrounding the WIB. It not only presents students as active feedback providers to the policy, which is crucial in the stages of its development, but also brings important practical implications for future policy development, with a particular emphasis on the role of language, national identity and academic opportunities in Dutch higher education.

Social Relevance of the Study

Although it is true that the WIB would achieve its goal to strengthen and recognize Dutch as the main scientific and educational language in the country, enforcing the aforementioned practices may bear unintended negative consequences for students. First, for Dutch students, who make up the majority of the overall student population, and speak Dutch as their native language, decreasing the number of English-taught programs may have a weaker negative impact or affect them differently, compared to non-native students. The WIB itself also differentiates between these two categories of students, referring to them as “nationals” and “internationals” (WIB, 2024). The former being local Dutch students for whom the WIB aims to provide high-quality Dutch-taught education, while addressing the claimed issues of overcrowded classrooms and housing crisis. The “internationals” category is composed of students with a non-Dutch

background who are presented as a key factor driving the aforementioned challenges. The WIB claims that one of its goals is to support international students by helping them learn the local language, integrate more easily in the community and improve their opportunities in the labour market (WIB, 2024). Furthermore, a third student category can be identified, although it is not mentioned in the policy, namely “nationals with an international background”. Such students have a mixed background, for example Moroccan-Dutch or Dutch-Chinese, etc. As data about race is not usually collected due to its sensitive nature, the exact number of HE students in that category remains unknown. Nevertheless, a big part of the general population of the Netherlands is represented by such individuals, usually from ex-Dutch colonies, who have a dual background (Sedoc-Dahlberg, 1984; Van Imhoff & Beets, 2004). It can be assumed that such individuals are also present in Dutch universities, hence it is of great importance to take this third category into account while conducting this research, given that the main goal of the study is to analyze different student perceptions of the proposed WIB. As such students often face integration challenges stemming from their dual identities, and often do not fully identify with either culture, it is important to analyze their expectations of the potential policy changes, as well (Verkuyten & Lay, 1998). To clarify, in order to build a complete and representative sample of the general student population, it is crucial to increase within-sample diversity as much as possible, thus reaching better coverage and representativeness of the population. In other words, considering the third category of mixed-background students in this research not only increases sampling validity, but also enriches the study by incorporating diverse perspectives from all student groups who might be affected once the WIB gets implemented.

The remainder of this paper will include a number of chapters, beginning with an in-depth theoretical framework, aiming to provide a clear and concise overview of the existing literature on the studied topic. Then, a methodology section will follow, highlighting the qualitative approaches used for gathering and analysing data. After that, a summary of the results will be provided, followed by a discussion chapter. The latter will consist of interpretation of the findings, practical implications, limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research. The paper will end with a conclusion, summarizing the key ideas and outcomes of the study.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following chapter contains a structured review of the existing literature, providing insights into student reactions to educational policies, the role of language in accessibility to education, and national identity. In addition, the lenses of Policy Feedback Theory (PFT) and the concept of linguistic nationalism will provide a strong basis for answering the research question.

The main goals of the WIB revolve around shifting the primary education and scientific language in the Netherlands from English back to Dutch (WIB, 2024). Research suggests that such drastic changes in educational policies could lead to negative outcomes. For example, the “No Child Left Behind” Act, initially introduced in the US in 2002, aimed to narrow the gap in educational achievements of white students and students of colour and improve the overall learning process, by introducing standardized teaching practices and examination for all students (Hursh, 2007). However, instead of reaching its primary goal, the newly introduced policy led to unintended negative consequences, for example, for students with disabilities who couldn’t meet these uniform standards, thus resulting in further marginalization and peer-discrimination of this student group (Hursh, 2007). Similarly, in 2001, China introduced a policy aimed at consolidating educational resources, which forced smaller institutions, such as rural schools, to merge with larger, urban schools (Hannum et al., 2021). Paradoxically, the mass closure of rural schools increased the number of dropouts, as many students were unable to travel far, due to lack of transportation or financial reasons (Hannum et al., 2021). Furthermore, the overall educational attainment decreased, creating salient inequalities in access to education (Hannum et al., 2021). Additionally, as Raina (2020) suggests in her research on Indian education, policy changes in such contexts can enhance existing social differences even more, as well as could further intensify social divisions.

The WIB classifies as a similar policy, as it also suggests decrease in accessibility to HE via changing the primary language of education. Such a shift could bear negative outcomes for all three student categories considered in this research. To begin, the goal of the bill is to make education more accessible to Dutch students, hence it is crucial to address this with local and mixed-background students to analyse whether the WIB could actually achieve this goal. Nationals could indeed benefit from the policy, as not only are they more likely to understand the

study material more easily when it is in their native language, but their national identity would also be strengthened (WIB, 2024). However, these advantages may be outweighed by the disadvantages of the potential decrease in the numbers of international students. For instance, not only could nationals lose exposure to various international perspectives, but their own career opportunities could become limited, as Dutch university diplomas may become less recognized globally. That could happen due to the proposed reduction of English-taught programs, making Dutch degrees less internationally oriented, given that Dutch is a language less applicable in the global labour market, compared to English (De Wit & Altbach, 2020). Specifically for some fields, such as Business and certain branches of Law, it is crucial to have knowledge of globally standardized terminology in a world-wide spoken language such as English (Gulshoda, 2025).

On the other hand, by making universities more accessible to Dutch students, the bill would make them less accessible to international students. For example, internationals could potentially face challenges, such as difficulties in integration, language barriers, or struggles to enter Dutch universities in the first place (Pozzo, 2022). It is important to note that the WIB frames international students as the driving force of issues such as the housing crisis and overcrowded classrooms (WIB, 2024). As Ha summarizes in her study, internationals are often criticized and blamed for causing a disbalance in education, lowering academic standards, creating social disharmony and housing crisis (2024). The researcher states that internationals' valuable contributions to innovation and research, stemming from their diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds (Østergaard et al., 2011), unfortunately, often remain unrecognized or taken for granted (Ha, 2024). Such negative portrayals could impact students' ability to integrate in Dutch society (Maruyama, 1998; Pozzo, 2022). Moreover, as non-native students would have limited opportunities in terms of linguistically accessible programs in the Netherlands, they might choose to study elsewhere in a world-wide spoken language such as English. The category of students with a mixed background are already facing challenges in integration due to their dual identity and potential feelings of exclusion from both Dutch and international students (Azghari et al., 2015), however shifting the language of education to Dutch could exacerbate these feelings (Hursh, 2007). Even though a lot of these students may have good knowledge of the Dutch language, they may not have the academic proficiency required in university programs, which would create additional barriers in their access to higher education (Qian, 2024). Additionally, as the WIB aims to strengthen Dutch national identity, students with mixed

backgrounds may feel pressured to choose between their dual backgrounds and may suppress their cultural heritage to integrate better in the Dutch educational system (Lee, 2010). That is why, it is crucial to gather all student groups' perceptions of the proposed policy, to understand whether it would achieve its primary goals, or if it would bear negative consequences instead. Therefore, the Policy Feedback Theory will be leveraged as a basis to explain and analyse how student opinions can shape the outcome of the bill through feedback.

Policy Feedback Theory

The WIB is constructed around the idea that it will benefit the students, so considering their feedback and opinions is crucial when analysing the bill. Therefore, the Policy Feedback Theory (PFT) by Pierson (1993) could help assess whether the policy could successfully achieve its aim to improve accessibility of higher education for Dutch national students by strengthening Dutch as the main scientific and educational language, or if it would bring unintended negative impacts to different student groups instead. PFT argues that once a certain policy is implemented, it not only generates certain outcomes, but it also derives feedback from the individuals who are directly affected by it (Pierson, 1993). This feedback then dictates future policy developments, and shapes behaviors and attitudes towards the policy (Pierson, 1993). In the context of the WIB, those directly affected would be the different student categories, hence they would play the role of feedback providers, driving future policy evolution. That is why it is essential to consider student perceptions of the WIB prior to its implementation.

Furthermore, PFT argues that there could be either self-reinforcing effects or reactive effects to newly implemented policies (Pierson, 1993). The former relates to cases when policies become more difficult to be changed over time, due to stakeholders getting used to the new regulations and internalizing them (Pierson, 1993). For example, a self-reinforcing effect of the WIB could be if national students perceive the bill as a means to preserve their national identity and support it, which could intensify divisions between the three student groups on linguistic or cultural grounds. On the other hand, the reactive effects translate to unintended negative consequences, which drive resistance against a certain policy (Pierson, 1993). By eliminating a number of English-taught programs and creating Dutch ones in their place, the WIB would limit accessibility to HE for international and potentially national students with an international

background, since some of them are not proficient in Dutch. A reactive effect to the bill would be for non-national students to disagree with the policy, voicing their concerns regarding inequality in educational accessibility and eventually choosing to study elsewhere in a more internationalized country.

Policy Feedback Theory provides a perspective on the WIB that allows for interpretation not only of how students would react to the policy being implemented but also how they might influence its development through the feedback they provide. Student reactive effects such as studying elsewhere or collectively protesting against the WIB could dictate how the bill may be adjusted or even turned around in the future (Pierson, 1993). The study will analyze and interpret different student categories' potential feedback and will try to forecast how it may affect the evolution of the policy in the future.

Although it is important to know how students react to the bill, it is also crucial to understand why the policy was developed and proposed in the first place. In order to do that, the concept of linguistic nationalism will be considered. It will provide a more precise and in-depth understanding of the document and the driving forces behind it.

Linguistic Nationalism

The current study considers linguistic nationalism to gain a better understanding of why the Dutch government favours Dutch as the main language of instruction, as well as how the WIB's proposed language regulations might affect student perceptions of educational accessibility.

The concept of linguistic nationalism specifies the key role of language in sustaining national identity (Fishman, 1999). Fishman distinguishes two scenarios where linguistic nationalism comes into play – the first one being when governments aim for internationalisation and introduce new language policies, also called multilingual policies, to promote inclusion (Fishman, 1999). The second type - monolingual linguistic nationalism refers to cases such as the Dutch suggesting the WIB, where a new language policy, which favours only one dominant language, usually the local one, is implemented to strengthen and preserve national identity (Fishman, 1999). Many European countries follow a similar approach. For example, Ireland

introduced compulsory Irish language education, as well as a requirement for proficiency in Irish for government jobs to strengthen their national identity after English had become the dominant language due to colonisation (Bromage, 1941). Nevertheless, as Bromage states in his research, linguistic nationalism might not be sustainable in the long-term, as a significant part of the Irish population continued to utilize English, due to the access it gives them to global career opportunities (Bromage, 1941). Therefore, it is essential to analyse whether students perceive linguistic nationalism and the WIB positively - as a way to preserve national identity or negatively - as a restrictive policy limiting access to higher education.

Changing the primary language of education may have different consequences for the different student groups. For example, national students might support the bill and perceive it as a way to strengthen their national identity, similarly to the case of Luxembourg people who recognized monolingual linguistic nationalism as a means to enhance their national identity and cultural cohesion (De Bres et al., 2020). On the other hand, internationals may face challenges such as linguistic barriers to HE and exclusion, similarly to non-Irish speakers who struggled to integrate in the post-colonial Irish society (Bromage, 1941). As the WIB would establish a context which promotes linguistic homogeneity, students with a mixed background might struggle with identity conflicts, as they would need to favour their Dutch background to integrate, while suppressing their other nationality (Lee, 2010).

The concept of linguistic nationalism explains the monolingual logic behind the proposed implementation of the WIB (Fishman, 1999). Additionally, it provides crucial grounds for understanding student perceptions of the policy, as well as how it may impact their educational opportunities.

This study utilizes the concept of linguistic nationalism in combination with the Policy Feedback Theory to support the data analysis and interpretation of the results. On the one hand, linguistic nationalism provides valuable insights as to how language is not only used as a tool for education and science, but as a symbol of the Dutch national identity. As the policy strives to strengthen exactly that, it is crucial to consider the lenses provided by the concept when analysing how Dutch students perceive the role of language in higher education and whether it impacts their national identity. On the other hand, PFT allows for a precise understanding on

how implementing the policy may impact students' experiences, as well as the expected circular interplay between the policy implementation and the feedback provided by these students. Therefore, considering these two theoretical pieces together is essential, as they not only provide a more complete overview of *how* the proposed policy and the Dutch language shape identities, perceptions and experiences of the different student groups, but also *why* and *in what ways* they do so.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

While the WIB aims to strengthen Dutch as the primary language of instruction, it remains unclear how the measures taken to achieve that will be perceived by different student categories. To analyze that, a qualitative method of analysis was adopted. Such a method allows for gathering and analysing detailed, information-rich statements, provided by participants, which is essential for studying complex phenomena, such as student perceptions of the WIB (Alshenqeti, 2014; Shackleton et al., 2021; Stevens & Wrenn, 2013).

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm refers to a basic belief system, which guides “our way of understanding the reality of the world and studying it” (Rehman & Alharthi, p. 51, 2016). The research paradigm selected for this study was constructivism, which relates to the notion that meaning and knowledge are socially constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To clarify, this paradigm suggests that individuals attach different meanings and have different interpretations of their experiences, influenced by personal and social contexts, which creates multiple true realities, rather than one objective reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As Creswell and Poth further suggest, the goal of constructivist research is to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell & Poth, p. 419, 2018). Taking that into account, the research paradigm selected for the current study was constructivism, due to its alignment with PFT and the active feedback showcasing students’ views on the policy. Furthermore, as will be later discussed, this study utilized semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection to understand the perceptions and expectations of different student categories, regarding the proposed WIB. Aligned with that, constructivism opts for interpretation of diverse views and experiences, rather than searching for one common measurable opinion (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

Categorisation of Student Groups

First, “national students”, used interchangeably with “nationals” referred to Dutch university students, whose native language is Dutch and who have a fully Dutch citizenship.

Second, “international students” or “internationals” were defined as foreign, non-Dutch students, both from the EU and outside of it, who have moved from their native country to the Netherlands with a purpose of completing their HE (OECD, 2015). Lastly, the “national students with an international background” category included students with a mixed-background, who may have one Dutch and one foreign parent and/or have a dual citizenship - a combination of Dutch and another nationality. It was essential to analyze these three groups separately, instead of as one single category, as this study aims to find out different perceptions of the WIB based on student cultural background and language accessibility.

Inductive Approach

The study followed an inductive approach, generating theory directly from the data, meaning that there was no-predetermined hypothesis that might be rejected or failed-to-be-rejected, but rather the data itself told the story and constructed the theory (Thomas, 2006). Given that the WIB was a recently suggested policy, it might have been the case that not all participants in the study were familiar with it. Additionally, especially for international students, Dutch policies may not be a subject of interest, hence they might not have been aware of the bill. Therefore, it was of great importance to ensure, prior to data collection, that all participants were familiar with the policy, had read it and knew what potential changes in their education would be driven by it. To achieve that, the WIB was sent to all participants of the study before the data collection phase. Each participant received two versions of the WIB – one in Dutch and one in English and was asked to carefully read the document in whichever language they felt more comfortable to comprehend the information. Once all participants had familiarized themselves with the policy, data collection occurred in the form of semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were selected as a method for data collection, as these provide a certain layout to the interviewer, yet allow for asking further questions, stemming from interviewees’ answers (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Longhurst, 2009). Furthermore, given the inductive nature of this research, semi-structured interviews allowed the direction of interviews to be dictated by the respondents’ answers, in other words, the research was being guided by the data (De Jonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

To gather the sample of interviewees, snowball sampling method was leveraged. This method entails finding one suitable representative of the desired population and then asking them to refer people similar to them, based on given criteria, in this case cultural background – Dutch, international, or half-Dutch, half-another nationality (Goodman, 1961). Then the referred person is also being interviewed and asked to refer somebody else, and so on, until the desired sample size is reached (Goodman, 1961). For the current study, the overall sample consisted of 15 students, 5 of which were internationals, 2 from non-EU countries and 3 from EU countries, since they were the category expected to be most affected by the bill due to language barriers; 5 students with international background but Dutch nationality, since the debate frames them as a key category for inclusion in higher education; and the remaining 5 were Dutch students who at the time being were or had previously been members of student councils or boards of student associations. Such students were expected to have an informed opinion about the WIB, since they had been involved in discussions surrounding its potential implementation. To clarify, Dutch student council members represented the Dutch student category, since even though they might not have been able to influence decisions, they most probably had a voice in discussions.

The questionnaire was divided into four designated parts, ordered as follows: “*Introductory Questions*”, “*Initial perceptions of the WIB*”, “*The Role of Language in Higher Education*”, and “*Closing Questions*”. The third part, namely “*The Role of Language in Higher Education*” included varying questions for the different student groups, due to the difference in their national language and their potentially different perspectives on how Dutch comes into play in HE. The goal of this structure was to create a conversation that allows students to express their opinions from their positionality and personal experiences. Several of the questions addressed specific parts of the bill to allow the researcher to analyse them along with the students. The full interview script can be found in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

The selected method for data analysis was the Gioia Methodology, as it corresponded to the inductive nature of this research (Gioia et al., 2012). This approach allowed for theory generation as it suggests a four-step process of analyzing and interpreting respondents’ statements in order to build a theoretical model. The first step entails open coding, where the

exact quotes of the interviewees were used as codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following, these codes were transformed into first-order concepts, which captured the broader perspectives behind participants' words. Third, these first-order concepts were laid against relevant theoretical aspects which allowed for the creation of second-order theory-centric themes. This step was also called axial coding (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). The final phase of the Gioia methodology consisted of building the so-called aggregate dimensions, based on the second-order themes. The aggregate dimensions were portrayed as overarching constructs and served as the basis of the theoretical model, grounded in participants' statements (Gioia et al., 2012).

Research Ethics

As this research collected data directly from respondents in the form of interviews, it was crucial to comply with a number of ethical considerations. First, the anonymity of interviewees was secured, as their personal data has not been collected nor mentioned anywhere within the research. An exception was made for cultural background data, as all participants were asked for their background in order to be separated into the different categories. Additionally, all participants received and signed a consent form prior to their interviews, ensuring that they were aware of the purpose of this research, as well as the way their input would be stored and used (according to GDPR standards). The consent form can be seen in Appendix C. Lastly, as already mentioned, three categories of students were identified, based on their cultural background. As this might be problematic due to the sensitive nature of cultural background data, all interviewees were specifically asked in the beginning of the interview whether they identified with the category they had been assigned to.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following chapter aims to present the research findings of this study, utilizing the data gathered through 15 semi-structured interviews, as well as the Gioia methodology, leveraged to analyze the interview insights. The sample of participants included representatives of diverse student groups in Dutch universities, such as native Dutch students, international students from both EU and outside of it, as well as students with a mixed cultural background who were either adopted in the Netherlands, lived their whole life abroad, or were 3rd/4th generation of immigrants living in the Netherlands. The students followed bachelor, master and/or PhD programs in various areas such as Business, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Humanities and Digital Sciences, etc. Some programs were English-taught and others were Dutch-taught, and students were enrolled in different Dutch universities. Such diversity ensured a better representation of the overall student population and allowed for a broader understanding of how students perceived the potential educational and language changes suggested by the WIB. A table showcasing the sample of participants and their individual characteristics can be found in Appendix D.

As described in the data analysis section of this research, Gioia methodology was used to ensure a grounded, inductive understanding of interviewees' insights (Gioia et al., 2012). Initially, first-order concepts were derived from participants' quotes via open coding. After that, these concepts were grouped, based on similar meaning and interpretation, to build the second-order themes. Lastly, these themes were further refined and backed up by theoretical insights to compose the aggregate dimensions which were then used to answer the research question and sub-questions of the study. The three aggregate dimensions are as follows: *“Internationalisation and Educational Value”*, *“Opinions on Policy Execution and Purpose”*, and *“National Identity, Integration, and Exclusion”*.

The remainder of this chapter will present each aggregate dimension of the Gioia structure, as well as the second-order themes that comprise it. Example interview quotes will be included to increase transparency and provide additional support for each theme. The results will be further interpreted in Chapter V of this research.

Aggregate Dimension I: Internationalisation and Educational Value

This dimension captures the general theme of internationalisation as a valuable tool for enrichment of academic perspectives, as well as a source of diverse viewpoints and insights. It also recognizes international presence as a main driver of educational quality and scientific discoveries. Additionally, this dimension emphasizes the contribution of English-taught programs to both increased academic mobility, and better career advancement opportunities. Across the interviews, the majority of participants disagreed with the WIB's idea of reducing the number of English-taught programs, hence limiting the intake of international students, as they described the policy as *"limiting collaboration"* (Personal communication, Interview 11, April 24, 2025), *"not very inclusive"* (Personal communication, Interview 9, April 23, 2025), and *"affecting student diversity and Dutch people who also benefit from this diversity"* (Personal communication, Interview 6, April 18, 2025). This dimension captured one second-order theme, namely *"The value and challenges of English-taught programs and internationals"* which consists of the following first-order codes: *"Opinions on English-taught programs"*, *"Value of diversity and international perspectives"*, and *"Classroom availability and academic quality"*. The second-order theme will now be examined in detail to explain its key ideas, as well as to provide example relevant quotes from the interviews.

Second-Order Theme I: The value and challenges of English-taught programs and internationals

The majority of participants shared that they believe international students benefit Dutch higher education, as they not only provide Dutch students with exposure to diverse perspectives and opinions, which could be very valuable in terms of both academic and personal experiences, but also contribute positively to research and educational quality in the country. For example, interviewee 4, who is fully Dutch, mentioned that *"opening my mind to new cultures, I've gained so much respect for certain people...these are people that I look up to, that I learn a lot from...internationalisation has a 100% impacted my mindset and the way I am. I've grown in a good way, right? I would have never had that (otherwise). I would have been in the same bubble, in the same minds of the same people. There would be no growth to who I am as a person, which I am then later contributing to society. If I find something inspiring and good, I will take it,*

which presumably will benefit either me or the Netherlands.” (Personal communication, Interview 4, April 15, 2025). Another participant with a mixed cultural background held a similar view suggesting that the bill *“will definitely impact student diversity...I was already quite surprised how [undiverse] it was. Liberal Arts and Sciences is known to be “the international study”...a lot of people were just Dutch. So I think implementing this would just make that even worse which I also think is bad. In my opinion...you should experience other people's like...how they see things and especially in an international course it shows you different people's opinion from all around the world, which I think is more valuable than if it's very nationalistic.”* (Personal communication, Interview 8, April 22, 2025). In terms of educational quality, some participants were unanimous in suggesting that *“the best teachers, you won't find them always in the Netherlands. I think if you want to have a certain standard of education then it's just necessary to teach (in English).”* (Personal communication, Interview 3, April 10, 2025), as well as *“I also think for international staff members, investigation, research, etc., when it's all more Dutch focused I think it will be impacting the future...the quality of education and the quality of research will decrease.”* (Personal communication, Interview 10, April 23, 2025).

Additionally, English-taught programs were considered to be particularly valuable, as they open up opportunities not only for internationals studying in the Netherlands, but also *“give Dutch people more opportunities to...move out and go somewhere else or...get better jobs”* (Personal communication, Interview 12, April 29, 2025). In other words, English education is considered beneficial for Dutch students who aim to work in international companies, move abroad or simply get more and better job opportunities after graduation. There were a few students who supported the policy's idea of positioning Dutch as the main academic and research language in the Netherlands, as it would be beneficial for national students who struggle academically or have insufficient knowledge of the English language. For example, interviewee 1 shared that they thought *“it's good that they try to make it more Dutch, also to increase accessibility...I can imagine that...some Dutch people are probably less academically inclined...or have trouble with the language barrier, so for the Dutch education system, I think it's quite a logical step to try to keep everything in Dutch”* (Personal communication, Interview 1, April 2, 2025). Nonetheless, even this interviewee emphasized that even so, there must still be opportunities for English-taught education, as the majority of Dutch students, including himself, prefer to follow their programs in English for a broader career future.

Overall, participants were unanimous in valuing English-taught programs and international presence highly due to their contribution to academic quality, increased career opportunities and diverse perspectives gained. Results suggested that internationalisation of Dutch higher education is just as beneficial for all three student groups. Therefore, even if the sample was small, the de-internationalisation proposed by the bill was strongly opposed by students, possibly leading to reactive effects, as suggested by PFT. For example, some students suggested they would rather choose to study in a different country in English, than to spend extensive resources on learning Dutch to study in the Netherlands (Personal communication, Interview 5, April 16, 2025). The whole Gioia table, including example quotes comprising the respective theme, can be found in Appendix B.

Aggregate Dimension II: Opinions on Policy Execution and Purpose

This dimension captures students' concerns and thoughts regarding the potential impact of the language policy, their opinions on the role of universities, as well as their views on whether implementing the bill would actually solve the issues that it claims to address, such as the housing crisis. This theme also focuses on the general understanding that students have of the policy and the reasoning behind it. Overall, the extent to which interviewees were familiar with the policy varied, as some of them heard about it for the first time when they received the invitation for their interview, and others had previously been involved in discussions with politicians regarding the WIB's implementation. Nonetheless, the level of understanding participants had after reading the document seemed to be unanimous, regardless of the language they read it in. For example some found it *“really difficult to understand, I read it in Dutch [interviewee's native language], it was very confusing”* (Personal communication, Interview 2, April 10, 2025) and others shared *“I actually read it in both (languages)...I read it in English first, then I realized that...the law language is insanely tough regardless of the language..., I tried in Dutch and I had just as much issues while reading it”* (Personal communication, Interview 4, April 15, 2025). Regardless of that, there was a clear pattern, as many students were skeptical as to how the changes in the educational language would be enforced in practice, and many questioned whether the policy would be able to effectively address the housing issues. Two

second-order themes composed this dimension, namely “*Critique on the impact and implementation of the WIB*” and “*Housing crisis – perceptions and recommendations*”. These will now be further discussed.

Second-Order Theme I: Critique on the impact and implementation of the WIB

This theme addresses students’ concerns regarding the potential impact that the policy might have on their education, as well as the uncertainty they face in terms of how the bill will be implemented. A few students suggested that prioritizing the Dutch language in HE may be a threat to research in the Netherlands, as they shared insights such as “*most scientific papers are published in English, most of the academic world is in English and it just feels like a setback to not allow that language to exist in the academic world, in the NL*” (Personal communication, Interview 1, April 2, 2025). Other students shared that they struggle to understand the need for having such a policy, as they believe HE in Dutch universities has already achieved a great balance and does not need to be changed (Personal communication, Interview 13, May 1, 2025). Similarly, another student suggested that “*international students are a good thing; I haven't heard of any Dutch students who were like, 'Oh, there's too many international students' or something like that or that they said like, they couldn't find their study in Dutch*” (Personal communication, Interview 8, April 22, 2025). The critique by students was mostly focused on the possible discontinuation of current programs that are English-taught and the fear of uncertainty as to how accessibility to such programs will change in the future. Specifically international and mixed-background students pointed out that they are likely to “*first choose English-taught programs even (if they are taught) in other countries*” (Personal communication, Interview 5, April 16, 2025).

Second-Order Theme II: Housing crisis - perceptions and recommendations

The housing crisis issue, suggested by the bill, was also recognized by the majority of the students. However, representatives of all of the three categories suggested that reducing the number of international students is not a viable solution to the problem. Several interviewees

suggested that there is a need for *”the government instead of blaming internationals, to actually start adding more social housing, I think that would help extremely; it's just you cannot benefit or profit as much from social housing”* (Personal communication, Interview 15, May 2, 2025). Some Dutch students also opposed the bill, suggesting that *“that's making international students a scapegoat for something that's not their fault; it will probably result in some housing issues being fixed, but they're (referring to internationals) not the issue. You're punishing the students, while you should be punishing people who own multiple houses, in my opinion, and who are trying to get money out of that.”* (Personal communication, Interview 4, April 15, 2025). Overall, students were unanimous that there is a lack of accommodation, however, the coping mechanism suggested by the bill, namely to reduce the amount of international students, is non-justified and other solutions shall be considered instead.

Aggregate Dimension III: National Identity, Integration, and Exclusion

This aggregate dimension considers student perspectives on topics such as integration into Dutch society, as well as whether it should be necessary for non-Dutch students to study the local language. International and mixed-background participants discussed the challenges they faced while trying to integrate, sharing stories such as *“(the bill) kind of confirms a little bit how I was feeling in Tilburg; Tilburg is not the biggest most internationalized city in the Netherlands but you can definitely feel that you're not always the most welcomed”* (Personal communication, Interview 6, April 18, 2025). Others highlighted the role of the local language and the importance of ensuring that non-Dutch students get enough opportunities to study it: *“if you want people to stay in the Netherlands, then maybe you should give them more opportunities to indeed be able to do so”* (Personal communication, Interview 12, April 29, 2025). Another interesting point of this aggregate dimension was Dutch students sharing their insights on the concept of “national identity”. As it is one of the key aspects the bill highlights as problematic and in need of being strengthened, native students’ opinions on the topic were very important. Some of them shared that *“...just the word 'Dutch national identity', I never really get it. People try to say that, like if they say it in politics, like what national, what identity is that right? It's an identity, a culture, that's something that's fluid in my opinion, that's something that changes and it changes*

with the society that you're in...I don't know what people feel that Dutch identity is. I feel like it's something fluid and that internationality is part of that actually.” (Personal communication, Interview 3, April 10, 2025). In line with that student’s perspective, others suggested that there is “political motivation” behind the policy, which might be driving potential socioeconomic barriers for international and mixed-background students, once the WIB gets implemented. The dominant second-order theme of this dimension was “*Integration challenges and political motives*” and it will now be further discussed.

Second-Order Theme I: Integration challenges and political motives

The bill was often seen as a policy which enhances exclusion, as the majority of international and mixed-background students suggested that the government “*obviously showed what their focus is; like the housing crisis and making it more nationalistic. So I think they specifically only had like Dutch students who were born and raised here in mind*” (Personal communication, Interview 8, April 22, 2025). It is important to note that some international students were “*not offended by this decision, it's their country, their resources, their people; if they can develop people who know the language, who know the culture, that would be beneficial for them*” (Personal communication, Interview 7, April 19, 2025). On the other hand, national and mixed-background interviewees suggested that students who don’t know the language “*will be disadvantaged because next to starting a whole new life in another country, they also really have to learn the language quickly and that is not a particularly easy language to learn*” (Personal communication, Interview 13, May 1, 2025). While discussing the topic of the Dutch language, the majority of international students shared that they are willing to or already are taking courses to study the language, as they felt “*...if I would decide to stay in the Netherlands, it would be easier for me for the job market and also with integration in the Dutch society; (however) ...it's not that simple, of course everybody can sit down and use like online courses just to study Dutch at a regular level but to achieve an academic level – that's a different thing; that would be years of practicing and studying*” (Personal communication, Interview 5, April 16, 2025). Additionally, others shared that there is a lack of opportunities for students to take such courses due to either time or financial constraints, as one interviewee shared: “*Now I am paying*

like 500 euros for the Dutch language (course) that I'm taking. I imagine if it was promoted in a cheaper way, maybe I would have started earlier" (Personal communication, Interview 7, April 19, 2025). Overall, those who already knew the Dutch struggled to see the benefit of internationals learning it, as they shared that *"it's always good to learn a language...when I was living abroad, I also learnt the language and I think it's an asset and it's always a nice skill to have; it's amazing if you encourage people to do that. But Dutch, the language, is it useful? if you're not planning to stay in the Netherlands?"* (Personal communication, Interview 3, April 10, 2025). There was only one exception who thought that *"for the experience of an international student, learning Dutch would be wholly beneficial."* (Personal communication, Interview 1, April 2, 2025). From the perspective of international students, learning the language would help with their integration, hence they were willing to study Dutch, given that they had proper opportunities to do so.

On the topic of political motives, there were a few Dutch students who questioned the necessity for the bill, and suggested that it might be *"a part of a bigger...political narrative that is going on right now... (which) as a whole is problematic in a certain way... is not doing us a favour, as people in general, people in the Netherlands, also all nationalities and backgrounds."* (Personal communication, Interview 3, April 10, 2025). When discussing the concept of "national identity" native students were unanimous, that they don't recognize a need for their national identity to be strengthened, with one student even suggesting that *"I don't feel very Dutch where I'm like "Oh, I have to be Dutch.", I don't really care about that. I'm very much international-oriented. There's a good chance I move abroad at some point anyway, so I don't really care about the nationalistic side."* (Personal communication, Interview 4, April 15, 2025).

Additional themes that emerged throughout the interviews included: the experiences of mixed-background students in particular, as interviewees agreed that this third category was not mentioned in the bill but is indeed present in the overall student population. Participants suggested that *"usually the response from these mixed individuals is to either only identify as Dutch, of course, it's difficult because they probably look different, but they tend to be even like also kind of internalising racism towards their own culture and other cultures as well or they*

become very vocal about this discrimination (by native Dutch students). But in general, not having this kind of diversity (as a result of the WIB) in universities would definitely impact them” (Personal communication, Interview 6, April 18, 2025). In line with that, some mixed-background students shared that when trying to balance their two nationalities they *“struggle like a little bit, but more so, connecting with the Dutch culture because I lived most of my life like not here; I think I struggled a little bit with just like talking with other Dutch people, because I connect so much better with like international people”* (Personal communication, Interview 8, April 22, 2025). Another topic that was brought up considered the classroom availability and the way the WIB phrases it as if international students have contributed to this issue. Students mostly disagreed with that statement, suggesting that *“that sounds very xenophobic to me actually; the internationals have applied to a master, they get accepted, and then it's their problem if when they go to school, the classroom is overcrowded. I feel like it's more of a classroom issue.”* (Personal communication, Interview 10, April 23, 2025).

In conclusion, this chapter highlighted the three aggregate dimensions that emerged from the data gathered throughout the interviews, namely *“Internationalisation and Educational Value”*, *“Opinions on Policy Execution and Purpose”*, and *“National Identity, Integration, and Exclusion”*. Combined, these dimensions allow for a comprehensive understanding of students’ perceptions of the policy and the potential consequences of its implementation. Interviewees recognized the academic and social value of diversity and internationalisation of the Dutch HE and expressed their concerns regarding the negative impact that the WIB may have on that. Participants also questioned the necessity for strengthening Dutch national identity and suggested that there is a bigger political motivation behind the bill. Lastly, interviewees criticised the way international students were framed as a *“driver of the housing crisis and classroom overcrowding”* in the document and saliently disagreed with that statement. These findings will be further discussed and interpreted in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This chapter aims to connect the empirical findings of the study to the theoretical framework, built on the concept of linguistic nationalism and the Policy Feedback Theory. Additionally, the sections below include an interpretation of the results and an answer to the research question and sub-questions of the thesis. These will be followed by the practical implications of the study, which showcase why and how this paper is relevant to society and scientific literature. After that, the limitations of the study will be discussed, followed by suggestions as to how these could be averted and what additional improvements could be considered in future research.

Results Interpretation

To begin with, interviewees across all student groups were unanimous when it came to the benefits of diversity and internationalisation of HE in the Netherlands and they opposed the proposed policy. Participants from all groups highly valued English-taught programs, as they stated such education would open up various career opportunities and allow for greater mobility in the future, given that English is a world-wide spoken language. In addition, most of the Dutch interviewees pointed out that they believe diverse classrooms contribute positively to academic enrichment. As many recognized the potential negative impact of the WIB on student diversity and in particular the consequences of limiting the number of international students, they were concerned that this may decrease international collaboration and possibly even harm the quality of higher education in the Netherlands. In addition, some students highlighted that not only international students, but also international staff may be negatively impacted by the policy, hence, many high-quality teachers who are not Dutch and do not know the native language on an academic level, would most likely continue their careers elsewhere. Following that, the overall educational quality would decrease, given that some national students suggested that lately it has been challenging to find very good Dutch teachers. To continue, interviewees suggested that the valuable feedback provided by diverse international people with various perspectives, regarding current educational programs, significantly improves the quality of these programs.

According to PFT, such opposition to the proposed policy indicates potential reactive effects if the bill ever gets implemented (Pierson, 1933). For example, given that the English-taught programs decrease drastically and international people have very limited educational opportunities in the Netherlands due to the language barrier, a reactive effect could be: students - both Dutch and international, opting for education elsewhere. This scenario was also confirmed by a number of interviewees, such as interviewee 5, who suggested that: *“I think not only me but many other people would choose to study elsewhere in English, because it would give them so much more opportunities later”* (Personal communication, Interview 5, April 16, 2025). In general, students did not understand and relate to the need for the policy and perceived it as harmful to education, rather than beneficial for students. Therefore, the current study found a concerning result - there is a clear mismatch between student perceptions regarding the policy and what the bill claims its main goals to be. Overall, there was an agreement across all student groups that the bill lacks certain logic and even comes off as exclusive, which weakens potential self-reinforcing effects. According to PFT, such lack of clarity might lead to the WIB losing its legitimacy in the eyes of students, which as well, would lead to reactive effects.

To continue, from the perspective of linguistic nationalism, the WIB comes off as a clear example of a monolingual linguistic nationalism, in other words - a language policy which favours only one dominant language (Dutch), proposed with the purpose of strengthening and preserving national identity (Fishman, 1999). As mentioned above, some students considered this as counterproductive and even “not a logical step” in a globalized academic environment. As suggested by LN, a monolingual policy might marginalize non-native students, as well as mixed-background representatives who stated that they already felt a bit challenged to balance between two cultures. Furthermore, through the lenses of LN, there is a cultural rationale behind the WIB, suggesting that the national identity in the country might need to be strengthened. This is also clearly stated in the policy itself. Nonetheless, data gathered from the interviews, particularly with Dutch students, suggests otherwise - namely, that native students do not recognize a need to strengthen their national identity. Such results are invaluable, as they might challenge the integrity and legitimacy of the WIB and lead to further discussions prior to its implementation.

Overall, there were a number of patterns that emerged throughout the data. First, representatives of all student groups perceived the policy as limiting internationalisation and thus being potentially harmful to higher educational quality and future career opportunities, including for national students who prefer to follow English-taught programs and build international careers. Such results are in contrast to the WIB's claimed goal of providing national students with better educational opportunities and greater accessibility. Another interesting pattern was related to the policy's claim that it is international students who drive the housing crisis and classroom overcrowding. All students recognized the housing problem, however there were only a few (one international and one mixed background student) who stated that they have personally experienced the classroom overcrowding. Some students suggested that it is not only student housing that is problematic, but there is an overall issue with housing in the Netherlands. Although some Dutch students agreed that internationals have probably contributed to the limited housing, they all held the opinion that internationals should not be "punished" for that but rather the government should take control over some private housing and turn it into social housing to meet the accommodation needs of the country.

To continue, the policy claims that one of its main goals is to strengthen Dutch national identity, although there were no Dutch students who agreed that they need their national identity to be strengthened. Some of them even mentioned that national identity is based on culture and that is something fluid, which changes along with the society they live in, as well as that internationalisation is a big part of their identity and they don't see the benefits of changing that. On the other hand, there were some Dutch students who agreed that there might be other potential benefits of having more Dutch education - such as providing more opportunities to native students who lack academic level English. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, the majority of students emphasized the importance of being internationally-friendly, as well as the benefits stemming from that such as greater academic mobility and career prospects.

Lastly, it is important to mention that mixed-background students felt especially marginalized by the policy, as they have not been mentioned in the document itself, hence the bill does not take into account their perspectives. Representatives of that group shared that they might struggle in a "more Dutchified" educational system, as most of them speak Dutch,

however, not at an academic level. Others suggested that they connect better with international students, compared to native students, and a potential decrease in the number of internationals would be especially harmful not only to their academics, but also to their social experience.

Based on these insights, an answer to the main research question of the study: “*How do different student groups perceive and interpret the potential educational changes proposed by the Balanced Internationalisation Bill (WIB) in Dutch universities?*” could be developed. Namely, interviewees perceived the WIB as exclusive and potentially harmful to the quality of education. They suggested that the outcomes of its implementation will be linked to a decrease in diversity, which would negatively impact international collaboration, social and academic experience of native students, as well as scientific research. Many students recognized the policy as politically motivated and suggested that it is a part of a bigger narrative, which follows a nationalistic ideology. Furthermore the first sub-question aiming to understand: “*What are student opinions on the role of language in their education, and do they expect the proposed WIB to affect their access to learning opportunities?*” was answered, as interviewees shared that although Dutch-taught programs may be beneficial for some native students, a lack of English-taught programs will be restrictive to international and some mixed background students, who do not speak Dutch at an academic-level. Furthermore, the majority of Dutch students shared that they prefer to follow English-taught programs in order to have more and better career opportunities in the future. Overall, students saw language not only as a means of instruction but rather as a path to academic and professional opportunities. The second sub-question, which aimed to investigate whether “*...students recognize claimed issues such as overcrowded classrooms and housing crisis and do they agree that reducing the number of international students will effectively address these issues?*” was also answered, as interview insights suggested that the housing crisis is a country-wide issue and blaming international students for it is unfair and even “xenophobic”. Some students proposed that the government should regulate the private property market and old buildings and thus create more social housing to meet the accommodation needs of the country. The overcrowded classrooms issue was experienced by only 2 out of the 15 interviewees, suggesting a potential misalignment with what the bill claimed. Finally, the question of: “*How do students perceive the potential impact of the WIB on their academic experiences and future career prospects?*” was answered as participants expected limited access to the international

labour market and a potential decrease in the overall quality of education. The majority of students (from all student groups) believe that internationals benefit the Netherlands, by providing greater diversity, improving the educational quality, and enriching the worldview and social experience of nationals, rather than contribute to the claimed issues of housing crisis and overcrowded classrooms.

These findings can serve as a starting point for discussion regarding the WIB, as they raise critical questions about language accessibility, national identity and institutional responsibility. The following section will provide further insights into the practical implications of these results.

Practical Implications

This study bears important practical implications, as its results can further inform the development and improvement of the policy. Considering the perspectives of the three student groups offers invaluable feedback and suggestions which could be incorporated into the bill, as suggested by Policy Feedback Theory. Although the theory was developed over a decade ago, recent events show that it is still relevant and intact. To clarify, when this research was initially conducted, the WIB required all non-Dutch programs to pass a TAO (Toets Anderstalig Onderwijs) test, in other words, a foreign language test, which would assess whether offering a certain program in a non-Dutch language was justified (WIB, 2024). Nonetheless, on May 27th universities across the Netherlands expressed their concerns regarding the test, stating that imposing such measures may decrease the quality of education and research (Tilburg University, 2025b). As a result, the House of Representatives in the Netherlands voted against the foreign-language education test, which meant that the TAO test would only be required for newly created programs and would not apply to any of the current ones (Tilburg University, 2025b). Similarly to how the removal of the TAO test demonstrated that institutional feedback can influence the WIB, this study highlights that students can also present meaningful feedback. Therefore, prior to the bill's implementation, a broader consultation with all student groups is strongly encouraged to prevent potential reactive effects - such as decreased enrolment rates, exclusivity and decreased educational quality.

These practical implications are crucial for the future of HE in the Netherlands and may have a great impact on the way the policy evolves, thus making the current study a relevant and valuable piece of scientific literature. Nonetheless, this research still has a number of limitations, which will be discussed in the following section. Additionally, recommendations for how to combat these limitations in future research on the topic will be suggested.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

To begin with, the data was gathered through 15 interviews, which indeed provided valuable and diverse insights, however, the small sample size limited generalizability to an extent. Therefore a recommended approach for future researchers would be to interview a bigger sample. Furthermore, the issue of classroom overcrowding was rarely recognized by students, which may be due to the size of their programs, as the majority of interviewees shared that they follow relatively small programs with not so many people. Hence, a different sample can be considered in future, with participants from other programs.

Another potential limitation of the study could be that, as an international student, the researcher might have been biased to an extent, given that the WIB would also directly impact them. Although the Gioia methodology improves transparency in coding and interpretation, researcher bias cannot be fully overcome. Regardless of that, the bias was minimized by designing an objective questionnaire that doesn't direct respondents towards a certain answer.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyse the perspectives of national, international, and mixed-background students to understand whether the Balanced Internationalisation Bill (WIB) successfully provides a solution to the issues of housing crisis and overcrowded classrooms it claims to address, or whether it creates unexpected challenges instead. As the study captures the perspectives of those directly affected by the proposed bill, namely the students, it presents the interplay between the benefits and drawbacks of internationalisation in Dutch higher education. Participants questioned whether reducing internationals' intake will combat the lack of housing and saw this approach as exclusive and unfair. In addition, many students expressed concerns regarding the educational quality and diversity which might be negatively impacted by the WIB. They suggested that internationalisation is essential for participation in a globalized research system and for broadening future career opportunities for both local and international students. Furthermore, Dutch students didn't recognize the need for strengthening their national identity, which opposed the fundamental goal of the policy. As suggested by PFT, instead of resolving existing problems, such misalignment between policy intent and student perceptions may create new challenges, such as reactive effects of resistance, decreased inclusivity and diversity, and overall damaged global competitiveness of Dutch universities. Therefore, student feedback on the bill raises important points for discussion and calls for further improvement of the policy prior to its implementation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Script

Introductory Questions (for all participants)

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
 - Nationality/ background?
 - Study program/ in what language?
 - How long have you been in the Netherlands?
2. How did you decide to study in the Netherlands?
 - Why here and not another country?
3. How would you describe your experience in Dutch higher education so far?

Initial perceptions of the WIB (for all participants)

4. Prior to our interview, I sent you the Balanced Internationalisation Bill (WIB). Did you get the chance to read it?
 - *If not, the interviewer gives a brief explanation of it as follows: “*The WIB, also called Balanced Internationalisation Bill, is a recently introduced Dutch policy which aims to strengthen Dutch as the main scientific and educational language. Furthermore, it aims to address claimed issues of overcrowding in classrooms and lack of student housing. The actions taken to achieve that involve reducing the number of English-taught programs in universities and encouraging international students to integrate by learning Dutch.*”

- I provided it in both Dutch and English. In what language did you read it?
 - What are your initial thoughts on it?
5. The WIB states that “If necessary, the Minister may impose a numerus fixus (maximum student cap) on programs to regulate enrolment numbers, particularly for international students.”. What do you think about this?
- How does that make you feel?
 - How do you explain this decision; what do you think has provoked it?
6. The bill states that the high numbers of international students have contributed to housing shortages, particularly in university cities. Do you agree with this statement?
- If yes, do you agree that the proposed solutions to the issue will be able to effectively address it? (reducing English-taught programs to reduce the number of internationals, etc.)
 - What other solutions to the issue would you suggest?
7. The WIB aims to reduce the number of English-taught programs. How do you feel about this shift?
- Who do you think will benefit from it the most?
 - The WIB says that “If a program limits enrolment, universities may prioritize Dutch-speaking students over international applicants.”. How do you perceive this decision?
 - Do you think there might be any negative outcomes of this shift?
8. Do you think proficiency in Dutch should be encouraged or required for higher education in the Netherlands?
- Why or why not?

9. Do you think the WIB will impact student diversity and international collaboration in Dutch universities?

- How and why?

The Role of Language in Higher Education (specific questions by student group)

For Dutch Students (Student Council/Board Members)

10. As you already know, this study considers three designated student groups, namely Dutch students, international students, and national students with an international background. You have been assigned to the first category of Dutch students. Do you identify with this category?

11. A lot of Dutch students choose to study in English. What do you think is the reason for that?

- Do you think they benefit from having English-taught programs, or do you see it as a disadvantage?

- What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of that?

- How happy are they with that?

- Are they satisfied?

- If you had to choose now, would you rather enrol for a Dutch program or an English program, given that the content was the same in both languages?

12. In your opinion, how does the presence of international students impact Dutch students' academic and social experiences?

- Can you give examples?

13. Do you think national students with an international background experience the WIB differently than national students?

- Why or why not?

14. What is your opinion on making Dutch the primary language of education and science in the Netherlands?

15. Do you think that there is a housing crisis and classroom overcrowding?

- Where do you think these problems stem from?
- What could be a possible solution for these issues?

16. How do you think student organizations and councils should respond to these changes?

- Are you required to change any of your current internal practices as a result of the WIB?

For International Students

10. As you already know, this study considers three designated student groups, namely Dutch students, international students, and national students with an international background. You have been assigned to the second category of international students. Do you identify with this category?

11. If Dutch was the primary language of education when you had to enrol for your program, would you have still chosen to study in the Netherlands?

- If not, where would you go instead? Why?

12. The bill aims to ensure that international graduates have sufficient Dutch proficiency to integrate into the labour market. Are you willing to learn Dutch to continue your studies or stay in the country after graduation?

- Why or why not?
13. As an international student, how do you feel about the new policy regulations?
- What do you think is the reason for the WIB's implementation?
 - Do you think it will impact your integration opportunities as an international student?
14. Do you think that there is a housing crisis and classroom overcrowding?
- Where do you think these problems stem from?
 - What could be a possible solution for these issues?

For Students with a Mixed Dutch-International Background

10. As you already know, this study considers three designated student groups, namely Dutch students, international students, and national students with an international background. You have been assigned to the third category of national students with an international background. Do you identify with this category?
11. How do you navigate between the Dutch and international student communities?
- In what language do you communicate more often?
12. What do you think about the shift towards Dutch-taught education?
- If Dutch was the primary language of education when you had to enrol for your program, would you have still chosen to study in the Netherlands?
 - If not, where would you go instead?
13. Do you feel the WIB takes into account the perspectives of students with a mixed background?

- Would you adjust it somehow to make sure it takes your perspective into account too?

14. Do you think that there is a housing crisis and classroom overcrowding?

- Where do you think these problems stem from?
- What could be a possible solution for these issues?

15. Do you think the WIB will create any challenges for students like yourself?

- Please, explain.

Closing Questions (for all participants)

16. What do you think universities should do to support students during this transition?

- Should the practices vary depending on students' background/ language?

17. Do you think there is a need to balance internationalisation and national identity in Dutch higher education?

- Can you think of possible ways to do that?

18. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences or thoughts on the WIB?

Appendix B

Gioia table (simplified)

Aggregate dimension	Second-order theme	First-order code	Example quote
Internationalisation and Educational value	The value and challenges of English-taught programs and internationals	Opinions on English-taught programs	<i>“It also gives more like Dutch people opportunities to...move out and go somewhere else or...get better jobs”</i>
		Value of diversity and international perspectives	<i>“it would definitely affect the diversity, which would also impact the Dutch people because we are not the only ones benefiting from this diversity. It's not only an international experience. Being able to meet international cultures and just different cultures, I think it's very valuable for Dutch students as well”</i>
		Classroom availability and academic quality	<i>“That sounds very xenophobic to me actually; the internationals have applied to a master; they get accepted, and then it's their problem if when they go to school, the classroom is overcrowded. I feel like it's more a classroom issue”</i>
Opinions on Policy Execution and Purpose	Critique on the impact and implementation of the WIB	Concerns about language policy impact	<i>“If you're having a bill that tries to keep internationals out of the higher education in the Netherlands, then it's going to influence the different</i>

			<i>perspectives in certain fields and I think that's a shame"</i>
		Criticism of implementation strategy	<i>"I think it will be quite stressful and you need to be very adaptable to learning a new language to be able to succeed, and it would be a huge gamble. I think not only me but many other people would first choose English-taught programs even in other countries"</i>
		Role of universities	<i>"I think universities should support or help international students. ; maybe make sure still everybody feels inclusive and accepted. So keeping an inclusive environment. language will be a barrier, I think you can still try to support them"</i>
	Housing crisis - perceptions and recommendations	Views on housing crisis	<i>"so it's not that there's not enough space or that there's not enough property, and the international people are snatching it from Dutch people. It's more that the availability is low so like it's mostly private property and it's extremely expensive"</i>
National Identity, Integration, and Exclusion	Integration challenges and political motives	Dutch language and integration	<i>"...if you want people to stay in the Netherlands, then maybe you should give them more opportunities to indeed be able to do so. It's never a wrong</i>

			<i>thing to give opportunities, let's not force people"</i>
		Nationalism and political motivation	<i>"I think it is a part of a bigger narrative..., it's part of the whole political narrative that is going on right now... as a whole is problematic in a certain way is not doing us a favor, as people in general, people in the Netherlands, also all nationalities and backgrounds"</i>
		Socioeconomic barriers for international students	<i>"obviously international students will be disadvantaged because next to starting a whole new life in another country, they also really have to learn the language quickly and that is not a particularly easy language to learn"</i>
	Mixed students views on the WIB	Mixed student experiences	<i>"if they are like half Dutch, half...Chinese but at home they only speak Chinese it might be easier for them to also follow a course in English, in that sense, it might affect them"</i>

Appendix C

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR MASTER THESIS INTERVIEWS

Title of the Study: Language Accessibility and National Identity in Dutch Universities: Student Perspectives on the Balanced Internationalisation Bill

Researcher: Mihaela I. Boyadzhieva

Master Strategic Human Resource Leadership, Radboud University

Thesis Supervisor: Paola Chaves

Purpose of the Study: You are invited to participate in research that explores student perceptions of the Balanced Internationalisation Bill (WIB) and its impact on language accessibility, national identity, and educational opportunities in Dutch universities. The study aims to gather insights from different student groups to understand their perspectives on the recent policy changes. The WIB is a newly proposed policy that seeks to regulate the balance between Dutch and English-taught programs in higher education, affecting student enrollment and language accessibility.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will take part in a semi-structured interview that will last approximately 30-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted online and will be recorded for transcription purposes. The collected data will be used solely for academic research purposes and may be included in the final thesis.

Confidentiality: Your responses will remain anonymous. No identifying information (such as your name or personal details) will be included in the research report. All data will be securely stored and will only be accessed by the researcher and the thesis supervisor. The study complies with GDPR regulations on data protection.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline participation or withdraw at any time without providing a reason. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from you will be immediately deleted.

Publication of Results: The findings from this research may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences. However, your identity will remain anonymous in all forms of publication.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about the study, your rights as a participant, or wish to withdraw, please contact me at mihaela.boyadzhieva@ru.nl.

Consent Statement: I have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research and consent to the recording of my interview. I understand that my participation is confidential and that I may withdraw at any time. I also acknowledge that the research findings may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences, with my anonymity maintained.

Participant Name: _____
Participant Signature: _____
Date: _____
Researcher Signature: _____

Appendix D

Sample of Participants

Interview №	Student category	Nationality	Program	Language of program	Program available in
1	National	Dutch	MSc Human Resources	English	English
2	National	Dutch	BSc Clinical and Medical Psychology	Dutch	English and Dutch
3	National	Dutch	BSc Liberal Arts and Sciences	English	English
4	National	Dutch	BSc Creative Business	English	English and Dutch
5	International	Bulgarian	BSc International Business Administration	English	English and Dutch
6	International	Italian	MSc Global Challenges for Sustainability	English	English
7	International	Iranian	Research Master / preparing for a PhD	English	English
8	Mixed background	Dutch/ Myanmar	BSc Arts and Sciences	English	English
9	Mixed background	Dutch/ Chinese	MSc Public Administration	Dutch	Dutch
10	International	Slovenian	MSc Positive Psychology and Well-Being	English	English
11	National	Dutch	BSc Computer Science	English	English

12	Mixed background	Dutch/ Moroccan	BSc Data Science	English	English
13	International	Vietnamese	BSc International Business Administration	English	English
14	Mixed background	Dutch/ Curaçao	MSc Ethics of Business and Organization	Dutch	Dutch
15	Mixed background	Dutch/ Turkish	MSc Human Resource Studies	English	English