

**LATVIAN STUDENTS' INTEREST IN DOUBLE DEGREE PROGRAM *INTERNATIONAL FOOD BUSINESS* OFFERED BY CAH DRONTEN, THE NETHERLANDS**

**LATVIEŠU STUDENTU INTERESE PAR DIVKĀRŠĀ GRĀDA PROGRAMMU „STARPTAUTISKAIS PĀRTIKAS BUSINESS” CAH DRONTENAS UNIVERSITĀTĒ NĪDERLANDĒ**

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**Abstract**

The present paper deals with Latvian students' mobility within the European Union, and more specifically, focuses on Latvian scholars' interest in the double degree program, *International Food Business* (IFB), offered by the CAH Dronten University of Applied Sciences (CAH).

The program attracts scholars from all over Europe. Latvia is one of the countries that the CAH focuses on to attract scholars. In order to attract Latvian scholars more effectively to the IFB program, there was a research study conducted in Latvia to gauge possible marketing activities for Latvian scholars.

The aim of the paper is to answer this main research question: Which factors influence the decision making process of Latvian scholars regarding their willingness to participate in the IFB program in the Netherlands? In order to answer this question, the obstacles and prospects of Latvian student mobility within the IFB program were researched and analyzed, based on the data from surveys. Quantification numbers contain analysis based on literature, internet resources, informative materials, scientific publications, articles and documents provided by the double degree IFB program.

It was concluded that despite the obstacles of Latvian students' mobility within the IFB program, Latvian scholars are interested in studying and enrolling in the program. Nevertheless, there still are many impediments, and the authors recommend several key activities to CAH, which could improve the marketing efficiency in order to attract more Latvian students to the IFB program.

**Key words:** Latvian students' mobility, quality of education, the study IFB program.

**Introduction**

According to the education policy of the European Union, students' mobility is an important factor for their growth and employment. Lately an increasing number of students tend to spend full or part of their study time in another higher education institution, most often choosing to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for their future profession in international environment.

The research work was carried out during the placement at the University of CAH.

The double degree program *International Food Business* (IFB) at the CAH Dronten (CAH) attracts scholars from all over Europe. Latvia is one of the countries the CAH focuses on to attract scholars. Since only one scholar from Latvia has enrolled in IFB, up to date research is needed to analyze Latvian students' mobility within the European Union in general and to carry out more specific research on Latvian scholars' interest in the IFB double degree program.

Students' mobility has a long history. Since the middle ages, mobility of students has been one of the most important features of universities (The National Unions of Students in Europe, 2007). However, reasons for being mobile have changed substantially in the past decades. Globalization as a tendency has become very significant in higher education. Today mobility is in the strong interest of students. Because of the changes in the environment and in all fields of society, not least in the labor market, students need to obtain new skills and be able to successfully participate in the activities of today's society.

Not only does it encourage the expansion of knowledge, but also people who have undertaken part of their studies abroad are more likely to take advantage of an increasingly internationalized labour market.<sup>2</sup> Students' mobility is a driving force for changes; therefore, it encourages development further, and it breaks down obstacles that stand in their way.

CAH Dronten University of Applied Sciences (CAH DUAS) in the Netherlands, in cooperation with Nova Scotia Agricultural College (NSAC) in Canada, offers a Bachelor of Business Administration Degree in *International Food Business* (IFB). Students start their study program either in Canada or in the Netherlands. The second year is offered in the Netherlands, and the third year of the program is only offered in Canada. Students can decide whether to take the last year of the program in Canada or in the Netherlands. In addition, the program contains two work terms - one in North America and one in Europe (CAH Dronten University of Applied Sciences, 2010).

During the 2009 - 2010 academic year, there were ten students who enrolled into the Bachelor of Business Administration Degree in IFB in CAH DUAS in the Netherlands. However, two students dropped out during the first year. As a result, currently there are three students from Germany, one student from Vietnam, and four students from the Netherlands. A student from Germany decided to quit at the beginning of the academic year because she was rather

interested in social sciences than in food business. A Latvian student left the studies at the end of the academic year because his priority was not studies, and therefore he could not manage to pass the exams.

For the following academic year of 2010 – 2011, there have already been 20 students enrolled into the Bachelor of Business Administration Degree in IFB at CAH DUAS in the Netherlands. Although there is only one Latvian student enrolled into the Bachelor of Business Administration Degree in IFB, the interest of Latvian students in this program has never fully disappeared.

### Research Methods

The contributors are experienced scholars of higher education, and the present paper covers both important theoretical questions as to the nature and extent of student mobility within the Europe Union, as well as provides significant research findings concerning the Latvian students themselves - their motivation for studying abroad and interest, and willingness to enrol in the IFB program.

In order to encourage and support the Latvian study-abroad students within the IFB program offered at the CAH in the Netherlands, a research study, which is based on presentations, discussions and a questionnaire, has been carried out.

This type of research methodology was selected because with the help of presentations and discussions, Latvian scholars' attitudes, behaviour and experiences could be explored while with the questionnaires, the trends and opinions about the IFB program of Latvian scholars could be measured.

The questionnaire was used to gain a deeper understanding of the subject and in order to analyze and create ways to encourage Latvian students' mobility under the IFB program. Three different high schools in Latvia were visited: A high school in a rural area, a high school in a city area, and a Russian-language high school. As a target group, eleventh-graders were selected, who mostly had not yet decided about their future plans and were open to different education market prospects.

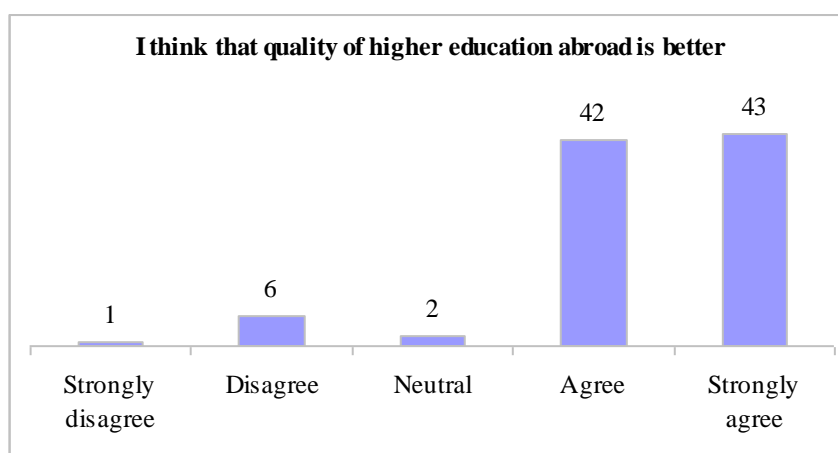
The research study in Latvian high schools was based on a 30-minute presentation about the study possibilities in the Netherlands and the IFB program offered by CAH. Afterwards, the copies of the questionnaire were handed out, and discussions were held with those scholars who requested more detailed information about the IFB program.

No remarkable differences were observed between the answers on the questionnaires in different living areas involving Latvian and Russian nationalities, or rural and city area scholars. Therefore, the results below show all students' opinions without focusing on the results of any one high school separately.

All the respondents share the same opinion and indicate that the tuition fees in Latvia are comparable to the tuition fee in the IFB program. However, the opinion on the accommodation costs in the IFB program is that it is higher than the scholars could afford.

During the research in Latvia, it was found that a large number of scholars would not prefer to study about the food industry sector. The majority of the respondents, forty, is indifferent or neutral about the study possibilities in the food sector while twenty-eight of them indicate that they are not interested in the food sector at all. These forty respondents, who showed neutral attitude towards international food sector, mostly due to the fact that they might not have been informed about the opportunities and career possibilities in the food sector. The most popular questions that the participants of the research study asked during the discussions were about future possibilities in the food sector worldwide and in Latvia.

Latvian respondents strongly believe that the quality of education abroad is better. (Chart 1.)

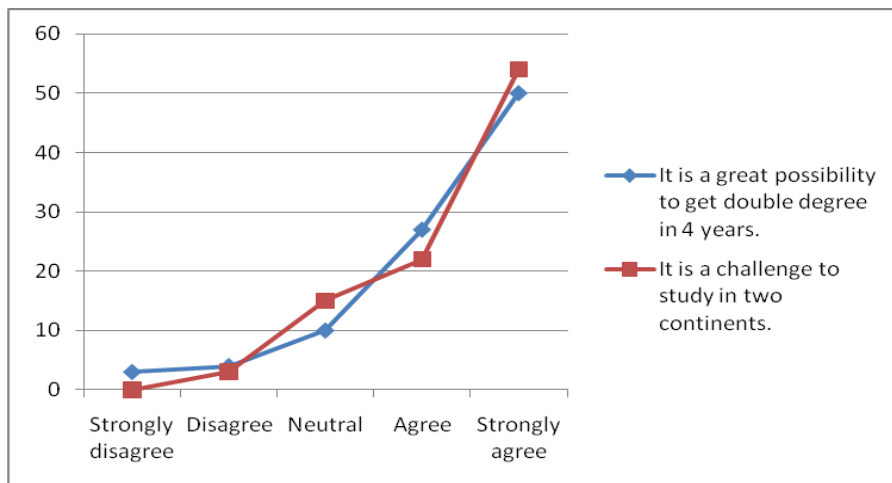


**Chart 1. The respondents' opinion about the quality of higher education abroad**

Source: The authors' research

During the visits to high schools in Latvia, it was found that students were very interested in double degree programs. The IFB program seems very attractive to them because of the fact that it offers double degree in four

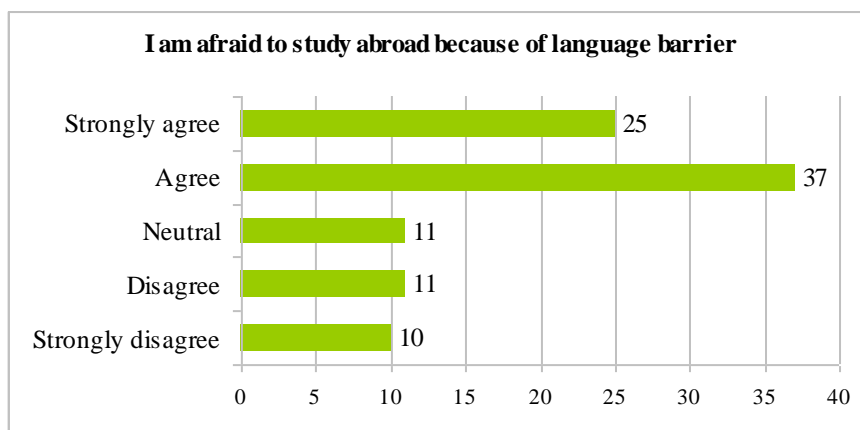
academic years. As a strong point of the IFB program, the respondents indicate also that it is a positive challenge to study in two continents. (Chart 2.)



**Chart 2. The students` opinion about the possibility to get a double degree in four years and study opportunities in two continents**

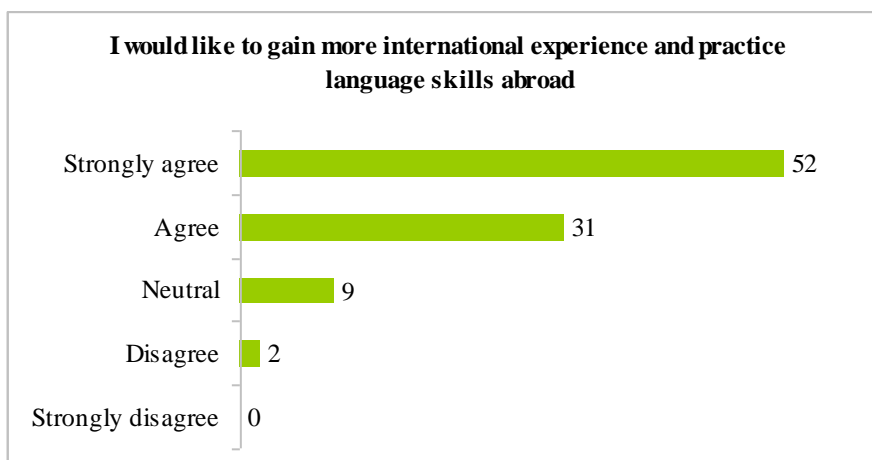
Source: The author`s elaborated research

Despite of the fact that Latvian students are afraid of studying abroad because of the language barrier (Chart 3.), a perspective of Latvian student moving within the IFB program could be considered as a willingness to gain international experience and motivation to practice languages abroad. (Chart 4.)



**Chart 3. Language competency as an obstacle for studies abroad**

Source: The author`s elaborated research



**Chart 4. The students` willingness to gain more international experience and practice language skills abroad**

Source: The author`s elaborated research

The students were asked to answer the question as to whether they would like to apply for the IFB program. Almost half of the respondents gave a positive reply. (Chart 5.)



**Chart 5. The students` interest to apply for the IFB program**

Source: The author`s elaborated research

## Results

This year, it can be seen that the economic crisis has made it not lower, but even higher Latvian students` mobility rates. Since there have been changes in the tuition fee policies after the EU enlargement and Latvian students have the EU citizenship, the number of students` mobility has sharply increased. Inga Ziemele, Director of the Baltic International Education Board of the Riga Centre, declares that Latvian students` interest in studies abroad has increased every year (T. Ancitis, 2009). In the following chapters, various reasons will be indicated for higher Latvian student mobility rates. These would include financial issues, quality of education, international experience and future opportunities.

In the research of the Latvian twelfth-grade secondary school students, which was conducted by the State Employment Agency, it was shown that one of the reasons to travel and get higher education abroad has been given as gaining valuable international experience, including improved language abilities, better business and technology skills and increased understanding of foreign cultures (Hansabank and the State Employment Agency, 2009).

Students` studying abroad offers the experience of a different study environment, which includes new cultural, social and academic values and creates opportunities for personal growth. Travelling to other parts of the world provides the opportunity to see different cultures and practicing new skills in their everyday context. Latvian respondents believe that these skills help think globally and prepare them to make the most of their opportunities in a competitive international marketplace. Latvian students travel abroad because they expect to be purveyors of new contacts and ideas, crucial for development of international cooperation and networking.

The other reason why the respondents choose to travel abroad is for a richer diversity in study programs abroad because in Latvia, there is a poor variety in study programs. Although the number of the offered programs by Latvian higher education institutions is high, the diversity in choice is still low. One member of the Parliament of Latvia finances his three daughters to study in the U.S., Switzerland, and Great Britain. He points that "his daughters have specific areas of study programs which are not available in any university in Latvia" (Students used to get higher education abroad more in humanities than in engineering and most mobile are those students who choose to study business, followed by languages and philological studies, social sciences and engineering).

As the main reasons for willingness to study in the IFB program, the respondents mention:

- ✓ The program looks interesting;
- ✓ The opportunity to get double degree in four years;
- ✓ Good career opportunities;
- ✓ A possibility to explore two continents; and
- ✓ Interested in gaining international experience.

The research results show that 48 percent of the respondents are not willing to apply for the IFB program by mentioning:

- ✓ Problems with finances;
- ✓ No interest in the food sector;
- ✓ Other plans for the future; and
- ✓ Interested in other higher education institutions.

## Conclusions

The students` mobility is increasing as it has been encouraged by Latvia`s entry into the European Union, and after the tuition fee policies in the EU countries have been changed, Latvian students have found it attractive to study abroad.

During the analysis of Education theory it was discovered that in the near future, higher education in Latvia is going to face big changes. The demographic situation in Latvia is characterized by a negative birth rate increase and by

ageing, and in the past five years, the number of persons engaged in education has been decreasing. At the same time, the number of students engaged in studying abroad has been increasing.

Because the tuition fees increase and the number of state financed study placements has decreased in Latvia, every year young people more often choose to travel abroad for their studies. Latvian students have discovered that the higher education in Latvia is more expensive or is comparable to higher education in other countries of the EU. Although the education system in Latvia is experiencing hard times, banks are encouraging students to study abroad even more by offering them *study abroad* loans. This can be a dangerous trend that may threaten the development of Latvian higher education and competitiveness with other countries.

In terms of Latvian students' mobility within the European Union, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Finland rank among the most popular destination countries for them. The main reasons why Latvian students travel abroad for higher education are: *financial issues, quality of education, international experience and future opportunities*. Because the tuition fees in the Netherlands are comparable to the tuition fees in Latvia, the number of Latvian students increases every year also in the Netherlands.

While the number of Latvian students who choose to study in the Netherlands increases, there are still numerous reasons which prevent Latvian students from travelling to the Netherlands and enrol in the Bachelor of Business Administration Degree in IFB at the CAH. *The financing of the abroad period and the poor availability of information on the offered field of study* are the main ones.

The majority of the respondents are interested in the IFB program, as they would enjoy the content of the program. As students' mobility shapes a student into a European citizen with the possibility for employment on the international labour market, it serves as their major motivator to study abroad.

No remarkable differences were observed among the opinions of the respondents of Latvian or Russian ethnicity who come from rural or urban areas.

Moreover, the majority of the respondents were not keen on studying in the food sector programs because they would prefer to study abroad *business, economics, law, languages or culture*. The other obstacle was that the accommodation costs in the IFB program were higher than the respondents could afford. It is important to underline that the costs of accommodation in Latvia are much lower than in the Netherlands.

The opportunity to receive a double degree, to explore life in two continents, to travel abroad for higher education and comparable tuition fee were found as the main dimensions of Latvian respondents' high interest in the IFB program.

Therefore, after a successful improvement of education marketing activities in Latvia, the CAH may expect greater Latvian student participations in the IFB program.

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