

# Radboud University



## Master's Thesis

*The relationship between multicultural competence, foreign language mastery and international career aspirations*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The globalisation of the business world has led to the re-evaluation of selection and hiring procedures of multinational corporations (MNCs). Valid documents are not sufficient to select the perfect candidate, because personality traits should also be acknowledged. The multicultural personality questionnaire (MPQ) measures these traits in order to assess multicultural competence. Another factor that seemed to contribute to the success of international assignments is the level of foreign language skills. Although Korzilius, Van Hooft, Planken and Hendrix (2011) reasoned that foreign language mastery (FLM) could predict multicultural competence, this study investigated the opposite assumption, namely the predictive value of multicultural competence on FLM, measured by the number of foreign languages spoken, the language proficiency and average grades. Besides the link and predictive value of the MPQ's dimensions on FLM, the moderating effect of international career aspirations on this relationship was tested. Since speaking foreign languages was required to measure differences in high and low multicultural competence, an online survey was filled in by 111 Dutch high school students with extensive foreign language education. The results showed that the MPQ is a reliable instrument to measure multicultural competence. Contrary to expectations, the number of foreign languages was not correlated to the multicultural dimensions. However, the MPQ's dimensions were indeed linked to English proficiency and language grades. The predictive value of multicultural competence only showed to be evident for English proficiency, which questioned the assumption that multicultural competence might predict FLM. More study is required to examine this assumption. Furthermore, international career aspirations were not found to have a moderating effect on the relationship between multicultural competence and FLM. Additional analyses showed that international ambition as independent factor predicted the number of foreign languages and correlated positively with language proficiency and average grades. The impact of international ambition could be further investigated in future research.

**Keywords:** multicultural competence, personality, MPQ, foreign language mastery, international ambition, international career aspirations

## **INTRODUCTION**

With the globalisation of the business world come scale advantages, an expansion of target audiences and the emergence of multinationals (Khojastehpour, Ferdous & Polonsky, 2015). However, this shift from a local business approach to a global orientation is inherent to obstacles, both cultural and linguistic (Leung, Ang & Tan, 2014; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Multinational corporations (MNCs) have to deal with geographical distance, cultural diversity among employees, language barriers and conflicting regulations of host governments (Khojastehpour et al., 2015). Human resource managers of MNCs believe to have found the solution for these issues in the form of international assignments, executed by employees working abroad, known as expatriates (Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh & Tangirala, 2010; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001). Expatriation was created to stimulate knowledge transfer from the headquarters of MNCs in the host country all the way to subsidiaries across the globe (Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004).

According to Leung et al. (2014, p. 490) “an individual’s ability to function effectively across cultures” is referred to as intercultural competence. These scholars (2014) distinguish intercultural competence between intercultural traits, intercultural attitudes and worldviews, and intercultural capabilities. The personal characteristics that determine an employee’s behaviour is referred to as intercultural traits. Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) have developed the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) in order to measure multicultural competence by means of these personality dimensions. With intercultural attitudes and intercultural worldviews, Leung et al. (2014) emphasize the perspective of employees on other cultures. Highly culturally competent employees have a positive attitude toward intercultural contact (Leung et al., 2014).

In order to establish successful intercultural contact, foreign language mastery seems evident. In context of the internationalisation, foreign language education should focus on intercultural communicative competence rather than simply on communicative competence (Sercu, 2006). Linguistic skills are part of all components one can do to achieve effective intercultural interactions, referred to as intercultural capabilities (Leung et al., 2014). The ability to speak another language is directly linked to adaptation to another culture (Korzilius et al., 2011).

In addition to linguistic skills, cultural intelligence is also directed toward intercultural capabilities (Leung et al., 2014). Cultural intelligence (CQ) is “the capability of an individual to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity” (Ang & Van Dyne,

2008, p. 3). A key component within the CQ model is motivational intelligence. Motivation influences whether and to what extent people make an effort to understand cultural differences and individuals from different cultural groups (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). Expatriates with high motivational CQ give their undivided attention toward cross-cultural situations due to their intrinsic interest (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and belief in cross-cultural effectiveness (Bandura, 2002). Consequently, expatriates are more likely to surpass intercultural challenges and adapt to the foreign work environment than employees in host countries (Chen et al., 2010). In order to fully grasp expatriates' effectiveness, the motivation to actively pursue international assignments should be taken into consideration (Chen et al., 2010).

The present study will provide insight into the cross-relationship between multidimensional personality traits, as measured in the MPQ, and foreign language skills. In addition, this study is aimed at investigating the effect of motivational aspects of individuals on the possible relationship between multicultural personality and foreign language mastery. In the next section, the underlying aspects of multicultural competence will be further explained. Subsequently, the link between personality and foreign language mastery is discussed. Finally, the role of motivation for an international career will be explained, leading to the formulation of the research questions.

## **MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE**

In the ever-growing international business context, companies are in need of employees who are capable of working across cultures. Successful employees should possess the necessary qualifications as well as the right personality traits (Korzilius et al., 2011). Companies can easily check for valid documents, but personality traits are more difficult to uncover. Job interviews only reveal the top of the iceberg with regard to personality. Moreover, most selection procedures are still solely focussed on professional dimensions and previous experience (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). As a result, the amount of failing expatriate assignments is high, which contributes to organizational costs (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Leung et al. (2014) refer to this business personality as intercultural traits, which are personal characteristics that predict the behaviour of employees in intercultural situations.

According to trait activation theory (Tett & Guterman, 2000), the influence of external situations on behaviour is mediated by the perspective on those situations. Conversely, people are capable of influencing their environment. With regard to personality traits, they require trait-relevant situations in order to be activated. The relationship between trait and situation is based

on the arousal of the behavioural expression of a certain trait by means of trait-relevant situations. Thus, the personality dimensions, as measured in the MPQ, are expected to be activated in multicultural surroundings. More specifically, highly cultural competent people will be distinguished from less cultural competent individuals due to their strong response to multicultural situations.

As stated above, Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) have developed the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) in order to identify these personality dimensions which should predict the multicultural effectiveness of an employee working abroad. These scholars (2000) have based their questionnaire on the Big Five Factor model (Goldberg, 1990). Whereas the Big Five Factor model is based on general personality scales, the MPQ is aimed at predicting international success (Leone, Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, Perugini & Ercolani, 2005; Van der Zee, Zaal & Piekstra, 2003; Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002). When measuring these personality dimensions, they are expected to remain, irrespective of the specific culture of the host country. In support of this statement, Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven (2000) found that the MPQ scored higher on predictive value than the Big Five with regard to multicultural behaviour and should therefore be a better instrument to measure intercultural effectiveness.

Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven (2000) define intercultural effectiveness as “success in the fields of professional effectiveness, personal adjustment and intercultural interactions” (p. 293). Work performance is essential to achieve success in one’s career, regardless of the host country, whereas adjustment refers to psychological well-being during a change in environment (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Inherent to a change in environment is the ability to deal with host nationals in intercultural interactions (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

Each personality dimension in the MPQ has been designed based on a wide range of items in order for the participants to assess their own traits (Korzilius et al., 2011; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). The MPQ has scales for cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, flexibility and social initiative (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Consecutively, these dimensions are related to the three fields of intercultural effectiveness (Korzilius et al., 2011). While cultural empathy and open-mindedness are related to intercultural interactions, emotional stability and flexibility are covered in the domain of personal adjustment, and social initiative and flexibility are linked to the field of professional performance in intercultural situations (Korzilius et al., 2011).

Individuals should be able to comprehend intercultural interactions in order to establish

intercultural effectiveness. These interactions are filled with culturally depended symbols, cognitions, values and behavioural patterns (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). The first personality dimension that encompasses the ability to interpret intercultural interactions is cultural empathy. *Cultural empathy* is referred to as the ability to convey interest in other individuals while correctly construe the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of others from different cultural backgrounds (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Another dimension that is relevant for ‘reading’ intercultural interactions is openmindedness. *Openmindedness* includes an open and unprejudiced attitude toward individuals outside the own cultural group and their different cultural norms and values (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

The domain of personal adjustment involves a feeling of psychological well-being in the multicultural environment (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). The dimension of *Emotional stability* contributes to this feeling, as emotional stable individuals have the tendency to remain calm, rather than to show strong emotional responses, when experiencing psychological stress in multicultural situations (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Happiness and satisfaction within a new environment call for *Flexibility*, since the familiar way of dealing with particular situations will not automatically work in a different environment (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001). Especially when the expectations of the host country situation do not match with reality, flexibility is required to reach a state of ease which makes it less complicated to shift from one approach to another (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

The field of professional performance refers to work effectiveness and the ability to ‘make things work’ (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). This pro-active attitude to approach and participate in multicultural situations is incorporated in the dimension of *Social initiative* (Korzilius et al., 2011). It includes a tendency to stand out in a different cultural group by solving problems and taking initiative (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Moreover, professional adjustment to a different environment demands a level of flexibility as well (Korzilius et al., 2011), because an employee should be able to switch from perspective on new rules and working methods.

The existence of these multicultural personality dimensions suggests that the establishment of employees’ international effectiveness entails more than just the right qualifications. However, even personality and qualifications do not seem to be the only determinants that define intercultural effectiveness.

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND MULTICULTURAL PERSONALITY**

Highly culturally competent people have a positive attitude toward intercultural contact (Leung et al., 2014). In order to establish intercultural interactions, individuals could feel pressured to learn foreign languages. Communication and foreign language learning are closely associated, since communication is an important facilitator of language acquisition as well as a goal in itself (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). In order to interact with people, travel around the world, experience other cultures or facilitate job tasks, foreign language acquisition is a necessity for communication (Clément & Kruidenier, 1986).

Success in language learning used to be attributed to aptitude and effective teaching (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015), but the acquisition of a language includes more than just learning the linguistic system (Verhoeven & Vermeer, 2002). Besides the obvious communication knowledge and language skills, effective intercultural interactions should be complemented with professional expertise as well as personality traits (Korzilius et al., 2011). In previous studies, the link between personality traits and foreign language skills has been assumed and significantly confirmed (Dewaele & Stavans, 2012; Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009; Dewaele & Wei, 2012; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Korzilius et al., 2011; Verhoeven & Vermeer, 2002; Wolff, 2016).

Dewaele and Van Oudenhoven (2009) found that individuals who speak and actively use at least two languages score higher on the personality dimensions Cultural Empathy and Openmindedness and lower on Emotional Stability than classroom learners of a second language. In a replication study, Dewaele and Stavans (2012) supported previous findings in that a high level of multilingualism, based on advanced proficiency and frequent use of foreign languages, led to higher scores on Cultural Empathy, Openmindedness and Social Initiative as well. In a study by Korzilius et al. (2011), foreign language skills were linked with high scores on Openmindedness, Emotional Stability and Cultural Empathy. Moreover, the multilingual international employees appeared to be more openminded and flexible than the less multilingual employees in the host country (Korzilius et al., 2011).

According to Dewaele, Petrides & Furnham (2008), multilinguals are more experienced communicators than monolinguals and have less difficulties to overcome communicative challenges. However, bilingualism has shown to have no effect on intelligence, but rather on cognitive abilities and cognitive development (Barac & Bialystok, 2011), which are “the processes responsible for attention, selection, inhibition, shifting and flexibility” (p. 37). These cognitive advantages are expected to contribute to one’s linguistic knowledge. Recently, researchers have argued that the biculturalism has more predictive value with regard to

cognitive advantages than bilingualism alone (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky & Chiu, 2008).

Foreign language acquisition (FLA) makes individuals understand how communication is perceived in another cultural context (Planken, Van Hooft & Korzilius, 2004). In addition, Korzilius et al. (2011) suggested that learning another language would lead to knowledge about its cultural meaning and contribution to intercultural competencies. Supposedly, multilingual experiences help individuals interpret their surroundings through the combination of multiple conceptual perspectives (Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009). However, a significant causality correlation of FLA neither with intercultural awareness (Van Hooft, Korzilius & Planken, 2003), nor with intercultural sensitivity (Jackson, 2008), nor with number of languages spoken by individuals (Dewaele & Wei, 2012) was found.

Both personality traits and social context affect the underlying process of the use of second languages (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Dewaele (2012) elaborated on this statement by discussing the link between multicultural personality and second language acquisition in which personality could be considered the predictor as well as the outcome variable. In light of many studies on foreign language acquisition, it is rather remarkable that only few studies have investigated the effect of personality on FLA (Dewaele, 2012). For example, Verhoeven & Vermeer (2002) found that openness of second language learners led to better linguistic abilities among children. Openness also seemed to be a significant predictor of the frequency and proficiency of English as a foreign language (Ożańska-Ponikwia & Dewaele, 2012).

Whereas scholars quickly draw the conclusion that there is a causality relationship of multilingualism with personality dimensions, the opposite relationship might also be plausible (Dewaele 2012; Dewaele & Wei, 2012). Individuals who are multicultural competent, in that they possess multicultural personality traits, could be more likely to develop linguistic skills and therefore master foreign languages better than less multicultural competent individuals.

## **INTERNATIONAL CAREER ASPIRATIONS**

Expatriates' cross-cultural intrinsic interest and belief in their own cross-cultural effectiveness are based on high motivational intelligence (Chen et al., 2010; Earley & Ang, 2003). "Motivation consists of the psychological processes that determine the direction, intensity, and persistence of action, and it involves the processes by which individuals marshal personal resources (e.g., skills, time, attention) to choose and accomplish work-related goals" (Chen et al., 2010, p. 1113). Motivational cultural intelligence is therefore strongly linked to psychological outcomes, such as intercultural and psychological adjustment, work adjustment and expatriates' intention to complete their assignment (Leung et al., 2014). Consequently,

these psychological outcomes could contribute to expatriates' overall intercultural effectiveness. According to Leung et al. (2014), intelligence models should include the role of motivation in order to be complete.

Clément & Kruidenier (1986) discussed the concept of motivation through the expectancy-valence approach, which entails that the tendency for an individual to practise a certain behaviour is determined by the valence of that behaviour. This goal-directed nature of motivation is based on two important orientations in foreign language learning: instrumental and integrative orientations. Instrumental orientation emerges "if the purposes of the language study reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement, such as getting ahead in one's occupation" (Gardner & Lambert, 1959, p. 267 as cited in Clément & Kruidenier, 1986). Integrative orientation is the reflection of an individual's desire to learn about other cultural communities in order to become part of that cultural group (Clément & Kruidenier, 1986).

The question how personality traits are connected to motivations and decisions to pursue an international assignment is just recently subject of research (Leone et al., 2005). Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) found inspiration for an international career as predictor for multicultural personality traits among students. In a study by Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2001), internationally oriented students scored higher on almost all multicultural dimensions than psychology students who were not explicitly planning to go abroad for their study. These scholars (2001) argue that explicit intentions to go abroad might positively affect the results on the MPQ. Van der Zee and Brinkmann (2004) provided support for this assumption as they found that personality dimensions were strongly related to the international aspirations of intercultural business clients.

The link between motivation and foreign language acquisition was the research objective of a study by Gardner (2007) who found that the two factors of motivation, integrativeness and instrumental orientation, correlated significantly with the English grades of Spanish students. These results indicated that students with an instrumental valence approach and a favourable attitude toward English speaking communities achieved higher grades in English than those who were less willing to be part of the English speaking communities. Chen et al. (2010) used a motivation-oriented approach to examine whether several factors moderate the influence of cross-cultural motivation on work adjustment and job performance of expatriates. These scholars (2010) controlled, among other factors, for the personality traits openness to experience and emotional stability as well as for expatriates' local language skills. The results showed that cross-cultural motivation was directly related to both personality dimensions and language proficiency.

Considering the potential influence of cross-cultural motivation on personality traits and foreign language skills while taking into account the expected relationship between the MPQ's dimensions and foreign language mastery, it is reasonable to suspect that international ambition might intensify this relationship. This possible moderating effect indicates that greater international career aspirations would lead to a stronger impact of personality dimensions on foreign language skills.

Although motivation to pursue an international career has received attention in multiple studies (Chen et al., 2010; Dornyei & Ryan, 2015), no study has yet investigated the international career aspirations of young foreign language learners in combination with the MPQ and foreign language skills. In order to understand to what extent motivation processes affect expatriate effectiveness, more study is required (Chen et al., 2010).

### **THE PRESENT STUDY**

As previously described, more research is necessary with regard to the assessment of the MPQ as a good predictor for multicultural competent individuals. Additionally, foreign language mastery seems to be inextricably bound up with multicultural personality. Although many studies have investigated to link between multicultural personality and foreign language acquisition, the results were either inconsistent or limited. The existing literature is limited on the causality relationship between multicultural competence and FLM. Furthermore, previous studies showed that motivational aspects could play an important role in the unaccountable results. Thus, this study will provide insight into the relationship between multicultural personality and foreign language mastery, using the MPQ. Moreover, this study will investigate the effect of international career aspirations of young foreign language learners on multicultural personality and foreign language mastery. Therefore the following *research questions* were formulated:

*RQ1:* To what extent is there a relationship between the MPQ's multicultural personality dimensions and foreign language mastery?

*RQ2:* To what extent can the MPQ's multicultural personality dimensions predict foreign language mastery?

*RQ3:* To what extent do international career aspirations moderate the relationship between the MPQ's multicultural personality dimensions and foreign language mastery?

This study contributes to the existing literature on the relationship between multicultural competence and foreign language mastery in multiple ways. This study does not only examine the link between multicultural competence and FLM, but it also seeks to shed light on the possible predictive value of multicultural competence on FLM. Finally, this study fills a gap in the existing literature as it takes into account the international career aspirations of young foreign language learners.

The practical relevance of this study lies within the improvement of the selection and training procedures for international assignments. This study could contribute to successful selection procedures of multinational companies by determining whether the MPQ is a good predictor of multicultural competence, while taking into account the role of international career aspirations. Moreover, the social psychological perspective on foreign language mastery among students could provide insight into the potential need for change of current foreign language policies in high schools.

## **METHOD**

### **INSTRUMENTS**

The present study tested the relationship between multicultural personality, foreign language mastery and international career aspiration (see Figure 1). Subjects were measured on each of the five personality dimensions (cultural empathy, openmindedness, emotional stability, social initiative and flexibility) by means of the MPQ in order to determine the independent variable multicultural competence. Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) developed the MPQ in order to identify personality dimensions, consisting of 78 items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) totally not applicable to (5) totally applicable. Since the reliability of the flexibility scale in the study by Korzilius et al. (2011) was relatively low, two items were added based on Wolff (2016), namely “I seek challenges” and “I enjoy unfamiliar experiences”.

*Cultural empathy* was measured with 14 items based on the short form of the MPQ (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). For the reliability analysis, the items ‘Finds it hard to empathize with others’ and ‘Has problems assessing relationships’ were reverse-coded. The reliability of cultural empathy was good ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Openmindedness* was also measured with 14 items. The reliability of openmindedness was good ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

*Social initiative* was measured by means of 17 items. Several items were reverse-coded in order to measure the reliability, namely ‘Finds it difficult to make contacts’, ‘Keeps to the

background’, ‘Waits for others to initiate contacts’, ‘Is a slow starter’, ‘Tends to wait and see’ and ‘Leaves things as they are’. The reliability of social initiative was good ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Emotional stability* was measured with 20 items, of which 11 items were reverse-coded. The reliability of emotional stability was good ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Flexibility* was measured with 15 items, of which also 11 items were reverse-coded. The reliability of flexibility was adequate ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

As in the study of Korzilius et al. (2011), the respondents were asked to provide the number of foreign languages they speak and to give a self-assessment on their proficiency of those foreign languages in order to measure the foreign language mastery: “How many foreign languages do you speak?”, “Which foreign languages do you speak?” and “Please indicate the level of proficiency for each foreign language you speak”, ranging from (1) very bad to (7) very well. Besides a self-assessment, the students were asked to provide their average grade for each foreign language course they follow, from 1 to 10.

International career aspirations were measured, based on Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2001), with two items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) totally not applicable to (5) totally applicable. Respondents indicated their motivation and interest to pursue an international career with the items ‘I am motivated to work in an international setting’ and ‘I am interested in an international job’. The reliability of this scale was good ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

Finally, the survey ended with demographic questions, namely gender, age, level of education and year of education.



**Figure 1** Conceptual model of the research questions

## PROCEDURE AND RESPONDENTS

In order to measure a possible causality relationship between multicultural personality and foreign language mastery, all respondents should have ideally mastered multiple foreign languages and should have been able to be differentiated between low and high scores on MPQ. Since Dutch students in high school education follow multiple obligatory foreign language courses, students of different Dutch high schools have been approached. Students were asked to fill in the entire survey via an online link in SurveyMonkey. Moreover, this group of familiar respondents have been politely asked to share the link with their fellow class-mates and friends via WhatsApp. Obviously, the survey was in Dutch so it met the instructed language of the respondents. All the questions required an answer in order to continue the survey. Respondents were asked to complete the survey and were reassured that their answers are treated confidentially. After filling in the survey, the students were thanked for their cooperation. The survey was online from 11 July until 16 July 2017.

Within this period, 163 students clicked on the link to open the questionnaire and 111 respondents actually completed the entire survey. In sum, one-third of the people dropped out before the end of the survey. Only the data of these 111 respondents were used for the analyses. Of the legitimate respondents, 75,7% were female ( $n = 84$ ) and 24,3% were male ( $n = 27$ ). The average age of the respondents was 15,47 ( $SD = 1,91$ ), with a range from 10 to 19 years. Most of the respondents reported to have VWO educational level, namely 70,3% ( $n = 78$ ), followed by HAVO educational level with 25,2% ( $n = 28$ ), whereas only 4,5% ( $n = 5$ ) indicated that they receive VMBO education. The school year distribution among the respondents was relatively equal, since 14,4% ( $n = 16$ ) were in the first grade, 12,6% ( $n = 14$ ) in their second year, 14,4% ( $n = 16$ ) in the third grade, 22,5% ( $n = 25$ ) in the fourth year, 10,8% ( $n = 12$ ) in the fifth grade and 25,2% ( $n = 28$ ) in the sixth year. All of the respondents were Dutch ( $n = 111$ ), of which five of them reported to have a shared nationality.

In order to differentiate between high and low scores on the MPQ, the respondents were divided into two groups. The mean score of all personality dimensions combined was calculated ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = .32$ ). Respondents who scored less than the average score were classified as scoring low on MPQ ( $n = 47$ ), whereas respondents who scored more than the average score were classified as scoring high on MPQ ( $n = 64$ ). The independent samples t-test for age with as factor MPQ groups showed no significant effect of MPQ group on age ( $t(109) = -1.42$ ,  $p = .160$ ). The chi-square tests for gender ( $\chi^2(1) = 1.32$ ,  $p = .250$ ), educational level ( $\chi^2(2) = 3.38$ ,  $p = .185$ ) and school year ( $\chi^2(5) = 4.21$ ,  $p = .519$ ) showed no significant difference either between the two groups. Consequently, the groups high and low on MPQ are considered to be

equally distributed.

For the third research question, it was necessary to make a distinction as well between low and high scores on the variable International ambition. Consequently, the same procedure was used as for the distinction between low and high scores on the MPQ dimensions. The mean score of both statements of International ambition was calculated ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = .95$ ). Respondents who scored less than the average score were classified as scoring low on International ambition ( $n = 57$ ), whereas respondents who scored more than the average score were classified as scoring high on International ambition ( $n = 54$ ), noted as IA group. The independent samples t-test for age with as factor IA group showed a significant effect of IA group on age ( $t(109) = -3.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Students who scored higher on International ambition were significantly older ( $M = 16.17$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) than students who scored lower on International ambition ( $M = 14.81$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ). The chi-square tests for gender ( $\chi^2(1) = .25$ ,  $p = .615$ ) and educational level ( $\chi^2(2) = 4.51$ ,  $p = .105$ ) showed no significant difference between the two groups. However, the chi-square test for school year showed a significant effect of IA group on school year ( $\chi^2(5) = 15.34$ ,  $p = .009$ ). Students who scored higher on International ambition significantly reported to be in a higher class ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) than students who scored lower on International ambition ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ). As only age and school year showed to make a difference between the two groups, the distribution of the groups scoring high and low on International ambition was still considered to be relatively equal. The possible influence of unequal distribution is elaborated in the discussion.

## **STATISTICAL ANALYSES**

In order to analyse the collected data, the statistical program SPSS Statistics version 24 was used. With regard to the relationship between MPQ and foreign language mastery, descriptive statistics and correlations were measured. The two groups, scoring low and high on MPQ, were compared by means of independent samples t-tests. The outcomes of these tests were used to locate possible differences of foreign language mastery between these two groups. Where there was a significant difference found, a regression analysis was conducted in order to measure the predictive value of the MPQ group on foreign language mastery. Finally, the moderating effect of international career aspirations on the relationship between MPQ dimensions and foreign language mastery was analysed by means of an analysis of variance and a regression analysis. Additional analyses to further examine the effect of international ambition on foreign language mastery included a regression analysis and correlations.

## RESULTS

As was asked in the survey, the students reported the amount of foreign languages they speak and which languages accordingly. Table 1 shows the frequencies of the different languages that were reported. Besides one respondent, all other students reported to speak English ( $n = 110$ ). A considerable amount of students said they speak French ( $n = 66$ ), as was the case for German ( $n = 62$ ). Since the other languages were only mentioned a few times, these languages were not included in further statistical analyses so the reliability of the data sample was not jeopardised.

**Table 1** Frequencies of different foreign languages spoken in numbers and percentages

Language	$n$	Percentage
English	110	99%
French	66	60%
German	62	56%
Spanish	12	11%
Greek	12	11%
Latin	9	8%
Moroccan	3	3%
Turkish	2	2%
None	1	1%
Other	8	7%

### *Relationship between multicultural personality dimensions and foreign language mastery*

After running statistical analyses of the gathered data, the results with regard to the correlation between multicultural personality dimensions and foreign language mastery were reported (see table 2).

Contrary to previous findings, the number of foreign languages did not significantly correlate to the MPQ dimensions Cultural empathy ( $r(111) = .10, p = .153$ ), Openmindedness ( $r(111) = .09, p = .171$ ), Social initiative ( $r(111) = .06, p = .277$ ), Emotional stability ( $r(111) = .07, p = .248$ ) nor Flexibility ( $r(111) = .00, p = .499$ ).

There were no significant correlations found between the proficiency in French and the proficiency in German with the multicultural personality scales. For the proficiency in English

were correlations found with multiple multicultural personality dimensions, namely with Openmindedness ( $r(111) = .25, p = .004$ ), Social initiative ( $r(111) = .18, p = .030$ ) and Flexibility ( $r(111) = .22, p = .010$ ).

With regard to the grades of the different languages courses, there were several significant correlations found between MPQ scales and the foreign language grades. Openmindedness correlated significantly with the English grade ( $r(111) = .20, p = .019$ ) and French grade ( $r(78) = .20, p = .042$ ). Social initiative showed a strong positive correlation with the French grade ( $r(78) = .26, p = .010$ ), whereas Emotional stability was negatively correlated to the German grade ( $r(64) = -.29, p = .010$ ). Finally, Flexibility had a strong negative correlation with both the German grade ( $r(64) = -.29, p = .010$ ) as well as the French grade ( $r(78) = -.34, p = .001$ ).

There was no significant correlation found between the number of foreign languages spoken and the proficiency in English ( $r(111) = .15, p = .058$ ). However, a significant correlation was found between the number of foreign languages spoken and the proficiency in German ( $r(89) = .34, p = .001$ ) and the proficiency in French ( $r(97) = .44, p < .001$ ). The number of foreign languages spoken was therefore related to the proficiency in German and in French.

The cross-correlations of language proficiency and grades were as followed: the proficiency in English was not related to the proficiency in French ( $r(97) = .10, p = .173$ ). However, the proficiency in German was significantly related to both the proficiency in English ( $r(89) = .27, p = .005$ ) as well as to the proficiency in French ( $r(83) = .30, p = .003$ ). The English grade was not related to the German grade ( $r(64) = .25, p = .051$ ). However, the French grade was related to both the English grade ( $r(78) = .30, p = .007$ ) as well as the German grade ( $r(48) = .52, p < .001$ ). Naturally, the proficiency in English was related to the English grade ( $r(111) = .69, p < .001$ ), the proficiency in German was related to the German grade ( $r(62) = .62, p < .001$ ) and the proficiency in French was related to the French grade ( $r(75) = .51, p < .001$ ).

Most of the multicultural personality dimensions were significantly interrelated, with the exception of Emotional stability being not related to Cultural empathy and Openmindedness.

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics and correlations of MPQ scales and variables measuring Foreign language mastery (FLM)

Variable	<i>n</i>	Range <sup>a</sup>	<i>M</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>SD</i>	CE <sup>b</sup>	O <sup>b</sup>	SI <sup>b</sup>	ES <sup>b</sup>	F <sup>b</sup>	Number of FL <sup>c</sup>	English PF <sup>c</sup>	German PF <sup>c</sup>	French PF <sup>c</sup>	English grade	German grade	French grade
CE	111	2.79 – 4.93	3.93	0.45		.51**	.26**	-.09	.25**	.10	.14	.09	-.13	.11	.08	-.16
O	111	2.14 – 4.93	3.51	0.52	.51**		.20*	-.08	.32**	.09	.25**	.16	-.06	.20*	.09-	-.20*
SI	111	2.18 – 4.76	3.46	0.59	.26**	.20*		.41**	.39**	.06	.18*	.07	.12	.05	-.18	-.26**
ES	111	1.65 – 4.05	3.02	0.51	-.09	-.08	.41**		.29**	.07	.11	.03	.12	-.09	-.29*	-.08
F	111	1.93 – 4.47	3.42	0.46	.25**	.32**	.39**	.29**		.00	.22*	-.03	-.05	.04	-.29**	-.34**
Number of FL	111	0 – 6	2.59	1.19	.10	.09	.06	.07	.00		.15	.34**	.44**	.13	.16	.23*
English PF	111	2 – 7	5.74	1.19	.14	.25**	.18*	.11	.22*	.15		.27**	.10	.69**	.03	.06
German PF	89	2 – 7	4.02	1.23	.09	.16	.07	.03	-.03	.34**	.27**		.30**	.17	.62**	.18
French PF	97	1 – 7	3.93	1.45	-.13	-.06	.12	.12	-.05	.44**	.10	.30**		.06	.15	.51**
English grade	111	5 – 10	7.41	1.04	.11	.20*	.05	-.09	.04	.13	.69**	.17	.06		.25*	.30**
German grade	64	1 – 9	6.77	1.49	.08	.09	-.18	-.29*	-.29**	.16	.03	.62**	.15	.25*		.52**
French grade	78	3 – 10	6.92	1.22	-.16	-.20*	-.26**	-.08	-.34**	.23*	.06	.18	.51**	.30**	.52**	

<sup>a</sup> High scores indicate that respondents possessed the measured variable to a greater extent.

<sup>b</sup> CE = Cultural empathy, O = Openmindedness, SI = Social initiative, ES = Emotional stability, F = Flexibility

<sup>c</sup> FL = foreign languages, PF = proficiency

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

### *Predictive value of multicultural personality dimensions on foreign language mastery*

The differences in foreign language mastery between the groups, scoring low and high on the MPQ dimensions, can be found in table 3.

An independent-samples t-test showed no significant effect of MPQ group (low and high) on the number of foreign languages ( $t(109) = -.96, p = .338$ ). The students who scored higher on the MPQ dimensions ( $M = 2.69, SD = 1.27$ ) did not speak more foreign languages than the students scoring low on the MPQ dimensions ( $M = 2.47, SD = 1.06$ ).

Independent-samples t-tests showed no significant effect of MPQ group on the grades of the different foreign languages, nor for English ( $t(109) = -1.39, p = .168$ ), German ( $t(62) = 1.08, p = .285$ ) or French ( $t(76) = 1.24, p = .220$ ). The students scoring high on MPQ ( $M = 7.53, SD = 1.11; M = 6.59, SD = 1.71; M = 6.77, SD = 1.31$ ) did not report to have a better grade in English, German or French than the students scoring low on MPQ ( $M = 7.26, SD = .92; M = 7.00, SD = 1.11; M = 7.12, SD = 1.09$ ).

Independent-samples t-tests showed no significant effect of MPQ group on the proficiency in German ( $t(87) = -1.20, p = .235$ ) or proficiency in French ( $t(95) = -.72, p = .476$ ). The students who scored higher on the MPQ dimensions ( $M = 4.15, SD = 1.28; M = 4.02, SD = 1.46$ ) did not report to have a better proficiency in German or French than the students scoring low on the MPQ dimensions ( $M = 3.83, SD = 1.16; M = 3.80, SD = 1.44$ ). However, an independent-samples t-test for the proficiency in English with as factor MPQ group showed a significant effect of MPQ group on the proficiency in English ( $t(109) = -2.78, p = .006$ ). This means that the group high on MPQ ( $M = 6.00, SD = 1.07$ ) reported a better proficiency in English than the group low on MPQ ( $M = 5.38, SD = 1.26$ ).

**Table 3** Means and standard deviations for variables of foreign language mastery (1 = low, 6 = high for number of foreign languages; 1 = low, 7 = high for proficiency; 1 = low, 10 = high for grade)

Variable	<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>		<i>n</i>
	low <sup>a</sup>	high <sup>a</sup>	low <sup>a</sup>	high <sup>a</sup>	
number of FL	2.47	2.69	1.06	1.27	111
English PF	5.38**	6.00**	1.26**	1.07**	111
German PF	3.83	4.15	1.16	1.28	89
French PF	3.80	4.02	1.44	1.46	97

English grade	7.26	7.53	.92	1.11	111
German grade	7.00	6.59	1.11	1.71	64
French grade	7.12	6.77	1.09	1.31	78

<sup>a</sup> The group of students who scored lower or higher than the average score on MPQ

\*\*  $p < .01$

The predictive value of MPQ group, scoring low and high on the MPQ dimensions, for proficiency in English can be found in table 4.

A simple regression analysis showed that the variable MPQ group explained 6% of the variance in English proficiency ( $F(1, 109) = 7.75, p = .006$ ). MPQ group was shown to be a small, but significant predictor ( $\beta = .26, p = .006$ ) of English proficiency. When MPQ group goes up from low to high, the self-assessed proficiency in English goes up with .26 SD.

**Table 4** Regression analysis for MPQ group as predictor of proficiency in English ( $n = 110$ )

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>
Intercept	4.77	.37	
MPQ group	.62	.22	.26**
$R^2$	.06		
$F$	7.75**		

\*\*  $p < .01$

*Influence of international career aspirations on the relationship between MPQ dimensions and foreign language mastery*

The moderating effect of international career aspirations on the relationship between MPQ group and number of foreign languages spoken can be found in table 5.

A two-way analysis of variance with as factors MPQ group (low and high) and International ambition (low and high) for the number of foreign languages spoken showed a non-significant main effect of MPQ group ( $F(1, 107) < 1$ ) on the number of foreign languages. However, a significant main effect of International ambition ( $F(1, 107) = 4.23, p = .042$ ) was found on the number of foreign languages spoken. The group that scored high on international ambition ( $M = 2.83, SD = 1.26, n = 54$ ) spoke significantly more foreign languages than the group that scored low on international ambition ( $M = 2.37, SD = 1.08, n = 57$ ). The interaction

effect between the MPQ group and International ambition was not statistically significant ( $F(1, 107) < 1$ ).

**Table 5** Average number of foreign languages spoken per MPQ group for low and high international ambition

MPQ group	International ambition	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Low	Low	2.21	.92	28
	High	2.84	1.17	19
	Total	2.47	1.06	47
High	Low	2.51	1.21	29
	High	2.83	1.32	35
	Total	2.69	1.27	64
Total	Low	2.37	1.08	57
	High	2.83	1.26	54
	Total	2.59*	1.19*	111

\*  $p < .05$

In order to be certain of the lack of the moderating effect of international ambition on the number of foreign languages, a multiple regression analysis was conducted (see table 6). The analysis showed that the variables entered, MPQ group (low and high) and International ambition (low and high), showed a non-significant variance in number of foreign languages spoken ( $F(2, 108) = 2.42, p = .094$ ). Furthermore, both International ambition ( $\beta = .19, p = .051$ ) and MPQ group ( $\beta = .07, p = .493$ ) showed to be non-significant predictors of number of foreign languages.

**Table 6** Regression analysis for MPQ group and International ambition as predictors of number of foreign languages

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Intercept	1.69	.47	
International ambition	.44	.23	.19
MPQ group	.16	.23	.07

$R^2$	.03
$F$	2.42

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Since International ambition was found to have a significant effect on the foreign languages spoken, the international career aspirations were further looked at as an independent predictor of foreign language mastery rather than a moderator. Therefore, a simple regression analysis (see table 7) showed that the grouping variable International ambition (low and high) explained 3% of the variance in the number of foreign languages ( $F(1, 109) = 4.39, p = .038$ ). International ambition was shown to be a small, but significant predictor ( $\beta = .20, p = .038$ ) of number of foreign languages spoken. When International ambition goes up from low to high, the number of foreign languages goes up with .20 SD.

**Table 7** Regression analysis for International ambition (low and high) as predictor of number of foreign languages ( $n = 110$ )

Variable	$B$	$SE B$	$\beta$
Intercept	1.90	.35	
International ambition (low and high)	.47	.22	.20*

  

$R^2$	.03
$F$	7.75*

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\*  $p < .05$

In order to further investigate the possible links between international career aspirations and the different aspects of foreign language mastery, the correlations between International ambition and number of foreign languages, language proficiency and grades were reported (see table 8).

In line with the outcome of the regression analysis in table 7, International ambition showed a significant correlation with the number of foreign languages spoken ( $r(111) = .24, p = .012$ ). Furthermore, there were strong significant correlations found between International ambition on the one hand and proficiency in English ( $r(111) = .39, p < .001$ ) and English grade ( $r(111) = .25, p = .008$ ) on the other hand.

**Table 8** Descriptive statistics and correlations of International ambition and variables measuring Foreign language mastery (FLM)

Variable	<i>n</i>	Range <sup>a</sup>	<i>M</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>SD</i>	Number of FL	En PF <sup>b</sup>	Ge PF <sup>b</sup>	Fr PF <sup>b</sup>	En grade <sup>b</sup>	Ge grade <sup>b</sup>	Fr grade <sup>b</sup>
Intern. ambition	111	1 - 5	3.68	.95	.24*	.39**	.16	.17	.25**	.03	.09

<sup>a</sup> High scores indicate that respondents possessed the measured variable to a greater extent.

<sup>b</sup> PF = Proficiency, En = English, Ge = German, Fr = French

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Due to the trans-border interests of the current business world, selection and hiring procedures for employees need to take this globalisation into account. Therefore, the present study aimed to contribute to the knowledge about the relationship between multicultural competence (measured by the MPQ dimensions), foreign languages mastery (measured by the number and self-assessed proficiency of foreign languages spoken and average grades for language courses) and influence of international career aspirations. In the following section, the results of the research questions are explained in further detail and compared to the findings of previous studies. Moreover, possible explanations for the findings are provided. Finally, the limitations of the present study are discussed while presenting potential directions for future research.

### *Relationship between multicultural personality dimensions and foreign language mastery*

The first research question focussed on the relationship between the MPQ dimensions and foreign language mastery. Contrary to previous findings of Dewaele and Van Oudenhoven (2009), Korzilius et al. (2011) and Wolff (2016), none of the MPQ dimensions correlated with the number of foreign languages that were spoken. However, the absence of a significant correlation of speaking more than one language and the intercultural effectiveness or personality profiles respectively, is in line with the results of Herfst, Van Oudenhoven and Timmerman (2008) and Dewaele and Stavans (2012). As in the present study, Dewaele and Stavans (2012) suggested that foreign languages as part of language education policy in early years might just be the reason for this finding. Since the respondents in the current study were only in high school, they recently started learning foreign languages. This might implicate a

different interpretation per respondent of the question “How many languages do you speak?”. One might argue that in order to speak a language, the vocabulary and grammar of that language should be well-established. In contrast to fluent language skills, students may also be proud to report that they possess the basic skill set of a certain language. Therefore a different connotation of ‘speaking a language’ might explain the lack of significant correlation between MPQ dimensions and the number of foreign languages.

With regard to language proficiency, only the proficiency in English seemed to correlate with several multicultural personality scales. The globalisation of the international market has led to the establishment of English as the lingua franca (Rogerson-Revell, 2008). As English is more embedded in the daily life of Dutch students than German and French, the attitude toward English and the cultural importance to speak English as lingua franca have intertwined (Baker, 2012). The perspective on English might be the underlying factor that explains the correlation between English proficiency and multiple personality dimensions. Even as lingua franca, English is not a culturally neutral language, since communication always involves people, locations and goals, and none of the latter occur in a cultural vacuum (Baker, 2012). Partially in line with the findings of Dewaele and Stavans (2012) and Wolff (2016), the proficiency of foreign languages, in this case of English, relates positively to Openmindedness, Social Initiative and Flexibility. An open and unprejudiced perspective with a motivation to engage in social interaction and the ability to adapt to language barriers may therefore lead to a higher self-assessed proficiency.

Concerning the grades of the foreign language courses, the study of Dewaele (2007) used a similar design in order to investigate the effect of four personality dimensions (psychoticism, extraversion, neuroticism and foreign language anxiety) on school students’ grades. According to this scholar (2007), the grades should be seen as relative indicators of language proficiency. The inclusion of language grades in the present study was done to provide a more profound measurement of the variable foreign language mastery as a whole, besides the number and self-assessed proficiency of foreign languages. Although significant correlations were found of several personality dimensions with some of the grades of English, German and French, there were no consistent factors among the correlations. According to Dewaele (2007, p. 184), the inconsistent findings “could be attributed either to the nature of the dependent variable or to the fact that the link between global personality traits and language learning outcomes are simply too tenuous”. In agreement with the results of Dewaele (2007), the grades of the three languages were all positively interrelated suggesting that if a student has a high grade for one language, chances are that he or she will have high grades for the other languages

as well, and vice versa. These strong positive correlations between the grades could be based on a sociocognitive dimension. Dewaele (2007) suggested that children who grew up in an environment where creativity and language were stimulated, might have developed better language skills from an early age on. Their high level of language skills could therefore be the consequence of nurture rather than nature. As may be expected, the grade of each language correlated significantly to the proficiency of the corresponding language. This finding implicates that the respondents were consistent in their answers about the level of the language courses.

When focusing on the relationship among the MPQ dimensions, the results showed that the dimensions were all interrelated, except for Emotional stability with Cultural empathy and Openmindedness. Wolff (2016) also reported a non-significant correlation of Emotional stability and Cultural empathy. Compared to Korzilius et al. (2011), the dimensions in the present study showed stronger correlations which led to the conclusion that the MPQ was a good instrument to measure multicultural competence of the respondents in this sample.

#### *Predictive value of multicultural personality dimensions on foreign language mastery*

Korzilius et al. (2011) reasoned that foreign language acquisition would lead to the development of cross-cultural competencies. When looking at the nature of the relationship between multicultural competence and foreign language mastery, arguments in the literature also seemed to support an opposite reasoning in which multicultural competence would predict foreign language skills. Therefore the second research question investigated the predictive value of multicultural personality dimensions on foreign language mastery.

Previous studies by Korziulius et al. (2011) and Wolff (2016) had a grouping variable which was distinguished into international employees and national employees. In comparison to these studies, the respondents in the present study were also divided into two groups, namely one scoring low and one scoring high on the MPQ dimensions. Whereas Korzilius et al. (2011) and Wolff (2016) found that international employees spoke more languages than national employees, the current study failed to provide an effect of group on the number of foreign languages. As was already proposed, different interpretation of the question about the number of foreign languages spoken could have led to this insignificant result as it might did for the lack of correlation between the MPQ dimensions and number of foreign languages as well. Moreover, the Dutch language learning policy in advanced high school education, HAVO and VWO, requires all students to follow at least two foreign language courses (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Thus inherent to the students' level of multicultural competence, they have all reported to speak

multiple foreign languages. The respondents in the studies by Korzilius et al. (2011) and Wolff (2016) were employees rather than students, which might therefore explain these contradictory findings.

Scoring either high or low on the multicultural personality dimensions showed no significant difference on the grades for the three language courses. The same tendency was found in the study of Dewaele (2007) where the effect of the personality variables was limited and inconsistent across the grades of foreign languages. In order to explain this non-significant effect, it might be worthwhile to look at the different linguistic capabilities that are tested in high school education. During the years of foreign language courses, several key aspects of language are reviewed: oral skills, written capabilities, reading proficiency and listening skills. Although linguistic skills graded in one score seem to be one concept, one might be extraverted and score high on oral lexical complexity in French and English (Van Daele, Housen, Pierrard & Debruyne, 2006), while extraverted people can at the same time be outperformed by introverts on English learners' writing abilities (Boroujeni, Roohani & Hasanimanesh, 2015). All aspects of language considered, the multifaced concept of a language grade might explain the fact that personality traits do not have a clear and straightforward effect on language grades.

The present study showed no significant effect of group membership on German and French proficiency, but only on English proficiency. The groups of MPQ revealed to be a small predictor of English proficiency. Higher scores on the multicultural personality dimensions would lead to a better proficiency in English compared to low scores, but this predictive value should be considered limited. Consequently, the results of group membership on language proficiency are to most extent in line with the results of Korzilius et al. (2011) and Wolff (2016), as these scholars did not find an effect of group membership on language proficiency as total variable. Research has indicated that the same independent variables in one study, such as motivation (Chen et al., 2010), sociopsychological factors (Dewaele, 2005) and extraversion (Van Daele et al., 2006), may have a different effect on each foreign language (Dewaele, 2007). In sum, the independent variable group membership might therefore have not showed a predictive value on German and French proficiency, while it did on English proficiency.

#### *Influence of international career aspirations on the relationship between MPQ dimensions and foreign language mastery*

The third research question investigated the expected moderating effect of international career aspiration on the relationship between multicultural competence and foreign language mastery. Because of the non-significant interaction effect between the MPQ groups and the international

ambition, the moderating effect of international ambition on the relationship between the multicultural personality dimensions and the number of foreign languages spoken was rejected. However, when international ambition was regarded as a predictor of the number foreign languages rather than a moderator, the variable showed a significant, positive and separate effect on the number of foreign languages. Therefore, the more international ambition a student has, the probability that he or she speaks more languages increases. This finding is in line with the expectancy-value approach of motivation, through which students learn foreign languages in order to anticipate on a future career. Besides the number of foreign languages, the other aspects of the variable foreign language mastery were analysed in combination with International ambition in order to further investigate international career aspirations as an independent influence. In complete accordance with the results of Gardner (2007) on the English grades of Spanish students, these analyses showed a significant correlation of International ambition with the English proficiency and English grade. Following this tendency, Chen et al. (2010) found a significant correlation between language proficiency and cross-cultural motivation among expatriates as well.

Prior to an international assignment, several aspects of anticipated success factors are taken into account, of which an expatriate's language ability in the host country language (Black et al., 1991). Knowledge of the host country language has been generally referred to as the contributor to the entire environment of expatriates, because the better the proficiency in a host country language, the easier it is to obtain the everyday information which is necessary to work effectively across borders (Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). As already discussed, English is most frequently used as lingua franca in the business world (Rogerson-Revell, 2008). Regarding the fact that the motivation to speak the host country language is considered important, this might explain the results of the correlations between the English language skills and international career aspirations of intending expatriates.

### *Practical implications*

In sum, the present study aimed to contribute to the knowledge about the success factors of internationally working employees that would lead to better selection and hiring procedures of expatriates for international assignments. Moreover, the secondary intention was to present recommendations for language policies in high school education. According to the findings, multicultural competence was slightly connected to foreign language mastery. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers should incorporate intercultural communicative competence in their foreign language courses rather than only the acquisition of communicative competence. The

distinctive results between the language skills in English compared to those in German and French could indicate that high school policies should treat the language courses for German and French as in depth as they do for the English course. The outcomes of the study showed that the MPQ seemed to be a valid instrument to measure multicultural personality traits. MNCs could use this instrument to predict an employees' intercultural effectiveness, but selection and hiring procedures should bare in mind that other factors predict the success of expatriatism as well. The results further implicated that international career aspirations should not be overlooked during the assessment of language skills.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The current study had several limitations that should be discussed and considered when interpreting the results. Moreover, the discussion of the findings and limitations will lead to directions for future studies.

First of all, the fact that one-third of the Dutch respondents dropped out before the end of the survey, led to a relatively small sample. The use of a small sample limits the possibility to generalise the findings for all Dutch advanced high school students. Larger samples of respondents are therefore recommended for future studies.

As already mentioned, there was an unequal distribution of age and school year between the groups of international ambition. Students who scored high on international ambition were significantly older and in a higher class than students who scored low on international ambition. Students who are older, and thus in a higher class, are in fact forced to think more about their future as they have to decide on education after high school sooner than younger students. Their intention to work internationally might therefore emanate from the conscious considerations of future job goals and how to get there. Future research on the international career aspirations of students should make an effort to reassure that age and school year are equally distributed, which makes the comparison between the groups more legitimate.

With regard to the instrumentation of the variables, foreign language mastery should be scrutinised in order to verify the validity of the variable as a whole. As previously discussed, the question about the number of foreign languages spoken might have led to different interpretations of the variable. Henceforth, this question should be adequately defined and clarified in order to anticipate on individual differences in interpretation. Even though respondents were asked for their honest and anonymous answers, the self-assessment of personality traits and language proficiency could have been influenced by social desirability. Social desirable answers could have led to higher scores on the variables, since respondents

would report as they would want to view themselves. However, no conclusion can be made with regard to the influence of social desirability, because this was not investigated as a factor in the present study. Although language grades were included to provide a more objective perspective on foreign language mastery, the multifaced concept of language course evaluation in one score might not suffice. Future research on foreign language mastery should elaborate and adapt the current sub-factors that are measured in order to establish the variable foreign language mastery as a whole.

Even though international ambition seemed of significant influence on foreign language mastery, this effect should be interpreted cautiously as the groups of international ambition were not equally distributed. Furthermore, international career aspirations of students were only measured by means of two items. In upcoming studies, the construct of international ambition should be further elaborated and potentially adapted. In the present study international career aspirations were thus taking into account as influencing factor in the relationship between personality traits and language skills. With regard to the prediction of overseas success, future studies should be contemplated other factors that might affect international effectiveness of students or employees. Besides individual factors, such as personality traits, language skills and motivation, contextual influences are worthwhile to investigate as well. Since expatriates have to move to another country for their international assignment, it might be important to investigate expatriates' family situation. In the current study, Dutch high school students were questioned, whereas Wolff (2016) used German employees in her study. One might argue that differences in the findings could be explained by cultural factors. However, more study is required to provide evidence for possible cultural influence on multicultural competence and foreign language mastery.

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## APPENDIX

### Online survey

Beste leerling,

Welkom bij mijn onderzoek in het kader van mijn afstudeerscriptie aan de Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen.

Het is voor mij van groot belang dat jij als leerling **in leerjaar 2016-2017 op de middelbare school hebt gezeten**. Mocht dit niet het geval zijn, dan wil ik je graag verzoeken deze vragenlijst niet in te vullen en weg te klikken. Als je wel in leerjaar 2016-2017 op de middelbare school hebt gezeten, dan wil ik je graag vragen deze vragenlijst naar eerlijkheid in te vullen. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden, het gaat hier om jouw eigen inzicht.

De vragenlijst bestaat uit vier onderdelen: persoonlijkheid, talenkennis, internationale ambities en tot slot wat algemene vragen. Bij een vraag over talenkennis is het verstandig je cijferlijst erbij te pakken. Het invullen van deze vragenlijst duurt ongeveer 10-15 minuten.

Uiteraard worden je antwoorden vertrouwelijk behandeld en niet met derden gedeeld.

Alvast bedankt voor je hulp!

Met hartelijke groet,

Rebecca Wijn

Student Master International Business Communication

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**Geef aan in hoeverre je het eens bent met de volgende stellingen:**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid per stelling*

Cultural empathy

	Helemaal niet mee eens	Niet mee eens	Neutraal	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
Ik begrijp andersmans gevoelens	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik probeer het gedrag van anderen te begrijpen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik hou rekening met andermans gevoelens	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik vind het moeilijk om me in te leven in anderen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb problemen met het beoordelen van relaties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik let op gezichtsuitdrukkingen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik stel persoonlijke vragen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik geniet van andermans verhalen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik onthoud wat anderen vertellen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben in staat om andermans gedachten te verwoorden	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik kan goed luisteren	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik merk op wanneer iemand het moeilijk heeft	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb mensenkennis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik leef me in in anderen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Geef aan in hoeverre je het eens bent met de volgende stellingen:**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid per stelling*

Openmindedness

	Helemaal niet mee eens	Niet mee eens	Neutraal	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
Ik ben geïnteresseerd in andere culturen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben geboeid door andermans opvattingen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben op zoek naar nieuwe manieren om mijn doel te bereiken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben nieuwsgierig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik vind (andere) geloofsovertuigingen interessant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik probeer verschillende benaderingen uit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben geïntrigeerd door verschillen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik begin gemakkelijk met een nieuw leven	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik raak betrokken met andere culturen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb gevoel voor wat gepast is in een andere cultuur	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben op zoek naar mensen van verschillende achtergronden	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb een breed interessegebied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik plaats mijn eigen cultuur in perspectief	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik sta open voor nieuwe ideeën	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Geef aan in hoeverre je het eens bent met de volgende stellingen:**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid per stelling*

Social initiative

	Helemaal niet mee eens	Niet mee eens	Neutraal	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
Ik neem initiatief	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik vind het moeilijk om contact te maken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik blijf op de achtergrond	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben geneigd om vrijuit te spreken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik wacht tot anderen contact leggen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik neem de leiding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben een langzame beginner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben altijd druk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben gemakkelijk in de omgang in groepen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik benader gemakkelijk andere mensen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik weet hoe ik me moet gedragen in sociale situaties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik vind het leuk om in het openbaar te spreken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben geneigd om af te wachten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik hou van actie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben vaak de drijvende kracht achter acties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik laat dingen zoals ze zijn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik maak gemakkelijk contact	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Geef aan in hoeverre je het eens bent met de volgende stellingen:**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid per stelling*

Emotional Stability

	Helemaal niet mee eens	Niet mee eens	Neutraal	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
Ik ben vaak zenuwachtig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben niet snel beledigd	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik pieker over conflicten met anderen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben bang om te falen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik blijf kalm bij tegenslag	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik vind het vanzelfsprekend dat alles goed komt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik straal kalmte uit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik beschouw problemen als oplosbaar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben verlegen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik sta vaak onder druk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik kan tegenslagen in perspectief plaatsen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben gevoelig voor kritiek	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb ups en downs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik vergeet tegenslagen snel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben zelfverzekerd	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik word gemakkelijk van streek	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben vaak bezorgd	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben geneigd me eenzaam te voelen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ik ben onzeker	<input type="radio"/>				
Ik heb een oplossing voor elk probleem	<input type="radio"/>				

**Geef aan in hoeverre je het eens bent met de volgende stellingen:**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid per stelling*

Flexibility

	Helemaal niet mee eens	Niet mee eens	Neutraal	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
Ik hou van vakanties zonder comfort	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik vermijd avontuur	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik verwissel gemakkelijk van een activiteit naar een andere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik vermijd verrassingen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik hou er van om alleen te werken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik hou niet van reizen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik wil precies weten wat er gaat gebeuren	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik functioneer het beste in een vertrouwde omgeving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik werk voornamelijk volgens een strak schema	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik werk voornamelijk volgens een strak schema	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik voel me ongemakkelijk in een andere cultuur	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik hou van routine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb vaste gewoontes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben op zoek naar uitdagingen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik geniet van onbekende ervaringen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Hoeveel vreemde talen spreek je?

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid*

- Geen (alleen Nederlands)
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 of meer

### Welke vreemde talen spreek je?

*Meerdere antwoordmogelijkheden mogelijk*

- Engels
- Duits
- Frans
- Grieks
- Latijn
- Spaans
- Marokkaans
- Turks
- Anders: \_\_\_\_\_

### Geef per vreemde taal je niveau aan naar eigen inzicht

*Mocht je een taal niet spreken, kies dan de laatste optie 'Deze taal spreek ik niet'*

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid per taal*

	Heel slecht	Slecht	Onvoldoende	Gemiddeld	Voldoende	Goed	Heel goed	Deze taal spreek ik niet
Engels	<input type="radio"/>							
Duits	<input type="radio"/>							
Frans	<input type="radio"/>							
Grieks	<input type="radio"/>							

Latijn	<input type="radio"/>								
Spaans	<input type="radio"/>								
Marokkaans	<input type="radio"/>								
Turks	<input type="radio"/>								
Andere taal	<input type="radio"/>								

**Geef per vreemde taal je gemiddelde cijfer aan volgens je cijferlijst**

*Mocht een taal niet op je cijferlijst staan, kies dan de laatste optie 'Deze taal staat niet op mijn cijferlijst'*

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid per taal*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Niet op mijn cijferlijst
Engels	<input type="radio"/>										
Duits	<input type="radio"/>										
Frans	<input type="radio"/>										
Grieks	<input type="radio"/>										
Latijn	<input type="radio"/>										
Spaans	<input type="radio"/>										
Andere taal	<input type="radio"/>										

**Geef aan in hoeverre je het eens bent met de volgende stellingen**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid per stelling*

	Helemaal niet mee eens	Niet mee eens	Neutraal	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
Het lijkt mij leuk om in een internationale omgeving te werken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik heb interesse in een internationale baan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Geslacht**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid*

- Man
- Vrouw

**Leeftijd (in hele jaren)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Nationaliteit**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid*

- Nederlands
- Anders: \_\_\_\_\_

**Opleidingsniveau**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid*

- VMBO
- HAVO
- VWO

**In welke klas zit je (schooljaar 2016-2017)?**

*1 antwoordmogelijkheid*

- Brugklas
- Tweede klas
- Derde klas
- Vierde klas
- Vijfde klas
- Zesde klas

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**Einde van de vragenlijst**

Hartelijk bedankt voor je tijd!

Vergeet je niet om op 'Verzenden' te klikken?

