The Influence of Language Proficiency and Social Capital on Sense of Belonging in the

Netherlands: International Students' Account on Dating and Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

Over eight percent of the students in the European Union are international students, which makes the challenge of assimilation an issue that needs to be understood in depth. Previous studies have presented mixed findings on the relationship between belonging, bridging social capital, and bonding social capital. Our study will elaborate on how bridging social capital and bonding social capital affect belonging. This study will begin to fill the gap in previous research, which fails to distinguish between quality of support and quantity of support. In the present study, we analyzed the impact of social capital and language proficiency on sense of belonging of international students in the Netherlands with a cross-sectional online questionnaire ($n = 134$). We found that higher language proficiency and higher levels of support from Dutch people are related to higher sense of belonging. However, higher levels of support from co-nationals and other internationals did not decrease sense of belonging in international students. The types of support from Dutch people differed in significance, meaning that we found quality of support to be a significant predictor while quantity of support was not. Within the regression, we also found that language was not a significant predictor when accounting for perceived support. When predicting sense of belonging, the characteristics of support from the host country are more significant than the amount of support, language proficiency plays a role, and co-national support did not factor in.

Keywords: social capital, bridging, bonding, belonging, support, international students.

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International students deal with the challenges of assimilating and adopting the habits of adult life. In addition, they must manage acculturative stress, specifically perceived discrimination and homesickness (Alharbi & Smith, 2018). International students undeniably struggle in various ways, such as feeling alienated due to a perceived resentment from peers who may view them as incompetent due to their language and communication barriers (Bastien et al., 2018). It is crucial to understand what contributes to international students' feelings of belonging, mainly because they are a specific group of migrants with different experiences than other migrants.

Eleven percent of students in the Netherlands are international (CBS, 2019). Understanding acculturation, the assimilation to a new culture, is key to predicting and explaining how these individuals will adapt to new countries. There are various adaptation aspects, such as psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Psychological adaptation includes psychological and physical well-being and life satisfaction, and sociocultural adaptation stresses the importance of acquiring the essential social skills required to adapt to this new culture (Yijälä & Luoma, 2019).

Acculturation has been proven to have a substantial and direct effect on well-being (Yoon et al., 2008), so regarding social-emotional experiences and well-being, the complicated construct of social connectedness has been increasingly emphasized in the well-being of international students (Brunsting, 2019).

Acculturation

Acculturation studies suggest that a strong sense of belonging is critical to the adaptation and well-being of immigrants (Karim & Hue, 2022). Acculturation applies not

only to students moving countries to pursue education but also to those who move for career

opportunities or those who have no choice but to leave their home countries, such as

refugees. This issue is relevant for several reasons, one being the international student

population in countless cities.

Interpersonal ties have several essential purposes, such as emotional and

informational support, which have been shown to correlate with well-being (Siedlecki, 2014).

Interpersonal ties can also provide contentment and gratification (Denissen et al., 2008).

Another reason would be that sense of belonging is crucial for an individual's self-esteem,

and students who have left their home country at a young age to come to a foreign country

have much to learn, whether intrapersonal, social, or educational. As for integrating into

Dutch culture after arriving, there are mixed personal accounts on how easy international

students find it to integrate into Dutch society and especially the difficulties they have

speaking to Dutch students. Although the Netherlands has the highest rate of English

speakers for a non-native English-speaking country (according to the English First English

Proficiency Index or EF EPI, 2021), the majority of Dutch people would prefer to speak to

friends in their native tongue, Dutch. Not being proficient in Dutch can also narrow the

housing market for international students arriving in the Netherlands, who face difficulties

with discrimination and operational disadvantages when looking for housing (Fang & van

Liempt, 2020)

When discussing the topic of belonging, the dependent variable in our study, it is vital

to extensively understand acculturation and social identification (Ward, 2001). Acculturation

occurs when individuals adopt the norms of their host country over their home country's

norms (Berry, 1992), as would be possible for international students in the Netherlands to

assimilate into Dutch culture. Additionally, immigrants tend to view issues such as language,

communication, and homesickness as more severe problems than locals do. There can be many reasons for this, the most prominent being that, if Dutch students are studying in the Netherlands, they likely do not understand the struggles that accompany immigrating to a foreign country, especially at a young age.

Belonging

Belonging is an experience that conjoins the desire to connect with others with the desire for positive regard constituting three concepts: belonging itself, the politics of belonging, and sense of belonging (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). Belonging and sense of belonging are similar yet separate concepts, the former being an affinity for a new place or group and the latter being how you feel about whether or not this affinity is fulfilled. This report will focus on a sense of belonging, of which three components exist (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). The first is national identity, which can be defined as the country or countries where you feel like you belong, not dependent on nationality. The second is feeling at home, which indicates a sense in which one's self-identity is connected to a particular place. The last component is a commitment to stay in the host country, which can be gauged by the person's willingness to become a legal citizen in the host country. These concepts and components are directly affected by the acculturation process and, in turn, directly affect the social capital that an international student can accumulate while in the host country.

Social Capital

There are two substantial types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding refers to a connection between similar groups of people. In this study, bonding will refer to the connection between international students from the same country (co-nationals) due to the notion that subjective shared identities can lead to inter-dependency in internationals from the country (Li, 2021). On the other hand, bridging refers to the connections between dissimilar

groups in which the links come from weaker connections. In this study, bridging refers to the connection between international students and Dutch people.

Social connections are essential to consider involving feelings of belonging, partially because the two are considered synonymic and coexistent in the face of social capital (Crisp, 2010). Moreover, considering social connectedness together with belonging can allow more nuance when studying social exclusion and social inclusion (Crisp, 2010).

When conceptualizing social capital, it is essential to consider both quality and quantity of support, specifically perceived support, as perceived support and belonging have been found to be positively correlated (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2006). Previous research has not found significant evidence behind the relationship between bonding social capital and sense of belonging. However, the present study focuses partially on bonding social capital due to its potential mechanisms and how those mechanisms could contribute to feelings of belonging. These mechanisms could be in the realm of feeling connected to your national identity through contact with a co-national, reducing feelings of belonging in the Netherlands. Bonding social capital could also create a superordinate identity as an 'international', contributing to fewer feelings of belonging.

Dating and romantic relationships tie directly into the concept of social capital. Whether it be bridging or bonding, when you begin dating someone, they become a part of your social capital, but you can also use the relationship as a resource to expand your social capital (Machalek & Martin, 2015). For example, suppose an international student began dating a Dutch person and was introduced to their group dynamics. In that case, that student has different social connections than an international student who is not dating a Dutch person. In addition, the international student dating a Dutch person has more chance to learn

the host country's language than an international student dating another international student or not dating anyone at all.

Language Proficiency

Viewing language as an essential resource for immigrants can allow us a deeper insight into the qualities of social capital (Nawyn et al., 2012). There is a tremendous amount of evidence which shows that being able to speak the primary language of the country in which you live is correlated with positive outcomes (Nawyn et al., 2012). Therefore, it is essential to understand that shared language and social connection with the host society may be inherently related to each other and sense of belonging. Not being proficient in the dominant language of your host country can subsequently decrease your chances of having expansive social capital and connect belonging and social capital to linguistic isolation (not speaking the primary language in a foreign country). In a refugee study based in the United States (Nawyn et al., 2012), the researchers found that household linguistic isolation had severely detrimental effects on those living together who did not possess the ability to speak the dominant language of the host country.

The language barrier between an international student and a Dutch person may not be as insurmountable as with host nationals who cannot speak English fluently, but it can potentially cause stress in a relationship. Therefore, the language barrier coupled with cultural differences may be considered reasonable to avoid dating an international partner (Stoner et al., 2019).

The Present Study

The study at hand focuses on how language proficiency and social capital affect international students' sense of belonging in the Netherlands. The context of this study is international students in the Netherlands. Specifically, we hypothesized the following:

H1: Higher proficiency in Dutch increases sense of belonging in Dutch society among international students.

H2: Higher bridging social capital increases sense of belonging in Dutch society among international students.

H3: Higher bonding capital increases sense of belonging in Dutch society among international students.

In addition, dating experience and attitudes will be collected and evaluated concerning international students' sense of belonging through the following research question: do international students feel as if they are regarded differently by Dutch people in terms of dating and commitment in the Netherlands? This question will be analyzed through qualitative research, specifically thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) There are few ways for international students to meet Dutch students and positively interact with them purposefully; if you do not speak Dutch, you cannot take a Dutch university course. Moreover, Dutch and English courses do not often overlap. Therefore, there is a more considerable barrier between Dutch and International students – more challenging to overcome and more difficult to facilitate a sense of belonging in international students.

Our contributions to the literature include the separate analysis of bridging and bonding social capital concerning sense of belonging and the additional separation of quality and quantity of support. Not many studies distinguish between the different forms of social capital, but examining this would be essential to better understand that acculturation experience of international students. International students are a distinctive category who experience different difficulties than other immigrants. This allows for a more specific analysis of which aspects of support create a welcoming and safe environment to nurture a sense of belonging. Previous studies have established a positive connection between language

proficiency and belonging; however, most of this literature focuses on the broad spectrum of immigrants and refugees rather than international students.

Furthermore, other studies on acculturation and sense of belonging in immigrants focus mainly on English-speaking countries. In contrast, this paper focuses on a country where most of the population speaks English, but it is not the dominant language. Speaking in your native language allows a sense of kinship and a pathway to sharing your culture with others, facilitating social connections (Fishman, 1996). We hope to provide a clear and specific insight into the international students' experience in the Netherlands.

Methods

Participants

The data was collected from a group of 140 participants. Six participants were excluded from the data pool for various reasons. Before the data obtained from the survey was analyzed, responses were analyzed in order to determine which met the necessary requirements to be counted in the study. As a result, we excluded six participants for not meeting our study requirements, such as length of stay in the Netherlands and nationality. Expressly, two participants were excluded for being Dutch, three participants were excluded for living in the Netherlands for fewer than six months, and one participant was excluded for an unclear date of arrival in the Netherlands. All of the included participants, 134 individuals after exclusion, are current international students from 38 different countries. Fifty-seven (42.5%) students were from Germany, six (4.4%) each from Romania and Italy, five (3.7%) from Greece, and the rest of the countries yielded four participants or fewer (Appendix A). These students were recruited through either convenience sampling or participated through a mandatory research practicum in the psychology curriculum at the University of Groningen. The students who participated through the research practicum received course credit as

compensation. The voluntary participants received no compensation. Of the 134 participants, 85 individuals (59.7%) identified as female, 49 individuals (36.6%) identified as male, three individuals (2.2%) chose other, and two individuals (1.5%) preferred not to say (Appendix A). The mean age of the participants was 21.7 ($SD = 2.3$), and the range was 18 to 30 years old (Appendix A). The mean time spent in the Netherlands was only 2.13 years ($SD = 1.3$), slightly over half the time it takes to complete a bachelor's degree.

Materials & Procedure

This study is a cross-sectional study that collected data through an online questionnaire created for the purpose of this study. We received ethical approval from the ethics committee of psychology in Groningen. Participants received a recruitment text with basic information on what the research will entail as well as a link to access the online questionnaire. The survey was estimated to take 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with information about the questionnaire and were required to give informed consent before proceeding. Moreover, the participants received contact information in case there were questions or concerns during or after the survey. As no manipulation was involved, the participants did not receive a debriefing after the study. The questionnaire included demographic questions, a belonging scale and a social support scale, and two qualitative open questions about dating experience.[1] Finally, the questionnaire was concluded with a seriousness check.

Control variables

We measured the number of years each participant had been in the Netherlands by asking the year in which they arrived. Time spent in the Netherlands denotes the amount of

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[1] This questionnaire was created for a Bachelor Thesis project; therefore, it included other scales to measure specific constructs, but those additional scales are beyond the scope of the current paper.

time the participants had spent in the Netherlands since they moved here. It was measured on

a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (never) to five (always). We included both control

variables to ensure that each participant had been in the Netherlands for a sufficient time to

reflect on their experience accurately.

Dutch Proficiency

The question "How well do you speak Dutch?" measured proficiency in Dutch with a

five-point Likert scale ranging from one (not at all) to five (extremely well). These were

scored accordingly from one to five.

Sense of Belonging

The Dutch belonging variable, which denotes the level of sense of belonging in the

Netherlands that international students feel on a scale from one to seven, was measured

through the Social Connectedness in Mainstream Society scale (Yoon et al., 2012). This scale

had five items (Cronbach's α = .900). Some examples from this scale include: "I feel a sense

of closeness with the Dutch" and "I feel accepted by the Dutch", measured with a Likert scale

ranging from one (strongly agree) to seven (strongly disagree).

Social Capital

Quality of Dutch support, which denotes the quality of support internationals felt they

received from Dutch people, was also measured with a Likert scale ranging from one

(strongly agree) to seven (strongly disagree). An example from this scale is: "Do you get the

emotional support you need from Dutch people?" This scale had three items (Cronbach's α =

.876). Quality of social support from Dutch people was measured through the Received

Social Support scale (Haslam et al., 2005). Quality of support from co-nationals was also

measured with the Received Social Support scale (Cronbach's α = .953), with three items.

Quality of support as measured with the same social support scale (Cronbach's α = .927). All

the scale reliability checks yielded high reliability; as a rule of thumb, a Cronbach's alpha higher than $\alpha = .700$ is good (Moran, 2021). After checking scale reliability, the scales were consolidated into one item per scale before continuing data analysis. To measure quantity of Dutch support, participants answered using a Likert scale ranging from one (never) to five (always); in response to the question "How often do you speak to several Dutch people in one day?"

Dating Experience & Commitment

There were three quantitative questions on the topic of dating and romantic relationships in the Netherlands.[2] The first was "How has your experience been dating Dutch people?" and the second was "What might hold you back from dating/committing to a Dutch person?". This data was processed with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

The data analysis, completed with JASP and SPSS, began with routine data checks, outliers were checked for, and none were found. Then, after running descriptive statistics (Appendix B) on each variable's data, we examined the data through correlational and inferential analyses before looking into qualitative insights. First, belonging was checked separately against the independent variables (quantity of Dutch support, quality of Dutch support, quantity of co-national support, quality of co-national support Dutch proficiency, and proportional time in the Netherlands). Then, following the correlations, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was run with the dependent variable of belonging and the independent variables.

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[2] "Are you currently dating (or have you ever dated) a Dutch person?", "Are you (or have you ever been) in a committed relationship with a Dutch person?" and "Are any of your friends dating a Dutch person? If yes, how many? If no, put 0".

Assumptions

All of the assumptions tested were met. Tests to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a problem (Appendix 4). The condition index for the collinearity analysis showed that dimensions one through four did not indicate problems with multicollinearity. Dimension five indicates the possibility of multicollinearity problems, but checked against the variance proportions; there is no problem. The data was also checked against the assumptions of homogeneity & normality with a residuals plot and a Q-Q plot (appendix 4), and we found the data to fit both assumptions.

Correlations

The correlations for sense of belonging, quantity of Dutch support, quality of Dutch support, quantity of co-national support, quality of co-national support Dutch proficiency, and proportional time in the Netherlands were measured using the Pearson correlation coefficient, also known as Pearson's r (see Appendix C). Starting with the control variables, the correlation calculation between the number of years in the Netherlands ($M = 2.130$, $SD = 1.297$) and belonging ($M = 3.921$, $SD = 1.333$) was $r(132) = .098$, $p < 0.265$, meaning that the correlation was not significant and therefore the number of years did not have an impact on belonging. The other control variable, proportional time spent in the Netherlands ($M = 4.045$, $SD = 0.745$), correlated with belonging $r(132) = .370$, $p < .001$, which is a weak correlation as a rule of thumb, but still significant, so it should not be ignored.

The correlation calculation between sense of belonging and quality of Dutch support ($M = 4.161$, $SD = 1.426$) yielded $r(132) = 0.496$, $p < .001$, which is considered a weak to moderate correlation. The correlation calculation between belonging and quantity of Dutch support ($M = 2.261$, $SD = 0.996$) yielded $r(132) = .424$, $p < .001$, which is considered a weak

to moderate correlation. This result supports our hypothesis of the positive connection between bridging social capital and belonging.

Contrary to our expectations, the correlation calculation between belonging and quantity of co-national support ($M = 3.097$, $SD = 1.408$) yielded $r(132) = -.029$, $p < .742$, which is both weak and insignificant as a correlation. We found similar results for the correlation calculation between belonging and quality of co-national support ($M = 5.062$, $SD = 1.535$) yielded $r(132) = .014$, $p < .871$, which is also considered a weak and insignificant correlation. These two results for the support of co-nationals were not further considered as they were insignificant based on their p-values; they were not linearly related. This study does not support our hypothesis for the positive connection between bonding social capital and belonging. In short, for social capital, we found a significant connection between Dutch support and belonging. However, against our expectations, we did not find a significant connection between belonging and co-national support or international support. The correlation calculation between belonging and Dutch proficiency ($M = 1.873$, $SD = 0.945$) yielded $r(132) = .308$, $p < .001$, which is considered a weak correlation but a significant one, which partially supports our hypothesis that Dutch proficiency has a positive relationship with belonging.

Multiple Regression

The multiple regression analysis was conducted with belonging as the dependent variable and quality of Dutch support, the proportional time spent in the Netherlands, Dutch proficiency, and quantity of Dutch support as the independent variables (see Appendix D). Hierarchical multiple regression was performed with two models: model one only including proportional time spent in the Netherlands as a control variable, and model two adding in quality of Dutch support, quantity of Dutch support, and Dutch proficiency. The results of

model one indicated that proportional time spent in the Netherlands explained 13.7 percent of

the variance in belonging ($R = .370$, $R2 = .137$, $R2\text{Adj} = .131$, $F(1) = 20.971$, $p < .001$). In

model two, we found that all of the variables together explained 37.2 percent of the variance

in the dependent variable ($R = .610$, $R2 = .372$, $R2\text{Adj} = 0.352$, $F(3) = 19.076$, $p < .001$. The

F change in this model was $F = 16.053$. The results of the hierarchical regression mean that

adding the variables to the control variable significantly changed the model and that all of the

variables have a significant amount of predictive power, not just the control variable.

As for the coefficients table, the H1 intercept was -0.056, and the unstandardized coefficients

were, in order, quality of Dutch support, the proportional time spent in the Netherlands,

Dutch proficiency, and quantity of Dutch support as ($B = 0.351$, $B = 0.182$, $B = 0.441$, $B =$

0.172). The standardized coefficients were in order, quality of Dutch support, the

proportional time spent in the Netherlands, Dutch proficiency, and quantity of Dutch support

as ($B = 0.376$, $B = 0.246$, $B = 0.129$, $B = 0.128$). The t-statistic for quality of Dutch support (p

$< .001$) was 4.822, with a standard error of 0.073. For proportional time spent in the

Netherlands ($t = 3.253$, $p = .001$), with a standard error of 0.136. For Dutch proficiency ($t =$

1.737, $p = .085$), the standard error was 0.105, and frequency of contact ($t = 1.518$, $p = 0.131$)

had a standard error of 0.113. The t statistic in regression is the coefficient divided by its

standard error and measures how precise the coefficients were measured. Generally, a value

between negative two and positive two indicates no large difference relative to the variation

in the sample data.

 Although we found significant correlations for each of these variables above, the

multiple regression showed that only quality of Dutch support and time spent in the

Netherlands were significant predictors of sense of belonging, while frequency of contact

(quantity of Dutch support) and Dutch proficiency were not significant predictors of belonging.

Dating Experience & Commitment

There were five total questions for this section of the questionnaire. The results showed that 32% of participants who responded had experience dating Dutch people, while 68% had no experience dating Dutch people. Of those who had dated Dutch people, only 34% had been in a committed romantic relationship with a Dutch person (11% of the total sample). Of the people who responded to "How many friends of yours are dating a Dutch person?" fifty-six people responded zero, 71 in the range of one to five, and three in the range of six to ten. One participant had more than ten friends dating a Dutch person. As for the qualitative questions, the thematic analysis showed prominent themes for both.

The steps of this thematic analysis included coding features of the data into themes, which were then described, named, and analyzed alongside the research question and previous relevant literature. Finally, this analysis was completed concerning the internal and external homogeneity of each category and theme in an attempt to identify the 'essence' of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For the question asking about the experience of international students dating Dutch people, the data was coded into no experience (0), overall positive experience (1), overall negative experience (2), and neutral experience (3). There were 97 responses out of 134. This yielded mixed results, with the majority of experiences being positive (Appendix E). After coding these experiences to get a feel for the data, a thematic analysis was performed, beginning with a developed thematic map (Appendix F) showing the participants' main ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The main themes in the first thematic map were: language as an inhibitor, perceived difference in personality, and difficulty finding common ground/different

values. Some examples of responses include: "The language barrier, and cultural differences I suppose", and "Good! Sometimes isolating when being the only non-Dutch present".

For the second qualitative question, which asked, "What might hold you back from dating/committing to a Dutch person?" the analysis of 114 responses began with a developed thematic map (Appendix G). One curious argument in the responses specified student associations in the Netherlands being a reason to avoid dating Dutch people, mentioned by three different participants (2.6%). Participants prominently mentioned language and differences in personality. However, the main themes were focused on the lack of contact between Dutch people and international students ("I feel like they are close in their own circles"). International students felt discriminated against by the choice of many Dutch people not to speak English ("Most of the Dutch people I meet don't want to speak English with me"), even though the majority of Dutch people can speak English fluently (English First English Proficiency Index, 2021). International students felt like they were not liked by Dutch people ("Sometimes I feel like the Dutch people don't really like the internationals). There was also a perceived pattern that Dutch people tended to date each other and have exclusively Dutch groups ("They tend to search for other Dutch people to date").

Discussion

When collecting the data for this study, we expected to find that an increase in Dutch proficiency correlates with an increase in belonging. During the analysis, we found Dutch proficiency to be significantly correlated but was not significant in the multiple regression, meaning that our hypothesis was partially supported.

For bridging social capital, we expected to find that an increase in Dutch support correlates with an increase in belonging, partially because interacting with Dutch people in a meaningful way might increase the likelihood of international students feeling at home and

subsequently increase belonging (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). However, there was no significant correlation between belonging and quality of support from internationals, which is why it was not included in the multiple regression analysis. However, there were significant correlations for both quantity and quality of Dutch support in relation to belonging (which shows support for the bridging social capital theory). When the multiple regression analysis was completed, the quality of support was significant, and the quantity of support was not found to be significant. Therefore, the data did not support the hypothesis that higher bridging capital increases belonging in Dutch society among international students, and there was no significant correlation between international support and belonging. This applied to both quality and quantity of support from internationals. Since, in this study, we choose to appraise international support as a measure for bridging social capital, we need to continue to differentiate between the two while ensuring that the insignificant results still get reported. There are various possible reasons for this outcome, such as the high number of German participants in the study (42.5%), which would skew the data collection towards co-national support and make it unreliable.

The data supported our hypothesis that higher bridging social capital increases belonging in Dutch society among international students. This hypothesis focused on both quality of support and frequency of contact from Dutch people. Quality of support from Dutch people correlated significantly with belonging and was a significant predictor of belonging in the multiple regression. Frequency of contact also correlated significantly with belonging but was not found to be a significant predictor in the multiple regression. Overall, higher bridging social capital (especially support) does increase feelings of belonging among international students. When accounting for our other variables, social support seems particularly essential in fostering feelings of belonging in international students.

For bonding social capital, we also expected to find that an increase in co-national support correlates with an increase in belonging. However, when assessing the data, it was interestingly found that there was no significant correlation between belonging and quality of support from co-nationals. This variable was not included in the multiple regression analysis. This shows a lack of support for the theory of bonding social capital, which might be because our study was too underpowered to find reliable effects. The data did not support our hypothesis that higher bonding capital increases belonging in Dutch society among international students, and there was no significant correlation between co-national support and belonging. It is interesting to find that the only type of support that influences belonging is support from the host country's nationals, mainly because it has been theorized that remaining in groups with one's co-nationals can reduce feelings of belonging. An increase in co-national support can help strengthen national identity from your home country, which might subsequently reduce belonging in your host country. For this reason, bonding capital has been argued to be less influential for belonging than bridging capital, the difference between being comfortable in a new country and taking the initiative to assimilate in a new country (Coffé & Geys, 2007). This can be as easy as going to a regular cafe or restaurant to meet locals, taking language classes to converse with your host country nationals, or broadening your social networks with nationals who do not necessarily align with your values.

Proportional time spent in the Netherlands also correlated significantly with belonging and showed significant predictive value in the multiple regression. The regression model was a moderately significant predictor, with the independent variables explaining over one-third of the variance in the dependent variable (belonging). The data showed that Dutch language proficiency related to international students' belonging. However, the data did not support the

hypothesis that higher proficiency in Dutch *increases* belonging in Dutch society among international students when accounting for other variables.

Dating Experience & Commitment

Regarding the research question on dating, the main themes present in the thematic analysis allowed further insight into feelings of belonging (or lack thereof) among international students.[3] Dutch people were seen as fun and casual by internationals, alongside a blunt and direct personality. However, the participants revealed that they felt excluded by the Dutch student population for several reasons, one of the most prominent being that most Dutch people can speak English, but they choose not to, even when in the presence of international students who do not speak Dutch. The last central theme relating to belonging was low contact with Dutch people. Participants reflected on the few instances they had contact with Dutch people, sharing that they felt that the Dutch have exclusive groups and do not want contact with internationals; they only want to date other Dutch people. This supports the theory that international students have difficulty becoming involved with other students they perceive as being from a different culture (Montgomery & McDowell, 2008). In addition to low contact, there was a sub-theme of Dutch people being 'hard to read' and having low emotional availability because they do not want to commit to an international student romantically. This perceived rejection likely reduces the national identity of the host country and the desire to remain in the host country, which would subsequently reduce feelings of belonging.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that part of our sample was a convenience sample,

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[3] Do international students feel as if they are regarded differently by Dutch people in terms of dating and commitment in the Netherlands?

and the other part of our sample was confined to first-year psychology students studying at the University of Groningen, who were compensated with course credit for completing our questionnaire. Another limitation is that almost half of our participants were from Germany (42.5%), which limits the generalizability of the study, especially because the move from Germany to the Netherlands is a relatively small transition to a similar culture (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). Finally, the age of the international students ($M = 21.7$, $SD = 2.26$) concerning dating and romantic relationships may restrict the reliability of the data. These limitations can be mitigated by having a large random sample in a replication study or a similar study. Additionally, depending on culture, international students may not have had any romantic relationships before coming to the Netherlands, meaning they may not have a sound basis for comparison. This limitation cannot be mitigated similarly to the above limitations, but questions can be added to assess the participants' previous dating experience to ensure that researchers know the extent to which the participants can compare. This study was also limited by the data analysis, in which we ran correlations and a hierarchical multiple regression, but we did not look for a causal relationship. This could be a goal of future studies on this topic, allowing for a tangible explanation.

Future Research

Further research is needed to establish the difference between the significance of quality of support and the significance of quantity of support. It is also essential to specify that quantity of support was measured solely through the frequency of contact question "How often do you talk to several Dutch people in one day?"." In contrast, quality of support was measured with a reliable scale. Bonding social capital was not found to influence social capital, whereas bridging social capital significantly impacted belonging.

In this case, it might be imperative to study international students with dual identifiers, particularly those individuals who are nationals of their host country. A study on this topic would amalgamate bonding and bridging and possibly allow further insight into the mechanisms behind these constructs or mediators to explain them. Further research on bonding and bridging social capital could potentially reveal moderators of their effect on belonging, allowing us to expand our theoretical and methodological knowledge. Possible moderators and mediators could include subjective well-being, perceived cultural distance, or national identity of either country.

As for practical implications, it might be prudent to use this study as a basis in order to create more detailed questionnaires for studies on integration and sense of belonging. There is much more to be analyzed before being able to predict and change the acculturation outcomes of international students reliably. However, steps must be taken to increase feelings of belonging through language proficiency and social capital.

Conclusion

This paper set out to analyze how social capital and language proficiency affect international students' sense of belonging and their experience of dating in the Netherlands. Dutch people can make a significant difference in how international students perceive their support, possibly by making an effort to not discriminate against internationals for not speaking Dutch. However, sense of belonging can likely increase if international students try to learn the language of their host country. Dutch people might benefit from knowing the extent to which internationals feel excluded, particularly in the dating environment of the Netherlands, by expanding their groups beyond primarily Dutch peers. Belonging takes active participation from both the host country's nationals and internationals. This can be implemented in various ways, such as encouraging international students to take language

courses soon after they arrive and, contrastingly, encouraging Dutch students to speak

English when in the presence of international students not to make them feel excluded.

Education on acculturation and assimilation may foster a sense of hope when moving to a

new country and give immigrants the tools needed to feel like they belong.

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Appendix A

Binomial Test

Variable	Level	Counts	Total	Proportion
Nationality	Germany	57	134	0.425
	England	4	134	0.030
	Romania	7	134	0.052
	Italy	7	134	0.052
	Other, namely	59	134	0.440
Nationality_6_TEXT	Albania	1	58	0.017
	Austria	1	58	0.017
	Brazil	2	58	0.034
	Bulgaria	1	58	0.017
	Canada	2	58	0.034
	Croatia	1	58	0.017
	Cyprus	1	58	0.017
	Finland	2	58	0.034
	France	2	58	0.034
	Greece	5	58	0.086
	Hong Kong	1	58	0.017
	Hungary	2	58	0.034
	India	2	58	0.034
	Indonesia	3	58	0.052
	Ireland	2	58	0.034
	Jordan	1	58	0.017
	Latvia	1	58	0.017
	Lithuania	4	58	0.069
	Moldova	1	58	0.017
	New Zealand	1	58	0.017
	Norway	1	58	0.017
	Palestine	1	58	0.017
	Poland	4	58	0.069
	Russia	1	58	0.017
	Singapore	1	58	0.017
	Slovakia	3	58	0.052
	Slovenia	1	58	0.017
	South Africa	1	58	0.017
	South Korea	1	58	0.017
	Suriname	1	58	0.017
	Sweden	3	58	0.052
	Syria	1	58	0.017
	USA	3	58	0.052

Binomial Test

Variable	Level	Counts	Total	Proportion
Gender	Female	80	134	0.597
	Male	49	134	0.366
	Other	3	134	0.022
	Prefer not to say	2	134	0.015
Age	18	5	134	0.037
	19	14	134	0.104
	20	30	134	0.224
	21	26	134	0.194
	22	13	134	0.097
	23	20	134	0.149
	24	12	134	0.090
	25	5	134	0.037
	26	5	134	0.037
	27	2	134	0.015
	28	1	134	0.007
	30	1	134	0.007

Note. Proportions tested against value: 0.5.

Table A1: Frequency table for Nationality, Gender, and Age.

Appendix B

Descriptive Statistics

	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation
BelongingNL	134	0	3.921	1.333
Quality of Dutch support	134	0	4.164	1.426
Time spent in NL since arrival	134	0	4.045	0.745
Proficiency in Dutch	134	0	1.873	0.945
Quantity of Dutch support	134	0	2.261	0.996

Table B1: Descriptive statistics table for dependent variable and independent variables

Appendix C

Correlations
Pearson's Correlations

		Pearson's r	p
BelongingNL	- Quality of Co-national support	0.014	0.871
BelongingNL	- Quality of Dutch support	0.496	< .001
BelongingNL	- Quality of International support	0.041	0.642
BelongingNL	- Time spent in NL since arrival	0.370	< .001
BelongingNL	- Intention to stay in Netherlands	-0.093	0.285
BelongingNL	- Years in the Netherlands	0.098	0.265
BelongingNL	- Proficiency in Dutch	0.308	< .001
BelongingNL	- Quantity of Dutch support	0.424	< .001
BelongingNL	- Quantity of Co-national support	-0.029	0.742
BelongingNL	- Quantity of International support	0.054	0.534

Table C1: Table of Correlations between dependent variable and independent variables.

Appendix D

Multiple Regression

Model Summary - BelongingNL

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	RMSE	R² Change	F Change	df1	df2	p
1	0.370	0.137	0.131	1.243	0.137	20.971	1	132	< .001
2	0.610	0.372	0.352	1.073	0.235	16.053	3	129	< .001

Table D1: Table showing model summary of model one: Proportional Time Spent in the Netherlands and model two: Multiple Regression between Belonging, Quality of Dutch support, Proficiency in Dutch, Quantity of Dutch Support, and Proportional Time Spent in the Netherlands.

Collinearity Diagnostics

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	**Variance Proportions**				
				(Intercept)	Quality of Dutch support	Proficiency in Dutch	Quantity of Dutch support	Time spent in NL since arrival
H₁	1	4.673	1.000	0.001	0.004	0.007	0.005	0.001
	2	0.145	5.672	0.009	0.035	0.990	0.029	0.009
	3	0.099	6.875	0.058	0.000	0.000	0.759	0.031
	4	0.068	8.265	0.017	0.885	0.002	0.116	0.064
	5	0.015	17.784	0.915	0.077	0.000	0.092	0.895

Table D2: Table showing Collinearity Diagnostics for Multiple Regression. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Residuals Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	N
Predicted Value	1.559	5.910	3.921	0.813	134
Residual	-2.555	2.586	-4.195e-18	1.057	134
Std. Predicted Value	-2.907	2.448	-2.304e-16	1.000	134
Std. Residual	-2.479	2.470	-4.817e-4	1.005	134

Table D3: Table showing Residuals Statistics for Multiple Regression.
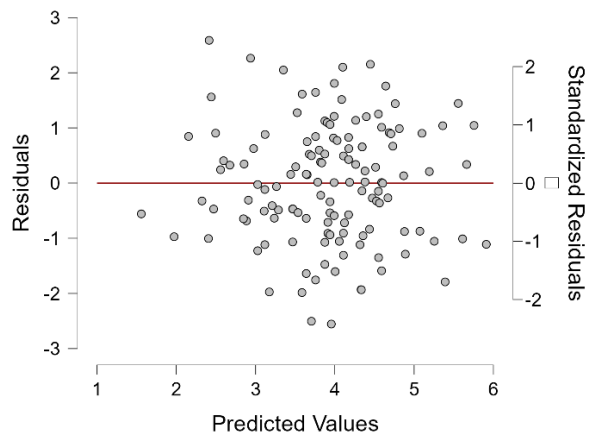
Residuals vs. Predicted - Homoscedasticity

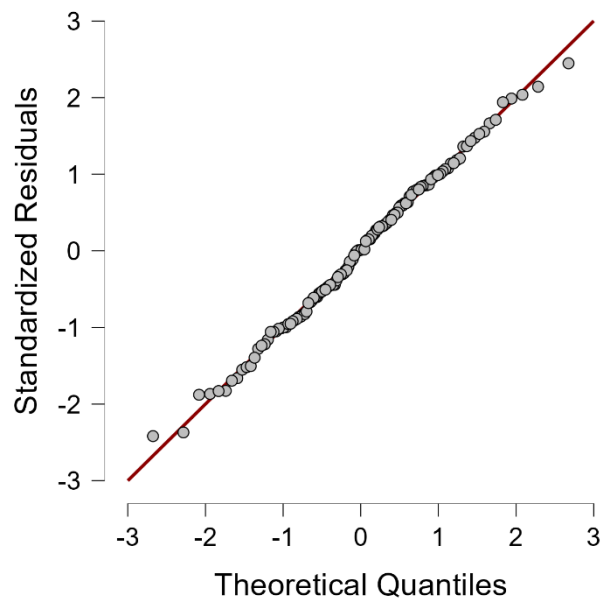Figure D1: Homoscedasticity scatterplot for residual values versus predicted values.

Q-Q Plot Standardized Residuals - Normality

Figure D2: Q-Q plot to check against assumption of normality.

Appendix E

DatingExpCoded

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	44	32.8	45.4
	1.00	31	23.1	77.3
	2.00	12	9.0	89.7
	3.00	10	7.5	100.0
	Total	97	72.4	
	Missing	37	27.6	
Total		134	100.0	

Table E1: Frequency table for coded values of responses to the question "How has your experience been dating Dutch people?" For the codes: zero denotes no experience, one denotes positive overall experience, two denotes negative overall experience, and three denotes neutral overall experience.

Appendix F

Thematic map – "How has your experience been dating Dutch people?"

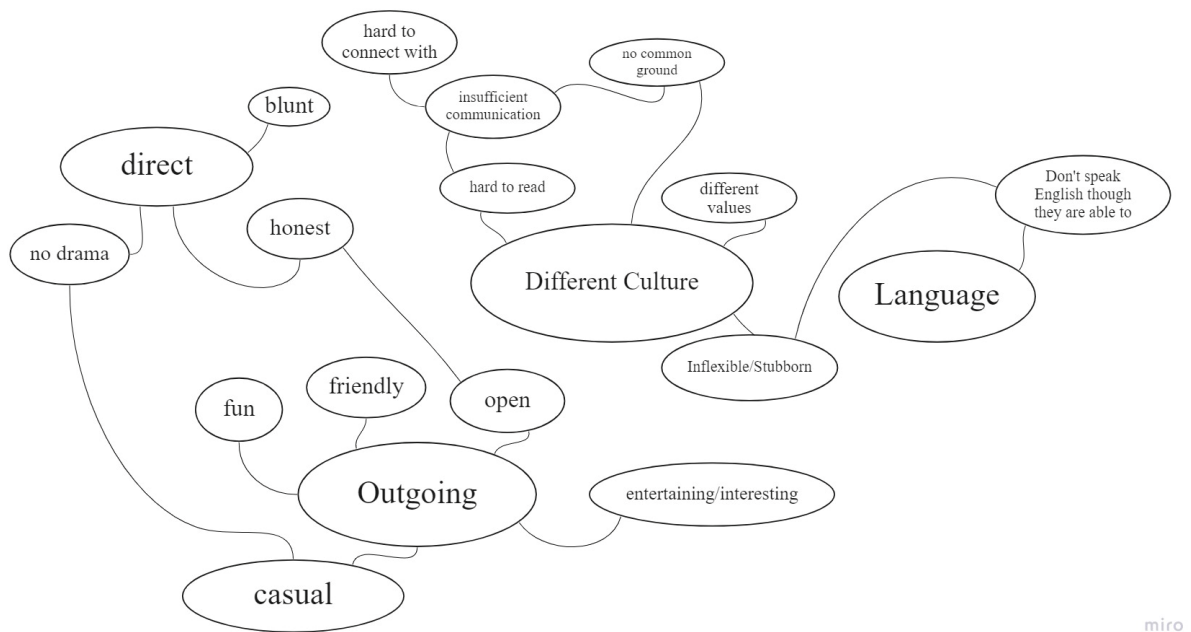Figure F1: A thematic mindmap created for analysis of responses to the question "How has you experience been dating Dutch people?"

Appendix G

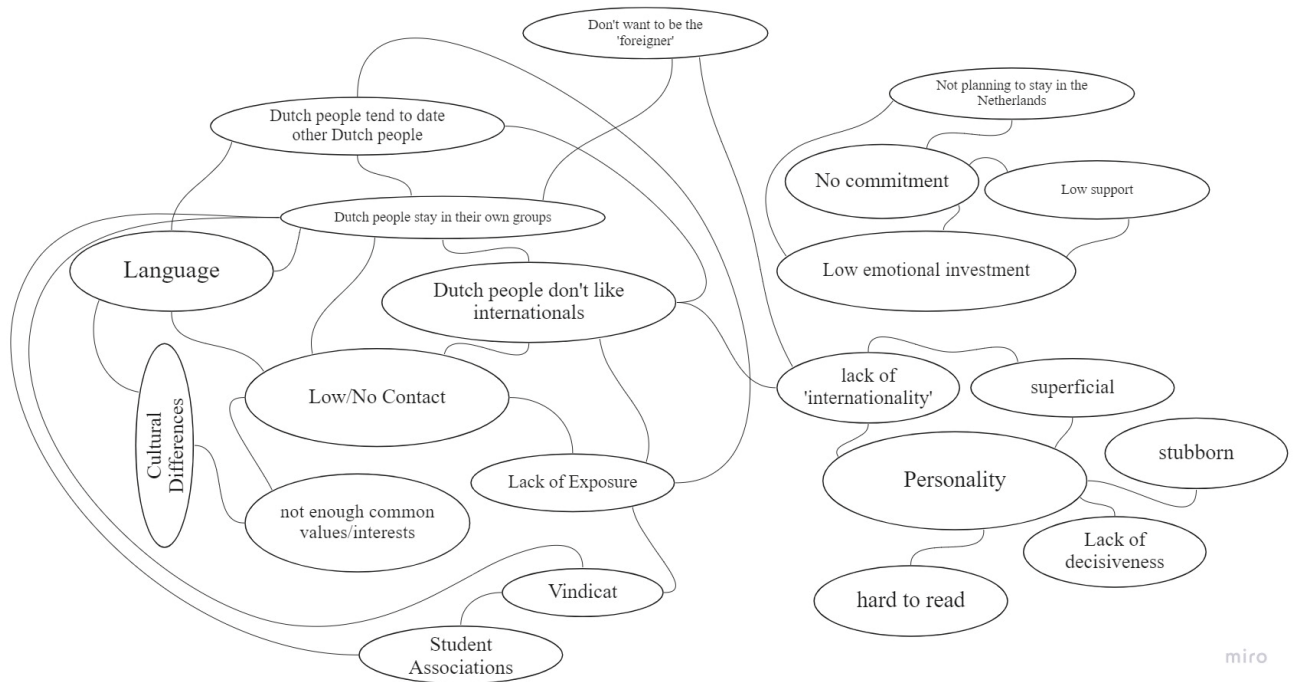**Thematic map – "What might hold you back from dating/committing to a Dutch person?"**

Figure G1: A thematic mindmap created for analysis of responses to the question "What might hold you back from dating/committing to a Dutch person?"