Route to reading: Promoting reading through a school library: effects for non-Western migrant students
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CHAPTER 1
GENERAL INTRODUCTION
Ethnic inequality in school performance is an urgent issue in the Netherlands, as in other Western countries (Gijssberts & Iedema, 2012; Schnepf, 2007). Since the 1960s, migrants have come to the Netherlands in large numbers (Herweijer, 2009; Nicolaas, Lootsen & Annema, 2012). Recent statistics show that in 2015, the Dutch population counted over 2.0 million non-Western migrants, or 12% of the total population, of which migrants with a Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antillean background constituted the largest groups (Statistics Netherlands, 2015). Along with the arrival of migrants, schools with a considerable number of students with a migrant background have become more common over the past decades, especially in the most highly urbanized areas (Herweijer, 2008). In 2015, 17% of the primary school aged children (4–12 years) were of non-Western origin (Statistics Netherlands, 2015). Research has clearly demonstrated that the educational achievement of children from non-Western migrant groups – including those born in the Netherlands – lags behind that of native Dutch students, especially when it comes to language and reading skills (Gijssberts & Iedema, 2012; Ledoux, Roeleveld, Driessen, Cuppen, & Meijer, 2011). Their disadvantages are already present at the start of primary education and continue throughout primary school and beyond (Gijssberts & Iedema, 2012; Herweijer, 2009).

**ART OF READING: LIBRARY AT SCHOOL**

In 2008, a national program called Art of Reading ("Kunst van Lezen") was initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science to promote a culture of reading among children (0–18 years) nationwide (Broekhof, 2015). Art of Reading is based on four pillars: (a) reading environment (providing an adequate collection for the target group), (b) expertise (investing in competence of staff working at libraries, schools, and childcare centers), (c) evidence (providing brochures, scientific research, and monitoring), and (d) cooperation (establishing strategic collaborations to accomplish a sustainable execution of programs; http://kunstvanlezen.nl). Apart from the program the Library at School ("de Bibliotheek op School"), which we focus on in our research, the Art of Reading initiative also includes the program BookStart ("BoekStart") for 0- to 4-year-olds, aimed at promoting early reading, storytelling, singing songs, and rhyming through baby books, as well as a program that aims to create regional reading promotion networks (Broekhof, 2015; Bron & Langendonk, 2015; van den Berg, 2015). With these programs, Art of Reading seeks to raise children’s reading and language ability through stimulating free reading and reading aloud to children, making sure that the promotion of reading is anchored permanently and on an extensive scale in the policy of libraries, schools, municipalities, childcare centers, and centers for youth and family (Bron & Langendonk, 2015; Langendonk, 2015). Public libraries take the lead in implementing the programs (Langendonk, 2015; Ros, 2010; van Mil, Kandel, Mulder, & Polderman, 2015). In the period 2008–2015, the Art of Reading program received a budget of EUR 20 million and was carried out by the Dutch Reading Foundation and The National Library (Broekhof, 2015; Bron & Langendonk, 2015; Stichting Lezen, 2012).

The program the Library at School, which comprises a structural cooperation between public libraries and schools, seeks to promote reading among students by creating high quality libraries in schools and improving the collaboration between public libraries and schools (Broekhof, 2015; Bron & Langendonk, 2015; van Dam & Heideman, 2015). The program is directed at promoting reading enjoyment, encouraging children to read more, stimulating the students’ reading and language development, and improving their information skills (Bron & Langendonk, 2015; Huysmans, Kleijn, Broekhof, & van Dalen, 2013; van Dam & Heideman, 2015). Its main priority is to provide students of all grades with a large, varied, and up-to-date collection in a school library, as most Dutch schools have a limited and unattractive book collection at their disposal (Ros, 2010; van Dam, Klerk, Langendonk, & Plooij, 2015). As part of the program, a reading and media consultant employed by the public library supports the school by, for instance, helping with setting up the school library, assisting students in finding books and information, providing teachers with advice, and implementing reading promotion activities (Huysmans et al., 2013; van Dam et al., 2013). Although the Library at School is a national program consisting of certain building blocks, how it is given shape depends on the local situation, wishes, and needs (Thomas, 2013). The objectives and activities are specified on a yearly basis by the school and the library involved (van Dam et al., 2013).

Also as a result of the Library at School, school libraries supported or run by public libraries have become increasingly common in the Netherlands. In 2014, 74% of all library organizations participated in the program, involving more than one third (36%) of all Dutch primary schools (Bron & Langendonk, 2015; van Dam & Heideman, 2015; van Dam et al., 2013). Although the initial focus of the program was on primary schools, since 2014, pilot studies have been conducted to extend the Library at School program to childcare centers and secondary education (Broekhof, 2015).

The present research project contributes to the scientific research carried out in light of the Art of Reading initiative. The two earlier dissertations, addressing BookStart (van den Berg, 2015) and the Library at School (Nielen, 2016), have shown encouraging outcomes of the national program. Van den Berg (2015) provided evidence for a causal relationship between BookStart and language development in 15- and 22-month-old children. Temperamentally reactive children, who are more prone to anger and frustration during daily activities, appeared to be particularly receptive to BookStart. Their parents were also more likely to participate in BookStart, suggesting that parents who notice less optimal interactions with their child look for a program that can offer advice and help. However, parents from a low educational background were less inclined to participate in BookStart, even when their interaction with their child was problematic. From the research by Nielen (2016) it appears that an enriched school library – including a larger and more up-to-date book collection as compared to regular school libraries – seems beneficial for students’ performance. He found that fourth and fifth grade students from schools with an enriched school library attained higher reading comprehension scores than students attending schools with a typical school library.
Students from schools with an enriched school library also had more interest in reading and knew more book titles, which may explain why these students were more proficient readers.

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF (SCHOOL) LIBRARIES

There is a growing need for Dutch public libraries to prove their value. The economic recession following the credit crunch in 2008, resulting in public spending cuts on the municipal level, has caused governments to question the self-evidence of investments in public libraries (Huysmans & Oomes, 2013; Vakkari, Aabø, Audunson, Huysmans, & Oomes, 2014). Moreover, due to the digitization of media, information, and communication, the library’s function and benefits available through the use of library services are questioned (Huysmans & Oomes, 2013; Poll, 2012). Huysmans and Oomes (2013, p. 2) have stated that “libraries are therefore more and more urged to document their value and demonstrate their relevance to citizens, commentators, and politicians”.

In addressing the relevance of public libraries for Dutch society much attention has been paid to the so-called outputs of the library, such as number of branches, opening hours, number of users, materials, visits, and loans (Huysmans & Oomes, 2013). However, these measures do not give sufficient insight into the value of the library to the user and the impact on one’s life. Increasingly, libraries are looking for measures of so-called outcomes, such as changes in behaviors, attitudes, and skills through library services, trying to get a grip on the benefits libraries produce to its users (Huysmans & Oomes, 2013; Vakkari et al., 2014).

According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), evaluation is also a critical aspect of implementing school library programs. Evaluation of school library programs and services demonstrates the benefits derived from the libraries and it helps to determine whether a school library meets the needs of the school population. Moreover, evaluations provide evidence needed to improve school library programs, leading to the renewal or development of new programs (Schultz-Jones & Oberg, 2015). Although ample studies – mostly conducted outside the Netherlands – have addressed the impact of school libraries, revealing positive outcomes (e.g., Nielsen, 2016; Roberson, Schweinle, & Applin, 2003; Scholastic, 2008; Williams, Wavell, & Morrison, 2013), there is still a lack of clarity as to the effects on children from migrant groups in the Netherlands.

PRESENT RESEARCH

This research aims to investigate whether the integration of a library facility in a Dutch primary school’s curriculum leads to a more positive attitude toward reading, more leisure reading, and better reading and language skills in students with a non-Western migrant background. Reading promotion through a school library seeks to stimulate these factors and previous studies have demonstrated positive effects for students in general. In this project, we specifically focus on the effectiveness of a school library facility for migrant children from non-Western families. As part of our research, we have first conducted a literature review in order to pinpoint what is known and what is as yet unknown about the effects of reading promotion efforts through school libraries for children in general, and children with a migrant background in particular. This review has identified gaps in the literature and has provided guidance for our empirical studies.

Central in the empirical part of this research was a children’s library in Oosterwei, a multicultural neighborhood in the city of Gouda in the west of the Netherlands. In 2012, Oosterwei had over 2,100 residents of which a high proportion was classified as non-Western migrant (60%), mostly of Moroccan origin (https://gouda.incijfers.nl). In agreement with national statistics, migrant students in this neighborhood often suffer educational disadvantages, especially in terms of language and reading ability. On the local public library’s initiative, the children’s library was established in 2011, using external funding. The library, joining the Library at School concept, was run by a reading and media coach employed by the public library. It provided the students with a large and varied collection of books as well as reading promotion lessons given by the employee (see Appendix A).

In the present research project, a longitudinal study with a quasi-experimental design was conducted, involving two Dutch primary schools in Gouda: the one with the integrated library facility (i.e., the experimental school), and another school in an adjacent multicultural neighborhood without such a school library (i.e., the control school). Standardized tests and questionnaires were used to gather data over three successive school years: 2011/2012, 2012/2013, and 2013/2014. The total sample consisted of 143 students (experimental school n = 72; control school n = 71), with one to three observations on reading attitude and reading behavior, and/or up to six observations on one or more aspects of language and reading proficiency. All students included in the sample had at least one parent from a non-Western background and the vast majority of students was born in the Netherlands. Due to the limited number of Western migrant students attending the two schools and the limited number of native Dutch students attending the experimental school, it was not possible to compare the non-Western migrant students with native Dutch and Western migrant students. Thus, our focus is exclusively on students from non-Western migrant families. The main research questions addressed were as follows:

1. Does a school library have an effect on the reading attitude of non-Western migrant students?
2. Does a school library have an effect on the reading behavior of non-Western migrant students?

3. Does a school library have an effect on the reading and language proficiency (i.e., vocabulary level, reading comprehension skills, and spelling skills) of non-Western migrant students?

4. Is there a relationship between the reading attitude, reading behavior, and language and reading skills in students with a non-Western background?

**SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIETAL RELEVANCE**

Answering our research questions is relevant from both a scientific and a societal perspective. Researchers from different scientific disciplines have already addressed issues related to our subject of study, as will be discussed in the next chapters. For instance, in the field of library and information sciences, many school library impact studies have been carried out, mostly conducted outside the Netherlands, and there is a debate going on about the societal value of public libraries, which increases the need for exposing the societal benefits of libraries. The socializing role of libraries and schools has also been discussed in the field of sociology, along with the role of parents as (reading) socializing agents, especially in terms of the reading climate at home. Furthermore, in linguistics, attention is paid to (second) language acquisition, which plays a role for students from migrant groups who are (partly or entirely) raised in another language than the Dutch language. Relationships between reading attitudes, reading behavior, and language and reading proficiency are mainly studied in the field of reading research, educational research, and psychology. Despite the bulk of research already carried out, there are still gaps in the literature that need to be filled.

As mentioned earlier, in the Netherlands, there is still a lack of clarity as to the effects of the integration of a library facility in a school for children with a non-Western background. Most studies on the effectiveness of school libraries, often focusing on gains in student learning in relation to school library characteristics, have been carried out outside the Netherlands and have not addressed ethnic differences. Findings from research conducted abroad cannot necessarily be considered valid to the Dutch situation (Veenstra, 1999), not only because the implementation of school library programs, such as the role of the school librarian, can differ (Brabantse Netwerk Bibliotheek, 2013), but also because the migrant groups in the Netherlands are not readily comparable with ethnic minorities in countries such as the United States. For example, the primary language of the majority of Moroccan-Dutch families is Berber, which, until recently, was a non-scripted language (Scheele, 2010), which is an entirely different situation compared to those of African Americans and Hispanics in the United States. Furthermore, little is known about the relationships between the factors targeted by reading promotion through a school library, that is, reading attitude, reading behavior, and reading and language skills, among migrant students in particular. Thus, by investigating the effects of a school library concept in a Dutch primary school on the reading attitude, reading behavior, and reading and language skills in students with a non-Western background, and by gaining more insight into the relationships between these factors among these children, this research project contributes to bridging a gap in the research literature in several scientific disciplines.

By eliminating these gaps, more effective policies and practices around reducing educational inequalities through reading promotion can be conceived as well, which brings us to the societal relevance of this research. Providing equal opportunities for young people and combatting learning disadvantages are important objectives in Dutch education policy (Herweijer, 2009; Roeleveld, Driessen, Ledoux, Cuppen, & Meijer, 2011). At state level, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science is primarily responsible for the education policy aimed at the integration of students with a migrant background (Herweijer, 2009). The primary focus of the Dutch educational disadvantage policy is on primary education (Herweijer, 2009; Roeleveld et al., 2011). An important part of the policies aimed at improving the achievements of children from disadvantaged families is a ‘weighting system’, introduced in the 1980s. In calculating the schools’ budget, a greater weight is assigned to students whose parents have a low or very low educational level (Herweijer, 2009). Although, as of the year 2006, ethnic origin no longer plays a role in this extra funding for schools, students assigned a student weight relatively often have a migrant background (Statistics Netherlands, 2016). More recently, educational disadvantage policy has focused on preschool and early-school education, aiming at stimulating the development of young children from deprived backgrounds, including many migrant children (Herweijer, 2009). In 2015, the Netherlands, including the Dutch education system, was confronted with many people entering the country who did not master the Dutch language, as large groups of asylum-seekers, mainly from civil-war-torn Syria, have sought to find safety in Europe (Boelhouwer, Kraaykamp, & Stoop, 2016). The large number of refugees gave rise to much debate around immigration and integration. The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy have stressed the importance of making integration a key objective from the start of the asylum procedure, of which language acquisition is an important aspect (Engbersen et al., 2015). Refugee children are entitled and obligated to participate in the Dutch education system (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). Obviously, these children, just like many migrant children already living in the Netherlands, fall behind in their Dutch language skills. Our research can therefore also be of interest to educational institutions and libraries working with these groups of students.

The present research project sheds light on the effectiveness of an integrated school library facility for non-Western migrant children – albeit mainly second generation migrants born in the Netherlands –, indicating whether this can be an effective tool in reducing learning disadvantages among these students, and thereby enhancing their chances as participants in the job market, as citizens, and as individuals. Moreover, effects on the students’ reading attitude are also studied.
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 constitutes a literature review which pinpoints what is known and what is as yet unknown about reducing learning disadvantages among children in general, and children from a migrant background in particular, through school libraries. Apart from literature on the correlation between leisure reading and school performance, this chapter discusses literature on the effectiveness of reading promotion efforts by parents, schools, public libraries, and school libraries in particular on the students’ reading attitude, reading behavior, and school performance. It concludes with directions for research, providing guidance to our empirical studies discussed in the next chapters.

Our first and second research question are addressed in Chapter 3, which examines whether a school library has an effect on the reading attitude and reading behavior of non-Western migrant students. This chapter also describes whether these effects differed for categories of gender, age, parental educational level, and reading climate at home.

Chapter 4 aims to investigate whether an integrated library facility in a primary school leads to better reading and language skills in students with a non-Western migrant background, addressing three important skills: vocabulary, reading comprehension, and spelling. It also explores whether the effects differed for categories of gender, age, parental educational level, reading climate at home, and language spoken with parents. This chapter focusses on the third research question.

Chapter 5 addresses the fourth research question by examining whether there is a relationship between the reading attitude, reading behavior, and language and reading skills in students with a non-Western background, and, if existent, whether these relationships hold after controlling for background characteristics.

Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings of the research project and discusses limitations, directions for future research, and practical implications.

The appendices provide background information on the research project. Appendix A gives a description of the school library central in our longitudinal study. Appendix B elaborates on the method, paying attention to the design, procedure, participants, and measurement instruments, whereas Appendix C discusses the two schools involved in the study. Given that the empirical chapters are based on journal articles, these chapters also pay attention to the school library, method, and schools, resulting in some overlap with the appendices which, however, contain more detailed information for the interested reader.

Notes
1. According to Statistics Netherlands a person is considered migrant, also referred to as allochtonous, if at least one parent was born outside the Netherlands. Thus, migrant groups also include persons who were born in the Netherlands themselves, called second generation migrants. A distinction can be made between migrants originating from Western countries (Europe [excluding Turkey], North America, Oceania, Indonesia, and Japan) and migrants coming from non-Western countries (Turkey, Africa, Latin America, and the rest of Asia; Alders, 2003).