De Europese integratie als bron van onderwijsinnovatie: een onderzoek naar de betekenis en de resultaten van de internationalisering in het voortgezet onderwijs in Nederland

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Summary

1 Background to the research

For almost half a century initiatives have been taken to apply one of the most spectacular political developments of our time, namely the integration of Europe, to education in a responsible way. Those taking the initiative are teachers, politicians, scientists, writers and civil servants.

These education activities have been preceded by centuries of devising ideas on European cooperation, with the primary theme being the prevention of wars. Erasmus, who is probably the most famous Dutch European and whose name has been given to the education programme of the European Union and the famous prize, devoted a great many dissertations to the subject of war and peace.

It is against the background of growing European cooperation that I decided, in 1999, to start research into the internationalisation in secondary education in the Netherlands. At that moment, a range of internationalisation activities have taken place over a period of almost ten years, with a high level of interest and participation on the part of teachers and students. The research is intended to show the significance of these activities for schools and the results as regards the teachers and students.

Whether European integration is a source of innovation in education was the central question tackled during the research. Whether the innovation is also a change in the sense of an improvement will have to be demonstrated by the empirical research. Answers will be provided, in the first instance, by analysing the internationalisation policy of both the European Union and the Dutch government.

In the empirical part of this research I will try to demonstrate that European integration has resulted in improvements not only from the point of view of policy but also in education in practice.

In this empirical part, the central question led to the formulation of the following two questions:

- What does internationalisation mean for secondary schools?
- What are the results of internationalisation for teachers and students?

These two questions were in turn converted into seven research questions as a guideline for the various lines of research. The following research questions concern the meaning of internationalisation and focus on the coordinators of internationalisation:

- What are the characteristics of schools that are internationalising and what activities are they carrying out?
- What are the organisational and financial preconditions of internationalisation in schools?
- How is internationalisation embedded in the school curriculum?
The results of internationalisation among teachers relate to the following two research questions:

- Do exchanges, partnerships and study visits lead to teachers acquiring more knowledge of the education system and education practice of the country with which cooperation is taking place?
- Do exchanges, partnerships and study visits lead to teachers being able to enrich their personal baggage?

The results of internationalisation among students are the subject of the last two questions:

- Do exchanges result in students acquiring more knowledge and a more adequate insight into the exchange country in general and the European Union in particular?
- Do exchanges result in students acquiring better listening and speaking skills in the language used?

2 Structure of the research

2.1 Research Design

Because the research questions focus on internationalisation coordinators, teachers and students, different research activities were carried out. These activities were related to those groups and, in effect, there were three lines of research.

First of all, the internationalisation coordinators – and where there are none the school heads – constituted the object of the research. An extensive questionnaire, an analysis of policy plans and an inventory of European themes in the attainment targets, the exams programmes and the schoolbooks were the instruments used.

Against the background of these details, the teachers who participate in internationalisation activities were the following target group. This group comprised a limited number of teachers from the vanguard schools, starter schools and control schools who were presented – in the form of a brief questionnaire – with some of the same questions as the coordinators so that comparisons could be made, as well as with new questions which might provide an answer to special aspects of the reinforcement of the European dimension in education. In addition, members of this group were interviewed; an analysis was carried out of logbooks of internationalisation activities compiled by teachers and school heads and of project reports that are regularly submitted to the European Platform.

The third line of research focused on students from vanguard schools, starter schools and control schools who participated – both prior to the exchanges and afterwards – in listening tests and tests of the knowledge of and the views on the exchange countries as well as knowledge of the European Union. Some of these students also took part in speaking skills tests.
2.2 VARIABLES

2.2.1 Variables in the research focused on coordinators

This part of the research focused on internationalisation coordinators from the research population, and where there are none, on the school heads. The aim is to provide an answer to the first three research questions.

Within the framework of the research question relating to specific activities, the first group of variables focused on the characteristics of the school where internationalisation gets a reasonable amount of attention. The concept of 'context' could also be used here. The concepts of 'characteristics' or 'context' include the following variables: the province in which the school is located, the denomination, the school type and the school size.

Attention is then requested for the variables that are related to the type of activities carried out, which students participate and the countries with which cooperation takes place. In order to acquire a clear insight into the specific activities, it is also necessary to acquire information on the intended objectives and the results that those involved believe they have achieved.

The research question relating to the organisational and financial preconditions produces variables such as coordination, investment in time and support: who is lurking behind the internationalisation coordinator, how many FTE (full-time employee) hours does the school use, what is the investment in time of the coordinator, the teachers and the students and how is the school supported externally in the execution of the work. The variables of internal and external financing are then important. What are the school and parents able and willing to contribute and what external resources are required?

For the research question relating to the embedding of internationalisation in the curriculum, the variables pertaining to the views on internationalisation within the school are important as well as the school policy. What is the level of interest and participation within the various sections of the school, what is the perception of the developments within the European Union and the consequences thereof for internationalisation at school. What are the views on the non-statutory compulsory school activities? The school policy variable may provide an answer regarding how the internationalisation activities are organised in the school, for which students and with what objective, partly in relation to the attainment targets and the final attainment levels.

In order to be able to place the results of the school policy in a context, the European themes are the central variables in the inventory of the attainment targets of basic secondary education, the exams programmes of the Second Phase and the school books.

2.2.2 Variables in the research focused on teachers

This part of the research focuses on the teachers who work at the schools of the respondents from the vanguard, starter and control groups. The aim was to find an answer to the two research questions.
In the case of the research question relating to more knowledge of the education system and the education practice of the country visited, the central variables are the interest of the teachers in internationalisation and their participation in activities. In effect, these two variables are also crucial for the research question relating to the enrichment of the teachers’ personal baggage. After all, the degree of interest and participation in activities are partly what determines whether teachers acquire more knowledge and enrich their personal baggage.

In relation to the same research question, attention is also requested for the variables of objectives and estimated realisation: what objectives do teachers have in mind and to what extent do they think that those objectives are realised?

The central variable of the research question relating to the enrichment of the teacher’s personal baggage is motivation and job satisfaction. Those who are and remain motivated by the internationalisation activities will enjoy their work more and will therefore be more inclined to continue working in the teaching profession.

2.2.3 Variables in the research focused on students

First of all, the background variables of the students were determined, namely sex, type of school, school year, highest level of education of the father and the mother, language used at home and marks for English, French, German, geography, history and mathematics as shown on the last report of the year.

The two last research questions were the focus of the student part of the research. In the case of the research question relating to more knowledge and a more adequate insight into the exchange country, the following central variables were important: ideas on students abroad with regard to parents and school; expectations regarding the exchange with regard to the host family, the partner school, the use of ICT and involvement in sport; the knowledge of the foreign student when it comes to the European Union, foreign languages, the economy; the knowledge of the Dutch student of the country to which s/he goes with regard to culture, economic developments, geographic particularities, history, nature, political system, way of life and knowledge of the European Union.

The last research question focused on improved listening and speaking skills in the language used by the students as a consequence of exchanges. The central variables were the listening skills and the speaking skills in English, German or French.

2.3 INSTRUMENTS

The following instruments were used during the research focused on the coordinators, teachers and students:

1. Questionnaire for internationalisation coordinators.
2. Analysis of schools’ internationalisation policy plans.
3. Analysis of attainment targets, exams programmes and school books.
4. Analysis of school reports on student exchanges and school partnerships.
5. Teachers’ questionnaire.
6. Interviews with teachers.
7. Teachers’ logbooks.
8. Analysis of reports on teachers’ study visits.
9 Questionnaire relating to prior and subsequent measuring of students in the vanguard and starter groups.
10 Questionnaire relating to prior and subsequent measuring of students in the control group.
11 Listening comprehension tests in German, English and French.
12 Oral tests in German, English and French.
13 Open learner report.

3 Results of the research

3.1 ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONALISATION POLICY

The most distinctive characteristic of European integration is the fact that the successes that have been achieved constitute the result of a constant battle between the pursuit of unity and the retention of individual identity.

Remarkably enough, however, the contrast of 'European unity versus national identity' has proven to be productive. As a consequence of the limited possibilities of the European Union, concrete and attractive education programmes have been developed; for example, the representatives of the Member States, who first ensured a curtailment of the authorities of the European Union, later actively cooperated on the creation of the Socrates education programme.

The European source is patently obvious in all preparatory documents that were drawn up in 1989, 1990 and 1991 by the Dutch government and that eventually led to the founding of the European Platform for Dutch Education. The realisation of the Internal Market in 1992 in general and the EU resolution on the European dimension in 1988 in particular were the reasons for starting an internationalisation policy in the Netherlands as well for primary and secondary education.

The interfaces with other international developments or themes, such as globalisation, the relationship with developing countries, the Atlantic relationship, the UN and the international environmental problems are not referred to explicitly. The objectives in the statutes of the European Platform, which were drawn up with the agreement of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, also reflect this situation by referring to reinforcing the European dimension in education and promoting internationalisation but without giving any specific details.

The bipolar development in the European Union is also revealed in the Dutch policy documents on internationalisation. The European Union is felt to be important, is also a priority and must be made the most of, but is not regarded as a political goal to which education should contribute by imparting knowledge and insight to the students concerning the European Union itself. In the policy documents on internationalisation, the main priority is the Dutch interest in increasing the quality of education.

The Dutch tradition of educational freedom, particularly relating to the content of the education, also makes it more or less impossible for the Minister of Education to say anything more about the content than in the general terms that are usually employed. As regards the policy objectives the aim is primarily to learn in Europe rather than about Europe.
In both the European and the Dutch policy documents, learning more languages and acquiring a better command thereof is a spearhead when it comes to reinforcing the European dimension. The considerable interest in the Netherlands in bilingual education with Dutch and English as the languages of instruction and communication is the response by a small country with a minority language to the ever-increasing importance of English at European and international levels. It is the perfect example of demand-driven internationalisation activities.

The bilingual education developments in the Netherlands have generated a need to compile a standard with a quality assurance system to support the execution of that standard in the schools. Schools that comply with the criteria in the standard are awarded a certificate. Discussions about the standard have resulted in the introduction of the concept of ‘European and International Orientation’ (EIO). The content and methods of EIO are described in general terms for bilingual education in lower and upper secondary school education.

The hybrid form of the European Union, the constant battle between the pursuit of unity and the desire to maintain an individual identity, as well as the considerable lack of clarity concerning the concept of ‘citizenship’ mean that it is not yet possible to clearly define the concept of ‘European citizenship’. Based on EIO education in practice and national citizenship in practice, it will be possible in the coming years to collect the building blocks for a theoretical concept for the longer term.

The EIO concept developed here constitutes the realisation in the schools of what is intended with the reinforcement of the European dimension and European citizenship. The concept focuses on both the European and the international themes and developments and thereby offers the elements for European citizenship.

Analyses of the national innovations in education have led to the conclusion that the large-scale innovations initiated by the government have not produced the desired results. In paying attention to this type of change, the perception of the school as a learning organisation is often lost. Innovation that stimulates the variety and quality of schools should be given precedence. The realisation of these new points of view is supported by the achievements of individual schools becoming available to a wider public.

From a pedagogical point of view it is essential to pay a lot of attention to the selection of the knowledge areas that relate to European and international orientation. The triadic make-up (teacher, student and subject matter) must be assessed together.

The combination of more freedom for schools due to national Dutch considerations and freedom already present as a consequence of the European education programmes constitutes a fruitful breeding ground for educational change and innovation at individual schools, aimed at objectives, contents and methods. That is also why these aspects serve as gauging points in the assessment of the innovative aspects of certain developments.
3.3 COORDINATORS

In schools in the Randstad conurbation there is lower participation in student activities and school partnerships than in schools in a number of border provinces. Conversely, schools in the Randstad provinces are more active in the field of study visits and European continuing education.

The chance of participating in an internationalisation activity is four times greater at a vanguard school than at a starter school.

The average level of participation by type of student confirms the conclusions relating to the school characteristics: 20% from VMBO [pre-vocational secondary education] and 80% from HAVO/VWO [senior general secondary education/pre-university education]. This difference is most evident in the case of student exchanges and school partnerships.

Germany is the favourite country to cooperate with, followed some way behind by Belgium, Italy, Great Britain and France and Denmark sharing the same position.

The coordinators of all three research groups regard imparting an understanding of the language and culture of other countries, combating prejudices, acquiring knowledge of other countries and improving modern languages skills as the most important objectives as far as the students are concerned. The use of ICT, contributing to European citizenship and knowledge of the EU and its policies are rated much lower.

Internationalisation at school is a -up process whereby the coordinators initially have to organise almost everything in their own time. If the results are positive, a dispensation is given for a few hours of school time and the teachers are also given more time to implement the necessary tasks. Once internationalisation is accepted in the school (vanguard group) a reasonably balanced relationship emerges between the time allocated to coordination, the coordinators' use of their own time and the time spent by the teachers on implementation. The total average of all these activities in the vanguard group is well over 200 days per year, in the starter group almost 100 days and in the control group well over 40 days. The average investment in time by the students amounts to over two weeks per year.

There is considerable support from the parents for student exchanges. On average, at the vanguard schools the parents contribute more in total to the costs than the European Platform.

The curricular preconditions relating to the attainment targets for basic secondary education, the exams programmes and the school books are sufficiently present for an adequate treatment of European themes in secondary education and the execution of European and international orientation activities. It is the case, however, that there are more possibilities at HAVO/VWO schools than VMBO schools. The extent to which the possibilities are used depends very much on the individual school and particularly on the teacher. The general impression is that European developments in school practice are not being given the necessary attention.
3.4 TEACHERS

In comparison to the coordinators, the teachers display a greater interest in internationalisation and attach more value to the importance of European Union developments for the prioritisation of internationalisation at school. This striking difference is caused on the one hand by the fact that the coordinators have selected teachers who have a very positive attitude to internationalisation activities, and on the other hand by the fact that these teachers actively carry out the activities together with students (even more than the coordinators) and have apparently been able to achieve good results.

This interest can also be seen in the prioritisation of the non-statutory school activities: internationalisation is given a higher percentage by the vanguard group teachers than by the vanguard group coordinators. Intercultural education, on the other hand, still scores almost ten percent among the coordinators and zero percent among the teachers.

Moreover, when evaluating the realisation of the objectives, the teachers from the research groups score higher than the coordinators. As far as teachers are concerned, the increase in knowledge of the education systems and education practice in the countries of the European Union is the most important effect of internationalisation activities, followed in a variable sequence by the use of ICT, the foreign languages methodology and the developments in the individual specialist fields. The fact that people have learned a lot from the approach to languages in other countries will have to do with the fact that, proportionally, a lot of teachers come from the language sector.

A variety of analyses reveal the considerable importance that is attached to increasing the linguistic skill and the interest in didactic innovations that can be acquired in other countries. As regards the realisation of a European orientation, teachers – just like coordinators – are more strongly oriented towards the possibilities of the students than learning experiences on their own.

Teachers regard the internationalisation activities as extremely motivating. The score for this aspect of the results are higher than those for knowledge and skills. It gives them fulfilment, they discover new subjects that fascinate students, build up an excellent network of foreign colleagues and gain inspiration for daily teaching practice.

A low value is attached to the contribution to career development, despite the positive image vis-à-vis the school head. The native speakers among the teachers have advanced their careers. After all, they are now working in a different country.

3.5 STUDENTS

Most Dutch students expect that a lot of things they experience abroad will be the same as in their own country. Part of the student population believes, however, that there is more respect abroad for parents and teachers, more solidarity between people, that the students are friendlier towards each other and that society is more straightforward. These students also think that the foreign schools pursue good exam results and a strong European and international orientation much more rigorously.
The experiences in the foreign host family and interaction with the foreign students constitute an essential element of a European and international orientation. VMBO students have much less positive expectations of the students at the partner school than HAVO and VWO students. After the exchange, the views of the VMBO students even became slightly more negative in contrast to those of the HAVO and VWO students.

However, the experiences in the host family reveal an increase in European and international orientation (EIO) value for all students, with the VWO students in the lead, followed by the HAVO students and then the VMBO students.

After the host family, the partner school constitutes the second most important element of exchanges. The impact on the student is less than that of the host family: the average fluctuation between the prior and subsequent measurements is minor. A striking aspect is the high percentage of students that believe that the partner school aims to offer the students more insight into Europe than the Dutch school. This view scarcely changes once the students have returned.

In a comparison of all EIO results (foreign students, host family, sport, ICT, knowledge of exchange country and European Union knowledge test) the vanguard group scores the highest with a net result of almost twenty-five percent; the starter group scores a lot lower at six percent. The learning effect among the HAVO students in these groups is the highest at forty percent, followed by the VWO students with almost twenty-five percent; the VMBO students showed a negative result of forty-eight percent. A comparison of these results with the results of the experiences as described by the students themselves shows that the vanguard group again has the highest EIO score and that the starter group has a lower score. As regards the types of school, the VWO group scores highest, followed by the HAVO and then the VMBO group.

Based on the results of the listening comprehension tests in German, English and French in the vanguard and starter groups in comparison with the control group, it can be concluded that the students that have participated in an exchange achieve a greater learning yield for listening comprehension than the students that have not done so. If the background characteristics are taken into account, this conclusion is the clearest for VMBO students of German, the HAVO and VWO students of German and to a slightly lesser extent the VWO students of French.

The results of the oral tests reveal that students who participate in exchanges achieve a greater learning yield than students who do not do so with regard to articulation, content and conversation in German, English and French. Here too, the difference is greater in the case of German and French than English.

These conclusions as regards the oral tests confirm the results of listening comprehension tests in foreign languages and lead to the general conclusion that students who participate in exchanges improve their skills more in relative terms in German and French and to a lesser degree in English than students who do not participate in exchanges.