

Supporting multilingual children's Dutch language skills at school: An intervention study

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Abstract

Background: Successful acquisition of a society's majority language is important for children in terms of their performance at school and their participation in society. However, supporting children in the early stages of second language acquisition can be challenging in large, multicultural classrooms with children from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Method: This study examined the impact of an intervention aimed at improving the Dutch language skills of multilingual children in primary school, aged 5-6 years. All children can be considered as L2 learners of Dutch. The study was conducted in three urban elementary schools in the Netherlands, using a quasi-experimental design. The intervention was delivered at one school, meaning that children ($n = 62$) took part in small-group sessions (45 minutes) with a trained university student four mornings a week during a period of seven months. Central to the intervention was supporting children's Dutch language skills by providing high quality language input and stimulating children's language output during regular school activities in class. The other two schools served as a control group ($n = 32$); these were comparable in terms of the urban area and the child population (high level of ethnic diversity, high percentage of L2-learners) and received schooling as usual.

To investigate the impact of the intervention on children's receptive and productive language skills in Dutch, we administered the subtest Sentence Comprehension of the CELF (Wiig et al., 2019) and a narrative task of the MAIN (Blom et al., 2020) both before and after the intervention.

Results and discussion: Coding of the collected data will be completed in a few months. Results will shed light on children's language development and the impact of the intervention. More specifically, we compare children's scores on the pre- and posttests for Dutch receptive and productive language skills and analyze whether the difference is influenced by the intervention. More exploratively, we also investigated the narratives that these multilingual children produced focusing on occurrence and patterns of code-switching. In this presentation, we will share our preliminary findings and we would like to discuss experiences and challenges when conducting language intervention studies in schools with the CLS-audience.

References

- Wiig, E.H., Semel, E., & Secord, W.E. (2019). *Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals – CELF 5 NL. Dutch version*. Amsterdam: Pearson Benelux BV.
- Blom, E., Boerma, T., & de Jong, J. (2020). Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (MAIN) adapted for use in Dutch. *ZAS Papers in Linguistics*, 64, 51-56.