



**Universiteit Utrecht**

Reforming Secondary Education in Sint Maarten; Improving Dutch Literacy among students in

Sint Maarten

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate what factors are perceived to explain the feelings of former students in Sint Maarten of being adequately prepared for Dutch tertiary education in the Netherlands with regards to their Dutch literacy. It was expected that students did not feel sufficiently prepared to study Dutch tertiary education in the Netherlands. Predicted factors were didactics of teachers, demographic background of students, parental involvement and low level of Dutch language use. The sample consisted of 16 former Milton Peters College students who transferred to the Netherlands to follow Dutch tertiary education. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Concluded was that the students felt sufficiently prepared, but that their feelings changed once they were in the Netherlands. This change was caused by the gap between the level of Dutch they learned in secondary education in Sint Maarten and the level of Dutch in the Netherlands. Factors that played a role in this were difficulties with reading comprehension, insecurities about the Dutch language use and difficulty with grammar. Factors that contributed to the development of students' Dutch literacy were a high level of use of the Dutch language and the use of extra learning resources outside of school. Recommendations were to introduce a policy on only using the Dutch language in Dutch secondary education in Sint Maarten and to pay more attention to students' insecurities about the use of the Dutch language.

*Keywords:* literacy, Dutch literacy, secondary education, tertiary education, second language and Krashen's theory.

### Samenvatting

Het doel van dit onderzoek was om te onderzoeken welke factoren bijdragen om gevoelens van oud-studenten in Sint Maarten te verklaren voor een adequate voorbereiding op het Nederlandse tertiaire onderwijs in Nederland met betrekking tot hun Nederlandse geletterdheid. De hypothese was dat studenten zich niet voldoende voorbereid voelden om in Nederland een Nederlandse tertiaire studie te volgen. Voorspelde factoren die hierbij een rol spelen waren didactiek van docenten, demografische achtergrond van studenten, ouder betrokkenheid en lage mate van Nederlands taalgebruik. De steekproef bestond uit 16 oud-studenten van het Milton Peters College die naar Nederland zijn overgeplaatst om Nederlands tertiair onderwijs te volgen. De gegevens zijn verzameld door middel van semigestructureerde interviews. De conclusie was dat de studenten zich voldoende voorbereid voelden, maar dat hun gevoelens veranderden toen ze eenmaal in Nederland waren. Deze verandering werd veroorzaakt door de kloof tussen het niveau van het Nederlands dat ze geleerd hebben in het voortgezet onderwijs in Sint Maarten en het niveau van het Nederlands in Nederland. Factoren die hierin meespeelden waren moeite met leesvaardigheid, onzekerheden over Nederlands taalgebruik en moeite met grammatica. Factoren die bijdroegen aan de ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse geletterdheid van leerlingen waren een hoge mate van gebruik van de Nederlandse taal en het gebruik van extra leerbronnen buiten de school. Aanbevelingen waren om een beleid in te voeren om alleen de Nederlandse taal te gebruiken op Nederlandse scholen en meer aandacht te besteden aan de onzekerheid van leerlingen over het gebruik van de Nederlandse taal.

*Kernbegrippen:* geletterdheid, Nederlands geletterdheid, voortgezet onderwijs, hoger onderwijs, tweede taal en Krashen's theorie.

### Reformed Secondary Education in Sint Maarten; Improving Dutch Literacy among students in Sint Maarten

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October in the year 2010, Sint Maarten became an independent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Being an independent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands means that Sint Maarten has its own government and governor, separate from those in the Netherlands (Het Koninklijk Huis, n.d.). Although the island has its own governing body, as a part of the Kingdom, the Dutch language plays an important role. For example, all laws and regulations are written in Dutch. Moreover, multiple primary schools and the largest secondary school on the island that follow the Dutch education system and use school materials in the Dutch language. Students who graduate from the Dutch secondary school on the island are most likely to go to the Netherlands for tertiary education for several reasons. One reason for this is because in the Netherlands there are more options for students to study on the tertiary level of education than in Sint Maarten. Another reason for this is because only students from Sint Maarten qualify for study financing from *Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs* (DUO) when they reside and attend school on the tertiary level in the Netherlands. Finally, students that travel from the Netherlands back to Sint Maarten after attaining a tertiary education degree can use their new skills and knowledge in practise, which has a positive effect on the economy and society of the island. In sum, the Dutch language is an essential part of the culture in Sint Maarten.

Although the Dutch language plays an important role in Sint Maarten, several organisations (e.g. *Taalunie*, Milton Peters College, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport) have expressed their concerns about the level of Dutch literacy on the island. In 2019, the University of Rotterdam published an article indicating that Caribbean students have a poor study success rate. As a result of this, the University of Rotterdam made a decision to accept Caribbean students, while temporarily halting the recruitment of Caribbean students until a higher study success rate can be guaranteed (Curaçao Chronicle, 2019). A possible factor that contributes to the students' poor study success rate is the level of Dutch literacy.

The poor study success rates of Caribbean students and concerns about the level of Dutch literacy on the island are just two reasons of why the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport in Sint Maarten has identified the need to reform the landscape of secondary education (S. M. Hodge-Lacorbiniere, personal communication, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020) . In order to make it more efficient, effective and better equipped to prepare Sint Maarten's students to function optimally

within the society. This includes meeting local, regional and global labour demands such as a high literacy rate (Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, 2019). Research already has been conducted to determine why students have low Dutch literacy (Waschke, 2015). The conclusion was that there is a gap between primary and secondary education; in primary education Dutch is taught as a foreign language whereas in secondary education Dutch is taught as a mother tongue. Subsequently Waschke (2015) concluded that the problem areas were vocabulary, speaking and comprehension. In addition to this research, no research has been done on the experiences of students who have graduated from the Dutch education system on the island and transitioned to the Netherlands for higher education. In order to improve and reform the landscape of secondary education on the island, and more specifically, to improve Dutch literacy on the island, it is important to understand the experiences of these students after they moved to the Netherlands and had to put their Dutch literacy to use. For this reason, the present study will focus on the experiences with Dutch literacy of students who graduated from the Dutch education system and moved to the Netherlands for their tertiary education.

Literacy skills are one of the basic building blocks required for youth to be able to fully engage in community life (Montoya, 2018; Montoya & Mundy, 2017). The definition of literacy has changed over time in combination with changes in the society, economy, and culture (Kirsch, 2001). According to Montoya and Mundy (2017), UNESCO's recent definition of literacy is the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts." Low levels of literacy can impact the youths' ability to develop and demonstrate critical, creative and innovative thinking, which in turn has an effect on the ability to be able to function optimally in the community (Montoya, 2018; Montoya & Mundy, 2017). Multiple studies show a positive relation between high literacy and labour market successes (Chapple & Maré, 2000; Chiswick, Lee & Miller, 2003; Dougherty, 2003; Green & Ridell, 2001). In sum, literacy is an important issue among researchers since low literacy levels can impact the ability of youth to engage in the community and function successfully in the labour market.

There are several factors that have a positive relation with literacy levels. One of these factors is a higher family socioeconomic status (SES). Parents and grandparents that have a high educational background, have children with high literacy levels (Quentin et al., 2012). Another important factor that contributes to high literacy is the quality and characteristics of the teacher's

instruction (Quentin et al., 2012). Repeating contextualized practice and involving learners in the instruction are elements that contribute to literacy levels. Sufficient time for a student to learn a new language is also a factor that leads to high literacy. In Sint Maarten teachers struggle with teaching Dutch as a foreign language instead of a mother tongue (De Visser-Lemstra, 2016). Most primary and secondary schools on the island use English as the language of instruction and teach Dutch as a foreign language. Nonetheless, when teaching Dutch as a foreign language, mother tongue didactics (NL: *moedertaal didactiek*) are being used. Furthermore, all school materials are Dutch which could be difficult for students to understand since they are not on the same Dutch literacy level as native Dutch speakers. Instead of allowing students to improve their Dutch vocabulary, teachers often translate concepts to English, which does not help eliminate the gap in frequency of using English versus Dutch. According to Waschke (2015), schools need to pay more attention to vocabulary, speaking and comprehension, in order to improve Dutch literacy in Sint Maarten. These elements are fundamental to develop a basic competency level. *Taalunie* is training teachers didactics and methods to teach Dutch as a foreign language in schools (M. Visser, personal communication, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2020).

Another factor that has a positive relation with literacy levels is strong home literacy practices. This can be reading books together, practicing vocabulary and speaking, but also taking a child to the library (Quentin et al., 2012). According to Waschke (2015), lack of parental involvement is one of the reasons why students have low Dutch test results in primary and secondary schools in Sint Maarten. A potential reason for this can be that parents have not mastered the Dutch language adequately. This is because Sint Maarten has two official languages: English and Dutch (Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, 2020). English is the most prevalent language that is spoken on the island. Although Dutch is an official language, not every citizen speaks and/or understands Dutch. Even those that can speak and/or understand the language prefer to speak English at home with their children (Waschke, 2015).

Since English is the main spoken language on Sint Maarten, the Dutch language is recognised and taught as a second language instead of an official language (M. Visser, personal communication, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020). A second language (L2) is defined as a language learned later than in earliest childhood (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019). This can be the second language a learner is working with, but it can also be the third, fourth or fifth language. Stephen Krashen (1982) developed a theory that guides the process of learning a second language. The so-called

Krashen's Theory consists of five main hypotheses: acquisition-learning, monitor, input, affective filter and natural order (Krashen, 1982). The acquisition-learning hypothesis is the most fundamental of the five hypotheses. Acquisition refers to meaningful interaction in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. It is a sub-conscious process. Learning refers to knowledge about the language, for example grammar rules. According to Krashen 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition' (Krashen, 1988; Lin, 2008; Schütz, 2019). Secondly, the monitor hypothesis refers to the language output. So being able to use the knowledge that is learned into practice, such as writing a paper. The third hypothesis input state that language can only be acquired by being exposed to input such as written or spoken language (Krashen, 1985; Schütz, 2019). Fourthly, the affective filter hypothesis state that comprehensible input will not result in language acquisition if that input is filtered out before it can reach the brain. The filtering may occur because of anxiety, a poor self-esteem or low motivation. A learner with a high affective filter, is likely to interact less with others and afraid to make mistakes. Lastly, the natural order hypothesis refers to the fact that a language is acquired in a predictable order by all learners. The natural order is similar to learning a native language (Krashen, 1983; Schütz, 2019).

Sint Maarten has one secondary school that utilizes the Dutch education system: Milton Peters College (MPC). Over the last ten years, final grades (EC) for the subject Dutch in tkl, havo and vwo varied between 5,85 and 6,70. The average results show that in overall students score higher for the school exams than for the central written exam (Division of Examination, 2020). The goal of the present study is to gain a better insight into experiences with Dutch literacy of former MPC students who transferred from secondary education to Dutch tertiary education in the Netherlands. By understanding their thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands, Dutch literacy education on the island can be improved. This leads to the following main research question: What factors are perceived to explain the feelings of former students in Sint Maarten of being adequately prepared for Dutch tertiary education in the Netherlands with regard to their Dutch literacy? To answer the main research question, the following sub questions have been formulated: (1) To what extent did former students feel adequately prepared for Dutch tertiary education, with regard to their Dutch literacy skills? (2) What kind of difficulties with Dutch literacy did former students experience in Dutch secondary and tertiary education? (3) Which factors contributed to the development of Dutch literacy skills of former students? (4) Based on the answers on the questions

above, what are the differences between the answers of former students from tkl, havo and vwo? Based on the literature, it is expected that there is a gap between the level of Dutch that students learn in secondary education in Sint Maarten and the level of Dutch that is expected from students in tertiary education in the Netherlands. For this reason, students do not feel adequately prepared to transition to the Netherlands to follow a Dutch tertiary study. Predicted factors that play a role are teachers' didactics, the students demographic background, parental involvement and low practice use of the Dutch language on the island.

## **Method**

### **Design**

To answer the research questions, a qualitative research was chosen. This design allows the researcher to conduct a more in-depth study into the participants' experiences and feelings with Dutch literacy and which factors played a part in that. Furthermore, qualitative research takes into account that perspectives can differ from one another, as they are formed by ones social and demographic background (Boeije, 2010; Flick, 2018).

### **Participants**

The participants that were assessed in this study consist of former MPC students that have a tkl, havo or vwo diploma and transferred to Dutch tertiary education in the Netherlands. After 2010, 1056 students were granted study financing and have graduated and/or stopped their study financing since then. Of these 1056 students 428 (40.53%) students pursued tertiary education in the Netherlands. The remaining 628 students travelled to Aruba, Canada, Curacao, England, the US, or remained in Sint Maarten to pursue their tertiary education. Apart from students that were granted study financing, there were also students that pursued tertiary education in the Netherlands without receiving study financing, the so called 'free-runners' (personal communication, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020). The sample consisted of 16 participants. The participants graduated between 2009 and 2013 and are between 24 and 29 years old. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of participants.

Table 2

#### *Demographic characteristics of participants*

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		



Female	11	68.75
Male	5	31.25
Dutch speaking parent(s)	15	93.75
Spoken language at home		
Dutch	1	6.25
English	8	50
Dutch and English	7	43.75
Primary education		
Dutch	15	93.75
English	1	6.25
Secondary education level		
tkl	6	37.5
havo	6	37.5
vwo	6*	37.5
Highest educational level		
MBO	4	25
HBO	7	43.75
WO	5	31.25

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\* Two participants studied vwo after graduating havo.

Note: N=16.

Participants were retrieved by a convenience sampling method (Bhardwaj, 2019). Convenience sampling means that the researcher uses his own network with finding suited participants in a short amount of time. Because data and information in Sint Maarten is not that well organised, the easiest and fastest way to find suited participants was by networking. However, a risk that comes with this type of sampling is the possibility of sampling error. To prevent this from happening, different types of networks have been used to collect as many different participants as possible.

To collect participants, several approaches have been made. One approach was to post several messages on Facebook. This approach was followed by the snowball technique (Bhardwaj, 2019). Those that responded to the invitation to participate, were asked if they knew any other interested former students. Another approach was contacting Mrs. Busby, who works as an Education, Culture and Youth Attaché at the Ministry Plenipotentiary in The Hague, the

Netherlands. She sent an email with more information about the research to possible participants. After agreeing to participate and signing an informed consent, a date was set to conduct the interview via digital connection.

### **Measuring instruments**

Experiences of participants were assessed through a semi-structured interview. With a semi-structured interview, a number of topics are established beforehand based on the theoretical framework, but during the interviews there is space for the interviewees to elaborate on topics and for the interviewer to choose the varying order of the topics and questions (Boeije, 2010). The topics that were covered in the interviews were: difficulties with Dutch literacy, contributing factors to Dutch literacy, teachers' didactics, students demographic background and transitioning to the Netherlands. An example question that matches the topic contributing factors to Dutch literacy is: *What things did you find simple or easy regarding Dutch literacy? Why?* An example question that matches topic teachers' didactics is: *What kind of structure did the teacher use during class? Can you give an example?* The interview schemes were adjusted based on the analysis of the first few interviews.

### **Data analysis**

After the semi-structured interviews had taken place, audio recordings were transcribed as soon as possible. This way important information did not get lost (e.g., nonverbal communication, which was analysed by writing down notes during the interview). This increases the reliability of the research. After that, the transcriptions were analysed and coded by using the program NVivo 12 (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). First data was open coded with the goal of providing a basic overview of the perspectives that the participants had. To illustrate: the phrase "And then the fear of failure, that you don't dare ask someone. Um, and I think that that could be, yeah, a limitation" (Participant A) was coded as 'fear of failure'. Second, data was axial coded. During axial coding, the open codes were labelled again, which made it easier to link them to a specific research question. Lastly, the data of the different target groups (tkl, havo and vwo) were compared with each other, to create an overview of similarities and differences in the answers of the participants (Boeije, 2010).

## Results

The focus of the present study was on what factors are perceived to explain the feelings of former students in Sint Maarten of being adequately prepared for Dutch tertiary education in the Netherlands with regards to their Dutch literacy. In total there were 60 open codes. The open codes were divided into eight axial codes (see Table 3). In the following paragraphs the most outstanding results are discussed.

Table 3

*An overview of all axial codes*

Axial codes	Number open codes	n	n in %
Demographic characteristics	4	9	56.25
Things that went well with Dutch language	6	13	81.25
Difficulties with the Dutch language	12	14	87.5
Recommendations for better Dutch literacy skills development	15	11	68.75
Additional learning sources outside of school	4	6	37.5
Parental/family involvement	3	9	56.25
Teaching methods at MPC	9	11	68.75
Transition to the Netherlands	7	10	62.5

*Note.* N=16.

### Feeling adequately prepared

The majority of the participants (n=9, 56.25%) indicated that they felt prepared enough to travel to the Netherlands to follow a Dutch study. One factor that played a role in this was that those participants came from a family with a Dutch background (n=9, 56.25%). Participant M: “Well for me it was easy because of all of my parents can speak Dutch. And my grandmother was also a Dutch lady. So for me it was very easy to speak and learn the language.” Another factor that played a role is that participants stated that at MPC, they learned enough to pass the central exams and graduate (n=4; 25%). Therefore participants thought that they had an adequate command of the Dutch language to be able to study a Dutch language course in the Netherlands. However, once they arrived in the Netherlands, they noticed a gap between the Dutch they learned at MPC and the Dutch in the Netherlands (n=6, 37.5%). In the Netherlands Dutch is spoken faster and with different accents. Participant K: “You have the words and the speed at which some Dutch people

speed and the different accents and you begin and it was hard for me to understand, like the different accents”. Furthermore, participants mentioned they were not used to speaking only Dutch (n=3). At MPC participants still spoke English during the lessons (n=5, 31.25%). This was not possible in the Netherlands.

### **Difficulties with the Dutch language**

Almost all participants indicated having difficulties with the Dutch language (n=14, 87.5%). The most frequently mentioned difficulties were: reading comprehension (n=6, 37.5), insecurities about speaking Dutch (n=8, 50%), and difficulties with grammar (n=8, 50%). In the following paragraphs each category is discussed.

**Reading comprehension.** Seven participants (43.75%) stated that they had difficulties with reading comprehension. For example, participant E mentioned that he finds it hard to understand the content of a Dutch text, because he does not know the meaning of certain Dutch words. Participant E: “But then once you try to grasp what you are reading it gets a bit distorted. Because you’re like hmm what is this big word mean.” Participants also mentioned that certain exam questions were difficult to understand and that had a negative influence on their test results (n=6, 37.5%).

**Insecurities about speaking Dutch.** Eight participants (50%) mentioned that they were insecure about speaking Dutch. Once they arrived in the Netherlands, they were not sure about their Dutch language use because of the big difference in level. Participant F: “In my first year here in the Netherlands, I didn't had the confidence to talk to people at all because I just felt so uninsured about my Dutch.” Also, participants were afraid of being seen as different because of their accent or command of the Dutch language. They were also afraid of making mistakes while speaking Dutch. For some participants, influenced their behaviour in school in the Netherlands. Participant D: “Uhm, I was a bit more quieter in class. Uhm I think it also has to do with uhm being afraid of yeah. Because you already speak with an accent and then like uhm your Dutch is okay but not strong enough. So sometimes when you’re explaining something you see people give you a weird facial expression like ‘huh, what is she saying?’. So, I think just being afraid for speaking up and making mistakes.” It took a while for participants to feel comfortable to start speaking Dutch more often in a classroom. Being in a class with multiple cultures is a factor that helped participants feel more comfortable.

**Difficulties with grammar.** Half of the participants stated having difficulties the grammatical aspect of the Dutch language, because they think in English (n=8, 50%). Participants mentioned they translate English thoughts into Dutch sentences. Participant F: “And just like I said, I thought in English. So anything I wanted to say back, I was going to translate it. And then it came, then it sounded really weird. Or those sentences didn't make sense in Dutch.” Multiple participants stated that they had troubles with the structure of Dutch sentences (n=7, 43.75%). Aside from translating English thoughts into Dutch, a related factor was that participants did not speak Dutch frequently enough to have a good command of the language. Participant D: “But uhm because even though yeah, you speak Dutch in the class, but 80% of the time you are speaking English. So when it comes to the *zinsopbouw*, I think a lot of us struggled with that.” Lastly, participants mentioned that because they are not used to speaking Dutch that often, they struggle with using the right article and do realize when they are using the wrong article.

Aside from the difficulties participants also mentioned aspects that they did not have struggles with. 37.5% of the participants mentioned having no troubles with speaking in Dutch. Furthermore, 37.5% of the participants mentioned having no troubles with the Dutch instruction language.

### **Contributing factors Dutch literacy**

Besides difficulties, almost all participants also mentioned factors that contributed to the development of their Dutch literacy skills (n=13, 81.25%). The most frequently mentioned factors were demographic characteristics (n=9, 56.25%), additional learning sources outside of school (n=6, 37.5%), and transitioning to the Netherlands (n=10, 62.5%). In the following paragraphs each category is discussed.

**Demographic characteristics.** 56.25% of the participants mentioned that having a Dutch background was an advantage for developing Dutch literacy skills. Eight participants (50%) stated that because they had a Dutch background, it was easier to learn the Dutch language. Participant A: “(...) but because I heard it a lot, I could understand it better. I could also make less mistakes because I knew how to articulate it, how to say it.” Six participants mentioned they felt like they had a head start because of their Dutch background, compared to students who did not have a Dutch background, such as participant E. A factor that played a role was that participants could ask their parents for help with homework, for example, to check a written report for spelling or grammatical errors (n=9, 56.25%).

**Additional learning sources outside of school.** Several participants mentioned that the use of certain additional learning sources outside of school helped them to learn the Dutch language (n=6). The learning sources that participants used were Dutch books (n=6, 37.5%), Dutch television (n=2, 12.5%), Dutch music (n=1, 6.25%) and the library (n=1, 6.25%). Based on their own experience, participants recommend others to use these additional learning sources in order to improve their Dutch skills.

**Transitioning to the Netherlands.** Several participants mentioned that their Dutch skills improved the most when living in the Netherlands (n=6, 37.5%). A factor that played a role was that participants were forced to speak Dutch in the Netherlands. Because of this, their Dutch improved faster. Participant K: “In high school I didn't want to speak Dutch to my teachers or to my friends. But when I came here, I was like, I don't have a choice now. So I had to learn.” Another factor was that participants had Dutch friends or partners, who helped them improve their Dutch. Instead of speaking English outside of school, they would speak Dutch. Participant I: “And I had only Dutch friends. So I didn't really speak a lot of English outside of my studies either”. Based on these experiences, participants recommend that MPC implement a strict Dutch speaking policy on school grounds (n=6, 37.5%). Although they found it difficult to speak Dutch during class at that time, in retrospect they found that it did help improve their Dutch skills.

### **Differences between tk1, havo and vwo**

In general, experiences of former students of MPC are quite similar. There are not a lot of differences. To illustrate, participants of tk1, havo and vwo have the same difficulties with the Dutch language. The most striking similarity is difficulties with articles and understanding. Another noticeable similarity is that participants mentioned having little to no difficulties with speaking Dutch.

Besides similarities, there are some minor differences that are interesting to mention. Some differences are in regard to experiencing difficulties. Mainly havo and vwo students mention that they were insecure about speaking Dutch. Another difference is that mainly havo students mention having difficulties with writing. Besides difficulties, there were also some differences within the contributing factors. For example, mostly tk1 and havo participants mentioned that home schooling by family contributed to their development of Dutch literacy skills. Mainly tk1 and vwo participants recommend MPC to implement an extra Dutch tutor within the school.

### Discussion

The main purpose of this present study was to investigate what factors are perceived to explain the feelings of former students in Sint Maarten of being adequately prepared for Dutch tertiary education in the Netherlands with regards to their Dutch literacy. It was hypothesized that students did not feel adequately prepared to transition to the Netherlands to follow a Dutch tertiary study. Predicted factors that play a role in this were teachers' didactics, the students demographic background, parental involvement and low practice use of the Dutch language on the island.

Contrary to the expected results, students did feel adequately prepared to travel to the Netherlands to study tertiary education. The main factor that contributed to this feeling was demographic characteristics. It was easier for students with a Dutch background to learn the Dutch language, because they were familiar with the language and could ask for help with homework if needed. Although students felt prepared, their feelings changed when they arrived in the Netherlands. This change was caused by the gap between the level of Dutch they learned in secondary education in Sint Maarten and the level of Dutch in the Netherlands. Factors that related to the non-adequately feelings were difficulties with reading comprehension, insecurities about speaking Dutch and difficulties with grammar. Factors that contributed to the development of Dutch literacy of students were a high degree of utilisation of the Dutch language and the use of additional learning sources outside of school. Lastly, there were no outstanding differences between tk1, havo and vwo.

Overall, the conclusions are in line with the literature discussed at the beginning of this study. In Krashen's theory (1982), a distinction is made between acquisition a language and learning a language. Krashen points out the importance of acquisition when learning a second language, which is meaningful interaction in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act (Krashen, 1988; Lin, 2008; Schütz, 2019). Students in Sint Maarten feel less adequately prepared once arrived in the Netherlands to study tertiary education, because of the low practice use of the Dutch language in secondary education. Furthermore, the 'affective filter hypothesis' of Krashen's theory relates to the factor 'insecurities about the Dutch language' (Krashen, 1983; Schütz, 2019). Students feel less adequately prepared because they feel insecure about their use of the Dutch language. According to the 'affective filter hypothesis' this negatively influences students command of the Dutch language because students are less open to new input of the language.

The results of the present study also comply with Waschke's research (2015) who concluded that there should be paid more attention to vocabulary and comprehension of the Dutch language. According to the results of the present study students have difficulties with understanding the content of a Dutch text because they do not know the definitions of certain words. Additionally, Waschke's results highlighted the importance of parental involvement. Results of the present study indicated that students found it easier to learn the Dutch language because of their Dutch background, because they were familiar with the language and could ask for help from their parents or family where needed.

Within this research there are a number of methodological limitations. Firstly, because of the coronavirus that occurred during the conducting of this study, the interviews could not have taken place physically. As a result, interviews were carried out through digital connections which made it harder for the researcher to analyse non-verbal communication which possibly could have an influence on the internal validity. Furthermore, sometimes the connection was bad which made it difficult for the researcher to understand what the participant was saying. This limitation was tried to be minimized by giving the respondents enough time and space to answer and by providing a summary of parts of the interview to the participant. Another limitation is that the participants were partially collected through a snowball technique. There was no clear information about the number of participants who graduated from a Dutch study and travelled to the Netherlands to study Dutch tertiary education. This made it difficult to distinguish between the group of students who do receive study financing and those who do not, which affects the external validity. Due to the snowball technique, it is possible that participants knew each other which could result in a less diverse dataset. This affects the internal validity.

There were a few strengths to this study. The research instrument design allowed the researcher to ask in-depth questions relating to the research questions. Regarding the semi-structured interviews, an interview scheme was made based on the discussed literature. The interview scheme was adjusted based the analysis of the first conducted interviews. This increases the internal validity. Another strength was that to ensure the validity of this research, the researcher kept a written copy of the research questions while analysing the data. This was done to constantly reflect on the research question and only analyse what was relevant to answer the research questions. To ensure the reliability of this study, the same interview questions were asked in different ways to see if the participant would report the same opinions.



In addition to the findings and conclusions, there are some recommendations for practice and science. The first recommendation is for Sint Maarten, to implement a policy on only utilizing the Dutch language at Dutch schools. Conclusions of this study highlights that using the Dutch language more often in practice has a positive effect on Dutch literacy. Furthermore, it is recommended to lay more focus on students' insecurities towards the use of Dutch language. These feelings can disturb the learning of a second language, in this case the Dutch language, as well as the perceived feeling by students of being adequately prepared to travel to the Netherlands to study tertiary education. Another recommendation is to do a follow-up study with a more diverse dataset. This way a clear image can be provided on differences between students that receive study financing, students who do not, and students who do not travel to the Netherlands at all.

To conclude, the present study highlights the importance of improving Dutch literacy in secondary education. The Dutch language plays an important role in the culture of Sint Maarten and should therefore not be undermined. The present study shows that a lot can be learned and prevented through speaking to the ones who already experienced the problems.

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