

To switch or not to switch?

An investigation of pupils' motivation to switch from bilingual HAVO to regular, non-bilingual HAVO at a bilingual school in the Netherlands.

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ABSTRACT

A bilingual school in the Netherlands offers a bilingual Atheneum and a bilingual HAVO programme, and although the Atheneum programme appears to be thriving, the school management is concerned about the HAVO programme: each year several pupils decide to switch to the regular, non-bilingual HAVO programme. This research explores the thus far uninvestigated concept of switching from a bilingual to a regular programme, and attempts to explicate pupils' motivation to do so. A survey tests bilingual HAVO pupils and switchers on ten variables related to pupil motivation and attitude; an interview with the school's coordinator of bilingual education is conducted to discover aspects of school organisation, which may affect the switchers' rate.

INTRODUCTION

A bilingual school in the Netherlands offers a bilingual Atheneum programme since 1994, and a bilingual HAVO programme since 2002. The bilingual Atheneum programme has done well from the beginning; the bilingual HAVO programme, however, is cause for concern. As the years progressed, the intake of pupils has become lower, and each year several pupils switch from the bilingual HAVO programme to the regular, non-bilingual programme. This is unusual: in case of insufficient academic results, pupils are usually only promoted to a higher class of a lower educational stream – that is, from Atheneum to HAVO or from HAVO to MAVO. These switchers, however, stay in the same stream but specifically give up the bilingual aspect. The school management wonders what might motivate these switchers and if anything may be done to prevent the switching, and has asked this research group to investigate the matter.

Relevance

As has been described, the school organisation has recorded that several bilingual HAVO pupils switch to the regular programme each year. Further, bilingual HAVO programmes are a relatively recent addition to the practice of bilingual education in the Netherlands. The difficulties the bilingual school has encountered may well be encountered at other schools with new HAVO bilingual programmes as well, which would suggest that there are general problems implementing bilingual HAVO programmes in Dutch secondary education. This research hopes to investigate what attracts pupils to the bilingual HAVO programme and why some back out on that decision after one or two years. The concept of switching has not yet been researched scientifically; this research hopes to provide a beginning of research of this concept, which could serve as the basis for further research.

Theoretical framework

This research deals with two main, tightly interwoven issues: bilingual education and the concept of switching to a different stream within school (in this case from bilingual HAVO to regular, non-bilingual HAVO). An extensive search in Dutch and international scholarly sources did not yield any literature dedicated to or other mention of the specific situation of pupils in Dutch bilingual education switching to the non-bilingual equivalent programme. For this reason, this research is forced to make use of more circumstantial sources as a theoretical framework.

There are ample sources of information regarding bilingual education, both internationally and in the Netherlands. Further, there are several studies dealing with retention – staying back a class – and dropping out of school (mainly in the USA) – leaving school without a basic qualification or diploma. The situation of leaving school can be compared with the situation of ‘switching’ in the sense that pupils leave an educational programme, which they are expected to finish successfully.

Bilingual education

Bilingual education has gained enormous international value over past decades, and its various aspects and consequences have been studied. On the negative side, one major concern was that teaching in a foreign language would have a negative effect on pupils’ mother tongue or on other school subjects. Many researchers, however, such as Admiraal et al. (2006), De Graaf and Koopman (2006), and Merisuo-Storm (2007), have investigated this matter and concluded that pupils who follow bilingual programmes reach higher levels of proficiency in English than pupils in monolingual programmes, and that there is no evidence of negative effects of bilingual education on pupils’ mother tongue or other school subjects. Admiraal et al. (2006) focussed on bilingual secondary education in the Netherlands and concluded that reading comprehension and general oral proficiency did improve as a result of bilingual education, but that more research in this area is needed to make more solid, generalisable conclusions. Over the years, the term ‘bilingual education’ has come to be viewed as limiting as it implies a strong focus on language learning, whereas an integrated method of teaching language and subject is desired. The term ‘Content and Language Integrated Learning’ (CLIL) is now usually preferred.

In any part of education, the pupils’ attitude is very important: Merisuo-Storm (2007) stated that negative attitudes towards language learning can reduce learners’ motivation and harm language learning, whereas positive attitudes can do the opposite. She has described several factors in bilingual education that improve pupils’ language abilities and how these are connected to pupils’ motivation: ‘the more that a person reads literature written in this language, visits countries where it is spoken on holiday, seeks opportunities to use the language and so on, the more successful he or she will be as a language learner. [...] Teachers should try to understand what motivates their students and what they find difficult in language learning. They should consider what aspects of motivation can be changed and create successful experiences that will enhance motivation’ (Merisuo-Storm 2007, p. 228).

Apart from pupils’ motivation, the effectivity of CLIL also depends on teachers’ competencies to deal with this concept of learning and on the educational methods, which are used. Teachers in bilingual programmes are trained to develop CLIL-specific qualities such as selection of subject matter, didactics, and strategies of language acquisition and methods of assessment. Based on scholarly research, G.J. Westhoff has designed a model which states five essential components of foreign-language education: exposure to input, use of strategies, meaning focused processing, form focused processing, and output production. For CLIL to be effective, these five aspects should be included (De Graaf and Koopman 2006). Merisuo-Storm (2007) states that teachers put more effort into their work when they start to use a new teaching method such as CLIL, which could have a further positive effect on the development of pupils’ academic and language capabilities.

Switching: retention and dropping out in secondary education

In the 1960s, Nam et al. researched what factor might be related to school retention and dropping out in American high schools. They established a number of variables to test on: personal identification (age, sex, race, place of residence), family background (socioeconomic status, religion), educational factors (attitude towards education, present enrolment status, future educational plans), school performance (reading achievements and IQ), and school characteristics (composition of pupil body, characteristics of teaching staff and available facilities) (Nam et al., 1965, 1968). It has further been established that there is also a significant correlation between preceding retention and dropping out (Nam et al., 1965; Jimerson, Anderson and Whipple, 2002). Although Nam et al., (1968) had expected the abovementioned variables to elucidate dropout rates, most variables did not yield sufficiently significant results. Many of the variables used indicated a correlation to dropping out, but only low socioeconomic level, non-Catholic religious identification and residence in the South of America could be significantly associated with dropping out in that particular study.

In 2007, Stearns et al. explored three theories regarding possible causes of dropping out. Firstly, the Frustration-Self-esteem model explicates how low(ered) self-esteem due to unsuccessful academic results leads to pupils shifting their focus from academic effort to other things that will boost their self-esteem, often resulting in criminal or other problematic behaviour. This theory focusses on internal psychological processes to explain dropout rates (Finn 1989, Moller et al. 2007). Secondly, the Participation-Identification model explores the relation of learners with the school, both academically (e.g., being on time, prepared for class) and socially (e.g., extracurricular activities). According to this model, engagement with either the academic or social realm keeps pupils in school; retained pupils are at higher risk to drop out, as they may feel alienated from the school. This theory focuses not only on internal processes but also on the context of pupils' relationships in the school (Mahoney and Cairns 1997, Randolph et al. 2004). Thirdly, the Weakening Social Capital model, which hypothesises that retained learners may have weaker pro-social bonds – relationships between pupils and teachers and pupils and parents – as a result of their 'retention stigma'. According to this theory, retention may break the bond between pupils and school. Therefore, a positive bond with teachers, as well as with parents, may prevent retention and dropping out (Stearns et al. 2007). To sum up, promoting self-esteem, child interaction, help from teachers and parental participation appear to lower drop-out probabilities.

Wu (1992) examined possible organisational conditions that may also be related to dropping out, such as schools' academic climate and organisation. He found that learners who 'place a high priority on learning, ... are pressed by teachers to achieve academically, ... are encouraged to enrol in academic classes, ... and are expected to do their homework' are at lower risk to drop out of school. Furthermore, highly structured classroom activities such as 'purposively conceived, well-planned, well-organised and well-executed' activities reduce the risk of pupils dropping out. Lastly, he concluded that contextual factors such as low pupil morale, low teacher morale, teachers' negative attitude towards pupils, motivational problems with pupils and not-so-good teachers correlate with schools' drop-out rates (Wu 1992, p. 6-8, 11).

Dropping out in secondary education: The Netherlands

Luyten et al. (2003) investigated dropout rates in Dutch secondary education. Their research variables, which were based on international sources on dropping out, are comparable to aforementioned variables used in research of retention and dropping out: school variables (organisation, opinions, quality of classroom teaching), pupil and family characteristics (level of involvement of parents with their children, the amount of reading material at home, family situation (single-parent family or couple family), place in birth order), pupil education characteristics (pupil achievement in primary and secondary education, retention, motivation), and pupil demography (ethnicity, migration status, gender, social class, socioeconomic status).

On the basis of their research, Luyten et al. could not conclusively associate any of the variables with dropout rates in secondary schools in the Netherlands. Certain findings are worth mentioning, however: ‘achievement scores and motivation appear to be related to the likelihood of dropping out’, but ‘the risk of dropping out is very high for pupils who are older than the median age when they enter secondary education, independent of their achievement scores’ (Luyten et al. 2003, pp. 397-8). Regarding pupil demography, gender and parents’ educational level actually interact in their effect on dropout: ‘girls with highly educated parents have a lower risk for dropping out than boys with highly educated parents (ibid., pp. 399-400). [Further,] for non-minority pupils the probability of dropping out increases considerably as the educational level of the parents decreases. Regarding family characteristics, parents’ cultural activities and literacy level do affect the probability of dropping out. Lastly, contrary to international research results, pupils that grow up in single-parent families are not at higher risk for dropping out. None of the other variables yielded a significant effect on dropping out in this particular study.

Research questions

Based on the consulted sources mentioned in the theoretical framework, and on consultations with the school staff, this research shall revolve around the following main question: Why is the switch rate higher in the bilingual HAVO programme than in the bilingual Atheneum programme, and what motivates particularly the pupils in the bilingual HAVO programme to switch to the regular, non-bilingual programme? To be able to answer this question, the following sub-questions have been devised: What negative and positive opinions about the HAVO bilingual program exist amongst the pupils participating in the programme and amongst the switchers? How is bilingual education organised in the research school? (e.g. teaching materials, selection procedure, teacher qualifications, etcetera.) What are the main reasons for pupils in the bilingual HAVO programme to switch to the regular, non-bilingual programme?

Hypothesis

After any relevant previous research has been analysed and the research questions have been established, the following hypothesis was developed: Pupils’ academic achievements, motivation and enthusiasm to learn, and interest in the English language are crucial concepts in the process of staying in or switching from the bilingual HAVO programme.

Variables

To gain a better understanding of the motivation and attitudes of the pupils in the lower years of the bilingual HAVO stream and the switchers, ten variables were selected, based on the abovementioned scholarly literature, on which to test the respondents:

Class

Are the respondents satisfied with the atmosphere in their class? Are they friends with their classmates or are pupils being bullied? Do they feel they learn from their classmates?

Self image

Are the respondents self-confident? Are they positive? Do they feel they study seriously? Do they feel they are intelligent?

Future image

Do the respondents think bilingual education is ‘better’ than regular education? Do they think they will understand other cultures better because of it? Do they think they will make contact with other cultures more easily?

Interest in English

Do the respondents enjoy learning English? Do they like the subject English in school? Do they like the English language as such? Do they find it important to learn English well?

Teachers

Do the respondents feel motivated by their teachers? Do they feel the teachers show personal interest in them? Do they think the teachers know their subjects and speak English properly? Do they find the teachers' lessons interesting?

Extra Curricular Activities

Do the respondents find bilingual activities and exchanges important and fun? Do they think those activities are important for learning English?

Grades

Do the respondents find it important to get good grades? Are their grades lower due to teachers' English language abilities or subject methods? Do they find it difficult to give answers in English in class?

Educational Aspirations

Do the respondents have ambitions regarding the English language for the future? Would the respondents like to study abroad in the future?

Class preparedness

When the respondents go to class, do they bring their pens, books and notebooks, and is their homework finished?

In class involvement

Do the respondents actively participate in class? Do they ask for help from the teacher when something is unclear? Do they volunteer to answer questions in class? Are they interested in teachers' feedback on tests and assignments?

The questions and clusters are designed based on the abovementioned literature, as well as Gardner's attitude/motivation test for French second language learning (2005); Dörnyei's extensive research into motivation and language learning (2001); and Kuhlemeier, Van den Bergh and Melse's generic research on the relationship between attitudes, motivation, achievement and teaching methods in Dutch secondary schools (1996).

Context

The bilingual school in the Netherlands is a large secondary school, based at three different locations. The bilingual HAVO and Atheneum programmes are all located in one building. So far, there is one bilingual HAVO class per year, and there are several bilingual Atheneum classes per year.

METHODS

This research is a specific investigation into the situation at the bilingual school in the Netherlands. It is conducted at this school and does not include information about other schools. It is a case study; it aims to explicate the specific situation at the bilingual school. No external validity can be attributed to the research results.

Respondents

Pupils currently in the junior years of the bilingual HAVO programme.

The bilingual HAVO pupils have been approached to clarify their opinion of the programme they are following, and their motivation to choose this programme. These respondents belong to the years 1, 2 and 3 bilingual HAVO, and are of the age of 12 to 15 years old. Both male and female pupils belong to this group of respondents. All pupils have an interest in the English language and/or internationalisation, as they all follow a bilingual programme.

Switchers

18 pupils that switched from the HAVO bilingual programme to the regular HAVO programme have been approached, of which 12 pupils filled in the questionnaire, to give details on their opinion of the bilingual HAVO programme, their motivation to choose this programme and their motivation to leave the programme at some point in the programme. These respondents belong to the years 2, 3 and 4 regular HAVO, and are of the age of 13 to 16 years old. Both male and female pupils belong to this group of respondents. All pupils once had an interest in the English language and/or internationalisation, as they once chose to follow a bilingual programme. All pupils were forced to switch, due to low grades.

Coordinator Bilingual HAVO/Atheneum stream

The coordinator of bilingual education at the research school has been approached to give information on the organisation behind and the school's perspective on the bilingual HAVO and Atheneum programmes. The coordinator is a woman, whose age is unknown.

Instruments

Quantitative methods

This research hopes to provide answers that are valid for all bilingual HAVO pupils at the bilingual school, not just the ones that will have participated in this research. For this reason, the data needs to be unambiguous and structured. This group is relatively large, so it is possible to sample. Therefore, a quantitative data collection method is used for this group of participants, which in this case is a questionnaire.

Sampling

The use of quantitative methods of data collection requires that a random sample of the available pool of participants is selected. The method of convenience sampling is used (Bryman 2001). The sampling is done to all pupils who are available to us in the junior years of this school: the first three years of the HAVO bilingual stream, and all the switchers that switched from bilingual to regular HAVO in the junior years have participated in the questionnaire.

Questionnaire

A self-administered questionnaire was used: the participants completed the questionnaire on their own. One of the researchers was present to answer any questions the respondents might have. The questionnaire consisted of just over a hundred questions. A six-point Likert scale was used, so that the respondents would be forced to commit to either the positive or the negative end of the scale, as a middle rating (e.g. 'neutral' or 'neither agree nor disagree') is not available. The questionnaire was administered in Dutch, which is for most of the respondents their mother tongue, to avoid ambiguous results due to translation problems the young respondents might encounter.

Pilot

Piloting of research instruments is essential to identify any possible pitfalls in them, before they are offered to the entire group of respondents (Dörnyei 2007). Therefore, a pilot of the questionnaire was conducted to test its effectivity and accuracy, and to increase the reliability and validity of the research: two random participants from the group of respondents filled in the first

version of the questionnaire. The participants were both female, 12 years old, followed the bilingual HAVO programme at the research school, but differed in academic ability.

Qualitative methods

The answers that cannot be provided by pupils and switchers must be obtained in a different manner. The coordinator of bilingual education is expected to be able to provide a rich contextual understanding of the school organisation. For this reason, a qualitative method of data collection is used in the form of an interview with this coordinator.

Interview

To obtain rich, detailed information from the one interview that is to be done, the method of unstructured qualitative interviewing has been selected. An interview guide was used. This method of interviewing is flexible; the interviewee may respond in any way he or she would believe to be appropriate and along the way the interviewers may adjust the emphasis and ask questions that follow up the interviewee's replies (Bryman 2001).

Set up of the research

Pilot

The pilot with the questionnaire was conducted a week before the entire group of respondents would be given the questionnaire. The two participants were instructed to take all the time they needed for the (pilot) questionnaire and to ask the researchers present questions if anything was unclear, irrelevant or problematic. They were further asked for any other feedback after completing the (pilot) questionnaire.

The participants completed the (pilot) questionnaire in fifteen minutes. They found it to be clear and formulated in such a way that it was easy to understand and quick to complete. They pointed out that one question was irrelevant, so should be either changed or deleted from the final questionnaire.

Questionnaire

At the bilingual school in the Netherlands, only one class of HAVO bilingual learners exists per year. The HAVO bilingual first and second classes were given the questionnaire on one day; the HAVO bilingual third class was not available that day. The switchers were given the questionnaire yet another day, separately from the pupils who are still in the bilingual HAVO programme. In administering the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to fill in their name and to answer all questions as honestly as possible. They were assured that their completed questionnaires would not be seen by anybody but by the researchers, so would not have to worry about getting in trouble with school, their parents or their classmates. The respondents were also encouraged to ask questions in case of any problems with the questionnaire. In administering the questionnaire, the researchers thus attempted to create a comfortable, friendly environment in which to complete the questionnaire, to further stimulate the respondents to provide the researchers with honest and therefore reliable data.

The respondents were able to answer the questionnaire easily and without any problems; occasionally, researchers were asked to clarify the meaning of a question. Most respondents completed the questionnaire in twenty minutes; several needed more time to read and think, and needed up to 45 minutes.

Interview

A private interview was held between the coordinator of bilingual education and two of the researchers. The interviewee was asked open questions on the matters the researchers required information on, so that the interviewee would answer in any way he or she would find relevant or

appropriate. Through this unstructured, free interview style the researchers attempted to create a comfortable, friendly atmosphere.

Due to the large amount of detailed information the coordinator provided, the interview quite unexpectedly lasted two hours. The interview was taped and transcribed, and included in the research report.

Response

The pupils in the three bilingual HAVO classes were asked to complete the questionnaire during one of their scheduled lessons. In total, 15 percent of the pupils was absent; all the pupils who were present, agreed to fill in the questionnaire. The switchers, as they are scattered over different classes with different schedules, were invited to participate in the research by completing the questionnaire during their lunch break on a set day. Twelve out of the eighteen switchers responded to the request and were present to complete the questionnaire, which puts the response between 60 – 69% of a self-completion questionnaire where the respondents were invited through a letter. This is an acceptable response (Bryman 2001)

Method of analysis

The data derived from the questionnaires was analysed with SPSS (Statistical package for the social sciences). SPSS has the ability to summarise data and link information through several tests, and is used to process research data all around the world.

Cronbach's α

The questions in the questionnaire are divided into constructs, that is, some questions basically ask the same thing, or are about the same topic. Of questions that belong to the same construct it should be established if both have been scored similarly. The Cronbach's α test was used to determine whether questions belong to the same construct; an α higher than 0.7 establishes that the questions within a construct have a significant correlation and therefore give significant information about the responses regarding construct.

ANOVA

To compare the results for the constructs of which Cronbach's α is high enough, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. An ANOVA test compares the differences within the groups with the differences between the groups. This comparison results in the F-ratio, which is a ratio between the two differences:

$$F = \frac{\text{Difference between groups}}{\text{Difference within groups}}$$

If the difference between the groups is bigger than the difference within the groups, F is higher than 1. In this research that would mean that the difference between the classes is larger than the difference within the classes, and a comparison between the responses of the different classes can be made. However, this difference may be due to coincidence. Therefore, the ANOVA also provides a significance level. If the significance level is lower than 0.05, the chance that the F-ratio is due to coincidence is less than 5%, and so the F-ratio may be considered significant and not the result of coincidence.

Reliability and validity

The motivation and attitude questionnaire is a non-standardised test, which should be considered when analysing the data and interpreting the results. The questionnaire is based on Gardner's (1985), Dörnyei's (2001) and Kuhlemeier, Van den Bergh and Melse's (1996) research on the relationship between attitude and motivation. They administered their tests on large

Construct	Cronbach's α	Construct	Cronbach's α
Class	0.69	Extracurricular activities	0.51
Self image	0.51	Grades	0.56
Future image	0.62	Educational aspirations	0.59
Interest in English	0.77	Class preparedness	0.60
Teachers	0.838	In-class involvement	0.70

Table 1. Constructs of the questionnaire with equivalent Cronbach's α .

samples and on several occasions; for instance, Kuhlemeier *et al.* (1996) examined 53 classes in Dutch secondary education, giving the results some credibility.

The questionnaire only provides information about the motivation and attitudes of the bilingual HAVO learners in the research school. External validity cannot be statistically proven as the sample is too small. However, the content of the questionnaire was based on previous research related to the topic of this research, a pilot was conducted to improve and ensure its quality, and to check the validity of the responses, some statements were repeated with wording variations (e.g. one statement was phrased positively and a similar statement was phrased negatively). The results are therefore valid for the situation at the bilingual school in the Netherlands, but no validity can be guaranteed for other situations.

RESULTS

Questionnaires

Cronbach's Alpha

Table 1 shows the constructs used in the questionnaire with their equivalent Cronbach's α .

ANOVA

The ANOVA was conducted twice: once to make a comparison between the classes one, two, three, and the switchers, and once to make a comparison between the three classes without the switchers. The constructs Teachers, Class preparedness, and In-class involvement yielded a significantly high F-ratio to compare the different classes.

Firstly, the mean and standard deviation of the responses on the three significant constructs were determined for two groups: classes 1, 2 and 3 bilingual HAVO form one group; the switchers form the other. These results show no substantial difference between the two groups regarding the respondents' opinion of their teachers. However, the mean value for Class preparedness and In-class involvement are considerably lower in the switchers' group.

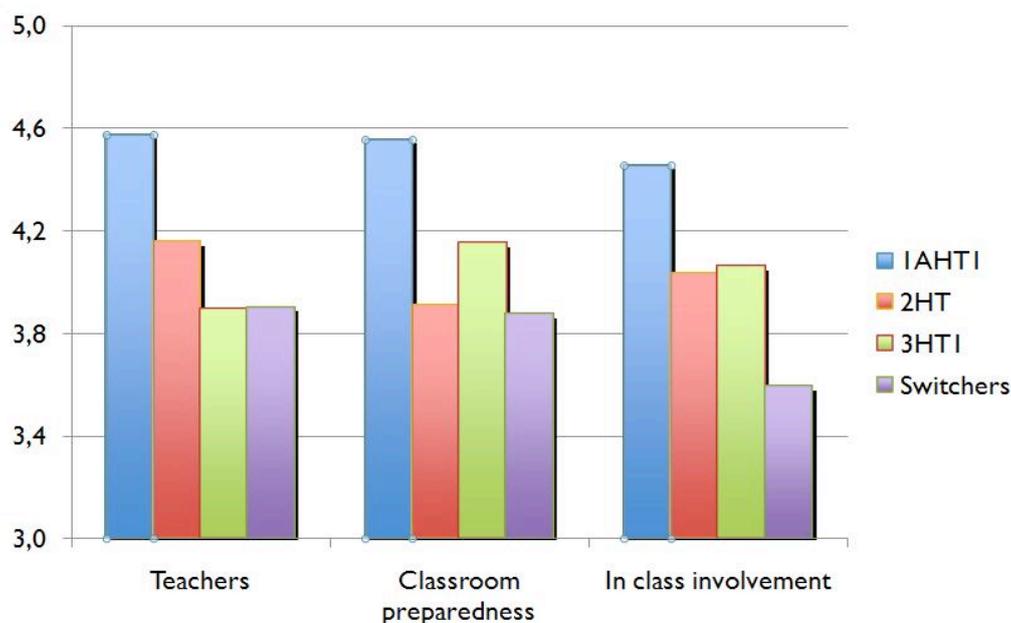


Figure 1. Mean of bilingual HAVO pupils' and switchers' responses on Teachers, Class preparedness and In-class involvement, on a scale from 1 to 6.

The second ANOVA was conducted between the bilingual HAVO classes 1, 2 and 3, to compare the responses of those who are still in the bilingual HAVO programme. Again, the constructs Teachers, Class preparedness, and In Class Involvement have a significantly high F-ratio; the responses of the classes may be compared. The results show a considerable drop of the mean and standard deviation of pupils' opinion on the three constructs between class 1 and 2 (see Figure 1). This is not a trend: the mean difference between class 2 and 3 is smaller than that between class 1 and 2.

Interview

The coordinator of bilingual education at the bilingual school in the Netherlands provided the researchers with detailed information on the organisation of the bilingual programmes at the school. A brief outline of the acquired information – on the organisation, curriculum, and other practical aspects of the bilingual HAVO programme as offered by the bilingual school, which forms an essential background of the research – is presented here.

Selection procedure

Pupils are admitted to school based on their Cito score and the advice of the primary school: to enter HAVO, a pupil requires a Cito score of at least 538; to enter Atheneum, a pupil requires a score of at least 542. These requirements are identical for the regular and bilingual programmes. If a pupil has not taken a Cito test, the school relies on the advice of the primary school.

The school provides information on the bilingual programmes through the website, a brochure, and an information evening. The website and information evening emphasise that bilingual education requires additional effort. Once a pupil has decided to join a bilingual programme, he or she and his or her parents are invited by the mentor for an intake meeting where the pupil's motivation to learn, and specifically to learn in English, may be discussed, and where the mentor once again emphasises the additional effort required for bilingual education.

Curriculum

Pupils admitted to a bilingual programme enter either a combined HAVO/Atheneum class or an Atheneum class. During the first year, 61% of the classes in the bilingual programme are taught in English: history, geography, mathematics, biology, music and physical education. In the second year, 70% of the lessons are taught in English; in the third year, 55% of the lessons are taught in English. Besides the regular subjects, bilingual pupils participate in one cross-curricular project every year, which is the same for HAVO and Atheneum. For class 3 an exchange programme with a school abroad is organised. Pupils who proceed to class 4 of the bilingual programme receive a CLIL-certificate.

Subject methods

The selection of teaching methods in English is sometimes problematic. Often, no adequate method is available for bilingual programmes: methods from the United Kingdom cover a different curriculum from the Dutch curriculum, and the level of English used may be too high; translated Dutch methods are either not properly translated or employ too complex language. Not many methods are especially geared towards teaching the English language through a subject. Due to these issues, at the bilingual school sometimes the same teaching materials are used in HAVO and Atheneum.

Teachers

Teachers in the bilingual programme at The bilingual school are required to be native speakers or to have passed a Cambridge Proficiency Exam (CPE). Sometimes, however, teachers interested in bilingual teaching who have not passed a CPE yet, are allowed to teach in English while taking the Cambridge Proficiency course. This solution is only offered when there are no other qualified candidates. Teachers support each other through intervision.

School structure

For class 1, 2 and 3 HAVO and Atheneum, three coordinating and supporting teams exist: year 1 HAVO/Atheneum; year 2 and 3 HAVO; year 2 and 3 Atheneum. Each of these teams consist of teachers and one team leader. There is an additional team for bilingual education, which consists of delegates from the three teams and a coordinator. The coordinator monitors the bilingual programmes, ensures its quality, coordinates the English education of the teachers, and communicates with the European Platform and other Dutch bilingual schools.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Teachers, Class preparedness and In-class involvement

The results from the questionnaire regarding Teachers, Class preparedness and In-class involvement indicate a significant decrease in motivation from class 1 to class 2, and a further decrease from class 2 to class 3. After class one, the respondents' opinion of their teachers and their preparedness for class and level of participation declined. The respondents stated that they generally do not feel very motivated by their teachers, that their teachers do not show much personal interest in them, and that the teachers do not know their subject very well. The switchers stated to feel less personal interest in their teachers compared to the bilingual learners and that their teachers rarely explained the purpose or goal of class content or activities. Strikingly, both the bilingual learners of class 3 and the switchers were particularly negative about their teachers' proficiency in English. This is the pupils' perspective – their negative opinion does not necessarily prove that the teachers actually are inapt. It does, however, prove pupils' general discontent regarding this matter. Whether the pupils are bothered because they were unable to

follow the bilingual lessons, or thought the bilingual lessons were not interesting, or whether the teachers actually do need to improve their bilingual teaching, this research cannot say.

As regards Class preparedness, the results show a decline of motivation after class 1 and 2, and the switchers' responses were considerably lower still than the bilingual HAVO pupils. These results indicate that bilingual learners put less effort in their homework and come less prepared for classes in each following year. Pupils becoming more comfortable or confident in school as time passes, and growing more interested in matters other than studying could explain this. The particularly low motivation of switchers to come to class prepared may well be a sign of discontent or lack of motivation towards participation in the bilingual programme. After all, pupils are well aware of the expectations the school has of its bilingual learners; failure to even be prepared for classes may be taken as a sign that the pupils are not inclined to work harder.

Finally, the results on In-class involvement again indicated that bilingual learners' motivation declines after class 1 and 2, and that switchers were least motivated of the respondents to actively participate. Switchers were again more negative on this construct than the bilingual learners. More so than the bilingual learners, they indicated not to study very seriously at home and in class, not to volunteer to give answers in class often, and not to be very interested in teachers' feedback on tests and assignments. This suggests they are not very active and involved in school, which could develop into poorer relationships with peers, teachers and the school. All learners stated not to ask for help when something is unclear, implying insecurity in class. Whether they are insecure to use the English language, or because they might feel stupid requesting further information, the data did not show.

School organisation

From the interview with the school's coordinator of bilingual education, it seems that the school works very hard to offer bilingual education of the highest level and to ensure that pupils enter the programme highly motivated. The coordinator stated that certain matters regarding bilingual education could still be organised in a better way – such as the lack of possibility to differentiate between bilingual HAVO and bilingual Atheneum pupils and the lack of appropriate subject methods and books – and that they hope to achieve this over the coming years. The researchers agree that exactly those issues are possibly problematic parts of the bilingual programmes.

Hence, generally the switchers showed less class preparedness and lower class involvement and were generally less positive about their bilingual teachers than the bilingual learners. More personal interest from the teachers might have helped the switchers, however cannot be significantly proven. On the learners side, higher involvement, a more serious attitude and better preparedness might have made a difference in the bilingual learning experience and choices of the switchers. The significant results may indicate a possible relationship between the three variables and the lower motivation of the switchers compared to that of the bilingual learners.

To switch or not to switch...

The results of this research show that first and foremost, the switchers switched because their academic achievements were quite simply not sufficient to be promoted to the next class. The results do show that the switchers have low motivation regarding their education, but as the switching occurred almost one year ago, it is impossible to say whether their level of motivation

was a factor in switching. Their falling grades may have been due to poor motivation, but their poor motivation may as well have been due to their falling grades.

Assuming that motivation was a factor, the results of this exploratory study should be taken seriously: whatever the reason(s), the responses showed a certain amount of discontent and disinterest of pupils in their education. This reminds one of the theories on retention and dropping out, explored by Stearns et al (2007): the Participation-Identification model theorises that pupils with little engagement with the academic or extracurricular aspects of school may be at higher risk of becoming so disinterested that they might drop out, or in this case decide to switch to the regular programme because they are not prepared to do the required work. Stimulating pupils' relationships in the school would be necessary to prevent this. Pupils' discontent with their teachers also reminds one of the Weakening Social Capital model, in which pupils feel no bond with their teachers and are therefore less motivated. Further, as all the switchers performed insufficiently, one might hypothesise that they all had difficulty with the level of the programme. If this was indeed the case, the Frustration-Self-esteem model would also be highly relevant: frustrations due to unsatisfactory academic results may lead to low(ered) self-esteem, which increases the risk of dropping out. This hypothesis is further supported by switchers' indication that they were not inclined to ask for help when not understanding class matter.

Based on these conclusions, it is interesting to note that the 'circumstantial' literature consulted for this exploratory study actually does seem to be relevant: some of the models, theories and conclusions can successfully be applied to theorise on the situation of switchers. This means that there are now (albeit modest) indications that the situation of switchers may indeed be compared – with caution – to the situations of retaining or dropping out. A great deal of further research is now needed to make stronger claims on this subject, that may be applied to external situations: other schools.

Recommendations

This research was conducted as a case study: it has no external validity due to the small group of available respondents. These results are only valid for the bilingual school. However, other schools may use this research to look critically to their own bilingual (HAVO) programme.

The questionnaires yielded significant results regarding three variables – both for the bilingual learners and the switchers: Teachers, Class preparedness and In-class involvement. In providing recommendations, these variables should form the basis for further investigating and improving the bilingual HAVO programme, as all respondents have strong and a reasonably unanimous opinion when it comes to these variables.

Teachers

The teachers need to be sufficiently proficient in English. Many respondents indicated this was not always the case. This opinion should be further investigated. If teachers' proficiency level is indeed not high enough, the school is advised not to have the teacher teach in English yet, but to wait until the appropriate quality of English is obtained, even if there are no other qualified teachers. If the teachers' proficiency in English turns out not to be the actual problem (but the pupils' perception), the needs of the learners should still be taken seriously; the bilingual programme might not be feasible at HAVO level as it currently exists, the materials may not be appropriate, or the pupils need to be stimulated more to engage with school activity to increase their motivation for learning. Continuing to search for appropriate teaching methods and differentiating classes and projects to cater better for HAVO pupils, would be ways to achieve that.

Class preparedness and in-class involvement

Pupils need freedom, but also clear boundaries in certain respects. By expecting pupils to come to class preparedly and to actively participate in class, and by having purposively conceived, well-planned, well-organised and well-executed activities (Wu 1992), their motivation, enthusiasm and grade prospects may be improved. Putting a student-tracking system (leerlingvolgsysteem) in place would aid the school in keeping a closer eye on pupils' developments, results and activities, both positive and negative. These tracking systems are available in a digital form, which would therefore be easily accessible to teachers, and would help the mentor and school organisation to be able to make motivated choices regarding encouraging pupils to continue with the bilingual programme or to switch to the regular programme. It would also be a way for the school organisation to keep track of pupils' opinions and possible problems with the bilingual programme, to further improve its quality.

Further research

To increase the validity of this research, a 'control group' should be tested, to investigate if the outcomes of this research are really valid only for bilingual HAVO learners, or if they are in fact indicative of problems in the HAVO stream, whether regular or bilingual. A similar study into pupils' motivation in the bilingual Atheneum programme would be interesting, especially when compared to pupils' motivation in the regular Atheneum programme.

Reflection

The researchers found the process of conducting this research – formulating a proposal, setting up the research, testing pupils, interviewing school staff, performing statistical analysis and concluding on the results – a highly educational, valuable and enriching experience. The product is only a small contribution to research in this field, but the researchers do feel that the necessary steps were taken (within the scope of the research) to maximise the validity of this case study and they attempted to analyse and interpret the results with care, based on previous scholarly research. The researchers feel that practice-based research such as this is a very valuable activity for teachers, as it enlightens certain issues and contexts that otherwise might go unnoticed.

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