

English Language Use in English Classrooms in Dutch Secondary Education Schools

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Abstract. The Netherlands, like other European Union (EU) countries, concern about their education. They have been trying so hard to improve the quality of their education in all levels. In order to prepare their secondary school level students for internationalization among other EU members, they are interested in investigating what actually happens during the English lessons in all secondary school levels. By knowing all things they need to know, it is hoped that they can increase the quality of English lessons in those schools as well as the quality of student exchange program both inside and outside the country land. This study reports how much time Dutch teachers and students use English language during English lessons in VWO and VMBO.

Keywords : language use, VWO, VMBO

Introduction

Education is a primary concern of the governments of all European countries. However, the structure of education systems differ considerably, both within and between countries. The European Commission through the Socrates program which consisted of fifteen countries at that time provides a forum for exchange of ideas and good practices in education and training areas. It does not have a 'common education policy' or a top-down approach. While each member state remains responsible for the content and organization of its education systems, the European Union (EU) provides:

- Multinational education, training, and youth partnership.
- Exchange schemes and opportunities to learn abroad.
- Innovative teaching and learning projects.
- Networks of academic and professional exercise.
- A framework to address across-the-board issues, such as new technologies in education and the international recognition of qualifications.
- A platform for consensus, comparisons, benchmarking, and policy-making.

The Netherlands is one of the member states of the EU. In relation to education, the Dutch Minister of Education establishes the European Platform for Dutch Education (*Europees Platform voor het Nederlandse Onderwijs*). It serves as a national co-ordinating organization to the Dutch education umbrella organizations, such as: NABS, NKS, NPC, and CBOO/VNG. The aim of this coordinating body is to strengthen European dimensions, to promote internationalization in Dutch education,

and in this way to contribute the quality of education. It focuses on primary and secondary and vocational training and adult educations.

The European Platform is the agency for national/bilateral and European educational internalization programs. The European programs are financed by the European Commission located in Brussels, Belgium. The national and bilateral programs are financed by the Dutch Ministry of Education located in Den Haag. Regarding to the internationalization program for secondary schools students, it provides international exchange programs for Dutch students to visit other European countries for several days or to be the host for students from other European countries.

Before joining student exchange programs, the students have to be well-equipped with knowledge of a foreign language, in this case English, which is used as the medium of communication with foreign students. Experts and English language teachers design and implement the teaching-learning material to prepare the students to be able to communicate in English sufficiently. During the international exchange programs, Dutch students interact with foreign students as well as with their own friends.

Funded by the European Platform for Dutch Education, this research is a part of a preliminary research on revealing the English language use the Dutch students apply during student exchange programs, both inside and outside the country land. This report only emphasizes on uncovering how much time Dutch teachers and students use English language during English lessons in the secondary education schools, which are VWO (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs*) and VMBO (*voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*). Knowing what actually happens in English classrooms in these secondary education levels is important for the Dutch Ministry of Education to improve its quality of education and, especially, to prepare the students for internationalization.

Some Related Literature

Education System in the Netherlands

Most Dutch children start primary school at the age of four, although they are not required by law to attend school until the age of five. As from 1 August 2002, the school starting age is due to be lowered to four. On leaving primary school at the age of about 12 (after eight years of primary schooling) children choose between three types of secondary education: VMBO or *voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs* (pre-vocational secondary education; four years), HAVO (senior general secondary education: five years) and VWO or *voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs* (pre-university education: six years). VMBO is a new type of secondary education introduced in the 1999/2000 school year to replace VBO and MAVO. Pupils who in 1999/2000 were in the second year or higher of VBO or MAVO

(*middelbaar algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*) will continue with the old curriculum.

Most secondary schools are combined schools offering several types of secondary education so that pupils can transfer easily from one type to another. All three types of secondary education start with a period of basic secondary education during which all pupils study the same broad range of subjects, whichever type of school they are at. This period varies in length from one type of school to another, but lasts at least two years and usually three.

After completing VMBO at the age of around 16, pupils can go on to secondary vocational education (MBO). Pupils who have successfully completed the theoretical programme within VMBO can also go on to HAVO. HAVO certificate-holders and VWO certificate-holders can opt at the ages of around 17 and 18 respectively to go on to higher education. HAVO is designed to prepare pupils for higher professional education (HBO). In practice, however, many HAVO school-leavers also go on to VWO and secondary vocational education. Only VWO certificate-holders can go straight to university. In practice, many of them also enter higher professional education.

In addition to mainstream primary and secondary schools there are special schools for children with learning and behavioral difficulties who – temporarily at least - require special educational treatment. There are also separate schools for children with disabilities of such a kind that they cannot be adequately catered for in mainstream schools.

Pupils who are unable to obtain a VMBO qualification, even with long-term extra help, can receive practical training, which prepares them for entering the labor market. Young people aged 18 or over can take adult education courses or higher distance learning courses. Below is the scheme of the Netherlands's education system:

Classroom Interaction

Interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other (Brown, 2001:165). In the era of communicative language teaching, interaction is, in fact, the heart of communication; it is what communication is all about. We send messages, we receive them, we interpret them in a context, we negotiate meanings, and we collaborate to accomplish certain purposes. Theories of communicative competence emphasize the importance of interaction as human beings use language in various contexts to “negotiate” meaning, or simply stated, to get an idea out of one person's head of another person and vice versa.

The following are some major principles of classroom interaction:

- *Automaticity*: True human interaction is best accomplished when focal attention is on meanings and messages and not on grammar and other linguistic forms. Learners are thus freed from keeping

language in a controlled mode and can more easily proceed to automatic modes of processing.

- *Intrinsic motivation*: As students become engaged with each other in speech acts of fulfillment and self-actualization, their deepest drives are satisfied. And as they more fully appreciate their own competence to use language, they can develop a system of self-reward.
- *Strategic investment*: Interaction requires the use of strategic language competence both to make certain decisions on how to say or write or interpret language, and to make repairs when communication pathways are blocked. The spontaneity of interaction discourse requires judicious use of numerous strategies for production and comprehension.
- *Risk-taking*: Interaction requires the risk of failing to produce intended meaning, of failing to interpret intended meaning (on the part of someone else), of being laughed at, of being shunned or rejected. The rewards are great and worth the risks.
- *The language-culture connection*: The cultural loading of interactive speech as well as writing requires that interlocutors be thoroughly versed in the cultural nuances of language.
- *Interlanguage*: The complexity of interaction entails a long developmental process of acquisition. Numerous errors of production and comprehension will be a part of this development. And the role of teacher feedback is crucial to the developmental process.
- *Communicative competence*: All of the elements of communicative competence (grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic) are involved in human interaction. All aspects must work together for successful communication to take place.

Research Design

This study is a descriptive study. In order to grab the information needed for the study, a research/ observational instrument is developed. It covers the information on the speaking partners, the teachers/instructors, and the students. It can be applied in classroom observation and student exchange observation.

The study puts a great deal of emphasis on the observation of the performance of the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s). The areas being observed are the characteristics of the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s), the interaction, the language use of the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s), didactical act of the speaking partner(s)/instructor, as well as the nature of the language.

Furthermore, the interaction among students is also considered to be contributive to one's acquisition of the target language, therefore the study also takes into account what students perform during the sessions,

both formal and informal. The observation includes the interaction of the students, the language they use during the sessions, and the nature of their interaction.

The Variables

As stated before, the observation will not only involve the contact between the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s) but also the one among the students. The interaction between the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s) is segregated into the following five categories:

No.	Categories	Explanation	
1.	Characteristics	The category contains the role of the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s). The speaking partner(s)/instructor(s) may range from lecturer to waiter in a café. The category is designed to point out which speaking partner(s)/instructor(s) would be the most advantageous for the language acquisition of the students.	
	1. Lecturer		
	2. Parents		
	3. Fellow Pupil		
	4. Provision of Services, Public Officers		
	5. Shopkeeper, waiter		
	6. Stranger		
	7. Colleague		
	8. Friends		
	9. Mechanical Input		
10.	Nobody		
2.	Interaction	The category explains how the interaction takes place, and how much language students may absorb. The interaction itself may vary from “the instructor only speaks” to mutual interaction. The category is intended to find out how much time students are given throughout the interaction. The more the students are assigned to speak, the greater the possibility that they will acquire the target language more.	
	1.		Instructor only speaks
	2.		All pupils – Instructor
	3.		A Pupil – Instructor
	4.		Instructor → students’ mutual interaction
	5.		Instructor → allowing 1 student speaks
	6.		Nobody speaks
	7.		Instructor → non-verbal communication
	8.		Computer
	9.		Video
	10.		Recorder
	11.		Radio
	12.		Television
13.	Unaimed		
3.	Didactical Acts	The particular category seeks what didactical act the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s) carries out during his duration of speech. There are 10 categories	
	1.		Organizing
	2.		Presenting
	3.		Problem Orientation

	4.	Observing/ Encouraging	describing the didactical acts of the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s). The category ranges from the simplest act like organizing to having a discussion or even an argumentation, each with different language skill involved. The more the students are exposed to discussion and argumentation activities, the more that they are invited to make use of their reasoning and language proficiency.	
	5.	Correcting/ Giving Feedback		
	6.	Arguing/ Exchanging Opinion		
	7.	Evaluating		
	8.	Condensing		
	9.	Task Control		
	10.	Not active		
	11.	Non intentional		
4.		Language Use		The category is aimed to keep a full inventory of what language(s) the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s) speak most dominantly. The more he speaks in the target language, the more the students are immersed in the target language itself.
	1.	English		
	2.	German		
	3.	Other		
	4.	Dutch		
	5.	English & another language		
	6.	No Language		
5.		Nature of the Language	The last category observing the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s) is meant to find out whether the time spent is related to the project or not and whether the tone of the interaction is either equal or emotional. The more the time spent on the project and the more the time that both the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s) are in equal position would be advantageous to the acquisition of the target language by the students.	
	1.	Project-oriented – equal		
	2.	Project-oriented – emotional		
	3.	Recreational – equal		
	4.	Recreational - emotional		
	5.	None		

The interaction among the students is segregated into three categories, namely:

No.	Category	Explanation
1.	Interaction	The category views the interaction of the students whether they spend the time interacting with their fellow or foreign students or with adults. The category even records
	1. With Dutch Pupils	
	2. With Foreign Pupils	
	3. With Foreign Adults	
	4. With Dutch Adults	

	5.	No Interaction	even if there is no interaction at all.
	6.	Non Verbal Interaction	
2.	Language Use		The category is aimed to uncover in what language the interaction takes place ranging to their native language to no language at all. The more the students speak in the target language, the greater also the possibility that they are in the advantageous stance in acquiring the target language. On the other hand, the absence of language use during the interaction would be detrimental to their learning.
	1.	English	
	2.	German	
	3.	Other	
	4.	Dutch	
	5.	English and other language	
	6.	No language	
3.	Nature of Language		The category is aimed to keep a full account of the nature of the language, be it project oriented or recreational, emotional or equal, passive or active. The more the time that the students spend on the project actively in equal manner, the more that they are expected to learn.
	1.	Project-equal; passive	
	2.	Project-equal; taking action	
	3.	Project-emotional; positive	
	4.	Project-emotional; negative	
	5.	Recreational-equal; passive	
	6.	Recreational-equal; take action	
	7.	Recreational-emotional; positive	
	8.	Recreational-emotional; negative	
	9.	None	

Procedure of Collecting Data

As stated above, the data collected by the above observation instruments consisted of 21 minute and 9 minutes sequences. The 21 minute sequence observation involving both the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s) was divided into minute cycle. The first 20 seconds were spent on observing the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s), and then followed by 10 seconds of filling in the 5 categories available for the speaking partner(s)/instructor(s). In this case, the researcher only took note the most dominant feature during the 20 second observation. After that, the 31st to 35th second of the minute was intended to take a short break. Afterwards the observation was continued to the chosen group of

pupils determined for the part of the day of the observation. This lasted for 10 seconds, and then followed by other 10 seconds of filling in the 3 categories available in the students' category. Similarly, the researcher only took into account the most dominant occurrence in the 10 second sequence. Again, the 55th to the 60th second was spent on taking a break before the second 1 minute cycle took place.

Research Groups

The samples for VWO were taken from 2 (two) English lessons of 4 VWO in Zernike College at Westerse Drift 98, Haren. The samples for VMBO were taken from 3 (three) English lessons of 3 VMBO. These three lessons were in different schools. One lesson was observed in Zernike College at Van Schendelstraat 1, Groningen while the other two lessons were observed in AOC Terra, Eelde. The two English lessons in 4 VWO were taught by one teacher. The observed English lessons in 3 VMBO at AOC Terra were taught by one teacher and of the same students.

Classroom observations were conducted 5 (five) times in two secondary educational levels, VWO and VMBO. The more detailed information is provided in the following table:

No.	Date	Level	School	Observation Time	Location
1.	April 13, 2004	4 VWO	Zernike College	12.25 - 12.46	Haren
2.	April 15, 2004	3 VMBO	Zernike College	08.40 - 09.01	Groningen
3.	April 26, 2004	4 VWO	Zernike College	12.25 - 12.46	Haren
4.	April 22, 2004	3 VMBO	AOC Terra	11.13 - 11.34	Eelde
5.	April 23, 2004	3 VMBO	AOC Terra	09.39 - 10.00	Eelde

The reasons why the study took the students from those schools was due to the reason that the students sitting in these levels were already expected to have been qualified in handling fluent conversation in the English language as they were about to enter universities in which the demand of the mastery of the English language was high. The choosing of such levels could also give an overall reflection of the teaching of the English language in the Netherlands had been going on since their *basis onderwijs* or elementary school.

The length of time of English lessons in 4 VWO throughout the whole school year is 80 (eighty) hours as each English lesson runs for an hour. The students have it for twice a week during 40 weeks of school period.

The length of time of English lessons in 3 VMBO throughout the whole school year is 108 (one hundred and eight) hours as each English lesson runs for an hour. The students have it for three times a week during 36 weeks of school period.

Findings

Table 1
The Amount and Percentage of Time Used by Speaking Partners

Speakers	Amount	Percentage
Instructor	81	77.1
Parents	0	0.0
Fellow Pupil	14	13.3
Public Service	0	0.0
Shopkeeper/Waiter	0	0.0
Stranger	0	0.0
Colleague	0	0.0
Friends	0	0.0
Mechanical Input	10	9.5
Nobody	0	0.0
TOTAL	105	100

During the observations in VWO and VMBO classes, the Dutch students listened to English conversations or instructions from several inputs. The instructors, in this case the teachers of English were the main source of English inputs. They spoke English in 77.1% of the time to organize the classrooms, presented the materials, gave questions or problems to their students, encouraged the students, and corresponded to their answers. The students, however, did not actively take part in the lessons. Their participation in the lessons by speaking English was only 13.3%. They seemed unmotivated to follow the lessons and tended to be busy with themselves by doing other things or talking with their neighbor fellows. Mechanical inputs, such as tape recorders or videos, were also used in the lessons to improve their listening skills. They took 9.5% of the lesson time. Other speaking partners, for example: parents, public service officers, shopkeepers/waiters, strangers, colleagues, and friends, did not appear in the lessons as the lessons occurred in the classrooms.

Table 2
The Amount and Percentage of Interaction Conducted by the Teacher

Interaction	Amount	Percentage
Instructor only speaks	40	38.1
Instructor → all pupils	9	8.6
Instructor → a pupil	11	10.5
Instructor → pupil's mutual interaction	14	13.3

Instructor → allow one pupil speak	7	6.7
Nobody speaks	13	12.4
Instructor → non-verbal communication	1	1.0
Computer	0	0.0
Video	0	0.0
Recorder	10	9.5
Radio	0	0.0
TV	0	0.0
TOTAL	105	100

During the teaching-learning process in the classrooms, the teachers managed to interact with their students in a number of ways. The teachers speaking in English to explain the materials took 38.1% of the time. The teachers also encouraged the students' active involvement and communicated with them in 39.1%. The teachers also made use of tape recorders in the classrooms for additional English language inputs and improved the listening skills of their students (9.5%). However, there were silent moments in the classrooms when the students were doing the assignments or quizzes required by the teacher which occurred in 12.4% of the time.

Table 3
The Amount and Percentage of Language Use Uttered by the Teacher

Language	Amount	Percentage
English	49	46.7
German	0	0.0
Danish	0	0.0
Dutch	31	29.5
English and others	8	7.6
No language	17	16.2
TOTAL	105	100

In order to deliver materials and manage their classrooms, the teachers tended to speak English (46.7%). Nevertheless, they had to speak in their mother tongue, Dutch, to re-explain the materials or instruct their students as they did not seem to understand the explanations or instructions in English. Sometimes, the teachers found it easier to explain or give instructions in Dutch. This happened 29.5% of the time. The teachers occasionally switched their languages from Dutch to English or vice versa (7.6%). The teachers also did not speak any languages (16.2%) to let their students do their assignments or quizzes.

Table 4
The Amount and Percentage of the Language Nature Conducted by the Teacher

Language Nature	Amount	Percentage
Project-oriented; equal	95	90.5
Project-oriented; emotional	0	0.0
Recreational; equal	0	0.0
Recreational; emotional	0	0.0
None	10	9.5
TOTAL	105	100

The nature of the language of the teachers was mostly project-oriented; equal (97.6%) which indicated that they used the languages, both English and Dutch, to deliver the materials to their students. Since they did not say anything to give a chance for the students to do their tasks, they did not say anything for some time. As a result, there was no nature of language for a short time (9.5%). Other variables, such as: project-oriented; emotional, recreational; equal, and recreational; emotional were not found in the classrooms.

Table 5
The Amount and Percentage of Interaction among Students

Kinds of Interaction	Amount	Percentage
With Dutch pupil(s)	31	29.5
With German pupil(s)	0	0.0
With German adult(s)	0	0.0
With Dutch adult(s)	3	2.9
Non-verbal communication	2	1.9
No interaction	69	65.7
TOTAL	105	100

The data above showed that the students made more no interactions rather than having interactions with their fellow friends and even with the teacher. They preferred to be busy with themselves. Having no interaction could mean that they were doing individual tasks or paying no intention to the lessons. However, during the observation, they paid no attention to the lessons more often than doing their tasks. They made no interaction 65.7% of the time. Their interaction with their fellow classmates was longer (29.5%) than with their teacher (2.9%). They also made non-verbal communication or gestures to their friends in order to not to be noisy (1.9%). Since there were no German students or a German teacher in the classroom, they did not speak German at all.

Table 6
The Amount and Percentage of Language Use Uttered by the Students

Language	Amount	Percentage
English	0	0.0
German	0	0.0
Danish	0	0.0
Dutch	19	18.0
English and others	1	1.0
No language	85	81.0
TOTAL	105	100

During the English lessons the students spoke English very little. When they spoke in English, they mixed it with Dutch (1%). They spoke Dutch more often than English (18%). However, most of the time, they did not say anything. They remained silent which took 81% of the entire time. The students did not speak in other languages such as German and Danish in the classrooms.

Table 7
The Amount and Percentage of the Language Nature of the Students

Language Nature	Amount	Percentage
Project-oriented; passive	11	10.5
Project-oriented; taking action	30	28.6
Project-emotional; positive	0	0.0
Project-emotional; negative	0	0.0
Recreational-equal; passive	0	0.0
Recreational-equal; action	0	0.0
Recreational-emotional; positive	0	0.0
Recreational-emotional; negative	0	0.0
None	64	61.0
TOTAL	105	100

The nature of the language of the students when they were speaking is project-oriented; taking action (28.6%) and project-oriented; passive (10.5%). Project-oriented; taking action meant they were active following the lessons by asking questions, writing, speaking, etc. Project-oriented; passive meant they were following the lessons by listening to the teachers. Since the students did not interact much with others and said anything most of the time so 61% of the time was no nature of language. The students also did not show any emotional behavior in the class. As the English lessons took place in the classroom, no recreational activities occurred as well.

Conclusion & Suggestion

The data above show that the teachers spent most of the time to talk in the classroom to manage the classrooms and explain the materials. In doing so, they used English more often than their first language, Dutch. However, the teachers used the language for project-oriented; equal which meant they used these languages to deliver materials and checked the students' works. In terms of the interaction, the teachers did not have much interaction with their students.

The students, on the other hand, were not enthusiastic in following the lessons. They were more interested in themselves; to be busy with themselves and daydreaming. They did not interact much with their fellow classmates. They did not pay attention to the English lessons and did not speak English as well. It happened because they assumed that English was boring and not so important. Their motivation to learn English was low. It seemed that they were lack of the need of stimulation, which was the need to be stimulated by the environment, by other people, or by ideas, thoughts, and feelings. They were also lack of the need for knowledge; the need to quest for solutions to problems (Brown, 2007:169). These led to their spending time of speaking English was very low compared to speaking in their first language, Dutch.

Though the Dutch Ministry of Education changed the curriculum in Problem-Based Learning, the teachers were accustomed to teaching using old-fashioned method, teacher-centered. It was not easy for them to change their way of teaching to the new one. The teachers should try their best to apply the Problem-Based Learning to encourage students' active participations and use English as much as possible during the English lessons. By doing so, it is hoped that the teaching-learning activities can be more interesting and challenging for them and arouse their interest in mastering English.

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