

1. Introduction

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The Research Group *Language and Education* (L&E) is one of the six research groups in UiL-OTS. The group is composed of two Full Professors, one Associate Professor, three Assistant Professors, and 12 PhD students (11 of whom have an appointment in a teaching institute for primary, secondary or higher education with a part-time research grant). The group has several additional teaching staff affiliates (non-research) who collaborate in the group’s societal activities.

The L&E group closely collaborates with researchers and other language education experts from the UU Graduate School of Teaching, the Education for Learning Societies (ELS) focus area, the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, and several local, regional, national and international organizations for language education and language testing.

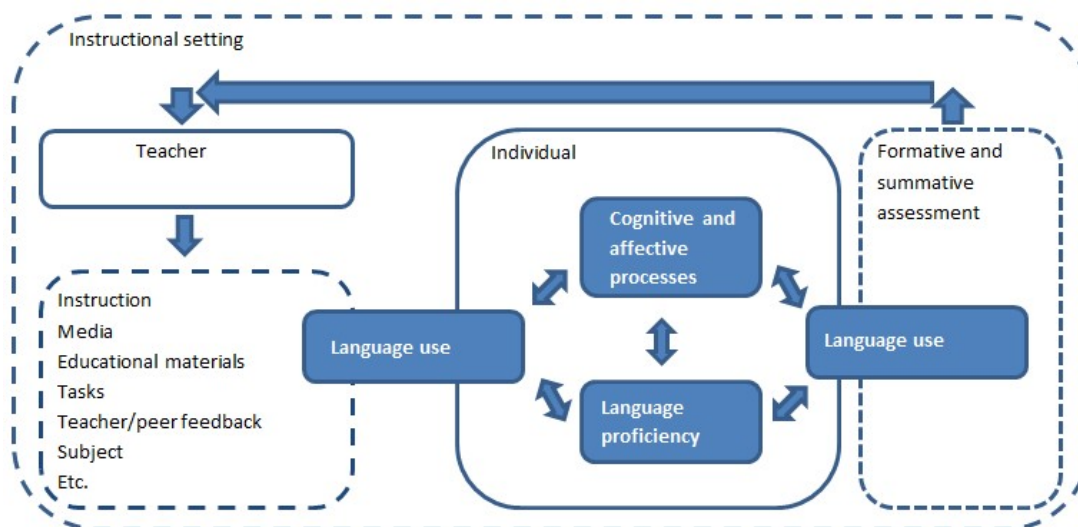
Research is funded through direct government funding (‘eerstegeldstroom’ – staff only) the Nationaal Regieorgaan Onderwijsonderzoek (NRO/NWO), Duurzame Geesteswetenschappen (programs Vakdidactiek GW and Dudoc Alfa), NWO Promotiebeurs voor Leraren, research grants from universities of applied sciences, the Dutch Ministry of Education, and the European Erasmus+ funding program (staff and PhD students).

1.2 Profile

The *Language and Education* research group investigates first and second language (L1 and L2) teaching and learning and communication processes in educational contexts, where language learning can be fostered pedagogically by effective curricula, tasks, instruction and feedback. Our research focuses on the interface between pedagogy, learning processes and learning outcomes in terms of language proficiency, attitude and intercultural competence.

Our goal is to understand which factors make L1 and L2 teaching and learning effective, and to provide an evidence base for the development of effective curricula, pedagogies and educational materials.

As the Figure below depicts, many factors are relevant to understanding what makes language teaching effective. Members of the L&E group focus on different factors, or combinations thereof, building on theories tailored to these factors. We apply these theories to L1 and L2 teaching and learning in various instructed settings, with a focus on primary and secondary education, thereby generating new insights that form the evidence base for understanding and improving language education.



For example, concerning media, we investigate the specific affordances of computer-mediated and/or multimodal tools in promoting language learning and intercultural competence. In the area of assessment, we study how language proficiency can be measured in a valid and reliable way.

Language plays a two-fold role in our research. First, we investigate the factors in instructed settings that enhance language proficiency, i.e. with language as a dependent (target) variable. Second, we investigate the role of language as a mediating variable, looking at questions such as:

- How does the quantity and quality of target language use affect students' language proficiency?
- How can language use and proficiency be promoted in non-language classes, as in content- and language-integrated learning?

In order to reach our research goal, we engage in three types of research, often employing a mixed-method approach:

- (1) In **descriptive research**, we observe and describe current language teaching practices and learning processes from a combined linguistic and pedagogical perspective, in primary, secondary and tertiary education.
- (2) In **design-based research** (usually iterative and small-scale), we develop and test curricula, tasks, materials and tests, on the basis of insights from previous psycholinguistic and educational research, and taking into account learner characteristics as well as implications for teacher education.
- (3) In **validation and effect studies** (usually quasi-experimental interventions), we examine how and why linguistic and pedagogical interventions affect learning processes and outcomes (i.e. language proficiency, attitudes and intercultural competence). With a main focus on communicative effectiveness and functional adequacy, our research aims at providing evidence for teaching and learning at micro level (interaction processes, task completion) and macro level (curriculum development).

Team members are based in the Department of Language, Literature and Communication, both in Foreign Languages and in Dutch. Several researchers are also involved in the Graduate School of Teaching (GST), while others combine their research position with a teaching position in primary or secondary education or a teacher education institute.

Our research is relevant for societal partners from the educational field and is frequently initiated in collaboration with those partners, including educational publishers, language teacher educators, *Vereniging Leraren Levende Talen*, *Stichting Lezen*, *Cito* and *College voor Toetsen en Examens*. This enhances the ecological validity of our research, and increases the usability of our research outcomes.

1.3 Ambition

Our main ambition is a better understanding of language development and language use processes and outcomes in educational contexts. The L&E research group aims to (1) conduct theory-guided research on the nature and impact of language learning in educational contexts, yielding publications in international, high-impact peer-reviewed journals, and (2) conduct societally relevant research, studying language teaching and learning processes in actual classrooms, yielding professional development of teachers and evidence-based materials and principles for the design of effective language curricula and pedagogies, thereby enabling children, adolescents and adults to become proficient first and second or foreign language users.

In order to reach these ambitions, the L&E group has been active since 2014, deploying the following strategies:

- Improving its strong connections with the educational field by initiating and carrying out research supported by and in collaboration with GST, ELS, NWO/NRO, Vakdidactiek GW/Dudoc Alfa, Universities for Applied Sciences, Ministry of Education etc. This includes applied research projects, as well as a substantial number of PhD projects carried out in collaboration with language teaching practitioners.
- Collaborating with other UiL OTS groups. We build on their theoretical insights and apply and extend these to the educational domain. With researchers from *Language and Communication*, we investigate features of and ways to promote effective communication, in the context of education. In concordance with *Language and Speech: Processing and Disorders*, we are

interested in the cognitive processes underlying instructed language use. With researchers from *Linguistic Theory and Language Acquisition*, we focus on the acquisition process of specific language features, in the context of education.

- International collaboration with scientific and societal partners, as in Erasmus+ projects and Research Networks, in order to increase our understanding of the role of different local settings on language teaching and learning processes, and strengthen the Dutch language educational context
- Frequent collaboration with educational partners. Such collaborations contribute to the ecological validity of our research and the usability and actual usage of our research outcomes.
- Supervising a considerable number of MA theses in the educational field, which provides opportunities for connecting language education theory, classroom practice and professional development of teachers.

2. Scientific and societal results in the past period

The L&E research group has been productive in research activities with both scientific and societal impact. The group members have been awarded a substantial number of PhD research grants (MaGW Onderzoekstalent, Duurzame Geesteswetenschappen), and have been involved as supervisors of externally funded PhD projects (Dudoc-Alfa, NWO promotiebeurs voor leraren), thereby offering language teaching practitioners the opportunity to engage in research in language education. Below we present a non-exhaustive list of research project outcomes that exemplify our impact.

De Graaff was appointed professor of Bilingual Education in 2012, and professor of Foreign Language Pedagogy in 2015. He has been coordinator of the AILA Research Network on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) since 2012 (www.clil-ren.org) organizing annual regional symposia (2012-2016) and a tri-annual international symposium at the AILA World Conference (2014 in Brisbane, Australia, and 2017 in Rio, Brasil). De Graaff was appointed a part time professor of language pedagogy and the Inholland University of Applied Sciences from 2012-2016, and at the Utrecht University of Applied sciences since 2016, aiming at valorising language pedagogical research for teacher education programs. De Graaff has held several keynote addresses at international CLIL and Bilingual Education conferences, as well as at national foreign language pedagogy conferences, both for researchers and practitioners.

De Graaff has been supervising PhD projects on, e.g., teacher educator professional development (Swart, 2013-2017), bilingual education (Mearns, 2012-2015; Denman, since 2012), the role of explicit instruction in L2 teaching and learning (Piggott, since 2014), the role of literature in L2 teaching and learning (Lehrner, since 2014), the role of reading strategies in L2 teaching and learning (Yapp, since 2015), the role of debating in L2 teaching and learning (el Majidi, since 2015). All PhD projects were carried out by teachers in secondary education or teacher education institutes, providing opportunities for practitioners to increase the evidence base for language teaching practice.

De Graaff has published on bilingual education, CLIL and foreign language pedagogy, in peer reviewed journals, edited volumes and journals for teaching practice. He served on the editorial board of the Dutch Journal for language teaching (*Levende Talen Tijdschrift*) 2011-2017. He has also served on several national quality assurance committees for language teacher education institutes, and is an advisor to the national *Meesterschapsteam MVT* and *Curriculum.nu* organizations for the development of language teaching curricula.

Jauregi has been rewarded several Erasmus+ grants for research in Telecollaboration: internet-based intercultural exchange between groups of learners of different cultural backgrounds set up in an institutional blended-learning context with the aim of developing both content & language skills and intercultural communicative competence. Within the framework of a series of European projects (NIFLAR, TILA and TeCoLa) Jauregui has supervised and coordinated a team from several European universities, teacher education institutes and secondary schools. The projects focus on: the affordances of specific online environments for creating effective telecollaboration tasks; the characteristics of these tasks for stimulating intercultural communicative exchanges; the impact of telecollaboration tasks on student motivation, attitude and intercultural competence and language proficiency.

Research output has been shared in conferences (Symposium organised at EuroCALL 2016: *Virtual Worlds & Serious Games in Foreign Language Education*, key-note provided at the AELFE conference in Alcalá de Henares, Spain (2016): *Teaching languages for specific purposes in a dynamic digital era: The power of the virtual*) and in several peer-reviewed journals such as *ReCALL* (Cambridge) or *CALL Journal* (Taylor & Francis), co-authoring Canto, Van den Bergh, De Graaff and others. Jauregi, Canto and De Graaff also published chapter in the edited volume *Technology-mediated TBLT: Researching technology and tasks* (González-LLobet & Ortega, 2014), in the prestigious Benjamins TBLT-series (Task-Based Language Teaching). Outcomes of the Erasmus+ NIFLAR, TILA and TeCoLa projects have been implemented and used in primary and secondary education in the Netherlands and several European countries.

Michel joined the L&E research group in 2017. Her research focuses on *second language (L2) writing* and the relationship of text quality and underlying cognitive processes. She hosted a symposium on *Methodological Advances in L2 Writing Research* at the conference of the *European Second Language Association (EuroSLA)* and acts as guest editor of a special issue of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* on the same topic. Together with Andrea Révész (PI, University College London) she received \$100k funding by Educational Testing Service (ETS) to investigate cognitive processes underlying L2 writing by adult testees of the TOEFL English test. To present this work she was invited to the seminar series *New Flavours in SLA* at Ghent University and to a colloquium on Eye-tracking SLA at the Annual Conference of the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) and a colloquium on L2 Writing at Murcia.

From a more pedagogic perspective, Michel is interested in task design in language education. In this line of research she co-convened a colloquium on *Linguistic Complexity and Instruction*, where L&E member Rick de Graaff acted as discussant, at the 2017 *Word Conference of Applied Linguistics (AILA)* and presented the study on task effects in a large learner corpus (Alexopoulou, Michel, Murakami, & Meurers, 2017). The article, Révész, Michel and Gilabert (2016) was nominated for the best-article award (*Biennial Conference on Task-based Language Teaching*, 2017) as it provides a guideline for researchers and teachers on how to objectively measure task complexity (it has 26 citations in google scholar already). Michel's work adds to professionalization of language teaching professionals. For example, she performed a needs analysis (with Gilabert and Levkina, both Barcelona University) that served as a basis to create pedagogic sample tasks for the online language learning platform of the French company Yes'N'You, that teaches English to corporate clients (e.g., AirFrance). Similarly, Michel is scientific member of the *ENGaGE project*, funded by Erasmus+, where the aim is to create material to support teachers and learners of English and German with dyslexia.

Le Pichon-Vorstman has been seconded for three years, since September 2017, to the University of Toronto, OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education). Since 2009, she has led several projects on the inclusion of minority pupils in education. She has participated in policy analyses, notably for the European Commission ([NESET II](#), Sirius, Erasmus +) and the [Migration Policy Institute](#) (Washington DC, May 2015). Her keen interest in migration policy has led her to conduct research studies on issues related to multilingual education, particularly on the education of newly arrived migrant pupils in Europe ([TRAM project](#), Taalschool project, [EDINA](#)) and indigenous pupils in Suriname ([Meertaligheid in Suriname](#) in collaboration with the [Rutu Foundation](#)). Le Pichon-Vorstman has collaborated and published extensively with Baauw, from UIL OTS research group XX. In 2015, their research report (Le Pichon-Vorstman & Baauw, 2015) was at the center of a debate on migrant issues and education in the [Dutch parliament](#). Le Pichon-Vorstman has served on boards of the [Dutch Association of Applied Linguistics](#) (2012-2017), of the [Ethical committee of the Utrecht Institute of Linguistics](#) (2016-2017) and of the Education Commission for undergraduate (2015-2016) and graduate students (2016-2017) of the Department of Languages, Literature and Communication in Utrecht. Outcomes of the European EDINA program have been implemented and used in primary and secondary education in the Netherlands and several European countries.

Van den Bergh has published extensively on methodology, on teaching and learning processes, and assessment in reading and writing, both in L1 and L2. He has supervised various PhD projects on reading and writing pedagogy and assessment, such as those of Bouwer and Koster (2016) on teaching students to write adequate texts, or of Kamoen (2014) on the methodology and measurement in surveys. His publications include frequently cited papers and handbooks on research methodology (e.g. Quené & Van den Bergh, 2004 and 2008), on language teaching (e.g. Fidalgo, Torrance, Rijlaarsdam, Van den Bergh & Alvarez, 2015), language learning (e.g. Koster, Bouwer &

Van den Bergh, 2017), language assessment (e.g. Tillema, Van den Bergh & Rijlaarsdam, 2013) and writing processes (e.g. Breetvelt, Van den Bergh & Rijlaarsdam, 1994).

Van den Bergh is chair of the national committee for the mandatory central exams Dutch in secondary education. Van den Bergh's research has been nominated for several awards. Some publications indeed received a prestigious award (e.g. the prize for the best article by EARLI in 2016), or were awarded for the valorization of scientific knowledge to educational practice (NRO-VOR prize 2016).

Focusing on assessment, **Evers-Vermeul** conducted two contract research projects for the Dutch Board of Examinations, investigating the complexity of the language used in national examination questions aimed at the lowest level of secondary education (Dutch *vmbo-bb*). This resulted in several publications in journals for a professional audience (*De Cascade, Examens – tijdschrift voor de toetspraktijk*), and in workshops for employees of Cito (National Educational Testing Service) on writing comprehensible valid and reliable examination questions. Her expertise was acknowledged by two invitations to become chair of a *Syllabuscommissie Nederlands mbo* (once for the 2F-level, and once for 3F), implemented by the Dutch Board of Examinations. This committee is responsible for formulating the boundaries within which national examination of the Dutch language should take place at the intermediate vocational training level (Dutch *mbo*). In addition, Stichting Makkelijk Lezen (Easy Reading Foundation) invited Evers-Vermeul to conduct and partially funded a joint NWO Alfa Meerwaarde research project in which writing guidelines promoted by Stichting Makkelijk Lezen were validated on the basis of a literature review and quasi-experimental studies with students from the Master Communication and Organization. This project resulted in an extendable website with evidence-based advice for comprehensible writing (www.schrijfadviezen.net).

Focusing on the teaching of L1 reading, and funded by a grant from *NRO kortlopend onderzoek*, Evers-Vermeul conducted research in collaboration with CED Groep and four schools for secondary education (*vmbo-bb/bk*). Within this project she investigated the role of explicit teaching on text structure, and of teacher modeling. The scientific papers are still in preparation, but the results have been presented at a symposium she organized (in collaboration with José van der Hoeven, CED Groep) at the Onderwijs Research Dagen 2017, aimed at research as well as practice-oriented audiences, as well as at the EARLI 2017 Conference. Furthermore, the lesson series developed during this project have been made available through the website of the Kenniscentrum Begrijpend Lezen. During this project, Evers-Vermeul developed a teacher training workshop on teacher modeling, which she then incorporated in one of her courses in the Graduate School of Teaching, and delivered at workshops during conferences for teachers (*Beroepsvereniging voor NT2-docenten, Conferentie Begrijpend Lezen* - organized by Kenniscentrum Begrijpend Lezen). The insights obtained are investigated further in a PhD project funded by NWO (MaGW-Onderzoekstalent) and awarded to **Bogaerds-Hazenberg**, with a focus on reading in primary education.

4. Conclusions of the self-evaluation

Over the past term, the L&E research group has been most successful in the application and performance of language-educational research projects with societal impact. Moreover, carrying out society-focused research projects also leads to an increasing scientific understanding of language teaching and learning processes.

We specifically mention our successful growth in PhD research projects, particularly through grant applications for teaching practitioners. As a result, we have been able to intensify our research collaboration with primary and secondary education as well as with teacher education institutes. PhD research accounts for a substantial part of the group's research output, not only scientifically, but also societally. Moreover, with chairs in first and second language pedagogy, language testing and bilingual education, we have been prominent in several language pedagogy development initiatives, such as the *Meesterschapsteams MVT*.

Due to the small number of tenured staff members and the high number of part-time PhD students with personal research grants, the L&E research is quite multi-faceted, both in organization and in focus. This will be further elaborated and commented in the SWOT analysis.

5. Past evaluation, future plans and SWOT analysis

The context of language teaching and testing in the Netherlands is expected to develop and change rapidly, as a consequence of the current *curriculum.nu* discussion on future goals and trends for primary and secondary education. We expect that language education research will both contribute to and benefit from these developments. Moreover, several Faculties of Humanities in the Netherlands have recently established research groups in language pedagogy, in collaboration with teacher education institutes. Research on pedagogical content knowledge and subject specific pedagogy in other fields (Sciences and Social Sciences) has developed as well. The *Nationaal Regieorgaan Onderwijsonderzoek* is preparing to increase funding opportunities for research on subject specific pedagogy, including language teaching and learning. We expect, therefore, that opportunities for scientific and societal research funding and for collaboration with other research groups and societal partners will further increase.

SWOT-analysis Language & Education

Strengths

- The high societal recognition, relevance and validity of the L&E research outcomes
- Direct connection with the Graduate School of Teaching, Universities of Applied Sciences, associations and for language teachers and national centers of expertise for curriculum development, thereby guaranteeing direct implementation of relevant research findings in educational programs
- High-stakes methodological and statistical expertise available and recognized, relevant for the L&E group as well as for other UIL-OTS research groups
- Ample opportunities for part-time PhD research grant applications, for language teachers from primary and secondary education as well as for language teacher educators
- Broad spectrum of expertise available in the group, in terms of both content and methodology

Weaknesses

- The relatively small faculty (1.5 full professor + 0.8 associate professor + 1.6 assistant professor) that is responsible for the supervision of a relatively large number of (part-time) PhD students, for education in the Graduate School of Teaching and in several other bachelor's and master's programs.
- Difficulty to meet and develop as a team: As most PhD students combine a part-time research grant with a teaching position in a primary or secondary school or a teacher education institute, it is difficult to organize meetings and professional development activities in which the whole team can participate.
- L&E is not structurally embedded in the department's bachelor programs, for instance through a responsibility for the language teaching curriculum. Staff members are based in the Department of Language, Literature and Communication, both in Foreign Languages and in Dutch, and several staff members are also involved in the Graduate School of Teaching. As a consequence, the group is fragmented, overcharged and vulnerable.

Opportunities

- Several relevant and actual societal issues with respect to language teaching and learning: national primary and secondary education curriculum development, implications for language teaching materials and programs, for testing and examination, and for language teacher education.
- Development of bilingual and English-spoken primary, secondary and higher education (and research on its impact).
- Influx of refugees in primary, secondary and higher education: challenges for language teaching, subject teaching and intercultural competence development
- A growing focus on societal research impact being as relevant as scientific impact

Threats

- As the L&E group is not involved in the Research Master Linguistics program, there is no breeding ground of empirically and methodologically well-trained PhD candidates.
- Design-based and intervention studies in educational practice are laborious in nature. Longitudinal research is essential in education, but funding opportunities are limited.

Members of the L&E research group (December 31, 2017)

Huub van den Bergh (full professor)
Rias van den Doel (assistant professor)
Jacqueline Evers-Vermeul (assistant professor)
Rick de Graaff (full professor)
Kristi Jauregi (associate professor)
Marije Michel (assistant professor)

Suzanne Bogaerds-Hazenberg (PhD student)
Jenny Denman (PhD student; Hogeschool Rotterdam grant)
Klaske Elving (PhD student; Dudoc Alfa grant)
Frederike Groothoff (PhD student; NWO Lerarenbeurs grant)
Linda Herrlitz (PhD student; Dudoc Alfa grant)
Elisabeth Lehrner-te Lindert (PhD student; Dudoc Alfa grant)
Abid el Majidi (PhD student; NWO Lerarenbeurs grant)
Leslie Piggott (PhD student; Dudoc Alfa grant)
Patrick Rooijackers (PhD student; Dudoc Alfa grant)
Esther Schat (PhD student; Dudoc Alfa grant)
Fenna Swart (PhD student; Hogeschool Inholland grant)
Deborah Yapp (PhD student; NWO Lerarenbeurs grant)

Former members of the L&E research group (2012-2017)

Nivja de Jong (assistant professor)
Emmanuelle Le Pichon-Vorstman (assistant professor)
Renske Bouwer (PhD student)
Monica Koster (PhD student)