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Conclusions

Item Type	Book chapter
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Citation	Faraclas, N., Kester, EP., Mijts, E. (2019). Conclusions. In: Community Based Research in Language Policy and Planning. Language Policy, vol 20. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23223-8_6
DOI	10.1007/978-3-030-23223-8_6
Publisher	Springer International Publishing
Download date	2026-03-12 01:48:58
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14473/716

Chapter 5

The Recommendations: Reactions and Implementation



5.1 Consensus

After the field work components of the research project had been completed in April 2013, the research team set out to compose the final report for the Island Council in Statia and the Ministry in the Netherlands. The combination of all insights gained from the focus group sessions led to a number of ground breaking observations that made the formulation of recommendations an easy exercise. What emerged from these research activities suggested that there were a considerable number of points of general consensus on the current situation in Statia, on community defined goals for the formal education system, and even on possible approaches to achieve these goals. Four main points of consensus were identified in collaboration with the community:

1. All agreed that the system in place was not working and that the results were far below their expectations.
2. All agreed that the goal of education on the island should be full academic competence in English alongside full academic competence in Dutch.
3. All agreed that, for the great majority of the students of Statia, Dutch is a foreign language.
4. All had observed that the students' attitudes toward Dutch in particular, and learning in general, tended to deteriorate as the students progressed from primary school where Dutch was being used alongside English, to secondary school where all lessons were supposed to be taught only in Dutch.

These points of consensus were resoundingly confirmed by the results of the language attitudes and use survey, the narrative proficiency tests, and the classroom observations, enhancing the validity of the study results and ensuring that as many members of the community as possible could eventually take ownership over the process of addressing the question of language of instruction in the schools.

In terms of language policy in Statia, the general results from all of the modules of the research project including the attitudes and use survey, the narrative proficiency test, the classroom observations, the focus group sessions and the literature research provided us with the solid and cross-verified empirical evidence necessary to draw the following conclusions:

1. All participants shared a common goal: maximal proficiency in both English and Dutch for all Statian students. There was a common misperception, however, that teaching a foreign language such as Dutch in Statia as a first or second language, or using Dutch as a medium of instruction or for initial literacy would automatically yield better results than teaching Dutch as a foreign language.
2. Because English is a first or second language of the majority of students and is a language widely used in daily life in Statia, maximal academic proficiency in English has been shown to be best achieved when it has been used as the language of instruction in the schools of Statia, and not simply taught as a language subject.
3. Because Dutch is a foreign language for the majority of students and is a language rarely used in daily life in Statia outside of school, maximal informal and academic proficiency in Dutch have been best achieved when Dutch has been taught as a foreign language in the schools of Statia and when Dutch has not been used as the language of instruction (see the results from the primary schools in the sections below).
4. Transitions in Primary Education from one language of instruction (English) to another (Dutch) have proven to be difficult and counterproductive in the schools of Statia.
5. The use of Dutch rather than English as language of instruction in Statian schools has had a negative impact on students' academic performance in all subjects (including Dutch) and has effectively excluded the majority of them from access to quality education, as observed by teachers, parents, schoolboards and other stakeholders interviewed in this study.
6. The use of Dutch as language of instruction and of Euro-centric approaches, methods and materials has alienated Statian students from their own language, culture, and community, with increasingly corrosive effects on their self-esteem at the individual level as well as on the Statian society as a whole, with Statian students adopting an increasingly hostile attitude toward Dutch language and all things Dutch, as pointed out time and time again during our interviews with students, parents, teachers in both primary and secondary education and other stakeholders.
7. Although the *Schakelklas* may have had some positive effects in terms of the student's attitudes towards Dutch, teachers observed that many students would be doing better if they were being taught in English.
8. Basic pedagogical principles, such as: (1) using what students already know to introduce what they do not yet know; (2) establishing a solid foundation in Academic Competence in English based on their informal competence in that language; (3) building on this first language Academic Competence in English as

well as on a carefully cultivated Informal Competence in Dutch to eventually establish an Academic Competence in Dutch; and (4) the introduction of key concepts in mathematics, the social and natural sciences and other subjects in a language known to the students before introducing these concepts to them in a language that they do not know, have often been violated in the schools of Statia, with predictably frustrating results for the meaningful participation of students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in the educational process.

5.2 The Two Options

The research process led to the formulation of two possible options for the solution of the identified problems that were presented to the government in 2013. The first option aimed at the total abolition of Dutch as a language of instruction in the Statian educational system, the second aimed at the abolition of Dutch as a mandatory language of instruction while keeping open a possible Dutch language of instruction track alongside the English language of instruction track in the last 2 years of secondary education. Both options focused on accommodating the widely expressed desire for full academic competence in both Dutch and English at the end of secondary education. The two options were accompanied by a set of prerequisites that had been formulated on the basis of the outcomes of the different research components, and these will be presented after the two options:

Option 1

- Standard/school English as the only language of instruction and as the language of initial literacy in the pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools, with attention paid to the transition from Statian English to Standard/school English during the first years. Dutch should be taught consistently and systematically as a foreign language at all of these levels.
- Foreign language instruction in Dutch should follow a strategy of *spelend onderwijs*¹ at the pre-primary level and during the first years of primary school, to ensure that all students gain a sufficient Informal Competence in Dutch to allow them to begin to acquire an Academic Competence in Dutch.
- Literacy in English should begin to be taught in the first years of primary school, while literacy in Dutch should not be introduced until a solid foundation has been established in reading and writing English (probably in *groep 5*² of primary school).
- Thereafter, academic competence in Dutch can be further consolidated on the basis of students' academic competence in English. This means that, in general, academic concepts should be taught in English first before they are introduced in Dutch.

¹ 'Playful education': gaining informal competence Dutch as a foreign language, in a playful way.

² Primary grade three

Option 2

- Standard/school English as the only language of instruction and as the language of initial literacy in the pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools, with attention paid to the transition from Stavian English to Standard/school English during the first years. Dutch should be taught consistently and systematically as a foreign language at all of these levels.
- Foreign language instruction in Dutch should follow a strategy of *spelend onderwijst* at the pre-primary level and during the first years of primary school, to ensure that all students gain a sufficient Informal Competence in Dutch to allow them to begin to acquire an Academic Competence in Dutch.
- Literacy in English should begin to be taught in the first years of primary school, while literacy in Dutch should not be introduced until a solid foundation has been established in reading and writing English (probably in *groep 5* of primary school).
- Thereafter, academic competence in Dutch can be further consolidated on the basis of students' academic competence in English. This means that, in general, academic concepts should be taught in English first before they are introduced in Dutch.
- At the end of the second year of secondary school students can opt:
 - (1) to continue on an academic, professional, or practical track with English as the language of instruction and Dutch as a foreign language; or
 - (2) to shift to a HAVO or VMBO track with Dutch as the language of instruction if they plan on further studies in the European Netherlands or the ABC islands (in which case, they will receive some additional hours of instruction in Papiamentu/o as a foreign language).

5.3 Recommendations for Implementation

Keeping in mind that former attempts for educational reform in Statia had failed time and again, the research team decided to formulate 21 conditions for the successful implementation of the transition from Dutch as language of instruction to English as language of instruction as a support to the teams that would be tasked with implementing these changes:

The successful implementation of either of these options would depend on the following:

1. Teachers should have systematic and dependable support in terms of training, coaching, supervision, and networking with other teachers.
2. Teacher placement should be very carefully done, to ensure that no monolingual Dutch teachers are placed anywhere except in Dutch foreign language classes, or (if Option 2 were to be selected) in the HAVO and/or VMBO classes of the final 2 years of secondary school.

3. More attempts should be made to recruit teachers from Statia and the rest of the Caribbean region.
4. Teachers recruited from the European Netherlands and elsewhere outside of Statia should be able use English as a language of instruction. They should first undergo a comprehensive orientation program before they arrive in Statia, and then be assigned a 'buddy' to help them to successfully adapt once they arrive on the island. Teachers should be encouraged to integrate into Statian society, rather than separating themselves from it. Teachers who integrate well should be offered contracts of longer duration than the standard 3 year contract.
5. Relatively uniform but generally flexible learning lines which reflect best practices should be established with maximal input from the teachers themselves.
6. Culturally appropriate English first language materials should be acquired and/or developed for the teaching of all subjects at all levels (but especially at the pre-primary and lower primary levels), except for Dutch as a foreign language and the subjects of the HAVO and VMBO tracks in the last 2 years of secondary education (if Option 2 were to be selected).
7. Linkages between the pre-primary and primary schools should be strengthened, with the goal of ensuring that *spelend onderwijs* begins in Dutch as early as possible. Caribbean-adapted Dutch foreign language materials and culturally sensitive Dutch foreign language teachers should play a crucial role at the pre-primary level in laying the foundation for informal and academic competency in Dutch at the higher levels.
8. A system should be put into place to identify, acknowledge, reward, publicize, and disseminate best practice by teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders.
9. Secondary school students should have easy access to counselors and regularly scheduled individual and group appointments with them, to make sure that they are fully aware of their options in terms of tracking within secondary education and further study after graduation.
10. More opportunities should be made available for further study in the Caribbean region (e.g. by creating agreements and exchange programs with Caribbean tertiary institutions), where students can stay and feel closer to home. Counseling should play a key role here during the first years of secondary education. More opportunities should be made available to graduates to return and make a living in Statia.
11. Students intending to pursue further studies should be made aware of options for study as geographically and culturally close to Statia as possible. Any student with plans to study off island should undergo a thorough orientation process. Whenever possible intake and other tertiary entrance examinations should be taken and passed by students while they are still on Statia.
12. Stronger linkages should be forged with support agencies such as EduPartners, the Mega D Foundation, the Education Care Expertise Center, and the Youth and Family Office to provide counseling, study skills, and other services to complement those provided in the schools.

13. Parents should be reintegrated into their children's learning process and more time should be made available for parent-teacher meetings. Report cards should be made more user friendly to give a clearer overall picture of students' performance, parents should be allowed to sit in on classes and participate whenever possible. Dutch classes should be organized for adults/parents.
14. More attractive opportunities should be made available to students to use Dutch outside of school and to cultivate an appreciation for the language. Perhaps the program of summer camps in the European Netherlands could be revived. The secondary school should make further attempts to reconnect with the surrounding community.
15. Special attention should be paid to the particular needs of the high percentage of students who were not born in Statia and/or are not Dutch citizens. These needs may be twofold: scholarships for secondary education students (between the ages of 16–18) who are not Dutch citizens and special attention for students from Spanish speaking and other backgrounds who may not wish to pursue their studies in the European Netherlands.
16. All standardized national testing should be in English, except for: (1) tests for competence in Dutch as a foreign language (here '*Profiel Taalvaardigheid Hoger Onderwijs*' of '*Certificaat Nederlands als Vreemde Taal*' can be utilized as a guide); (2) tests in the HAVO and VMBO tracks (if Option 2 were to be selected); (3) any students who may opt to be tested in Dutch. Some experimentation could be done whereby the Dutch exams could be translated *both* linguistically (into English) *and* culturally to suit the Statian context.
17. The appropriate legal framework should be identified for the use of English as language of instruction.
18. Where there are questions and stumbling blocks in the implementation of a system with English as the language of instruction and Dutch as a foreign language, reference should be made to the school system on Saba which generally follows the British (CXC) system and to the Statia Terminal School which generally follows the US (College Board) system, to determine the optimal solution for the schools on Statia.
19. Statian English: At all levels, teachers should normally use Standard English rather than Statian English in their classes, and expect students to do the same. Whenever Statian English is used by students in class, teachers should immediately take advantage of the moment to demonstrate to students how the same thing is said in Standard English, gently and non-judgmentally reminding the students of the contexts where Standard English is the preferred form, such as at school.
20. Dutch should be taught as a Foreign Language, as the vast majority of the students are non-speakers of Dutch with very limited access to Dutch outside the school system. Crucially, Dutch should not be taught as first or second language. Foreign language education to foreign language speakers has been demonstrated to be more effective than first or even second language instruction to foreign language speakers (i.e. non-speakers) of Dutch or any other language. Models of Bilingual Education (Dutch-English) in Holland cannot be adapted

to Statia, because of the different status of the two languages in the two parts of the Kingdom. English is increasingly becoming a second language in the European Netherlands. Students in Holland have massive access to English through the media, fostering high comprehension levels on a daily basis from early on, which facilitates the use of English as a language of instruction in the European Netherlands within a model of bilingual education. The same is not true for Dutch in Statia, where English is the dominant language and Dutch does not play a significant role in most peoples' daily lives, apart from school and governance.

21. Number of hours per week for Dutch as a foreign language: An example of how Dutch could be integrated into the curriculum as a foreign language could include the following: at least 3 h of *spelend onderwijs* in Dutch per week in all years of pre-primary education, at least 4 h per week of Dutch as a foreign language in all of the primary school years, and at least 4 h per week of Dutch as a foreign language during the first 2 years of secondary school. During the final 2 years of secondary school, the number of hours of Dutch as a foreign language would vary based on the orientation of the track.

5.4 Presenting the Options and Recommendations to the Governments of the Netherlands and Statia and to the Population of Statia

The report was presented in written form in September 2013 to the governments that had requested it. The full text of the report as it was finally approved and presented to the Chamber of Representatives of the Netherlands and to the Island Council of Statia can be found online under the title 'Language of Instruction in Sint Eustatius: Report of the 2013 research group on language of instruction in Sint Eustatius.' (Faraclas et al. 2013).

The research team insisted on the presentation of the recommendations to the community of Statia. All authorities agreed on this proposal and the team was given the opportunity present and discuss the research findings during two very well attended town hall meetings in the E. Mike van Putten Youth Center (also referred to as the 'Lion's Den') in Statia on January 27 and 28, 2014. During these community meetings, the strong sense of consensus among the people of the island was reconfirmed, and it became even clearer that a large majority of those present adopted and valued the observations and recommendations that had emerged from the research project. On January 28, the project findings and proposals were also presented in a series of radio-interviews with the project team members that were broadcast several times over the period of January to February 2014. The RCN office, on the basis of the report and in close consultation with the research team, drew up a press release that was distributed in the Caribbean media.

5.5 Feasibility Study

After the research team presented the results and suggested options concerning the language of instruction, the authorities decided to mandate an evaluation of the recommendations of the research project by means of a feasibility study. The focus of the feasibility study was: “to answer the question of what language of instruction and examination system would be most feasible on St. Eustatius. The study was premised on the students on St. Eustatius, their capabilities and their future prospects.” (Drenthe et al. 2014, p. 5). The results of the feasibility study supported the adoption of Option 1 of the two options recommended in our original report, which was to adopt English as the language of instruction in primary, secondary and vocational education in order to prepare Statian students for the CXC exams, while teaching Dutch as a strong foreign language.

With respect to the new language policy which would be required by the adoption of Option 1, those who were responsible for carrying out the feasibility study highlighted the importance of making proficiency courses available to the teachers in Statian schools, designed to assist them in developing their full academic competencies in Standard English. Another area that they identified as in need of urgent attention was the development of specific methods and materials to teach Dutch as a foreign language in the Caribbean context. They noted that although the implementation of the new model would require additional economic investment, this investment could be minimized by efficient collaboration among the five different schools on the island and the Buzzy Bee Day Care Centre. They added that the development of a method and textbooks to teach Dutch as a foreign language in the Caribbean context would not only be relevant for the education system in Statia, but also for schools on the other islands of the Dutch Caribbean, hopefully leading to further savings in the longer term.

The confirmation of the findings of the original research project by the feasibility study that followed was the last element required to convince governmental bodies to accept the recommendations regarding the language of instruction made in the original report.

5.6 Acceptance of the Proposed Changes in Option 1

In June of 2014, the educational authorities approved the implementation of Option 1, which recommended the use of English as the language of instruction and Dutch being taught as a strong foreign language. The preparation for the recommended transition from Dutch to English as the language of instruction in all schools at all levels started in 2014, with the actual implementation being initiated in school year 2015–2016. This process was envisioned as a gradual transition, meaning that the system would be changed step-by-step, phasing out the Dutch secondary school tracking and examination system and the use of Dutch as a language of instruction.

5.7 Implementation

A consequence of the implementation of English as the language of instruction in secondary education was that the transitional phase from English to Dutch in the last 2 years of primary education became redundant, and that the English to Dutch transitional *Schakelklas* at the Gwendoline van Putten secondary school became redundant as well. The annual School Guide of the Gwendoline van Putten school for 2017–2018 clearly indicated that the transition from Dutch to English as language of instruction was in full swing at the school. The guide stated that as of spring 2018, the school would be in the third year of the transition to English, so that the only students at the school who would still be studying under the former Dutch system would be those in their final 2 years of secondary education. In 2020 the last cohort of students who began their secondary education under the Dutch system should have graduated, after which time Dutch would only be offered as a foreign language, with some additional Dutch instruction being given to those students who plan to study in the European Netherlands. Students in the final Dutch cohort who are not successful in the 2020 exam year would have one last opportunity to repeat their exams, so that the Dutch system would have been completely replaced by school year 2021–2022.

The decision has also been taken to change the assessment system in the schools. Instead of the Dutch tests and examinations that were used in the past, the Caribbean regional assessment system of the Barbados and Jamaica based CXC (Caribbean Examinations Council) has been adopted. This assessment system “offers a wide range of subjects in academic, technical and vocational areas for candidates of varying ages, abilities and interests from the English-speaking Caribbean and the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname” (Caribbean Examinations Council 2018). Apart from the fact that it is regionally embedded and that it is fit for the context of the students in Statia, the added advantage of using the CXC assessment framework is that it is backed up by an extensive professional and material support network, which can facilitate the development of syllabuses and other teaching materials maximally adapted to the different regional settings of the Caribbean.

Students who initiated their secondary education from August 2015 onward have been prepared for the exams issued by the Caribbean Examinations Council that cater to both academically and vocationally oriented students. In this new system, students prepare for the Caribbean Certificate Secondary Level Competency (CCSLC) in 3 years. Subsequently, students can proceed to a higher form of secondary education, directed to the attainment of either a Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) or a Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ).

5.8 Evaluations of the Transition from Dutch to English

In its 2016 reports concerning all four primary schools in Statia (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2016c, d, e, f), the Dutch Inspectorate of Education pointed out substantial improvements in comparison to the results recorded in the previous reports of

2012. Although it was too early to evaluate the final results of the students due to the recent character of the implementation of the transition, the changes in the atmosphere at the schools were already very noticeable. It was observed that teachers were motivated and felt responsible to work as a team with the newly created materials in English. Levels of respect were high among students and teachers such that the schools had improved their capacity to function as safe, pleasant and cheerful learning environments. Class observations pointed out that classes were well structured and encouraged students' active participation. Parents had also noticed these and other improvements and felt more connected to the schools. Despite the fact that the Dutch inspectorate did not wish to evaluate the attainment of core competencies in the Statian schools on the basis of the fact that the Dutch tests were deemed not to be fit for this purpose, all other aspects of the schools were evaluated in a positive way, which was not the case in the 2012 reports (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2012a, b, c, d, e).

The 2016 reports of the inspectorate of education for the Gwendoline van Putten secondary school (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2016a, b) confirm that the process of transition from Dutch to English as the language of instruction was taking place in the school and that the general trend at the school was a positive one. This has helped to create a favorable climate for the full implementation of the transition. Despite the fact that the inspectorate report concluded that the school had not yet reached so-called 'baseline quality' (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2016a, p. 11) many areas of tangible progress were noted. The school had succeeded in transforming itself into a quiet and safe environment, a point which was positively affirmed by teachers, students and parents. Although the transition from Dutch to English as the language of instruction had demanded much effort and additional work on the part of the teachers and administrative staff at the school, they expressed optimistic attitudes toward the changes. They generally felt connected and committed to the school as a team, functioning with a high level of cooperation in a positive atmosphere. The results of the students at the school revealed systematic improvements, which appear to confirm these observations. The GvP School Guide for 2017–2018 indicates that the percentage of passing grades had increased substantially in 2016 and 2017, reaching from 81% to 100% per class.

The main point of concern for the schools which was underscored in the reports was the lack of appropriate materials to teach Dutch as a foreign language and to assess the students' proficiency in Dutch. It is not yet clear what the outcomes of the new system will be in terms of students' proficiency in Dutch, but this observed lack of materials could potentially represent a threat to the smooth transition to English as the language of instruction.

The 2018 reports of the inspectorate of education for the Gwendoline van Putten secondary school (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2018a, b) signal additional positive developments regarding educational quality at the school. The percentages of students passing their final exams increased substantially in 2016 and 2017, reaching 100% in certain tracks. In the areas of learning materials, student counseling, school environment, quality control and time management in the classroom the school has reached so-called 'baseline quality' (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2018a, p. 5–10)

and specific programs have been created in order to meet the needs of individual students. The reports note that the introduction of CCSLC encounters wide support among the staff and has led to more interaction in the classroom and to the systematic development of language skills in English. Although the full implementation of CCSLC among the school team members will require more time and effort, the reports express optimism and confidence regarding the final results of the transition process.

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