

## The implementation and evaluation of a program for Dutch language proficiency for teacher education in Curaçao

M. Bak-Piard and S. Kroon

**Summary** This contribution deals with the implementation and evaluation of a program for Dutch language proficiency that was developed in a long-term educational design study in Teacher Education at the University of Curaçao. It first gives an overview of the study and describes the multilingual context of the Dutch Caribbean in which it was conducted. It then briefly goes into the large study dropout rates and low Dutch language proficiency of student teachers that led to developing design principles and a new language proficiency program. The program's implementation was investigated in a mixed methods case study with classroom observations, interviews, and language tests, to describe and evaluate its use and effect. The case study included a formative part, investigating how the program and its implementation were perceived and evaluated by the teacher educators and student teachers and a summative part, investigating the effects of the program for the student teachers' Dutch language proficiency and study success. The results of the case study showed that the program and its underlying design principles were positively evaluated by the student teachers and teacher educators and that it contributed to higher Dutch language proficiency scores and lower dropout rates in teacher education.

**Keywords** teacher education, language diversity, Dutch language proficiency, educational design research

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## 1 Introduction

This contribution focuses on the implementation of a Dutch language proficiency program for Teacher Education at the University of Curaçao (UoC). It relates to the final phase of a larger empirical study conducted between 2006 and 2015 by the first author who is a teacher educator at UoC (cf. Bak-Piard, 2021). This long-term study took place in a bachelor's program for student teachers in Dutch as a subject in secondary education (*Tweedegraads Lerarenopleiding Nederlands*; TLN) and student teachers in primary education (*Lerarenopleiding Funderend Onderwijs*; LOFO) in the Dutch Caribbean islands of Curaçao and Bonaire. The main reason for conducting this study were the observed large dropout rates of the student teachers and their low levels of Dutch language proficiency. Preliminary studies that dealt with student teachers' dropout and Dutch language proficiency in relation to their language backgrounds provided the building blocks for developing tentative design principles and a preliminary version of a new Dutch language proficiency program for TLN and LOFO. The implementation of this program was then investigated in case studies at LOFO in 2010 and TLN in 2012 and 2013. It is the 2013 case study at TLN in Curaçao that is reported here. In view of the ongoing discussion regarding the question whether Dutch should be used as the main or even only language of instruction in the Dutch Caribbean islands or should be combined with Papiamentu – echoing as a matter of fact the inherited Dutch colonial language policies; see Mijts (2021) for an overview – the outcomes of this study are still relevant for offering student teachers the best possible language proficiency curriculum.

The main question to be answered in this study relates to the implementation of the Dutch language proficiency program. More specifically the research questions are: (1) How was the program implemented and how was its implementation perceived and evaluated by teacher educators and student teachers (formative evaluation)? (2) What were the program's effects for the student teachers' Dutch language proficiency and study success (summative evaluation)?

## 2 Multilingual context

The Dutch Caribbean is a multilingual society as is clearly reflected in its schools and classrooms. The students have mainly (combinations of) Papiamentu, Dutch, English, Sranan, and Spanish as their home languages and they include speakers of Dutch as a first, second and foreign language (see Bak-Piard & Kroon, 2018). Most students have multilingual language repertoires and habitually engage in *polylinguaging*, in which they “employ whatever linguistic features are at their disposal to achieve their communicative aims as best they can, regardless of how well they know the involved languages” (Jørgensen, Karrebæk, Madsen, & Møller, 2016: 151).

Before students enter teacher education, they have been educated in Dutch for at least ten years and obtained a secondary education diploma. Mainly due to historical reasons, however, their Dutch language proficiency is in most cases limited. Dutch was introduced in the Dutch Caribbean almost 400 years ago and in addition to its status as a second and foreign language, it also (still) holds the status of a colonial language, that is, ‘a language you should not want to learn wholeheartedly’ (as one of our research participants said).

The majority of the population of Curaçao, where we conducted our case study, has Papiamentu, a Portuguese-based Creole, as their first and home language. Between 1992 and 2011 the number of Papiamentu speakers declined from 85 to 78.4% (CBS, 1993; 2012). There are also smaller numbers of people who speak (a variety of) other languages such as Chinese, Surinamese, Spanish, Haitian, Arabic, and Portuguese (Faraclas, Kester, & Mijts, 2013). Since around 1900, however, Dutch was the main language of instruction in all schools. In 1986, Papiamentu was introduced as a school subject in the first six years, and in some schools, Papiamentu became the language of instruction, and Dutch was taught as a foreign language. It was only in 2001 that Papiamentu was introduced as an additional language of instruction in (most) primary schools and in 2007 Papiamentu, in addition to Dutch and English, was declared an official language of the then Dutch Antilles. In 2005 Curaçao introduced Papiamentu as a language of instruction in primary education whereas secondary education continued to be in Dutch (Mijts, 2008). As of 2008 school boards could decide themselves which official language they would prefer as a language of instruction which again led to an increase of Papiamentu. After a few years, however, many primary schools returned to Dutch as a language of instruction in addition to Papiamentu. The main reason for this is believed to be the students’ disappointing results at the end of primary education and their limited possibilities to be admitted to higher forms of secondary education (Severing & Weijer, 2008). Currently, Dutch is still the main language of instruction and examination in secondary and higher education in Curaçao (Dijkhoff, 2014). As will be shown below, the multilingual context of the Dutch Caribbean and the specific position of Dutch needs to play a role in the development of a Dutch language proficiency program that aims at successfully preparing students for being a teacher in this linguistically super-diverse environment.

### 3 Student dropout, Dutch language proficiency and design principles for a Dutch language program

As a first step in the long-term study, reasons for dropping out and student teachers’ levels of Dutch language proficiency were investigated in relation to their language backgrounds (Bak-Piard, van de Ven, Coppen, & Cijntje, 2016;

Bak-Piard & Kroon, 2018; Bak-Piard, 2021: 37-61 and 103-121). Based on the findings of these studies that were thoroughly discussed with the participating teacher educators and student teachers, design principles and a preliminary version of a new program for Dutch language proficiency were developed (Bak-Piard, 2021: 63-84 and 123-153).

### 3.1 Student dropout

Reasons for dropout in education include personal, institutional, and environmental factors (Declercq & Verboven, 2010) such as characteristics of prior education and the students' current program (Prins, 1997), lack of support from friends or fellow students and the extent to which a program fits the students' abilities (Lacante, De Metsenaere, Lens, et al., 2001).

Dropout rates of regular student teachers in the propaedeutic phase of TLN and LOFO, as reported in the UoC student administration at the start of the long-term study, were high. In 2005 all and in 2006, 71.43% of the TLN students dropped out and in the years that followed, this percentage would rise to above 80%. In 2006 56.09% of the LOFO students dropped out (UNA, 2012; Bak-Piard, 2021).

Interviews with student teachers and teacher educators showed that there were language-related and non-language-related reasons for dropout, some of which were linked to the local island context. Among the reported language-related factors were the student teachers' limited Dutch language proficiency, their (negative) attitude towards Dutch as a former colonial language and the multilingual context of the Dutch Caribbean. The non-language-related reasons for dropout were consistent with the findings of international research among students in higher education. They mainly concerned institutional factors such as dissatisfaction with and not being well informed about the program and lack of a good connection between the student teachers' previous education and the program. Individual and environmental factors, such as legal and financial problems, providing informal care to relatives, peer pressure and domestic violence also played a role.

### 3.2 Dutch language proficiency

The relationship between Dutch language proficiency (writing and listening skills) and dropout was examined in 2009-2010 among all first-year student teachers of TLN and LOFO in Curaçao ( $n=67$ ). For the listening exam, students had to listen to a text, answer comprehension questions and write a summary. For the writing exam, student teachers had to complete a comprehension test including parsing, vocabulary, orthography, and syntax. Both tests were taken from course books used at TLN and scoring was done by two independent teacher educators

following the B2 level format of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). B2 refers to a language user who is able to communicate easily and spontaneously in a clear and detailed manner and who is able to understand and be understood in most situations (Goullier, 2007).

For listening 71.4% of the student teachers scored below CEFR B2 and 65.7% of them dropped out. 28.6% scored B2 or higher and only 28.5% of them dropped out. A Spearman's correlation analysis showed that the relationship between high listening skills and study success was highly significant with  $r=0.382$ ,  $n=49$ , and  $p<.001$ . For writing 83.7% of the student teachers scored below B2 and 60.9% of them dropped out. Only 16.3% scored B2 or higher and only 25% of them dropped out. A Spearman's correlation analysis showed that the relationship between high writing skills and study success was highly significant with  $r=0.491$ ,  $n=49$ , and  $p<.001$ .

In addition to these standard tests, also an error analysis was carried out on the first 250 words of a writing assignment. The categorization of mistakes and types of mistakes was based on van de Gein (2004; 2012). In principle every deviation of the official norms of written Dutch was considered a mistake. Most mistakes were made in the categories of vocabulary, orthography, punctuation, grammar, and formulation. The average number of mistakes and types of mistakes was 12.7 and 5.5 respectively. A Pearson's correlation analysis showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the number of mistakes and study dropout with  $r=.143$  and  $p=.215$ . There was, however, a statistically significant relationship between the number of types of mistakes and study success with  $r=.351$  and  $p=.002$ . Student teachers who make fewer types of mistakes are likely to have more study success (Bak-Piard, 2021: 99).

All in all, despite the fact that they all had at least a secondary education diploma, the results of the Dutch language proficiency study showed that the majority of student teachers at the start of teacher education had an insufficient command of Dutch that negatively influenced their academic success – even if it was clear that language, as has been shown above, was not the only reason for dropout (Bak-Piard, Coppen, van de Ven, & Cijntje, 2016; Bak-Piard, 2021: 85-102).

### 3.3 Design principles and program

The preliminary study on student dropout led to developing a draft program for teaching Dutch language proficiency that was first used in TLN in 2006-2007. The program resulted in dropout rates going down from around 80% to 33.33%, whereas one year later, when the program, for administrative reasons mainly, was not in use, they increased again to over 80% (UNA, 2012; Bak-Piard, 2021). The try-out of the program resulted in a set of 23 provisional design principles with which a new Dutch language proficiency program could be developed. These

design principles included three categories: principles that are seen as preconditional for successfully implementing the program, principles that relate to the language policy perspective of the program and principles that relate to the language content and language teaching approach of the program (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

Tentative design principles (DP)

DP	Content
Preconditional	
1	The program is an integral part of the curriculum
2	The program is completely taught
3	The program uses standard end tests
4	The program is compact and it is taught and evaluated in a limited period of time without interruptions
5	The program uses a student monitoring system in order to establish the (language) profile of the students
6	There is alignment between those involved in the implementation of the program
7	There are good provisions for the participants in the program
8	There is ample space for implementing the program
9	Non-language-related local risk factors for study drop-out are monitored
Language policy	
10	Students' use of Dutch and academic language are stimulated
11	Students' Dutch language proficiency is assessed in all modules
12	Students' Dutch language proficiency is not corrected by teachers in other subjects than Dutch
13	Attention is paid to Dutch language proficiency in all subjects
14	Language assignments in other subjects are integrated in the program
15	Attention is paid to (using) the multilingual context
16	Differentiated teaching and learning materials are used
Language content and teaching approach	
17	The students' language proficiency profile is monitored
18	A go/no-go decision for continuing the program is taken based on the total of a student's results in the first year
19	Attention is paid to reflective language learning and language development
20	Attention is paid to analytical and investigative language learning
21	Attention is paid to the development of listening proficiency
22	Attention is paid to contextually rich and interactive language learning
23	Attention is paid to differentiation in teaching approach in view of language diversity: together where possible, individual where necessary

The main aim of the new program was to improve the student teachers' Dutch language proficiency, leading to less dropout in the propaedeutic phase of teacher education. The program was based on the design principles in Table 1 and offered the student teachers new contents and a teaching approach that closely matched their personal (language) backgrounds as well as the multilingual context in which they studied. The program includes three important phases: a diagnostic phase, a phase for improving Dutch language proficiency, and an assessment and evaluation phase.

In the diagnostic phase it is attempted to obtain a clear picture of the initial (language) situation of each student teacher. Therefore, language proficiency tests and a self-evaluation test are administered, as well as a questionnaire that determines the student teachers' language background and their affinity and attitude regarding languages (Dutch, English, Spanish, and Papiamentu) and language learning. The motivation of the student teachers to become teachers of Dutch in secondary education is assessed by an open writing assignment. The student teachers are also screened for non-language-related risk factors for dropout and these factors are monitored throughout the program. The student teachers receive teacher educator feedback on their diagnostic language tests, they analyze their results and, based on this analysis and the feedback, they make improvement plans for monitoring their Dutch language proficiency. The student teachers include their results and analyses in a language portfolio that they (learn to) build up and use in the program (see below).

In the improvement phase, the student teachers follow language proficiency modules. These include formal reading and writing skills (two modules each) as well as explicit attention for listening and speaking skills (two modules each). In student groups with a high degree of linguistic diversity, students explicitly need to learn to listen to feedback and criticism (in more than one language). Finally, there are two modules on specific skills (like vocabulary, orthography, and grammar) integrated in the language proficiency modules.

Two specific instruments were developed and used in the program: a language portfolio and a tool for the analysis and improvement of language errors. In the language portfolio (one integrated module), the student teachers collect information on their language background and proficiency, their affinity with Dutch and other languages, and their personal experiences with different (home, school, and foreign) languages. Through the language error analysis tool, the student teachers become more aware of the most common (types of) mistakes they make in their writing and learn to identify and eliminate these. The aim of working with these instruments was to support the process wherein student teachers could learn to adopt an inquisitive attitude and to distinguish between language knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In this way, they were also trained to be more self-directed, self-investigative, self-responsible, and collaborative and to monitor and improve their Dutch language development.

In the assessment phase it was decided to use regular TLN standard tests for Dutch language proficiency at the end of the program to decide about promotion to the second year.

The curriculum for the first year has 60 credits, 30 per semester. About half is filled with general subjects for student teachers in all languages, like speech therapy, sociology, psychology, (general) pedagogy, educational sciences, ICT, literature, and traineeships. When teaching these modules, the teacher educators simultaneously use Dutch, Papiamentu, English, and Spanish whereas the student teachers have to write assignments in their target language. The other half are four Dutch language modules (1-4), two more general modules for study skills and counseling related to Dutch (5-6), and an integrated module for working with the language portfolio (7) as in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Language modules and credits in the program in semester 1

Modules	Credits
1 Listening and speaking skills	2
2 Reading skills	4
3 Writing skills	4
4 Specific skills (vocabulary, orthography, grammar)	2
5 Study skills (Dutch)	1
6 Course counseling (Dutch)	2
7 Language portfolio (integrated in writing skills)	-

## 4 Method

### 4.1 Educational design research

The program that we focus on here could not simply be developed from behind a desk. We, therefore, opted for an interactive and practice-related approach that was inspired by the tradition of educational design research (van den Akker, Gravemeijer, McKenney, & Nieveen, 2006; McKenney & Reeves, 2012). Educational design research is a research method that contributes to directly improving the educational practice in which it is conducted and a fundamental understanding of that practice (Andriessen, 2014). Through this approach, we could combine the ambition to improve student teachers' study success and to conduct scientific research into this very process. In doing so, we used existing theory, our own and others' experiences, and practical knowledge to establish initial design principles. These were used to develop a concrete program and



teaching approach that was then put into practice. The parallel and continuous evaluation of this new teaching practice in turn produced empirically validated and refined design principles that can be considered a practical and theoretical contribution at the same time (Cremers, 2012).

In conducting educational design research, the researcher continually makes choices based on the purpose and question of the research, the available resources, methodical thoroughness, theory building, practical relevance, and the researcher's own vision and world view (Plomp, 2013). Especially the latter largely determines the definition of a certain state of affairs in education as a problem – in our case study, high dropout rates and low Dutch language proficiency.

Educational design research is generally divided into the phases of diagnosis and planning, analysis and exploration, design and implementation, and evaluation and reporting of knowledge development (Andriessen, 2011; McKenney & Reeves, 2012; Sandoval, 2004). These four phases were also followed in the long-term study. In a cyclic process, the study successively focused on the design, implementation, evaluation, and adjustment or rejection of the program in which there was always room for a new problem analysis (van den Akker, 1999; Imants & van de Ven, 2011). The case study that is presented here, relates to the implementation and evaluation phase mainly.

## 4.2 Research methods

The implementation of the program in 2013 was investigated in a case study in which we used a mixed methods approach (Greene, 2007) including qualitative and quantitative research instruments with data triangulation as a main research strategy. The qualitative methods included participant and non-participant observation (sometimes with video or audio recording), field notes of (striking) developments, situations, and interventions, individual interviews with student teachers after each lesson (series), asking them to assess the program's content and process, and individual interviews with teacher educators and counselors about their positive and negative experiences with the program. In doing so, special attention was paid to the working of the design principles and suggestions for improvement of the program. The reflections in the student teachers' language portfolios also provided useful information. In classroom observations, an observation list was used in which for each design principle, notes could be made regarding the teaching process and possible improvements. The different types of data were first independently analyzed and then triangulated to find possible differences, similarities, and recurring patterns that could contribute to answering our research questions. These analyses formed the basis for intermediate reports that were written by the first author and then discussed with the participants and triangulated with their comments and expe-

riences. Following the approach of educational design research, where necessary and possible, the participants' feedback was immediately used to improve the program and to give better instructions to the teacher educators for its implementation.

The study was carried out in close collaboration between the first author, being a teacher educator investigating her own practice, and a large number of local actors, including teacher educators, counselors, coordinators, administrators, and student teachers. A total of 17 student teachers participated in the case study. They were between 18 and 51 years of age with a majority between 18 and 30. Mainly depending on their country of origin, they had Dutch as a foreign language (10), a second language (5), or a first language (2). Student teachers also reported English, Papiamentu, Spanish, French, German, and Javanese as part of their language repertoire. One student teacher reported that he wanted to become a teacher of Dutch; the others mainly entered teacher education to get a better (position in their current) job. Earlier education trajectories of the student teachers included secondary education, intermediate vocational education, and higher education and some of them had already worked as a teacher in a language other than Dutch or in another subject. The Dutch language proficiency of the student teachers, at the start of the program, was assessed using standard TLN tests for listening, speaking, writing, reading, and specific skills (vocabulary, orthography, grammar, style, punctuation). In addition to these formal language tests, following van de Gein (2004; 2012) also an error analysis was conducted on 250 words of a writing assignment.

## 5 The program for Dutch language proficiency under investigation

### 5.1 Formative evaluation

In this section we will go into the implementation of the program in relation to the underlying design principles. In doing so, the focus will be on the student teachers', teacher educators' and counselors' reactions and experiences regarding the day-to-day workings of the program. This includes the program's content, the design principles underlying it and its implementations. In the description we follow the three types of design principles (DP) as presented in Table 1, i.e., preconditional, language policy and language content and teaching approach DP's.

*Preconditional DP's* – The whole program was taught in the first semester (DP2) as an integral part of the curriculum (DP1). According to the student teachers, this was much better than teaching it as a (stigmatizing) remedial or extra-curricular program. The program lasted for 20 week (DP4) and standard

exams were included (DP3) for which a 5.5 score was needed to pass. According to the student teachers, this period was indeed needed to improve their language proficiency level. They also positively evaluated the fact that tests were only conducted at the end of the program because earlier tests often lead to disappointing results which can negatively influence their motivation. At the start of the program, all necessary provisions for teacher educators and counselors were available (DP7) but textbooks for the student teachers were missing and could only be ordered later. A critical note was also that it was sometimes difficult to find enough room in the curriculum for implementing the program (DP8). There was, however, intensive and positive collaboration and alignment between all participants, including the student teachers (DP6). Team teaching was used where possible, and teacher educators and counselors positively evaluated the exchange of information about the student teachers' initial situation (DP5) and about managing possible non-language-related risk factors for dropout (DP9).

*Language policy DP's* – Against the background of the multilingual character of the TLN student population and their relatively low levels of Dutch proficiency, it was decided that student teachers during and outside lectures should preferably use Dutch (DP10). This decision was wholeheartedly implemented by the student teachers. In their language portfolios they wrote that this 'forced exposure' to Dutch positively influenced their Dutch language development. Video recordings show that student teachers, who at the start of the program hardly dared to speak Dutch, at the end were teaching lessons to their classmates and explained how they overcame their fear of speaking Dutch. It turned out to be difficult to pay specific attention to Dutch language proficiency in other subjects (DP13) and to have student teachers' Dutch proficiency assessed or corrected by teacher educators of other subjects (DP11; DP12). What did work, was the integration of written assignments from other subjects into language modules as exercise material (DP14). It made the student teachers also better speakers, listeners, readers, and writers in other subjects, which increased their self-confidence. This was positively evaluated by the student teachers as well as the teacher educators. The student teachers also highly appreciated that special attention was paid to errors in Dutch that originated from their multilingual repertoire (DP15), by, among other things, using differentiated teaching materials and letting them make progress at their own pace. See the reflection of a student teacher below:

"The teacher allows everyone to further develop their language skills at their own pace, depending on everyone's specific situation and experiences. Nobody has to wait for other students and if you don't manage, you get extra time and help." (Student Reflection TLN, 2013; our translation from Dutch, also in the following citations)

The suggestion that they should engage in situations where mainly Dutch was used, was well received and put into practice by the student teachers (DP21; DP22):

“We extended our knowledge of Dutch by reading many Dutch books, by watching Dutch television programs and by listening to Dutch radio stations.” (Student Reflection TLN, 2013)

*Language content and teaching approach DP's* – In the program, whether in groups or on their own, student teachers improved their knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding Dutch to a level that is needed for successfully participating in teacher education (DP23). This includes assuming a reflective and inquisitive attitude in language learning (DP19; DP 20), developing listening skills (DP21) and engaging in contextual and interactive language learning (DP22) by fulfilling communicative tasks, working with a language portfolio and a language error analysis tool, and giving and receiving critical feedback.

Based on their individual language proficiency profile, student teachers got a realistic insight into their Dutch language proficiency and in ways for its further development (DP23). The observations showed that the student teachers enthusiastically engaged in all of this and often stayed working at the institute till late in the evening. In their language portfolio's the student teachers also gave positive evaluations of this way of working (DP19) that according to them led to positive effects for student teachers with high as well as low Dutch proficiency (DP23). In the program all language skills were included but there was special attention for writing and listening skills (DP21). Especially the way in which listening skill were taught, was highly valued by the student teachers. At the end of the program one of the teacher educators commented on the student teachers' learning as follows:

“At the end of the day it's not about students being able to pass all kinds of standard tests, i.e., to reproduce knowledge. They rather have to learn to take responsibility for their own language development and work on this in a conscious, critical and investigative way, if necessary, using support from their environment and the teaching materials that are offered to them.” (Report Teacher meeting TLN, 2014)

This inquisitive attitude that the student teachers developed clearly shows from an entry in a language portfolio:

“I learned a lot through giving feedback on texts of fellow students. Now I can almost feel that a formulation can be phrased differently. By analyzing types of language errors, I found out that I always have to be sure that something is wrong. I therefor first look up all information I have in my textbook or on the internet. In this way I detected new types of mistakes that I wasn't aware of. [...] I paid a lot of attention to coordination. I investigated how it should be changed when using conjunctions.” (Student Reflection TLN, 2013)

The student teachers positively evaluated the fact that the program used real and functional communicative tasks (DP22). They also liked the fact that individual student teachers had to find out themselves what knowledge, skills, and attitudes they needed to be successful in the language modules (DP20) and they were positive as well about the requirement of the program to make their progress visible by registering it, proposing an improvement plan, and assessing and registering the progress in their language portfolio (DP22).

As part of the program individual meetings with the student teachers were organized to discuss and register their language development (DP23). These individual sessions were highly valued by the student teachers. Working with a language portfolio and a language error analysis tool as part of reflective language learning (DP19; DP20) and its effect on the student teachers' language development, was often referred to by student teachers as well as teacher educators as an 'eye opener'. The language portfolio was considered an adequate way to determine the student teachers' initial (language) situation and their specific learning needs (DP17; DP23). It was also used to monitor, assess, and improve the student teachers' language proficiency for further development.

The main effect of the language error analysis tool was that the student teachers were forced to develop a critical attitude regarding the (origin of the) errors they made. See the student teacher's reflection below:

"I use the tool for language error analysis always and everywhere. When I see an advertisement, when somebody is talking, when I read an information leaflet, or letters to the editor, I always analyze the mistakes. If I read a newspaper and I'm not sure that something is written correctly, I have a look in my Dutch handbooks or on the internet to find out." (Student Reflection TLN, 2013)

Of course, student teachers in the new program still made language errors. But the difference was that they could now be asked to account for these errors and knew how to design an improvement trajectory. Making language errors did not hinder them from passing the modules that were necessary to obtain their propaedeutic certificate, to obtain their final diploma, and to become teachers in secondary education. They had become more conscious language learners who, in learning the Dutch language, made use of all the knowledge and instruments provided to them by the program.

Having participated in the program also had its effect on the teacher educators, as they themselves witnessed. It led to the awareness that it is important for them to engage in further professionalization in the field of language teaching, the use of digital teaching media, the use and influence of social media, coaching and doing research as a teacher educator.

Based on the above, we can conclude that the teacher educators' as well as the student teachers' reception and evaluation of the program were positive.

Especially the student teachers 'asked for more', i.e., for a continuation after the propaedeutic year. This positive evaluation of the program was certainly supported by the fact that the student teachers experienced a real improvement in their Dutch language proficiency and a more positive attitude regarding Dutch that prevented them from dropping out. The teacher educators considered the program an improvement as compared to the traditional program. They, however, also expressed their concerns regarding the extra workload that the program caused.

## 5.2 Summative evaluation

In this section we will mainly deal with the program's summative evaluation in terms of the participating student teachers' language proficiency scores and their study success.

At the end of the program four language proficiency tests at CEFR B2 level were administered that are standard at TLN. The tests included two assignments each for listening/speaking, functional writing, reading, and specific skills. The listening/speaking test included a theoretical part with questions on handbook knowledge and a practical part with a listening skills test. In the writing test the student teachers had to show their ability to apply the formal rules of Dutch to fulfill a communicative writing task and had to detect and recognize language errors in a text. Reading skills were tested in a reading proficiency test and a vocabulary test. The specific skills test dealt with vocabulary, orthography, grammar, style, and punctuation. In addition, an error analysis was conducted on a sample of written work. Table 3 presents the mean scores of the language proficiency tests and the number of error types in the error analysis.

Table 3 shows that all student teachers' scores (in some cases after a resit) were at the requested B2 level. In comparison to the entry tests, in which only one student teacher reached this level, we see a considerable progress. In addition to these tests, also the results of the error analysis conducted at the beginning and the end of the program show a clear progress, i.e., an improvement from an average of 9.4 error type mistakes to an average of 4.5 error type mistakes. We can, therefore, conclude that the program clearly contributed to an improvement of the Dutch proficiency level of the participating student teachers.

Out of the 14 student teachers who completed the 2013 program, 13 have successfully obtained their propaedeutic diploma. They all entered the second year of the study. Four student teachers voluntarily left the study because they opted for a different career or moved to another study in higher education. All student teachers that successfully graduated TLN found a job as a teacher of Dutch in the Caribbean or the Netherlands. In addition to the results from the TLN 2013 case study, we also have data on study success regarding the 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 cohorts. These are reported in Table 4.

**Table 3**

Mean score for language proficiency (scale 1-10) and number of error types at the begin and end of the program (N=14; 3 students left the program)

Students	Listening and speaking	Functional writing	Reading	Specific skills	Mean score	Error types begin program	Error types end program
1	9.0	7.1	6.8	7.5	7.1	12	4
2	6.1	7.4	6.7	6.9	6.9	12	5
3	7.4	6.5	7.0	7.5	7.1	10	4
4	7.3	6.6	6.9	6.5	6.8	10	6
5	E*	7.2	E	6.0	6.6	10	6
6	7.3	7.1	6.3	6.0	6.0	12	5
7	6.4	6.3	6.2	5.5	6.1	13	6
8	6.2	6.5	7.0	8.3	7.0	9	4
9	E	9.0	E	7.0	8.0	6	3
10	E	9.2	E	7.1	8.2	3	2
11	E	8.3	E	8.0	8.2	9	3
12	E	7.8	E	6.0	6.9	8	3
13	7.6	7.6	7.6	6.6	7.4	8	3
14	8.3	7.8	6.9	6.0	7.3	9	4
Mean	7.0	7.5	6.7	6.8	7.0	9.4	4.5

\* Exemption for students who already had the necessary competences based on earlier education

**Table 4**

Intake, throughput and drop-out 2013-2017 TLN in the propaedeutic phase (UoC, 2019)

Cohort	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Program	New	Old	Mixed	Mixed	New
Intake	14	11	10	10	5
Propaedeutic diploma	13 (93%)	4 (36%)	6 (60%)	6 (60%)	4 (80%)

In comparison to the dropout figures that we reported earlier – 100% in 2005, 71.43% in 2006 and over 80% in the years that followed – these figures show that the new program had a positive effect on the student teachers' study success. Interestingly, in 2014 when, for administrative reasons mainly, the old program was used again, and in 2015 and 2016 when a mix of the old and new program was used, the dropout rates in the propaedeutic phase, again showed an increase. Dropout in the propaedeutic phase decreased again after the rein-

roduction of the new program in 2017. Main reasons for these changes can be found, we think, in the fact that in the old and mixed version of the program, a number of preconditional design principles were no longer taken into consideration. This applies to the use of the student monitoring system in which the student teachers' language proficiency profile and their dropout risk is monitored (DP5) for taking a go/no-go decision to continue the study (DP18). There was also limited attention for cooperation and alignment between the teacher educators and counselors involved in the implementation of the program (DP6) and for the monitoring of non-language-related risks of study dropout. In this way the use of the old and the mixed program helped us to detect and isolate the factors that are important to guarantee study success in the propaedeutic phase. This is the more important since, as Collins, Joseph and Bielaczyc (2004) indicate, in educational design research it is not always easy to get a 100 percent certainty about the factors that matter most in being successful because it is often difficult to isolate these factors in day-to-day schooling practices.

## 6 Conclusions and discussion

The results of our TLN case study led to two conclusions. A first conclusion is that, after having finished the study, in consultation with the participants, we managed to regroup the design principles that turned out to be effective in four different categories for further use in program development (see Table 5).

In the original category of preconditional design principles we distinguished between a first category of design principles that relate to the embedding of the program in the curriculum (DP1-DP2) and a second category of design principles that relate to preconditional actions and activities to be carried out by various institutionally involved individuals and bodies to make the program possible (DP3-DP7). Our research showed that it was considered of utmost importance by all participants that the program, to be accepted by teacher educators and student teachers, had to be a visible, integrated, and accepted part of the curriculum that is taken seriously as shown by its use of standard tests for language proficiency. Our research showed that language-related and non-language-related reasons for study dropout demand a strong student monitoring system that can lead to early interventions to prevent dropout. Teacher educators and other actors involved especially highlighted the importance of collegial cooperation and consultation. The third category relates to the language policy perspective of the program (DP8-DP11). DP11 in this category, exclusively applies to situations in which bilingual programs in Dutch and Papiamentu are organized, such as in teacher education for primary education. Our study showed the high importance of adequately dealing with the student teachers' linguistic diversity by allowing a role for languages other than Dutch in the program, while at the

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**Table 5**

Final list of Design Principles (in brackets the original DP numbers from Table 1 are added where applicable)

DP	Content
Curricular embedding	
1	The program is a compact, integral part of the curriculum that is taught in a short and fixed period of time (1-2-4)
2	The program uses formative and summative standard tests for language proficiency that are applied for assessment at the end of the program (3-18)
Preconditional activities	
3	A student monitoring system and language proficiency tests are used for making informed decisions about study progress (5-17)
4	There is close cooperation and consultation among all teachers and other local actors involved in the implementation and evaluation of the program (6)
5	There are good provisions and possibilities for further qualification of participating teachers (7-new)
6	There is ample physical and non-physical space in the curriculum for implementing the program (8)
7	Non-language-related risks for study dropout are closely monitored (9)
Language policy	
8	The use of Dutch and the use of academic language is promoted (10)
9	Students' language mistakes are not corrected by teachers of other subjects; they merely give feedback (12)
10	Language assignments in other subjects are integrated in the program (14)
11	In bilingual programs, Papiamentu and Dutch are dealt with in the same way, if possible, in team teaching (new)
Language content and teaching approach	
12	The multilingual context of the region, the students and the program is acknowledged and used (15)
13	Sufficient and diversified teaching-learning materials are made available (16)
14	Attention is paid to differentiation in teaching approach and the management of language diversity (23)
15	Attention is paid to contextual and interactive language learning and development (22)
16	Attention is paid to analytic and inquisitive language learning and development (20)
17	Attention is paid to reflective language learning and development (19)
18	Students are given the opportunity to experience and keep track of their study progress (new)
19	Specific attention is paid to the development of listening skills (21)
20	Students are stimulated to apply newly acquired knowledge in their (trainee) teaching practice and teacher education program (new)

same time observing the important normative mission of education when it comes to teaching standard Dutch. The fourth category relates to language content and the language teaching approach (DP12-DP20). DP20 is added on the basis mainly of experiences during the student teachers' teaching traineeships. The program clearly shows new content elements but the main innovation that was positively evaluated by teacher educators and student teachers alike was its new teaching approach in which interaction, reflection, and practical experience are key concepts.

The above design principles can be considered a theoretical as well as practical result of our study. They contribute to our understanding of what works in education, and they can be used for further developing adequate and effective Dutch language proficiency programs. Their formulation, however, is not an endpoint. Educational programs that are developed following these principles and that want to do justice to the participating student teachers, their characteristics, and the circumstances in which the programs are taught, cannot escape continuous innovation and adaptation. This concerns the curricular embedding, the preconditions, the language policy perspective, the language content, and the language teaching approach of the program in the concrete linguistically and culturally diverse context of the Dutch Caribbean islands and comparable contexts.

A second conclusion is that the program turned out to have a significant impact on the Dutch language proficiency of the student teachers and their study success. This is shown by the student teachers' scores for the standard language proficiency tests at the end of the program. Where in earlier years, working with the traditional Dutch language proficiency program led to scores for almost all student teachers far below the required CEFR B2 level, the implementation of the new program resulted in almost all student teachers reaching that level and passing the propaedeutic as well as final exams of the study and becoming teachers of Dutch as a subject in secondary education. The dropout rates in the propaedeutic phase and in the program as a whole also showed a considerable decrease from around 80% in earlier years to 14% in 2013, as reported by the UoC student administration (UoC, 2013; 2015; 2019). Even if it cannot be ruled out that also factors other than the program might have played a role here, the positive effect of the program on the student teachers' Dutch language proficiency and their study success is evident (Bak-Piard, 2021).

In addition to the above results, our study also contributed to an improvement of the quality of the teacher education programs in which it was conducted and to the positive assessment of these programs by the Netherlands Flanders Accreditation Organization in 2012 and 2017. The program also contributed to producing more qualified teachers of Dutch as a subject and as such it has contributed to solving the perennial global problem of a lack of qualified teachers.

The results of our study are partly comparable with the results of educational design research in higher education in other non-western societies. Dowse and Howie (2013) investigated an intervention in the field of English reading proficiency in South-Africa. They propose three characteristics of a program that should lead to better English reading skills. Firstly, the students should be given 'room' for learning that is physically and collaboratively adequate for interaction and cooperative learning. Secondly, subject specific and contextually relevant knowledge should be offered to the students in a highly structured way, as well as modules for academic writing and research methodology in order to acquire an academic and research-oriented attitude. Thirdly, the program should be taught continuously as part of the whole curriculum. These characteristics of a good reading program show a great deal of resemblance to mainly the design principles in our program that relate to its curricular embedding and structure.

Abdallah (2013), based on his research on teaching English as a foreign language in Egypt, presents design principles that can be considered local theoretical results closely connected to the Egyptian situation. These principles relate to learning foreign languages, design-related learning, developing and maintaining an adequate course registration system, designing learning models and accompanying learning activities, and designing web-based facilities for language learning and language practice. In addition, he offered concrete teaching materials. Our study also resulted in a combination of local theoretical knowledge in relation to a new perspective and approach of language teaching and learning and practical teaching materials such as the language portfolio and the tool for the analysis and improvement of language errors.

Stoffelsma (2014), finally, dealt with reading skills in higher education in Ghana. Her study also has quite some similarities with our research. This mainly relates to the large number of data collection methods she used for the summative and formative evaluation of her program as well as to the combination of theoretical and practical results. The context in which Stoffelsma conducted her study is comparable with the situation in Curaçao. This mainly relates to the inescapable moment in which the researcher ends her study and leaves her participants, while, in doing so, trusting that the efforts put in the study were adequate and worthwhile and that the participants would in the end continue using the instruments that were produced with and for them.

Our study was limited to teacher education in the Dutch Caribbean, but it was carried out in close collaboration with a large number of local actors, such as teacher educators, counselors, coordinators, and student teachers. To keep all of them informed during the study, all steps that were taken and all preliminary findings were extensively documented and communicated. In that way the knowledge, the practical results and the teaching materials that resulted from the study were made transferable to other teacher education programs in comparable multilingual contexts. In this way the cooperative knowledge that

was produced in the study was prevented from disappearing or eroding after the end of the study (Pauw, Jongstra, & McKenny, 2018). All participants indicated that they had acquired new knowledge and experiences through being part of the program, which has benefited both their personal development and their commitment to teacher education at the UoC. Being part of a research project also benefited the student teachers in acquiring an inquisitive attitude which is needed in student research projects that are increasingly part of the teacher education curriculum (Andriessen, 2014). A great deal of scientific research has been conducted internationally into student learning, study dropout, and study success in higher education, including teacher education (Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2009). At the same time, there is an increasing interest in research carried out by teacher educators as researchers in their own teaching practice (Sjølie, 2014; Beijaard, 2016). Our case study is an example of teacher educators investigating and improving their own teaching practices and thereby contributing to better educational careers of their student teachers. Educating teachers cannot rest on motivation, ambition, professional knowledge and years of experience alone. It also requires thorough scientific knowledge of, among other things, what works in the practice of teacher education to be able to make the right choices that benefit both student teachers and their future students in primary or secondary education (Beijaard, 2016). Participating in the development and implementation of the program at TLN opened up ways to do so.

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## Samenvatting

### **De implementatie en evaluatie van een programma voor Nederlandse taalvaardigheid voor de lerarenopleiding in Curaçao**

Deze bijdrage betreft de implementatie en evaluatie van een taalvaardigheidsprogramma Nederlands dat werd ontwikkeld in een meerjarig onderwijsgericht ontwerponderzoek in de lerarenopleiding van de University of Curaçao. Eerst wordt de studie en de meertalige context waarin deze plaatsvond beschreven. Daarna wordt ingegaan op de hoge studie-uitval en de lage Nederlandse taalvaardigheid van de studenten die leidden tot de ontwikkeling van ontwerpprincipes en een nieuw taalvaardigheidsprogramma. De implementatie van het programma werd onderzocht in een mixed methods gevalsstudie waarin het gebruik en het effect van het programma centraal staan. Ze omvat een formatief deel dat beschrijft hoe de programma-implementatie door deelnemende docenten en studenten werd beoordeeld en een summatief deel dat de effecten van het programma op de taalvaardigheid en het studiesucces van studenten beschrijft. De resultaten van de studie laten zien dat het programma en de ontwerpprincipes positief werden geëvalueerd en bijdroegen aan een betere Nederlandse taalvaardigheid en minder studie-uitval.

**Kernwoorden** lerarenopleiding; talige diversiteit; Nederlandse taalvaardigheid; onderwijsgericht ontwerponderzoek

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