



Implementing the CEFR in Dutch secondary education: impact on FL teachers' educational and assessment practice

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Overview (1)

Introduction

- Foreign languages in Dutch secondary education
- Educational policy regarding the CEFR in the Netherlands
- implementation of innovations in foreign language educational practice

Research questions

Methodology



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Overview (2)

Results

- Impact of the CEFR on FL teachers' beliefs, teaching and assessment practice, and needs and plans
- Implementation of the CEFR in the Netherlands: some key factors

Conclusion and discussion



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Foreign languages in Dutch secondary education (1)

Main languages taught:

- English (compulsory); French, German (optional)

Three types of secondary education:

- Pre-vocational education, 4 years
- Higher general secondary education, 5 years
- Pre-university education, 6 years

Target levels for reading, listening, speaking and writing at the end of secondary education are specified in terms of the CEFR



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Target levels in terms of CEFR: pre-university education

	German	English	French
listening	B2	B2	B2
oral skills	B2	B2	B1+
writing	B1	B2	B1
reading	B2	B2	B1



Example

<http://www.erk.nl/docent/training/Engels/en-gv-03/>



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Foreign languages in Dutch secondary education (2)

- target levels and central reading exam levels are specified nationally
- schools possess considerable freedom with regard to content and type of instruction
- Final examination:
 - National reading exam with standardized tests
 - school exam for all other language skills and literature (no external examination)



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Educational policy regarding the CEFR in the Netherlands (1)

Programme launched by the Ministry of Education (2008-2011)

Goal:

- to increase knowledge and use of the CEFR among FL-teachers, publishers, school management and teacher trainers

Participants:

- a collaboration of key institutes in FL education: national curriculum and test development centres and school counselling institutions



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Educational policy regarding the CEFR in the Netherlands (2)

Activities in four areas:

- dissemination of information regarding the CEFR
- the CEFR in teaching practice
- the CEFR in assessment practice
- professional development with respect to the CEFR

Examples:

- www.erk.nl
- Testing materials, e.g. CITO TaalstERK
- Workshops, conferences



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Implementation of the CEFR in the Netherlands

Roger's concept of *diffusion* (2003, p. 5)

"Diffusion is the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system."



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Key factors in FL innovation

Van den Branden (2009):

- Relative advantages
- Compatible to previous practice
- Complexity
- *Trialability*
- *Observability*
- *Feasibility*
- *Concreteness*
- *Problem-orientedness*



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Research questions

What is the impact of educational policy regarding the implementation of the CEFR on:

- FL teachers' beliefs regarding the CEFR
- FL teachers' teaching practice
- FL teachers' assessment practice
- FL teachers' needs and plans regarding professional development in the field of the CEFR



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Method (1)

Large-scale survey

- One foreign language department per school drawn randomly
- Departments decided who filled out the survey
- N= 373: English 141, French 101, German 131

In-depth interviews

- Respondents drawn from large-scale survey
- 18 teachers: 6 English, 6 French, 6 German
- Grouped according to level of experience with the CEFR (low, intermediate, high) based on their survey answers





Method (2)

Case-studies

- Two experienced schools selected from previous interviews
- Interviews with school management
- Group interviews with FL teachers
- Classroom observations

Each phase builds upon the experience of the previous research phases



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Results: FL teachers' beliefs (1)

Method:

- Interviews and case-studies
- Teachers' level of experience with the CEFR: low, intermediate, high (based on survey results)

Main question:

- What is your strongest association related to applying the CEFR in your educational practice?



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Results: FL teachers' beliefs (2)

Both low and high CEFR-experienced teachers appreciate that:

- the CEFR makes it possible to compare FL proficiency across Europe
- the CEFR provides insight into requirements and expectations regarding levels of FL proficiency

General impression: positive/neutral



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Results: FL teachers' beliefs (3)

High CEFR-experienced teachers:

- Using the CEFR in daily teaching practice can be difficult
- What does it mean exactly, using the CEFR in FL educational practice?
- Levels are complex (e.g. too broad)
- Complex relationship grading system and CEFR-levels



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Results: CEFR in FL teaching practice (1)

Method: large-scale survey

- 42% uses a textbook related to the CEFR
- 75 % report a low-intermediate level of experience in the areas of:
 - assessment of CEFR levels of learner performance
 - analysis and design of teaching materials according to CEFR criteria
- 59% plan to use the CEFR more frequently in the near future



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Results: CEFR in FL teaching practice (2)

Method: interviews and case-studies

Topics reported by high CEFR-experienced teachers:

- CEFR mainly used in practice and assessment of oral skills (writing to a lesser extent)
- Textbook related to the CEFR
- CEFR mainly used in upper forms of secondary education
- Change towards more communicative, competence-based FL pedagogy
- CEFR is compatible to their educational practice and/or beliefs



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Results: CEFR in assessment practice (1)

Method: large-scale survey:

58 % plans to use the CEFR more frequently in their assessment practice in the near future

Method: interviews and case-studies:

Topics reported by (very) experienced teachers:

- Most teachers use tests included in their textbooks
- The CEFR is included in most school programmes of testing and exams



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Results: CEFR in assessment practice (2)

A minority of high CEFR-experienced teachers uses

- international tests, e.g. Goethe, Delf, Cambridge
- the European Language Portfolio

Most intermediate and high experienced teachers report increased awareness of

- the proficiency levels to be acquired by pupils
- the possibility to take into account individual differences
- the complex relationship grading system–CEFR
- the possibility to assess a performance on different CEFR levels
- shift in focus from grammatical accuracy to fluency on lower CEFR levels



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Results: professional development

Method: Large-scale survey

Teachers need more information

- CEFR in teaching practice 72%
- CEFR in assessment practice 78%

Method: interviews and case-studies

Both high and low CEFR-experienced teachers need:

- Good practices, practical examples
- More detailed assessment criteria, rubrics
- Information on the use of the CEFR in curriculum development
- More teaching and testing materials



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Results: impact (1)

Method: survey

retrospective questions: perceived change compared to two years ago

- 55% reports more attention to the CEFR in the teaching practice in their schools
- 40% reports more attention to the CEFR in the assessment practice in their schools



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Results: impact (2)

Method: interviews and case-studies

Intermediate and high CEFR-experienced teachers report pedagogical changes in

Assessment:

- increased awareness of the attained and (to be) required levels of FL proficiency
- increased linking of current grading system to the CEFR
- increased awareness of individual differences between learners
- increased focus on “Can-do” instead of “Can't”

Teaching

- increased focus on FL skills and competences



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Key factors in FL innovation

Van den Branden, 2009

Relative advantages for teachers

Intermediate and high CEFR-experienced teacher report:

- CEFR useful tool to compare FL proficiency across Europe
- Useful tool to practice and assess oral skills, writing to a lesser extent



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Key factor: relative advantages (2)

- Broad international innovation supports teachers who want to adopt a more communicative, competence-based approach
- The CEFR can be adapted to teachers' own needs and context
 - > is it still CEFR?



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Key factor: compatibility (1)

The CEFR is compatible to the educational practice / beliefs of (very) experienced teachers

“What does it mean to work with the CEFR?”

- Competence-based FL teaching, compatible to the CEFR, without knowing the CEFR
- Competence-based FL teaching, with explicit reference to the CEFR
- Traditionally oriented FL teaching, without the CEFR



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Key factor: compatibility (2)

Implementing the CEFR: different scenarios

- 1) CEFR is introduced by individual pioneer
- 2) CEFR is used by (more than one) FL department
- 3) schools have FL policy, including the CEFR



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Key factor: complexity

Topics reported by intermediate and high CEFR-experienced teachers

- Levels too broad for some pupils
- Assessment criteria/rubrics too vague
- My B1=your B1?
- How to use CEFR levels in curriculum development?
- Complex relationship grading system-CEFR
- Explain CEFR assessment to pupils and parents
- Need for more testing materials
- Need to include all FL skills equally in (national exit) exams



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Conclusion

The CEFR is increasingly becoming part of Dutch FL education

- As a descriptive framework, teachers have to adapt the CEFR for use in assessment, curriculum design and FL pedagogy

Experienced teachers adapt/use the CEFR according to own need and practice, e.g.:

- competence-based FL education (e.g CLIL, task-based instruction, advanced FL programmes)
- Impetus practice and assessment of oral skills
- Too much adaptations, too little CEFR?
- Pedagogical changes require changes in assessment



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