HUMANITIES & EDUCATION

Humanities & Education
2026, Vol. 1, No. 1
DOI: 10.54195/hued.25772

RADBOUD UNIVERSITY PRESS

OPEN ACCESS

Sustainability in modern foreign language education: Teaching and learning for the future

Eva Knopp[1*], Marije Michel[2], Wander Lowie[2], Rozanne Versendaal[3], Maaike Koffeman[1], Sible Andringa[4], Nivja de Jong[5]

[1]Radboud University
[2]University of Groningen
[3]Utrecht University
[4]University of Amsterdam
[5]Leiden University

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the declining interest in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) education in the Netherlands, particularly for languages other than English, and argues for a revitalized approach centered on intercultural communicative competence. We, representing the *Meesterschapsteam Moderne Vreemde Talen*, advocate for integrating language competence, language awareness, and cultural awareness in secondary and higher education curricula. We highlight the limitations of skill-focused, exam-driven instruction, and instead propose a broader, research-informed vision that connects language learning to cultural, historical, and social contexts. This contribution emphasizes individualized, engaging, and content-rich learning environments, discusses the dynamic and non-linear nature of second language acquisition, and calls for assessment methods that value ongoing development. The goal of MFL education is not limited to the development of language proficiency; it also fosters personal growth, intercultural understanding, and societal enrichment, making it essential in a rapidly changing, multilingual world.

KEYWORDS

Modern Foreign Languages; Second Language Acquisition; Language teaching; *Meesterschapsteam*; Curriculum reform; Intercultural communicative competence; Language awareness; Cultural awareness; Language competence

Introduction: Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in the Netherlands

For many years, school-based language learning and teaching in the Netherlands have seen a decline in interest among secondary school students and the wider public (DIA, 2025; Michel et al., 2021; Stam, 2025). This decrease is also felt in higher education, where fewer students each year decide to pursue language and culture studies and even fewer enter further training to become language teachers (UNL, 2025). At present, this trend raises

✉ *Contact: Eva Knopp, eva.knopp@ru.nl, Radboud University, PO Box 9103, Nijmegen 6500 HD, The Netherlands

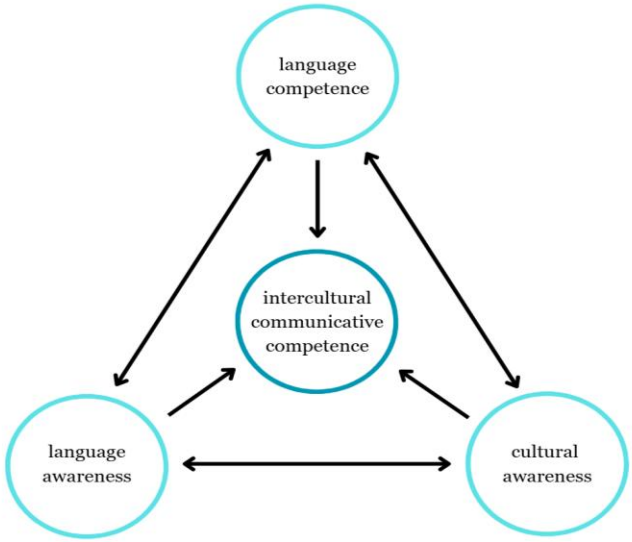
© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Radboud University Press.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License. CC BY permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms under which this article is published allow the author(s) or a third party, with the author's permission, to deposit the accepted manuscript in a repository.

questions about the vitality of languages other than English (LOTE), such as German, French, and Spanish. For example, in the academic year 2024/2025, fewer than 30 students across all Dutch universities enrolled in an educational master's program to teach German, French, or Spanish in upper secondary education (UNL, 2025). The situation is similar for teacher education in lower secondary education, where enrollment numbers for German and French have decreased by 50% and 30%, respectively, over the past 5 years (Vereniging Hogescholen, 2026). Some fear that the introduction of generative AI in 2023 and other tools that draw on large language models (LLMs) may exacerbate this downward spiral, under the positivist assumption that such technologies make the need for humans to engage in language learning redundant. Indeed, a utilitarian perspective on the usefulness of modern foreign language (MFL) knowledge other than the *multilingua franca* English (Jenkins, 2015) reiterates the question: how much need is there to learn a language if machines can mediate or even take over communication in multilingual settings?

In this article, the *Meesterschapsteam Moderne Vreemde Talen* (MT-MVT, https://modernevreemdetalen.vakdidactiekgw.nl) presents a visionary answer to this question. Commissioned by their faculties, the MT-MVT is a Dutch think-tank of university researchers and teachers who specialize in second language development, literature and culture studies, language pedagogy, and didactics. The goal of the MT-MVT is to build a bridge between research and practice in MFL learning and teaching. In 2022, we published a vision paper in Dutch (MT-MVT, 2022) in which we presented our perspective on how MFL learning could be implemented in (high) school education to strengthen the field for the future. This vision forms the basis for the present article, anno 2026, in which we advocate that language learning can and should remain an integral part of school-based learning by foregrounding the rich disciplinary content of language and culture studies. More specifically, at the heart of the MT-MVT vision, we propose a stronger connection between language and culture studies in secondary and higher education, leading to content covering areas as wide as linguistics, literature, culture, history, politics, and other aspects of the geographical area(s) where the target language is a means of communication. Although many individual teachers successfully dedicate their class time to these kinds of relevant language-related content, too often current high-school practice in the Netherlands has a narrower focus on language as a system, primarily focusing on skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking), grammar, and vocabulary. In particular, MFL classes in the final years of secondary education often spend extensive time and energy on preparatory training sessions for the central national exams (Rouffet et al., 2023). Given that these multiple-choice exams exclusively test reading comprehension and strategies, they create a strong negative washback and induce teaching to the test behaviors (Green, 2007; Rouffet et al., 2023). In the first place, such practices, which often take place across different target languages, tend to make Dutch MFL education unengaging (for both students and teachers), and in the second place, they leave many students with a feeling that they still cannot communicate well in the target language after five or six years of MFL instruction. Yet, more importantly, this narrow focus on language skills deprives students of opportunities to experience the specificities, as well as the full richness and beauty, of foreign language and culture studies.

Accordingly, we argue that secondary education has the responsibility to introduce students to, and support their development in, three key areas that make engagement with foreign languages and cultures meaningful and motivating: *language competence, language awareness,* and *cultural awareness*. This triptych aligns well with the discipline in academic studies and, therefore, prepares students for studying languages and cultures. After all, developing knowledge and skills in these three areas not only enables young people to communicate effectively using their entire plurilingual repertoire but also makes them culturally aware and interculturally competent, which are vital skills in today's society. The first area, *language competence*, draws on more traditional aspects of language learning such as learning to use (or mediate) a target language for communicative purposes, across receptive (i.e., reading and listening) and productive (i.e., writing and speaking) modes (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2020). The second area, *language awareness*, guides students to reflect on their language(s) and language use, in order to develop a deeper understanding of how languages are structured and function as cognitive and social phenomena. This reflection enables them to regard language as an object of study in its own right, including knowledge about language use as well as language learning processes. The third area, *cultural awareness*, concerns the way in which linguistic repertoires contribute to the identities and cultures of individuals and societies. By reflecting on their own language(s) and culture(s) and those of others, young people learn to position themselves within the immediate social contexts of their home society, or more broadly within Europe and the world. Such reflections may include individuals and groups encountered in real life or in narratives students read, listen to, or watch. Accordingly, these encounters with "the other" contribute to the development of (global) citizenship. This third and final area of language education is expected to facilitate growing cultural awareness, in which students learn how to reflect on their own culture through the lens of a newly learned and actively used language. We accordingly adopt contemporary viewpoints on intercultural (communicative) competence by defining intercultural competence as stated in Beacco et al. (2016): "the ability to experience otherness and cultural diversity, to analyze that experience and to derive benefit from it." It is only through participating in different cultures (pluriculturality) that intercultural competence can develop.

Figure 1
Three core areas of intercultural communicative competence



Together, these three areas depicted in Figure 1 form components of the concept of intercultural communicative competence, as defined by Byram (1997, p. 34). It refers to the ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries. Through engagement with source materials, learners encounter culture-specific elements, experience different worldviews, and learn to relativize their own perspective. Most importantly, authentic texts in and of a target language community allow students to experience other cultures from within, through individuals' perspectives rather than through "dry" factual knowledge. Engaging with materials in another language and from another culture can broaden learners' horizons and cultivate attitudes of openness and empathy toward others (Schat et al., 2023b). In short, the three components contributing to intercultural communicative competence should be the core of any citizenship and MFL education program, which is a major goal of compulsory education in the Netherlands.

As MT-MVT, we are convinced that engagement with modern foreign languages that integrates these three components makes language learning exciting, challenging, and enriching. It has the potential to strengthen the position of languages in education, and more importantly, in society at large, in sustainable ways. As such, this article can be understood as supportive of the recent curriculum reform for the MFL in the Dutch school system (i.e., *vakvernieuwing* MVT, SLO, 2025a) that has resulted in the development of (1) new core learning goals for the primary and lower secondary school years (i.e., *kerndoelen*) and (2) new attainment goals (i.e., *examenprogramma's*) for the final exams of secondary education in the Netherlands. These new learning and attainment goals, partially inspired by the MT-MVT, acknowledge the above-described developments in MFL in the Netherlands (cf. SLO 2021, 2023) and pave the way from a predominantly skills-oriented MFL curriculum to one that integrates skills-oriented learning of communicative competence (i.e., *domein A* within the Dutch system, cf. SLO 2025b, 2025c) with content-related learning goals in the areas of language awareness (i.e., *domein B*, cf. SLO 2025b, 2025c) and cultural awareness (i.e., *domein C*, cf. SLO 2025b, 2025c). While the new MFL curriculum overlaps with our framework (Figure 1), we would like to stress that our proposed vision cannot be read as congruent. As scholars in language and culture studies and SLA research and pedagogy, we take a broader, more research-oriented perspective that transgresses the systemic and legal boundaries that a curriculum framework must adhere to. At the same time, in this article we sketch and propose ways in which the (old) skills-oriented learning goals can and should be integrated with more content-oriented learning goals related to language and cultural awareness in teaching and examination.

In what follows, we will lay out our insights from research and practice to answer the question: why is it important and useful, and why is it challenging and enjoyable to engage in MFL learning? As we go on, we tap into the broad construct of Second Language[2] (L2) competence – or better: intercultural communicative competence – and its development, on L2 teaching theory and practice, as well as language assessment. We

[2] As is customary in the field, we will use the label *second* language and its abbreviations *L2* and *SLA* (for *Second Language Acquisition*) as umbrella terms for the concepts we refer to. We are well aware that many pupils in school-based language education have a much richer language repertoire as they might build on standard and non-standard home language(s), the dominant language in education, and other school-based MFLs. As such, the reality we refer to will often entail engagement with a 3rd/4th/Xth language, where *LX* might be more appropriate than *L2*.

conclude by providing some answers to the why-question and formulate desiderata for future research and practice.

Building intercultural communicative competence in Modern Foreign Languages

Before we dive deeper into L2 development, we need to define the construct of language competence, that is, outline the aim of MFL education. In our view, a proficient user of a language is well-equipped to function in the newly acquired language in a variety of communicative and cultural contexts. This ties in closely with Byram's (1997, 2021) concept of intercultural communicative competence, defined as "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self" (1997, p. 34).

To employ a language effectively, one needs more than versatility in the narrow construct of proficiency, typically involving vocabulary, pronunciation, and a certain level of grammatical accuracy. Effective language use also conforms to standards of social interactions and cultural values in the target-language community (Ortega, 2011). Language proficiency in this broad sense encompasses Canale and Swain's (1980) seminal notions of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic abilities, which have more recently been taken on board in L2 research by adding communicative or functional adequacy to the linguistic aspects of proficiency (e.g., De Jong et al., 2012; Kuiken & Vedder, 2017; Pallotti, 2020). This perspective on language proficiency aligns well with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020), which describes the development of language competence in terms of effective language use across increasingly complex and varied plurilingual communicative situations. The CEFR also acknowledges "plurilingual competence" (Council of Europe, 2020, 28f.), where the construct of "mediation" refers to common situations in which a language user mediates between different (varieties of) language(s), sources and outputs, drawing on a wide range of their plurilingual repertoire. For example, it entails someone listening to a news item in language A, reading about the same topic in variety B, and reporting on it orally in yet another language C. In such contexts, L2 users can flexibly draw on their full linguistic repertoire employing translanguaging techniques to fulfill their communicative potential (Duarte, 2019). As such, our vision moves away from the native speaker as a benchmark with an underlying deficit perspective in more traditional, monolingually-biased understandings of MFL competency and instead advocates a positive perspective on language competence (Dewaele & Saito, 2022).

Assuming that explicit instruction in forms and rules will directly lead to internalized competence, MFL education in the Netherlands still often takes a very form-oriented approach. This focus on vocabulary and grammar emphasized explicit knowledge of the linguistic system as the primary way to support language learning. However, research has consistently shown that an explicit focus on forms is not the most effective guiding principle of language education and may even be unnecessary for successful L2 development (e.g., Piggott, 2019; Rousse-Malpat et al., 2022). More importantly, engaging in decontextualized learning of grammatical rules and words alone is not sufficient to develop the communicative competence mentioned earlier (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, 2007; Van Ek, 1986). More recent communicative

approaches focus on language use, based on the insight that what aids in developing language proficiency in all its aspects is authentic engagement with language (both receptive, i.e., reading/listening, and productive, i.e., writing/speaking, cf. Van den Branden, 2022) across a variety of contexts. When genuine interaction connects input and output (Long, 1996) and interactional feedback promotes development (Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 2002; Goo & Mackey, 2013; Swain, 2005), extensive use of a language contributes to the development of both implicit and explicit knowledge. By engaging in meaningful real-life communication on relevant topics, both receptive and productive competencies may grow. Such authentic engagement with language also supports processes of automatization and proceduralization. That is, over time, skilled and versatile language users can rely on proceduralized linguistic knowledge that requires little controlled attention (DeKeyser, 2020; Van den Branden, 2022). Yet our view goes one step further. We argue that the development of students' intercultural communicative competence in MFL education cannot rely on communicative approaches alone. Rather, authentic engagement with language in communicative approaches should be integrated with knowledge that is inseparable from and supportive of this competence, namely, language and cultural awareness, which form the core content of language and culture studies.

Language awareness

As we have outlined in our vision document (MT-MVT, 2022), intercultural communicative competence encompasses knowledge about language and languages as both a cognitive and social phenomenon, usually coined as Language Awareness (LA). LA is defined as "explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use" (Svalberg, 2012). Accordingly, LA-oriented MFL education is much broader than traditional grammar teaching. A focus on language as a formal, cognitive phenomenon with regularities and systematicities within and between language(s) allows students to discover crosslinguistic similarities and differences between the languages and dialects they know, which can have positive effects on their language competence in those languages (Hawkins, 1999; Roehr-Brackin, 2018; Sierens et al., 2018; McManus & Marsden, 2017, 2018, 2019). Moreover, such an approach allows learners to make use of their whole plurilingual repertoire when encountering, learning, and using new and unknown languages and varieties, which has been found to increase motivation and specifically boost the confidence of multilingual language learners (Sierens et al., 2018; Turner et al., 2023). In addition, language awareness entails engagement with language as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon. As such, it enables learners to critically evaluate language use in different contexts (e.g., political framing) and to understand how different languages and language varieties function as markers of (cultural) identity in different social and historical contexts. This allows students to connect language to broader cultural and historical phenomena and developments, while it is also expected to increase their motivation to engage with different languages and varieties (Sierens et al., 2018). Finally, awareness and knowledge of the cognitive, affective, and sociocultural underpinnings of language learning and development (language learning awareness) help to understand, monitor, and steer their own language learning. This supports greater autonomy and agency in that process and, thus, prepares learners better

for challenges they might encounter along their own learning path (Jessner, 1999; Sierens et al., 2018) – a notion that ties in with the idea of language learning as humanization and a whole person approach (Zheng et al., 2025).

Recent language pedagogic research that includes material development provides showcases of what such language-awareness-oriented activities might look like. For example, Abel-Hardenberg et al. (2025) draw on crosslinguistic similarities (e.g., Dutch and German both put a conjugated verb in sentence final position in subordinate clauses) using an implicit teaching approach, thereby, successfully eliciting heightened language awareness. Such pedagogical interventions contribute to students' understanding and have been shown to increase motivation and interest in MFLs (Leenders et al., 2024). Yet such research and material are scarce and more initiatives for material development are necessary in order to cover the wide range of topics relevant to language awareness.

Cultural awareness

Someone who is culturally aware knows that the behavior, expectations, perspectives, and values of an individual or a group of people might be related to their cultural background and experiences (Dasli, 2011). From a more static perspective on culture, we can identify cultural norms or clichés such as "Italians love pizza and Germans eat sausages" that transport superficial aspects of culture. A more dynamic perspective views culture as one factor contributing to an individual's repertoire intersecting with age, gender, ethnicity, and other individual features (Dervin, 2015). Culture can change over time as one grows with experience, and, as such, language, culture, and identity are shaped by those experiences throughout a lifetime. Education that aims to foster this awareness encourages learners to actively explore different aspects of their own and other cultures, so that the reflection about differences and similarities develops into intercultural competence (Liddicoat, 2005, 2019; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Given the inseparable connection between language and culture, the MFL classroom is an important locus for (world) citizenship education and for increasing learners' cultural awareness and intercultural competence. In fact, teaching language without reference to and incorporation of cultural aspects of a target language seems meaningless if not impossible. Hence, active engagement with cultural phenomena from the target language culture(s) that may initially strike learners as *odd* and *other* can lead to a critical reflection and reevaluation of students' own beliefs and cultural situatedness (Immers et al., 2022). Yet explicit integration of language and culture in Dutch MFL classes is rare and too often culture plays a subordinate role, as indicated by recent research on German as a foreign language coursebooks in the Netherlands (Ciepielewska-Kaczmarek et al., 2020). One exception might be in literature education. Literature classes in the Netherlands, however, remain quite marginal, even though research highlights the potential of literature to develop cultural awareness and cultural literacy (Schat et al. 2023a; Toonen et al., 2024). Also, literature in the MFL classroom is often confined to upper secondary school, although integrating literature in lower secondary MFL classes can benefit the development of reading and literary competence, including cultural awareness (Lehrner-ter Lindert, 2020). Typically, literature classes focus on authors and works that are part of the literary canon (Delhey et al., 2025). However, a more integrated approach that includes text, context,

readership, and language can give learners a multifaceted view of culture in the target language. By treating formal elements of literary texts in conjunction with the social, cultural and historical elements represented in literature, the text is studied from different perspectives. Literature, then, can be a rich source of creative language use in context and may help develop cultural literacy and critical cultural awareness (Bloemert, 2019; Segal, 2015).

To sum up, the above overview argues that school-based MFL education *could* and *should* entail much more than a narrow focus on language competence. In contrast, there is immense value in aiming for an integrated approach to MFLs. In such a context, using the language to learn its system (grammar and vocabulary) goes hand in hand with studying and fostering language awareness and cultural awareness. The aim is that students develop their intercultural communicative competence as a whole. When conceptualizing those different aspects of L2 competence as the ultimate attainment goal of language education, it is important to acknowledge the processes underlying its development.

How does second language competence develop?

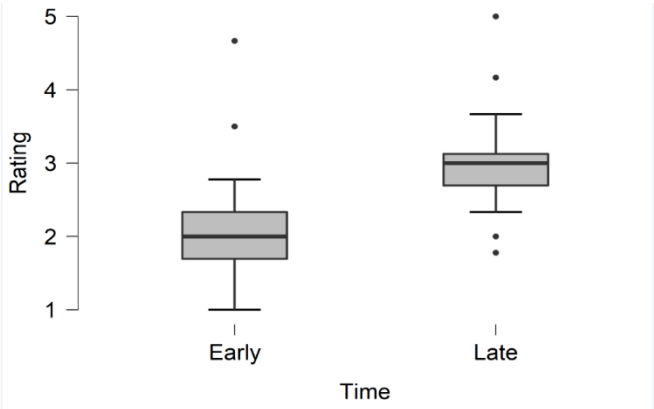
Research on second language development covers many aspects and dimensions, and its outcomes are not always directly applicable to language pedagogy. However, one important outcome of these studies is that language learning is characterized by a nonlinear and variable developmental trajectory, in which input and interaction are key (Atkinson et al., 2025). Second language proficiency does not develop in a straight, predictable manner but emerges over time, with many moments of rapid development, periods of slowing, and even periods of language attrition. Although general patterns and stages may be identified, they are hardly ever the same across individuals. Language learning is shaped by numerous interrelated factors, including the learner's first language, motivation to learn, aptitude for language learning, the time available for learning, the amount, intensity, and quality of contact with the target language, personal history and associations, and personality traits (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) and even musical ability (Jansen et al., 2023), and circadian rhythm (De Bot, 2013).

School-based instruction may modulate some of these factors, but not all. It is therefore not surprising that language development over time is highly individual. This has been illustrated by a study on the second-language development of first-year secondary students in the Netherlands (Verspoor et al., 2021). The data for this study were collected at a so-called bilingual school in the Netherlands where a major part (around 50 percent) of the curriculum is taught in students' L2 (English), implementing a content and language integrated (CLIL) approach (De Graaff et al., 2007). Considering the students' background characteristics, such as their verbal intelligence, socioeconomic status, and language learning environment, the group of learners turned out to be surprisingly homogeneous. In the study, all students in one class were given a similar writing assignment every week for 15 weeks. These writing products were then blind assessed on holistic writing quality (both for student and for week) by a group of trained raters. Each product was evaluated by three raters, with a fourth added if there were large discrepancies. Since half the lessons at the school were taught in English, we could expect significant progress in English during that

time. And indeed, when we look at the group average at the beginning (first two weeks) and end (last two weeks) of the data collection, we see exactly that (Figure 2).

Figure 2

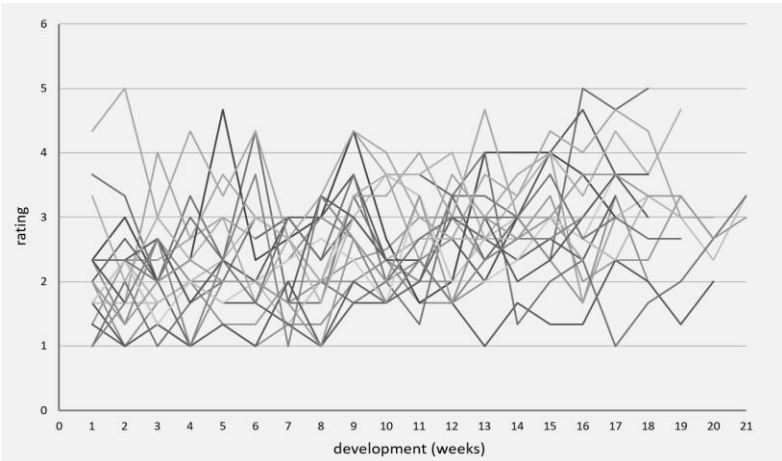
The group scores of the rated writings at an early and a later moment during the first half year (see figure 4, Verspoor et al., 2021, p. 6)



However, the picture changes when we look at the development of individual students (see Figure 3, where each line represents an individual student). What stands out most here is the wide variation within the same learner. These data show that the writing development of the students does not follow a straight line but is marked by strong week-to-week fluctuations. While the group average shows a positive trend, the individual language learner's development is hardly predictable. Some variability may be assigned to the fact that students did not write about the same topic every week, to prevent them from losing interest. However, the statistical analyses showed that topic variability could not account for the strong week-to-week fluctuations in the rated scores. Similar findings of highly variable language learning trajectories have been reported in other studies, such as in the work of Derwing and Munro (2013) on the development of English pronunciation among a large group of immigrants in Canada. Similarly, a longitudinal study of the English development in Chinese twins, who strongly share personal preferences, living environments, schooling, and amount of contact with the second language, also showed considerable individual variability in development (Lowie et al., 2018).

Figure 3

The individual scores of the rated writing products of the individual learners (see figure 5, Verspoor et al., 2021, p. 6)



Our best understanding of the principles and mechanisms of second language development comes from a holistic perspective that recognizes the inherent complexity of language learning (Michel et al., 2025). This includes the evolving individual differences among learners as well as the influence of the learning environment. Language learning is not a fixed state but a relational, ecological, and dynamic process in which learners and their contexts continuously shape one another. For instance, a well-documented individual factor that interplays with context is *Willingness to Communicate*, which fluctuates in real time as communicative opportunities emerge or fade in relation to the individual's abilities, dispositions, and the situational affordances available (Henry & MacIntyre, 2024, pp. 7-8). Because language functions as a form of social action and contributes to identity formation, it is fundamentally learned through interaction with others. Rich social interaction enables new connections between linguistic forms, their uses, and their meanings to emerge and become reinforced. Engaging with a language in authentic social contexts, including classroom settings, provides some of the most natural conditions for MFL development. Much language learning unfolds within the complex environment of direct, dialogic interaction with other speakers, whether in real or virtual contexts. Other forms of language contact, such as watching films, reading books, or interacting with target-language materials, also contribute meaningfully to second language acquisition.

We argue that such content, firmly rooted in language and culture studies, provides the ideal foundation for content and language integrated learning (CLIL; Mearns & De Graaff, 2018) in MFL education – CLIL teaching that promotes language competence while also fostering the development of intercultural communicative competence. It is here that teachers play a pivotal role in instructed second language acquisition. Educators can choose which content to prioritize, direct their students to valuable and interesting materials, and create strategies for working together with students on those topics. However, MFL course book material often focuses on a wide range of themes that are not directly related to language and culture (e.g., climate change, healthy living) – even though, as we have argued above, language and cultural studies offer a wealth of compelling content with strong potential to engage and motivate students in school contexts. Some MFL teachers, drawing on their own experiences with such content during their own studies in higher education, work with (self-created) materials. Those integrate language education with topics such as the role of language in shaping and expressing social or regional identity, the way language is used in politics and advertising, and how language and culture have shaped colonial history – to name just a few. By drawing on relevant and meaningful content that relates to language awareness and cultural awareness, as proposed in Figure 1, they support the construction of meaningful communicative interactions for their students.

How to teach MFL?

Over the years, many different approaches to language instruction have dominated the field (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Since the communicative turn, it has, however, become evident that developing communicative competence requires extensive language use (see Andringa et al, 2011; Gombert et al, 2024; Rousse-Malpat et al., 2022; Piggott, 2019). Different pedagogical approaches emphasize substantial, authentic, and rich language use as a prerequisite for language learning (e.g., Van den Branden, 2022) because, as Sato et al. (2025,

p. 4) state: "Simply put, without input, there is nothing to be learned." Input, however, only becomes meaningful in the context of language use, including production and interaction, in short, when L2 is part of communication and conversation. In addition, Thorne and Hellermann (2022) introduced the concept of "rewilding the classroom", that is, to "integrate formal language-learning settings with the vibrancy of diverse linguistic, experiential, and situational contexts elsewhere in the world" (Sato et al., 2025, p. 24). In many classrooms, language learning is still very much guided by explicit grammar learning activities, also in the Netherlands. Yet language learning is not "simply" a matter of transferring explicit knowledge from an expert (the teacher) to the learner (Andringa & Rebuschat, 2015). Explicit instruction, that is, sharing facts about the target language and explaining differences in language structure, may lead to knowledge about the language. However, it may not automatically lead to language learning.

The more recent emancipation of *Instructed Second Language Acquisition* (ISLA) as its own field of enquiry has resulted in evidence-based pedagogical implications that are applicable in the language classroom (Sato & Loewen, 2019). This ranges from more implicit techniques, such as L2 input modification and corrective feedback, to more explicit forms such as explicit attention to specific linguistic forms or form-focused production and elicitation activities. Often, evidence-based techniques guide learners towards making more effective use of language learning opportunities by instruction on metacognitive skills, by enhancing their language awareness, and by strengthening cognitive-affective factors such as motivation in order to enhance L2 engagement (Sato et al., 2025). Another innovative way forward might be the combination of task-based (TBLT) and dynamic-usage based (DUB) approaches (Lowie et al., 2020). For example, Salama et al. (in press) propose a DUB-TBLT pedagogy, where learners work on a series of (self-directed) task cycles that follow and guide individual trajectories of L2 development. Another evidence-based combination is an integrated focus on content and language education.

As we have established in the preceding section, the development of a second (or third, or fourth) language is highly individual. It is an active, internal developmental process that leads to implicit (and largely unconscious) linguistic knowledge. The right kind of feedback at the right moment, and in the right context, can (sometimes indirectly) contribute to this, but the effect is difficult to predict. Recognizing variability in the learning process (see Verspoor & De Bot, 2022) and acknowledging individual differences between learners (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005) requires a different role for the language teacher than we may be used to. It requires not someone who explains grammar rules and/or vocabulary items to a group and then tests students' knowledge of these rules and words, but someone who creates the optimal conditions and an optimal context for each individual's learning to take place.

Fostering individual learning opportunities through engagement

The above insights would imply that individualized, learner-centered teaching is more likely to be effective than teaching large groups of students such as entire classes in the same way – as is common practice in most institutionalized compulsory education. In this light, it is not very surprising that personalized language instruction offered by private institutes like the Dutch Regina Coeli (https://www.reginacoeli.com) is popular and successful for

those who can afford it. Yet the reality of compulsory MFL education (e.g., in secondary schools) is different, and we need another take on teaching in these more common contexts to build on the insights of research into L2 development. The important question for the here and now is what we *can* do in mainstream education to increase success. In our view, it is important for teachers and learners to have a better understanding of what and how we *learn* when learning a language – and then build on those understandings to create a supportive classroom environment.

Given the large number of individual differences, many of which may change over time, successful language instruction by a particular teacher may seem virtually impossible (but is becoming increasingly possible in the era of AI, in which individualized algorithms can support learners). However, despite the many individual differences, research does show fairly clearly which factors can contribute to optimal conditions for language learning. One of the most important conditions for learning, and thus for second language development, is engagement with both the learning goals and the learning process. The role of engagement has been studied through cognitive, affective, and social indicators, and is crucial across all of these areas (see Hiver et al., 2024, for a comprehensive overview). Research also shows that the learning environment, and especially the teacher, can play an important role in increasing engagement and motivation, particularly in the first years of language learning (Nikolov, 1999). By fostering a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and by focusing on positive psychology (Dewaele & Saito, 2022; Gabryś-Barker & Gałajda, 2016), the learning environment can boost learner engagement. Hiver et al.'s review concludes that the main implications for increasing engagement in education have to do with technology. Video games, authentic social media, and web-based language use have proven effective in increasing engagement (see Kassenberg et al. 2020 for an implementation in Dutch higher education, and Pattemore & Gesa, 2025, for further examples). In person and virtual exchange and intercultural communication also contribute to this (Heinzmann et al., 2024; Hermann et al., 2026; O'Dowd, 2021; The EVALUATE Group, 2019). In such contexts, the boundary between language use inside and outside the classroom becomes blurred, and learning is less structured – comparable to the above-mentioned notion of *rewilding* the classroom (Thorne & Hellermann, 2022). More importantly, this leads to authentic and meaningful language use, thereby enhancing learner engagement (see, for example, Mercer, 2019). We may also expect that engagement itself can reshape the learning environment (the classroom). In other words, the opportunities the environment provides for learning and for engagement mutually influence one another.

Integrating language and content

Several decades of research into CLIL-based teaching demonstrate that integrating language and content has strong potential to foster language development (Hidalgo & Ortega-Sánchez, 2023). Interestingly, most of the research focused on advancing language rather than on content learning. Yet if we consider a CLIL approach for the language classroom, that is, growing disciplinary content knowledge as the aim of language education, we see that there is just as much to be gained. Indeed, empirical studies implemented in Dutch secondary schools demonstrate that drawing on language awareness and cultural awareness

can achieve exactly this. For example, Schat et al. (2023a) implemented a CLIL-based literature intervention fostering intercultural competence. The longitudinal experimental project provided evidence that not only intercultural competence but also reading proficiency improved, indicating that working with literary texts can support language development and intercultural competence in parallel. More importantly, students reported that they appreciated the social relevance of the literary content – a finding that reiterates earlier work showing that disciplinary literature content was found to promote learners' motivation (Schrijvers et al., 2019). In a similar vein, Abitzsch et al. (2024), who investigated the motivations of Dutch foreign language learners of German who, against the current trend, did enroll in German Language and Culture degrees in the Netherlands, found that their primary motivation, besides having had an enthusiastic German teacher, were their enthusiasm for culture, politics, society, and the language as such. And finally, Abel-Hardenberg et al. (2025) demonstrated that even a short-term implementation of pedagogical translanguaging techniques to implicitly foster language awareness in German classrooms in Dutch secondary education managed to engage students in meaningful activities that positively influenced their language learning as well as crosslinguistic awareness.

How to assess language proficiency?

In addition to the implications that the dynamic nature of language learning has for a stimulating and engaging learning environment, important conclusions can also be drawn regarding assessment, both in terms of its content and the way it is conducted. Language testing often takes the native speaker as the norm, with deviations labeled as "errors". Apart from the fact that native norms are themselves variable and may not form a reliable benchmark, it is hardly motivating to define a learner as a deficient native speaker (Dewaele & Saito, 2022). With his idea of multi-competence, Cook (1999) already posited that someone learning an additional language or who is multilingual, will notice that these multiple systems influence each other which does not only affect linguistic abilities but impacts cognitive functions and processing, "offering bilinguals or multilinguals a broader range of cognitive skills, such as enhanced problem-solving abilities and creativity" (McCray & Hanks, 2024, p. 178). Partly for this reason, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was developed around what learners *can* do. The CanDo descriptors are based on communicative competences and are elaborated for different skills and levels (A1–C2). When it was introduced in 2001, the CEFR was primarily intended as a tool for learners to profile themselves as multilingual Europeans. Since then, however, ownership of the CEFR seems to have shifted to testing agencies and publishers, who prefer to work with the now familiar labels. It should be clear that the CanDo approach aligns much more closely with a dynamic, individual process of self-development than with testing against native-speaker norms ("errors"). Ideally, a language learner is not characterized by a single label (B1), but by a dynamic, individual profile across competencies (for example, B1 for spoken production and B2 for receptive competencies like listening). This use of the CEFR remains possible in the future.

What many people, including professionals in education, are less familiar with is that the CEFR is not limited to the well-known labels, but also includes a European

Language Portfolio (ELP, Council of Europe, n.d.). The ELP was designed as a tool for learners to record their language development, learning experiences, and intercultural encounters. Instead of a one-time test, the learner continuously collects evidence of developing communicative competencies. From the perspective of learning as a dynamic and variable process, the portfolio is a more suitable form of assessment than a test at a single moment in time, as it views language development as an evolving process. As a learner tool, a portfolio can also strengthen engagement in the learning process. It is, therefore, unfortunate that the ELP did not succeed in practice, mainly because of its complex structure and burdensome administration. But this does not mean that education cannot make use of portfolios to help learners gain insight into their individual development. Some form of continuous assessment is therefore highly commendable.

Apart from what would be the most appropriate form of assessment for languages, we are confronted with the needs of schools to provide grades based on single observations, such as a final examination. In practice, the content and the form of the final examination largely determine the curriculum, due to washback effects (Green, 2007). Taking the Dutch context as an example, the central final examination consists of a multiple-choice reading exam, in which students answer questions about a number of texts. In preparation for this exam, an important focus in the MFL classroom is on reading, but also on strategically answering MC-questions about texts (Rouffet et al., 2023). We are hopeful that the ongoing reform of language education at the secondary school level in the Netherlands, with its newly formulated learning and attainment goals (see above; SLO, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c), will lead to the design of new examinations that assess not only (aspects of) language competence but also knowledge related to language awareness and cultural awareness. In light of this development and considering a recently published exploration of CLIL-based assessment practices in the Netherlands (Mearns et al., 2025), it seems particularly important to support teachers in developing and designing integrated approaches to assessment. Given that a CLIL approach aims to foster both content learning and language development, it is essential that assessment likewise integrates both dimensions from a strongly integrative perspective (Sato, 2023). Implementing a high-demand, high-support context ensures that both are integral parts of subject learning while taking into account that the dynamically developing L2 competence might affect how a learner is able to communicate about their content knowledge. In practice, assessment in an integrated curriculum in mainstream education that aims to foster intercultural communicative competence requires informed pedagogic decisions about (a) what aspects of language competence and content knowledge count (b) to what extent to a grade, and (c) what linguistic support students might be allowed to consult during the assessment.

Why do we need MFL education? Language Learning as Humanization

As we have laid out so far, our perspective is that intercultural communicative competence can be fostered by targeting MFL education not only to develop language competence but also to give equal weight to developing language and cultural awareness. We are yet to answer an even more fundamental question: why do we need MFL education in the first place? Indeed, in the era of generative AI and technological advancements, one might ask, why anyone would engage in MFL learning – or more importantly, why we consider it

important that general education should have students engage in school-based language learning (cf. Stam, 2025; Zheng et al., 2025).

From the above, it has become clear that, in our view, language learning is not "just a skill" like playing basketball or doing embroidery. Language learning opens students' worlds in many directions. First and foremost, it enables real and direct contact with people who speak another language. Yet language learning is more. As Michel et al. (2025, p. 97) recently put it, language learning is closely related to humanization. This concept "[...] builds on the Humboldtian notion of *Bildung* where the aim of education is to form valuable human beings, building character in the sense that encountering ideas and realities beyond one's own limited experience allows one to engage with the world beyond one's head, ideally as a co-conspirator rather than competitor or aggressor: Language learning exponentially expands the scope of experience and, potentially, the scope of understanding as well." Similarly, Zheng et al. (2025) argue that language education is an ideal context for building the *person as a whole* beyond being competent in a language. In the language classroom, students can learn how to be agentic and well-prepared to become lifelong learners who are "resilient, tenacious, and highly motivated, and who can regulate their learning processes and create learning opportunities for themselves" (Zheng et al., 2025, p. 71). This is supported in a recently published study investigating teachers' perspectives on the didactic role of in-person school exchange in the context of neighbor language learning of Dutch and German (Hermann et al., 2026). Language teachers and their colleagues from other disciplines who had participated in such an exchange indicated that it contributed to much more than the foreign language competence of participating learners, enhancing their cultural awareness and personality as global intercultural citizens. In other words, MFL education can be the locus of learning that enables young people to reach their goals and develop new identities in a new linguistic and cultural context.

For those who are in need of support in convincing doubting others (e.g., parents, friends, school leaders) why it is a valuable and positive choice to focus on language and culture studies, most importantly, young people with a genuine interest in language learning, the MT-MVT has published a poster with a set of 10 reasons why language studies are meaningful (see Figure 4).

10 Reasons for choosing languages (translated from the Dutch original, see figure 3 below)

1. Language studies allow for real contact.
2. Language learning is brain gymnastics.
3. Your own culture becomes less obvious.
4. You develop understanding for the perspectives of others.
5. You develop new sides of yourself.
6. Language studies are exciting and challenging.
7. Language studies trigger creative thinking.
8. We need linguistic expertise for the development of AI.
9. Multilingualism has great value in the job market.
10. … and yes, it also comes in handy when you want to ask for the wifi-code at the hotel reception desk.

Figure 4

Poster with 10 reasons for choosing languages (see taalwijs.nu, 2025 for a full list of references with research supporting each of the statements).

Outlook for research and education: Desiderata

Seeing language learning as an individual and variable process helps us to understand that successful language education depends on creating optimal learning conditions, in which learner engagement plays a crucial role and in which language development is fostered and assessed in a realistic way. In the ongoing curriculum reform of language education in the Netherlands, serious efforts are underway to make language teaching more relevant, challenging, and engaging, with language awareness and cultural awareness as meaningful goals (SLO, 2025b, 2025c). This is also an opportunity to take a fresh look at language teaching methodology, with greater attention to the individual and dynamic process of language development.

For the future of language education in general, we hope that this article has inspired teachers as well as those responsible for designing coursebook material and standardized

assessment to view language learning as an individual process and to recognize that engagement with the target language and culture is much more important than explicit instruction about rules and facts. To foster such engagement, challenging and exciting disciplinary content is key to language education. Studying language as both a phenomenon and a carrier of cultural identity is important to open young people's minds to new perspectives and ways of understanding the world. The scenario sketched by Thompson et al. (2025), in which the closure of language programs at universities might be a canary in the coal mine signaling the onset of undemocratic and inward-looking societies, should be avoided at all costs.

For the Netherlands, specifically, we are positive that the ongoing revision of the national curriculum, taking on board several of the MT-MVT recommendations described above, is indeed able to change MFL teaching practice in high-schools. The current decline in interest in language studies, as well as in enrolments in teacher education, is extremely worrying. In our view, one way forward would be to ensure students (and their significant others, including parents) see the value of language learning for themselves and society at large. We believe that engaging in meaningful content, which is the core of language and culture studies, plays a pivotal role there. Once young people show an interest in language and culture studies, society needs to nurture this potential and encourage students to enroll in these programs in higher education. Only if we value the contribution of MFLs to society – not in a purely utilitarian way, but as a form of conceptual enrichment that supports the holistic formation of young people – can the vicious circle be reversed. When people express an interest in entering language teacher education, societal support should be even stronger, as well-trained and inspiring teachers play a key role in delivering engaging MFL classes in secondary schools and thus have the potential to turn the current decline into a virtuous circle.

Future research and policy efforts should specifically look into ways to nurture interest in and positive attitudes towards MFL. Such research may benefit from international collaborations, as the challenges faced in the Netherlands are not unique. Furthermore, in light of genAI, it is imperative to integrate technological advancements into language and culture studies and consider how MFL education can support students' knowledge, skills, and abilities at a meta-level: that they learn how to use those tools critically and develop transformative skills that allow them to continue doing so in the future.

Finally, the more practical outlook would require a strong focus on material that integrates language competence, language awareness, and cultural awareness to foster intercultural communicative competence (Figure 1). Developing such material is equally important as gathering and improving existing material for both teaching and assessment. Additionally, in line with principles of educational design research, the evaluation of the material should be conducted through iterative design cycles, guided by four key evaluative questions concerning the relevance, consistency, practicality, and effectiveness of the newly developed material and pedagogy (e.g., Plomp, 2013). Development should occur in close co-creation with key stakeholders, particularly students and teachers. In this way, classroom realities are systematically incorporated into the design process, ensuring ecological validity. Encouragingly, there is a strong research agenda into language

pedagogy, with numerous teachers involved as researchers (see vakdidactiekgw.nl). To keep the workload for teachers amenable, it seems essential to guide both beginning and in-service teachers towards using and creating such material while also strengthening sharing practices as open educational resources.

The beauty of MFL competence, both from a language and culture perspective, is that it enriches personalities. As a society, we should prevent it from becoming an elitist privilege. Therefore, MFL learning should remain core to compulsory education as it allows young people to grow, discover themselves and others, and continuously open their worlds and minds to new encounters.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare none.

References

Abel-Hardenberg, N., Poarch, G. J., & Michel, M. (2025). The effect of pedagogical translanguaging, typographic input enhancement, and input flood on the awareness for syntactic L1–L3 transfer opportunities in Dutch learners of L3 German. *Journal of the European Second Language Association*, *9*(1), 124-138. https://doi.org/10.22599/jesla.119

Abitzsch, D., Knopp, E., & Michel, M. (2024). Motivatie om Duits te studeren aan Nederlandse universiteiten. *Levende Talen Tijdschrift*, *25*(2), 13-24. Available from https://lt-tijdschriften.nl/ojs/index.php/ltt/article/view/2402, last visited 05-05-2026.

Andringa, S., De Glopper, K., & Hacquebord, H. (2011). Effect of explicit and implicit instruction on free written response task performance. *Language Learning*, *61*, 868-903. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2010.00623.x

Andringa, S., & Rebuschat, P. (2015). New directions in the study of implicit and explicit learning: An introduction. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *37*(2), 185-196. https://doi.org/10.1017/S027226311500008X

Atkinson, D., Mejía-Laguna, J., Ribeiro, A. C., Cappellini, M., Kayi-Aydar, H., & Lowie, W. (2025). Relationality, interconnectedness, and identity: A process-focused approach to second language acquisition and teaching (SLA/T). *Modern Language Journal*, *109*(S1), 39–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12982

Beacco, J. -C., Byram, M., Cavalli, M., Coste, D., Cuenat, M.E., Goullier, F., & Panthier, J. (2016). *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*. Council of Europe Publishing. Available from https://rm.coe.int/16806ae621, last visited 21-04-2026.

Bloemert, J. (2019). *Getting off the fence: Exploring the role, position, and relevance of literature education in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Dutch secondary education* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Groningen]. https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.101550168

Byram, M. (1997). Cultural awareness as vocabulary learning. *Language Learning Journal*, *16*(1), 51-57. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571739785200291

Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, *1*(1), 1-47. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1

Ciepielewska-Kaczmarek, L., Jentges, S., & Tammenga-Helmantel, M. (2020). *Landeskunde im Kontext. Die Umsetzung von theoretischen Landeskundeansätzen in DaF-Lehrwerken* [Culture in context: The application of theoretical culture-didactics in German as a foreign language coursebooks]. V&R Unipress. https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737011211

Cook, V. (1999). Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, *33*(2), 185–209. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587717

Council of Europe (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing. Available from

https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4, last visited 10-12-2025.
Council of Europe (n.d.). *European Language Portfolio (ELP)*. Available from https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio, last visited 29-12-2025.
Dasli, M. (2011). Reviving the 'moments': From cultural awareness and cross-cultural mediation to critical intercultural language pedagogy. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, *19*(1), 21-39. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2011.527118
Delhey, Y., Dera, J., Janssen, L., Jentges, S., Koffeman, M., & Mekenkamp, M. (2025). *Tekstselectie in het Nederlandse literatuuronderwijs. Een enquêtestudie onder docenten Duits, Engels, Frans, Nederlands en Spaans*. Stichting Lezen. https://www.lezen.nl/publicatie/tekstselectie-in-het-nederlandse-literatuuronderwijs/
De Bot, K. (2013). Circadian rhythms and second language development. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, *19*(2), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006913489201
De Graaff, R., Koopman, G.J., Anikina, Y., & Westhoff, G. (2007). An observation tool for effective L2 pedagogy in content and language integrated learning (CLIL). *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *10*(5), 603-624. https://doi.org/10.2167/beb462.0
De Jong, N. H., Steinel, M. P., Florijn, A. F., Schoonen, R., & Hulstijn, J. H. (2012). Facets of speaking proficiency. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *34*(1), 5–34. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263111000489
DeKeyser, R. (2020). Skill acquisition theory. In B. VanPatten & J. Williams (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition* (3rd ed., pp. 83-104). Routledge.
Dervin, F. (2015). Towards post-intercultural teacher education: Analysing "extreme" intercultural dialogue to reconstruct interculturality. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 38*(1), 71–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2014.902441
Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2013). The development of L2 oral language skills in two L1 groups: A 7-year study. *Language Learning*, *63*(2), 163–185. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12000
Dewaele, J. M., & Saito, K. (2022). Positive psychology can help overcome the pernicious native speaker ideology. *The European Educational Researcher*, *5*(2), 225-234. https://doi.org/10.31757/euer.526
Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam (2025). *Feiten en cijfers* [Facts and figures]. Available from https://duitslandinstituut.nl/naslagwerk/1223/feiten-en-cijfers, last visited 18-12-2025.
Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410613349
Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). The psychology of the language learner revisited (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315779553
Duarte, J. (2019). Translanguaging in mainstream education: A sociocultural approach. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *22*(2), 150-164. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1231774
Ellis, R. (2002). Does form-focused instruction affect the acquisition of implicit knowledge? A review of the research. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *24*(2), 223–236. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263102002073
Gabryś-Barker, D., & Gałajda, D. (2016). *Positive psychology perspectives on foreign language learning and teaching*. Springer.
Gombert, W., Keijzer, M., & Verspoor, M. (2024). Long-term effects of structure-based versus dynamic usage-based instructional programs for French. *Journal of the European Second Language Association*, *8*(1), 18-33. https://doi.org/10.22599/jesla.118
Goo, J., & Mackey, A. (2013). The case against the case against recasts. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *35*(1), 127–165. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263112000708
Green, A. (2007). Washback to learning outcomes: A comparative study of IELTS preparation and university professional language courses. *Assessment in Education*, *14*(1), 75-97. https://doi.org/10.1080/09695940701272880
Hawkins, E.W. (1999). Foreign language study and language awareness. *Language Awareness*, *8*(3&4), 124-142. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658419908667124
Heinzmann, S., Ferris, C., Roderer, T., & Ehrsam, K. (2024). Student exchange in primary and secondary education and its effect on language gains, intercultural competence and language learning motivation:

A systematic review of research in the European context. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *22*(2), 1–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2024.2331609

Henry, A., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2024). *Willingness to communicate, multilingualism and interactions in community contexts*. Multilingual Matters; Channel View Publications. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.22679683

Hermann, J., Jentges, S., & Knopp, E. (2026). Teachers' perspectives and understanding of cross-border school exchange: A qualitative content analysis from the Dutch-German border region. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics,* 1-33. https://doi.org/10.1515/eujal-2024-0061

Hidalgo, D. R., & Ortega-Sánchez, D. (2023). CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) Methodological Approach in the Bilingual Classroom: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Instruction, 16(3)*, 915-934. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2023.16349a

Hiver, P., Al-Hoorie, A. H., Vitta, J. P., & Wu, J. (2024). Engagement in language learning: A systematic review of 20 years of research methods and definitions. *Language Teaching Research*, *28*(1), 201–230. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211001289

Immers, S., Abitzsch, D., & Jentges, S. (2022). Reflecteren op cultuur tijdens schooluitwisselingen. *Levende Talen Magazine*, *109*(1), 12-17. https://lt-tijdschriften.nl/ojs/index.php/ltm/article/view/2228

Jansen, N., Harding, E. E., Loerts, H., Başkent, D., & Lowie, W. (2023). The relation between musical abilities and speech prosody perception: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Phonetics*, *101*, 101278. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wocn.2023.101278

Jenkins, J. (2015). Repositioning English and multilingualism in English as a lingua franca. *Englishes in Practice*, *2*(3), 49-85. https://doi.org/10.1515/eip-2015-0003

Jessner, U. (1999). Metalinguistic awareness in multilinguals: Cognitive aspects of third language learning. *Language Awareness*, *8*(3&4), 201-209. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658419908667129

Kassenberg, T., Galati, F., Vries-Zhuravleva, D. de, & Menke-Bazhutkina, I. (2020). Film language integrated learning: A usage-inspired L2 teaching approach. In W. Lowie, M. Michel, A. Rousse-Malpat, M. Keijzer & R. Steinkrauss (Eds.). *Usage-Based Dynamics in Second Language Development* (pp. 271-294). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788925259-015

Krashen, S. D. (1982). Acquiring a second language. *World Englishes*, *1*(3), 97-101. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.1982.tb00476.x

Kuiken, F., & Vedder, I. (2017). Functional adequacy in L2 writing: Towards a new rating scale. *Language Testing*, *34*(3), 321-336. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532216663991

Leenders, G.P.M., Amstel, M.O. van, De Graaff, H.C.J., & Koppen, J.M. van (2024). Het didactiseren van bewuste taalvaardigheid in het grammaticaonderwijs: Grammaticale concepten ingebed in hun grammaticale en taalcontrastieve context. *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *13*, https://doi.org/10.51751/dujal16273

Lehrner-te Lindert, E. (2020). *Fremdsprachliches Lesen mit literarischen Texten. Zur Entwicklung von Leseverstehen und literarischer Kompetenz im DaF-Unterricht der niederländischen Sekundarstufe I* [Foreign language reading with literary texts. On the development of reading comprehension and literary competence in the Dutch lower secondary German-as-a-foreign-language classroom]. Erich Schmidt Verlag.

Liddicoat, A. J. (2005). Teaching languages for intercultural communication. In D. Cunningham & A. Hatoss (Eds.), *An international perspective on language policies, practices and proficiencies* (pp. 201-214). Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes (FIPLV).

Liddicoat, A. J. (2019). Improving reading strategy knowledge in young children. *Estudias de lingüística inglesa aplicada*,(19), 17-37. https://doi.org/10.12795/elia.mon.2019.i1.02

Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural language teaching and learning* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118482070

Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413-468). Academic Press.

Lowie, W., Michel, M., Rousse-Malpat, A., Keijzer, M., & Steinkrauss, R. (Eds.). (2020). *Usage-Based Dynamics in Second Language Development*. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788925259

Lowie, W. M., Verspoor, M. H., & Van Dijk, M. (2018). The acquisition of L2 speaking: A dynamic perspective. In R. Alonso (Ed.), *Speaking in a Second Language* (pp. 106–125). Benjamins.

McCray, D., & Hanks, J. (2024). Multicompetence in second language academic writing: Reframing salient topics in writing research through the lens of the work of Vivian Cook. *Journal of the European Second Language Association*, *8*(1), 177-191. https://doi.org/10.22599/jesla.129

McManus, K., & Marsden, E. (2017). L1 explicit instruction can improve L2 online and offline performance. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *39*(3), 459-492. https://doi.org/10.1017/S027226311600022X

McManus, K., & Marsden, E. (2018). Online and offline effects of L1 practice in L2 grammar learning: A partial replication. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *40*(2), 459-475. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263117000171

McManus, K., & Marsden, E. (2019). Signatures of automaticity during practice: Explicit instruction about L1 processing routines can improve L2 grammatical processing. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, *40*(1), 205-234. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716418000553

Mearns, T., & Graaff, R. D. (2018). Bilingual education and CLIL in the Netherlands: The paradigm and the pedagogy. *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *7*(2), 122-128. https://doi.org/10.1075/dujal.00002.int

Mearns, T., Van Beuningen, C., Nederlof, N., & De Jong, N. (2025). Integration, demands and accommodations: An exploration of summative assessment practices in Dutch bilingual secondary education: An exploration of current practices. *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *14*. https://doi.org/10.51751/dujal15756

Meesterschapsteam Moderne Vreemde Talen (2022). Visie op de toekomst van het curriculum Moderne Vreemde Talen [Perspectives on the future of the curriculum of Modern Foreign Languages]. Available from modernevreemdetalen.vakdidactiekgw.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2022/04/Basistekst-visie-4.4.pdf, last visited 10-12-2025.

Mercer, S. (2019). Language learner engagement: Setting the scene. In X. Gao (Ed.), *Second handbook of English language Teaching* (pp. 643–660). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02899-2_40

Michel, M., Vidon, C., De Graaff, R., & Lowie, W. (2021). Language Learning beyond English in the Netherlands: A fragile future. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *9*(1), 159–182. https://doi.org/10.1515/eujal-2020-0020

Michel, M., Atkinson, D., Ribeiro, A. C., Alexopoulou, T., Cappellini, M., Eskildsen, S. W., Gao, X., Hellermann, J., Kayi-Aydar, H., Lowie, W., Mejía-Laguna, J. A., Ortega, L., Pekarek Doehler, S., Sasaki, M., Sato, M., Thorne, S. L., & Zheng, Y. (2025). Forging common ground in second language acquisition and teaching: A combined synergy statement. *Modern Language Journal*, *109*(S1), 90-103. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12983

Nikolov, M. (1999). "Why do you learn English?" "Because the teacher is short." A study of Hungarian children's foreign language learning motivation. *Language Teaching Research*, *3*(1), 33–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/136216889990030010

O'Dowd, R. (2021). Virtual exchange: Moving forward into the next decade. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *34*(3), 209-224. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1902201

Ortega, L. (2011). SLA after the social turn: Where cognitivism and its alternatives stand. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition* (pp. 167-180). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203830932

Pallotti, G. (2020). Measuring complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF). In P. Winke & T. Brunfaut (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and language testing* (pp. 201–210). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351034784-23

Pattemore, A., & Gesa, F. (Eds.). (2025). *Foreign language learning from audiovisual input: The role of original version television* (Educational Linguistics, Vol. 66). Springer.

Piggott, L. E. B. (2019). *First meaning then form: A longitudinal study on the effects of delaying and reducing explicit form-focused instruction for young adolescent EFL learners*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Utrecht]. LOT. https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/386767

Plomp, T. (2013). Educational design research: An introduction. In T. Plomp & N. Nieveen (Eds.), *Educational Design Research: An Introduction* (pp. 10-51). SLO.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Rouffet, C., Van Beuningen, C., & De Graaff, R. (2023). Constructive alignment in foreign language curricula: an exploration of teaching and assessment practices in Dutch secondary education. *The Language Learning Journal*, *51*(3), 344-358. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2025542

Rousse-Malpat, A., Steinkrauss, R., Wieling, M., & Verspoor, M. (2022). Communicative language teaching: Structure-based or dynamic usage-based? *Journal of the European Second Language Association*, *6*(1), 20-33. https://doi.org/10.22599/jesla.86

Roehr-Brackin, K. (2018). *Metalinguistic awareness and second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.

Salama, M., Rousse-Malpat, A., & Michel, M. (in press). Making the case for dynamic usage-based task-based language teaching. TASK. *Journal for task-based language teaching*.

Sato, M., & Loewen, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Evidence-based second language pedagogy: A collection of instructed second language acquisition studies*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351190558

Sato, T. (2023). Assessment in CLIL. In D.L. Banegas & S. Zappa-Hollman (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of content and language integrated learning* (pp. 355-370). Routledge.

Sato, M., Thorne, S. L., Michel, M., Alexopoulou, T., & Hellermann, J. (2025). Language, people, classrooms, world: Blending disparate theories for united language education practices. *Modern Language Journal*, *109*(S1), 15-38. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12976

Schrijvers, M., Janssen, T., Fialho, O., De Maeyer, S., & Rijlaarsdam, G. (2019). Transformative dialogic literature teaching fosters adolescents' insight into human nature and motivation. *Learning and Instruction*, *63*, 101216, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2019.101216

Schat, E., Van der Knaap, E., & De Graaff, R. D. (2023a). Implementation of an integrated intercultural literary pedagogy intervention in Spanish-as-a-foreign-language classrooms in the Netherlands: An effect study at the secondary level. *Language Teaching Research*, *30*(4), 1789–1813. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231156391

Schat, E., Van der Knaap, E., & De Graaff, R. (2023b). Key principles for an integrated intercultural literary pedagogy: An educational design research project on arts integration for intercultural competence. *Language Teaching Research*, *27*(2), 332-358. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211045012

Segal, N. (2015). From Literature to Cultural Literacy. *Humanities*, *4*, 68-79. https://doi.org/10.3390/h4010068

Sierens, S., Frijns, C., Van Gorp, K., Sercu, L., & Van Avermaet, P. (2018). The effects of raising language awareness in mainstream and language classrooms: A literature review (1995-2013). In C. Hélot, C. Frijns, K. Van Gorp & S. Sierens (Eds.), *Language awareness in multilingual classrooms in Europe. From theory to practice* (pp. 21-86). De Gruyter.

SLO (2021). *Startnotitie Moderne Vreemde Talen. Bovenbouw voortgezet onderwijs*. [Rationale Modern Foreign Languages. Upper secondary school.] Available from https://www.slo.nl/@20066/startnotitie-moderne-vreemde-talen, last visited 22-12-2025.

SLO (2023). *Startnotitie Moderne Vreemde Talen. Actualisatie kerndoelen* [Rationale Modern Foreign Languages. Curriculum reform core learning goals]. Available from https://www.actualisatiekerndoelen.nl/modernevreemdetalen/updates/startnotitie-van-het-leergebied-moderne-vreemde-talen--2-3, last visited 22-12-2025.

SLO (2025a). *Actualisatie kerndoelen en examenprogramma's* [Update of core learning goals and exam programme for Dutch secondary education]. Available from https://www.slo.nl/thema/meer/actualisatie-kerndoelen-examenprogramma, last visited 18-12-2025.

SLO (2025b). *Definitieve conceptkerndoelen moderne vreemde talen inclusief toelichtingsdocument*. [Definitive core learning goals MFL including explanation]. Available from https://www.slo.nl/thema/meer/actualisatie-kerndoelen-examenprogramma/actualisatie-kerndoelen/definitieve-conceptkerndoelen-moderne/@25209/de-conceptkerndoelen-moderne-vreemde-tal, last visited 22-12-2025.

SLO (2025c). *Toelichtingsdocument conceptexamenprogrammas moderne vreemde talen voor vmbo, havo en vwo: Versie 2* [Explanatory document concept attainment goals MFL: Version 2]. Available from https://www.slo.nl/thema/meer/actualisatie-kerndoelen-examenprogramma/actualisatie-

examenprogramma/examenprogramma-moderne-vreemde-talen/@24933/toelichtingsdocument-mvt-vmbo-havo-vwo, last visited 22-12-2025.

Stam, D. (2025). *Opinie: Stop met Duits op de middelbare school* [Opinion: Stop with German in high-schools]. De Volkskrant. Available from https://www.volkskrant.nl/columns-opinie/opinie-stop-met-duits-op-de-middelbare-school~b7afc228/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F, last visited 19-12-2025.

Svalberg, A. M.-L. (2012). Language awareness in language learning and teaching: A research agenda. *Language Teaching*, *45*(3), 376–388. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000079 Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: Theory and research. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 495-508). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410612700

Taalwijs.nu (2025). *Tien redenen om voor talen te kiezen* [Ten reasons to choose for languages]. Available from https://taalwijs.nu/2024/11/25/tien-redenen-om-voor-talen-te-kiezen, last visited 18-12-2025.

The EVALUATE Group (2019). *Evaluating the impact of virtual exchange on initial teacher education: MA European policy experiment*. Research-publishing.net. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2019.29.9782490057337

Thompson, A., Chalupa, C., & Stjepanovic, S. (2025). The canary in coal country: Educational policy, politics, and the dissolution of a language program. *Modern Language Journal*, *109*, 431–453. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.13002

Thorne, S. L., & Hellermann, J. (2022). Interfacing formal education and language learning beyond the classroom. In H. Reinders, C. Lai & P. Sundqvist (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language learning beyond the classroom* (pp. 36-51). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003048169

Toonen, J., Van der Knaap, E., & De Graaff, R. (2024). Sprekend literatuuronderwijs bij de moderne vreemde talen: Docenten Duits en Engels over spreken en literatuur in de bovenbouw van havo en vwo. *Levende Talen Tijdschrift*, *25*(3), 3-21. Available from https://lt-tijdschriften.nl/ojs/index.php/ltt/article/view/2414, last visited 05-05-2026.

Turner, M., Keary, A., & Tour, E. (2023). Home language literacy practices: learning opportunities for primary EAL students. *Australian Educational Research*, *50*, 1513–1531. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00566-9

UNL - Universiteiten van Nederland (2025). Feiten en cijfers [Facts and figures]. Available from https://universitaireaanpaklerarentekort.nl/feiten-en-cijfers, last visited 24-04-2026.

Van den Branden, K. (2022). How to teach an additional language: To task or not to task? John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/tblt.15

Van Ek, J.A. (1986). *Objectives for Foreign Language Learning, Vol. 1: Scope*. Council of Europe.

Vereniging Hogescholen (2026). Feiten en cijfers. Dashboard instroom, inschrijvingen en diploma's [Facts and figures. Dashboard uptake, enrollment and diplomas]. Available from https://www.verenigingghogescholen.nl/kennisbank/feiten-en-cijfers/artikelen/dashboard-instroom-inschrijvingen-en-diploma-s, last visited 24-04-2026.

Verspoor, M., Lowie, W., & Bot, K. de. (2021). Variability as normal as apple pie. *Linguistics Vanguard*, *7*(s2), 20200034. https://doi.org/10.1515/lingvan-2020-0034

Verspoor, M., & De Bot, K. (2022). Measures of variability in transitional phases in second language development. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, *60*(1), 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2021-0026

Zheng, Y., Ortega, L., Pekarek Doehler, S., Sasaki, M., Eskildsen, S. W., & Gao, X. (2025). Praxeology, humanism, equity, and mixed methods: Four pillars for advancing second language acquisition and teaching. *Modern Language Journal*, *109*(S1), 64-89. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12977