The number of primary schools providing early English education has grown from less than 100 to more than 1000 during the last decade, and will most likely further increase in next years: Platform2032, the Dutch governmental advisory board for the future educational curriculum, recommends to make early English lessons compulsory. It furthermore states that, next to teachers’ and policy makers’ views, the curriculum should be based on scientific insights. The problem is that a gap remains between educational research and its actual implementation: it is difficult to transfer research insights to classroom practices, and a real danger exists that schools base their (early English) practices on myths. With the described valorisation activities I want to: (1) help teachers communicate their questions regarding early English education to researchers, and (2) contribute to an adequate transfer from scientific findings to educational practice. These activities will contribute to bridging the gap between education and research, and help schools to offer high quality education.

(1) **Outline of proposed activities to finance with the grant**

This proposal entails two activities: (1) an online questionnaire assessing teachers’ beliefs and questions about early English education, resulting in an article in Didactief, and (2) four “explanation videos” on early English.

*Assessing teachers’ needs*

The questionnaire (based on one previously used in my PhD project) will contain questions on teachers’ beliefs and questions about early English. The outcomes will be presented in Didactief, a magazine that aims at making research outcomes comprehensible for teachers and improving interaction between researchers and teachers.
Instructing teachers and pupils

“Explamination videos” are short videos (max. three minutes) that explain concepts by means of animations. One video will be developed for pupils in the highest grade of primary school, and three are for teachers. Videos are unique and highly effective for explaining complex concepts. They are easily accessible and can be viewed at a time suitable to the individual, which is particularly preferred for teachers, who experience a heavy workload.

The videos for teachers explain three core concepts of early English education (and my PhD project), and why it is important to study these concepts. This adds to teachers’ understanding of scientific research on early English education.

One video, aimed at pupils in the highest grade of primary school, will describe the research cycle (question, method, results, conclusion), illustrated with the development of English vocabulary. English is an obligatory school subject in the highest grades of primary school and thus a topic that relates to pupils’ daily lives. Teachers can use the video during ‘Science and Technology’ lessons to visualize the research process to children. It will serve the dual purpose of awakening pupils’ interest in research and in English education.

(2) Explanation of the social benefit

Benefits for teachers and schools

Scientific research leads to new insights that are relevant for educational practice. Platform2032 advices schools to base their practices on these insights. Teachers find it hard, however, to transfer research findings to classroom practices.

I noticed this problem myself during my research. Primary school teachers and directors told me they were eager to translate scientific insights to their own practices, but encountered several problems while trying to accomplish this. They signalled that scientific reports are incomprehensible to them. Furthermore, the results of previous research they participated in were communicated to them only after a long time, making the link between the research and educational benefits unclear, and increasing unwillingness to participate in future research. The valorisation activities will stimulate interaction between teachers and researchers, and help teachers interpret the outcomes of scientific research. Thereby, it will aid teachers to transfer scientific insights to educational practice, preventing them from basing their practices on widespread claims that are not empirically funded.

Benefits for children

One of the current core objectives in the highest grades of Dutch primary education is to stimulate pupils’ inquiring attitude. Pupils are for example taught how to set up
experiments. Platform2032 recommends stimulating pupils’ inquiring attitude even more. That is exactly the aim of this video: help pupils understand scientific research and trigger their interest in it.

(3) Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholders

My proposal is based on conversations with teachers and school directors, and on the results of a previous questionnaire in my project. That questionnaire, completed by 24 teachers, revealed that teachers felt unknowledgeable about (the effects of) early English education. E.g., they were afraid that English lessons would be disadvantageous rather than beneficial to some pupils. The proposed activities will give them the ability to communicate such questions to researchers. The teachers and directors I spoke to declared that they would benefit from the activities because it would increase their knowledge about the effects of English education. As this will lead to educational practices being more informed by research insights, all pupils in elementary school will benefit from this project too. Further, the pupils’ video will stimulate their interest in research and in English education.

Finally, researchers will benefit from the activities as well. Interaction between researchers and teachers contributes to teachers’ willingness to participate in scientific research and may generate new research questions: both are beneficial for future studies.

Reaching stakeholders

The valorisation activities are in line with activities of my PhD project. The “video explanations” and questionnaire will be uploaded to the project website (http://www.ru.nl/cls/research_0/vroeg-vreemdetalenonderwijs). I will use my extensive network within the educational system (both directly and through organizations and academic partners) to reach the target groups. E.g., the activities will be widely announced via the newsletter of EP-Nuffic (the organization for internationalization in primary education that supports my research project), and through networks of early English and non-early-English schools I am in contact with.
(4) Planning & budget plan (2016)

Prepare and launch questionnaire: January-February

Video for pupils: March

Videos for teachers:
- June: Executive functions
- August: Phonological awareness
- October: English vowel perception & production

Write article outcomes questionnaire, submit to Didactief: November

The RU communication department agreed on assisting this project. The grant will be used to hire a student assistant from HAN multimedia design studies, and to cover the material costs for producing the videos (€400 for the first, €200 for each of the other three).

References


