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Vanessa Ruth Lobo

Teaching L2 English at a very young age:
a study of Dutch schools

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Research on the question what is the best age for second language (L2) acquisition does not wholly support the belief *the earlier, the better*. Yet the link between an early start and a superior language learning outcome has frequently been used to justify implementing early L2 learning in primary education.

The present longitudinal study has investigated the credibility of this claim by examining the effect of a CLIL approach on first and third graders attending seven Dutch primary schools. Children were taught art and crafts or physical education using English as the exclusive medium of instruction. In addition to analysing children's linguistic development and documenting their (first) foreign language experience, classroom interaction was studied. The inclusion of parents and teachers in the study also provides important data about their attitudes and opinions towards early L2 learning in primary education.

Can the Dutch early bird catch the worm? The present study confirms this question. However, it also provides important evidence distinguishing the younger from the older child, leading to a new notion of *the later, the better*.

This thesis will be of interest to researchers studying the unique, initial stages of L2 acquisition in classroom contexts. Its practical research design will be equally interesting to policy makers, practitioners and parents who wish to learn more about the outcomes of L2 learning in (Dutch) primary schools.

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