

Disorder during language lessons at ethnically diverse schools

9 June 2017



Africa Studio. Credit: Shutterstock

Pupils at schools with greater ethnic diversity experience more disorder during language lessons. This is one of the outcomes of research conducted by Gert-Jan Veerman, Lecturer in Education Studies at the Christelijke Hogeschool Ede (CHE). He defended his PhD thesis at the University of Amsterdam on Thursday 1 June. His research was made possible by a Doctoral Grant for Teachers from NWO.

Veerman himself worked in primary education for ten years. During his research, he discovered that in Western countries – where migrants have greater participation rights in society – pupils suffer less from the influence of [ethnic diversity](#) on disorder. According to Veerman, this demonstrates how the focus of integration [policy](#) either on including or on excluding migrants correlates with everyday situations in ethnically diverse schools.

For his research, Veerman analysed the responses of over 108,000 15-year-old pupils at more than 3,500 schools in 20 different Western countries. As part of a PISA study (Programme for International Student Assessment), the pupils were asked

whether they were able to work in class, whether whether the pupils listened to the teacher and whether there was disorder or uproar in class. The pupils' responses were linked to the ethnic [diversity](#) in the [school](#) and to a migrant integration policy index (MIPEX). The research revealed that an inclusive integration policy at ethnically diverse schools indirectly provides more opportunities for pupils to work on their [reading comprehension](#) because there is less disorder.

Atmosphere at ethnically diverse schools

Veerman: 'Compared with most other countries, the Netherlands offers migrants more opportunities to participate, according to the MIPEX. Changes to this policy could have consequences for the atmosphere at ethnically diverse schools. This calls for teachers to consciously respond to changes in integration policy, which affect the lives of children in their classes.'

The relationship between ethnic diversity and school performance is a subject of current debate on school segregation. It is unclear whether such a relationship exists and if so, in what way. These debates have hardly touched on pupils' behaviour during lessons. This PhD thesis examines the relationship between ethnic diversity and school performance among pupils in primary schools in the Netherlands and pupils in secondary education in a variety of European countries. A distinction is made between the percentage of pupils with a migrant background and ethnic diversity. Ethnic diversity was found to have only minor effects. These effects only concerned reading comprehension for children with a migrant background.

Provided by Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)

APA citation: Disorder during language lessons at ethnically diverse schools (2017, June 9) retrieved 24 September 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-06-disorder-language-lessons-ethnically-diverse.html>

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