

Why the Dutch educational system is outdated,  
and how it could be improved.

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## INTRODUCTION

The first of September 2015, was a remarkable day in the history of Dutch education. From that day onwards, students would no longer receive a student grant from the government to compensate the costs of studying (Smith, 2015). The student grant, which turned into a gift after graduation, made place for a loan, which students have to pay back after their graduation (Bureau Krediet Registratie, n.d.). Since higher education in the Netherlands is not free of charge, the student grant could be used to cover the costs of the annual tuition fee.

When the loan system was introduced four years ago, former minister of education Jet Bussemaker, defended the reform by claiming that new investments would be done to increase the quality of the Dutch educational system (Hoger Onderwijs Persbureau, 2017). Whether these investments have been done is not clear, but it has not stopped the annual tuition free from rising. In 2015, the tuition fee for higher education in the Netherlands was 1951 euros, growing annually to an amount of 2083 euros this year (Rijksoverheid, 2018). The combination of rising tuition fees, and the abolishment of the student grant, make one thing clear; there is more budget available than before, for investments in the Dutch educational system. Logically, the question rises how this budget could be invested to improve the quality of the Dutch educational system. It is therefore vital, to get a deeper understanding of the educational system as it is today, to see where there is room for improvement.

### **The Dutch educational system**

The Dutch educational system can be divided into three parts. Between the age of four to twelve years old, children attend primary school (Nuffic, n.d.). At primary school children are divided into groups of roughly thirty children, with one and the same teacher for the whole schoolyear. The teacher is responsible for teaching all subjects to the children, and the social activities during and outside school hours. Primary education in the Netherlands has a dual function. On the one hand, it focuses on teaching essential knowledge such as learning how to read, write, arithmetic and general knowledge. On the other hand, it focuses on the development of social skills and values. By the age of twelve, children close off the primary school period with a final examination, of which the so called 'CITO-toets', is the most popular (CITO, n.d.). The CITO toets takes several days to complete, and consists of questions in which the knowledge and intelligence of the children are tested. The result of the CITO toets, together with the school advice of the teacher, is binding for the type of secondary education the child is allowed to attend.

Secondary education is divided into three different types; preparatory vocational secondary education (vmbo), senior general secondary education (havo), and pre-university education (vwo) (Nuffic, n.d.). The focus and duration of the three types of secondary education is different. The Preparatory vocational secondary education, has a duration of four years and is strongly focused on practical knowledge. The pre-university education is highly theoretical, and has a duration of six years. The senior general secondary education finds itself somewhere in between, it makes the combination between theoretical and practical knowledge, and has a duration of five years. Depending on the type of education, the first two or three years of secondary education, follow a fixed curriculum. The preparatory vocational secondary education, follows a fixed curriculum in the first two years (Rijksoverheid, 2019). The senior general secondary education does so in the first three years (Rijksoverheid, 2019b). The pre-university education follows a fixed curriculum in the first three years as well (Rijksoverheid, 2017).

From the third or fourth year onwards, students get a saying in their personal curriculum by choosing a 'profile'. A profile consists of a group of obligatory- and elective subjects. Hereby, the variety of elective subjects is restricted to subjects fitting the profile. Choosing a profile is a decision of big influence on the future career possibilities of the student, since it might be important for the admission requirements of future studies. After graduating from high school, compulsory education stops. From that moment, it is the free choice of the student, to continue educating themselves (Nuffic, n.d.).

After high school graduation, students can decide to continue studying. They can then choose a study programme at an educational institute, fitting their previous educational training. Students who attended preparatory vocational secondary education, are excluded from having direct access to university, they first have to attend a lower degree of higher education first, called secondary vocational education (MBO) (Rijksoverheid, 2018b). After receiving a MBO diploma of the highest degree (MBO-4), they have the possibility to continue studying on a university level (Rijksoverheid, n.d.).

Students with a senior general secondary education diploma, or pre-university education diploma, can apply for university directly. The curriculum of university studies is often divided in a major and minor, where the set of courses in the major is completely or almost completely fixed, and the minor can be used to choose elective courses (Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2018). Besides that, some programmes offer the possibility to study part-time instead of fulltime. At the University of Amsterdam for example, about half of the bachelor's programmes can be followed part-time (Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2018b).

### **Globalization and education**

With an annual tuition fee of 1155 euros, secondary vocational education is, just like university studies, not free of charge (Rijksoverheid, 2019c). Nearly every year, students and their parents see the tuition fees rising. It is interesting to see what consequences this might have in the future for the international competitiveness of the Dutch educational system. The Danish educational system for example, is free of charge. Besides that, every student with EU citizenship has the possibility to apply for a student grant (Uddannelses og Forskningsministeriet, n.d.). In this example, pull factors from Denmark, and push factors from the Netherlands, might motivate students to migrate to another country and choose for a more affordable, or better, educational system (Knox & Marston, 2010). When the students would then decide to stay in Denmark and look for a job there, they would no longer contribute to the Dutch tax-income, and thereby investments in the Dutch educational system. But of course, this can also work the other way around, where a student studies for free abroad, and comes back to his or her home country to find a job and pay taxes.

The migration of people will always be hard to control, but by creating an attractive educational system, push factors will be diminished, and pull factors increased. Attractive education, increases the chance of people staying in the country not only during, but also after their studies, resulting in more tax revenue to fund the educational system. The more budget there is available, the more possibilities there will be to keep the educational system competitive, and attract ambitious students. In order to get an overview of where improvement in the educational system is necessary, it might be useful to investigate what needs and interests the educational system has to serve.

### **THE INTERESTS BEHIND THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

The educational system is an enormous expense for a society, since it has to cover the costs for the salary of teachers, the study environment, and study materials. This leads to a logical conclusion, that the educational systems serves interests that make it worth investing in. In order to get a deeper understanding of which interests the educational system serves, it can be useful to analyze which parties are part of it. On the one hand, the state has an interest in the educational system, since the educational system is often partially, or completely, funded by the government. On the other hand, students have an interest in the educational system, since they often continue studying long after compulsory education stops.

In the Netherlands, companies are responsible for more than half of the governments tax revenue (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2016). Since companies contribute such a substantial amount in tax revenue, it is important for the government, to satisfy the interests of companies in the educational

system. By providing a high-quality educational system, students are provided with useful knowledge to very easily integrate into the labor market. The result of this is, that companies can find candidates for available jobs more easily, leading to more tax revenue for the government, which can be used as a reinvestment in the educational system.

### **The needs of students, companies and the state**

The first group with an interest in the educational system, are students. Students can have the need to acquire suitable knowledge, to specialize themselves in a certain discipline fitting their interest. This specialization can make them scarcer, and increases their chance to find a fitting job. It is therefore in the interest of students, to have a flexible educational system, fitting their personal interests in the best way possible. Flexibility in the educational system, may also lead to a better work-life balance, where the number of courses can be adapted to work, or other time-consuming activities in the private life. Besides flexibility, students have an interest in a high accessibility of the educational system. When the educational system is free of charge, there are no financial barriers to get access to the educational system, which makes it more accessible.

Companies can have an interest in the educational system, because of its transmission of knowledge and skills. Students with valuable knowledge and skills, are interesting applicants for companies, where teamwork, discipline, structure and expertise, can be very useful. Apart from that, it might be interesting for companies when the educational system would take over the role of in-service training, since the amount of flexible contracts in the Netherlands has increased by 856.000 in the period of the year 2003 and 2017 (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2018). Because of the flexible contracts, there is a smaller commitment between a company and employee compared to a permanent contract. It is therefore less attractive for a company, to provide the employee with the time or financial means, to complete an in-service training. For companies, a more flexible educational system might be useful where employees invest in themselves, and take classes outside working hours.

The state has an essential role regarding the design of the educational system. The state is responsible for the structure of the system, and its biggest investor at the same time. In order to decide what the educational system should look like, and where investments are needed, the state has to keep the interests of the students and companies in mind. Moreover, the state faces additional challenges while structuring the educational system. One of these challenges, is the well-being of teachers, since according to the statistics, teachers are most likely to face a burn-out of all professions (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2016b). Besides that, the teacher shortage in the Netherlands is increasing (Rijksoverheid, 2018c), especially within secondary education (Rijksoverheid, 2018d). Another task of the state, is the cost management of the educational system. Since the educational system is a substantial expense of the state, it is in the states interest to create a cost-efficient system, without compromising on the quality. However, where a cost-efficient educational system is primarily focused on reducing expenses, it could also be used to increase tax revenue. One way to do so, is by growth of the workforce, which could be essential to compensate the costs of retirement payments of the ageing Dutch population (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2018b).

The educational system in the Netherlands, faces many challenges. Students, have an interest in a flexible curriculum, where they can choose courses fitting their needs as best as possible. Moreover, the accessibility of education is important. A way to achieve that, is by reducing the costs of the tuition fee. Companies might have similar needs. When classes are of high quality, fitting the interests and talents of students, their knowledge and skills will be optimized. Together with flexibility to attend classes outside working hours, supplementary training will be more accessible. The state, faces additional challenges over the needs of students and companies. One of these, is finding a solution for the well-being of teachers, and the teacher shortage. Another, is the realization of a cost-efficient educational system, of high quality. Apart from that, it could be in the interest of the state, to stimulate students to enter the labor market on a younger age, without compromising on the quality of their education. In that way, growth of the workforce could be achieved to increase tax revenues.

Since the interests of students, companies and the state, are extensive, it is logical to conclude that the Dutch educational system is outdated. Integrating these interests in a new educational system, might therefore be a suitable solution to improve the quality of education in the Netherlands.

## **REFORMING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

The educational system leaves an important mark on the norms and values within society. The effects of this system are profound and can eventually reflect in laws. Students are the voters of the future, and, the norms and values they learn at school determine, for a great part, their development and political convictions. A good educational system is aware of this effect and, therefore, thinks carefully about the norms and values it wishes to convey. Another task of the educational system, is the preparation for the job market, since both students, companies, and the state, benefit from highly educated citizens. The more educated people are, the more likely they will be financially successful, leading to more tax revenues. Tax revenues are essential for the general prosperity in a country and the educational system is directly connected with this. It is often found important, to maintain a balance between the transmission of norms and values, and preparation for the labor market, to avoid an 'economization of education' (Biesta, Eskens, Sissing, Gude, & Lusse, 2015). Economization of education would lead to an educational system, where the preparation for the job market is strongly prioritized over the remaining tasks of the educational system. Therefore, it is a challenging, yet important task, to maintain this balance when restructuring the educational system.

### **Analyzing the educational system**

A time of rapidly technological developments and flexible contracts, demands a flexible and accessible educational system. Retraining and the principle of "lifelong education and training" are necessary to respond to the fast-changing labor market. The current educational system, at least as used in the Netherlands, does not provide sufficient space to do so. One of the key elements of accessibility to education, is its price. The more expensive the education, the higher the threshold to make a start. In addition to this, flexibility plays a big role. When somebody works and has a family, education must be flexible and offer a lot freedom of choice to keep it accessible. In that way, education can be easily combined with work and other duties in the private life.

To increase the accessibility of education, it should be entirely financed by tax revenues. It is only logical that, because high tax revenues are the result of a good educational system, to re-invest this budget. These reforms are expensive and, therefore, ask for a concrete plan. Analyzing the educational system from bottom to top, is needed to examine where the current educational system lacks efficiency, and could be improved. It is therefore needed, to start with the examination of the primary school level, followed by the secondary school level and higher education.

In the Netherlands, compulsory education applies to all children between the age of five and sixteen years old (Nuffic, n.d.). The existence of compulsory education is understandable. A child will not always wish to go to school and perhaps does not yet realize that it is quite convenient to eventually be able to read and write. Primary schools work with a fixed curriculum, where children are taught basic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. To introduce children in the primary school period to a fixed curriculum, does not seem to be wrong at all. Reading, writing, arithmetic and general knowledge can be acquired. Besides that, work can be done on the development of social skills. Dutch primary schools are free of charge for the parents, which make them accessible for every child (Rijksoverheid, 2018e).

Just like primary education, secondary education is free of charge, which has a positive outcome on its accessibility (Rijksoverheid, 2018f). The secondary school curriculum, is fixed for the first two or three years of the programme. Afterwards, the earlier mentioned 'profiles', give students the possibility to have a small saying in their personal curriculum. The profile system does not allow all

combinations of subjects, and is therefore very limited to a small number of subjects offered at school. When children get the opportunity to choose a profile, they are between fourteen and sixteen years old. It is the first time in their lives, they get a small saying in their personal curriculum.

Young adolescents have strong physical, social, emotional and intellectual differences, which has led to many attempts to create an educational system serving the school environment, and the needs of the students (Irvin & National Middle School Association, 1997). When there is a fixed study program, it is an enormous challenge to respond to the intrinsic motivation of every student, resulting in an inefficient educational system. A more flexible curriculum, could then help to answer the individual needs of students in a better, more efficient way. On the other hand, this may increase pressure on teachers, since differentiation could lead to a high pressure on teachers to develop new knowledge, skills and perform new tasks rapidly (Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). An increased risk on burn-outs among teachers, might not only harm the well-being of the teachers, it might also damage the popularity of the profession, contributing to a bigger teacher shortage in the future. It is therefore vital, to find a solution to answer the needs of both students and teachers, within secondary education.

In contrast to primary- and secondary education, higher education is not free of charge. The tuition fee of a university programme, will be over two thousand euros this year, leading to a total cost over ten thousand euros, for a three-year bachelor's degree and a two-year master's degree (Rijksoverheid, 2018). Thereby, the tuition fees restrict the accessibility of higher education. Besides the accessibility, the flexibility of the educational system, could be improved as well. Stand-alone courses, are highly uncommon within the Dutch educational system, and can only be followed as part of a bachelor- or master programme (Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2018c). Around half of the bachelor's and master programmes, offer the flexibility of a part-time programme, which on average takes about one and a half times longer to complete than the full-time alternative (Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2018b). The restricted flexibility of the educational system, makes it harder for employed people to study besides their job. If they manage to do so anyway, they will have to attend a full programme, including courses that might not be in their interest, to receive a diploma. Because of the restricted flexibility, it can be hard to maintain a balance between work, study, and private life, making it less attractive to study while being employed. An alternative can be found by following stand-alone courses at independent educational institutes, although their quality is not recognized at the same level as official universities. A more flexible and accessible educational system, might contribute to possibilities regarding retraining and supplementary training.

### **A new educational system**

Within the Dutch educational system, primary education, secondary education, higher education, and continuing education, work as smaller independent systems, in the educational system as a whole. Seen from a cost-efficient point of view, it could be an interesting question whether or not these systems could be integrated into one. In order to find an answer to this question, it can be useful to look at the results of the analyzation above.

In the analyzation, it became clear that there might be room for improvement in the secondary- and higher educational system. The flexibility of the current system is limited, and can therefore not answer the intrinsic motivation of all students. On average, intrinsic- and self-determined extrinsic motivation, starts to take shape around the age of fifteen (Gillet, 2012). To adjust the curriculum to the intrinsic motivation of the student, a solution could be found, in the offer of separate courses during the secondary school period. By offering training courses in various areas of interest and levels, the student can compose his own study program, which suits his or her interest and level. Herewith compulsory education consists exclusively of a required number of compulsory teaching hours, together with a number of essential training courses, which every student must attend. The number of compulsory courses in the compulsory education should decrease every year to give more room to the personal interpretation of the student. Thus, the curriculum will grow along with the student, who, while growing older, will be able to better determine in what subject he or she would like to specialize.

The percentage of compulsory courses, could be adjusted to the average development of intrinsic motivation, of adolescent students. For example, in the first year, when students are between twelve and thirteen years old, ninety percent of the curriculum could consist of compulsory courses, leaving room for ten percent elective courses. From the second year onwards, when students are more familiar with the educational system, the number of compulsory courses could decrease to, for example, seventy percent, leading to an amount of twenty percent compulsory courses in the last year of compulsory education.

Another design of the course system, could be useful for students who know at a very young age in what professional field they would like to work. In that situation, students could choose for 'professional profiles' from the first year onwards, which are composed by companies. Together with a limited amount of general compulsory courses, professional profiles could consist of groups of courses that are selected by companies, or even taught by its employees. By doing so, students get the possibility on a very early age, to invest their time and effort in a programme that is useful for their future. An educational system which is based on course education, creates endless possibilities for personalization of the curriculum, to the needs of the individual student. But even though the endless possibilities of the curriculum might sound good, it also creates a high responsibility to offer all students high quality, individual coaching by teachers, to guide them in their decision making.

Within the new educational system, local schools would cease to exist. Instead, central teaching centers would be established, which might be combined with distance learning when the course is suitable for this. As courses will be offered at different levels, people with a learning delay or disability will also be able to enroll. An additional benefit of distance learning, will be a relieved pressure on traffic and public transport. Thus, education will be made more accessible for disabled people and for people in sparsely populated areas. To be trained for a specific profession, companies, together with the teaching centers, draw up a summary of useful combinations of courses. Then the student has the freedom to plan his program of courses at his own level, and, if necessary, add extra courses. In this way students can focus on looking for the job they trained for, and combine this with the development of personal interests. Via this new educational model, students will meet, at every training course, not only other students with the same interests and of the same level, but also of different ages and cultural backgrounds. They can complement each other, and so strengthen further development in their respective fields of expertise. Apart from that, it is an excellent opportunity for networking, which can be very useful within the future professional field.

When students reach maturity at the age of eighteen, compulsory education stops. At that moment there is no more a fixed number of compulsory hours they must attend, but they themselves can fully determine how many courses they want to attend besides their actual work or free time. In this way they are able to continue to specialize, decide to continue learning or start an entirely new subject of education. When students start looking for a job, companies will be able to select them on the basis of the training courses they did. If any knowledge is lacking, then the company, in consultation with the future employee, can draw up a contract and state therein the courses that need to be completed, besides their actual working activities. By doing so, it will be easier to hire people, even when they do not have a fully matching profile, which might make it easier for job seekers, to find a job. The training courses see to it that companies do not have to invest in a new employee. Instead, the employee can be required to attend extra courses. This will benefit both parties. The company does not need to make extra costs and the job seeker invests in his or her curriculum.

### **Flexibility and responsibility**

Every individual is, responsible for his or her chances on the job market. Within a more flexible educational system, he or she will be able, from secondary school on, to, more and more, give an increasingly freer interpretation to the design of the personal curriculum. Also, at a later age, everybody within the educational courses' program, can determine how much time he or she would like to invest in self-development. When, for instance, a person is unemployed, they have the

possibility to take courses full-time to retrain. When a person just started a family, they have the possibility to take a break, or attend only one or two courses. And if they would like to take a complete pause, this is possible as well. The possibility to balance the private life with the professional life, diminishes the chance of getting a burn-out. When compulsory education stops at the age of eighteen, individuals will get the opportunity to work more instead of studying full-time. Thus, the knowledge gained from courses can be applied into practice immediately. When individuals start working at a younger age, this will mean an increment of the labor force, which will result in more tax revenues. Reinvesting these revenues in the educational system, can keep it free of charge, and thereby, accessible.

Apart from more flexibility and a better accessibility, digitalization in education offers a wide variety of possibilities, to increase the quality of the educational system. As mentioned above, digitalization increases the accessibility of classes, and relieves pressure on the transportation system, but it provides more benefits than just that. An important benefit of digitalization, is that a teacher no longer has to be physically present for the transmission of knowledge. The possibility to record lectures, takes away a lot of pressure of teachers. Instead of telling the same story over and over again, lectures can be uploaded to a digital environment which is accessible anytime, anywhere. A result of this, will be that the teacher has more time left to focus on other tasks than giving lectures, which could lead to a lower work pressure, and a more coaching role towards the students. Both online as offline, the teacher could spend his or her energy, on coaching the students by answering the questions they have, and thereby differentiate efficiently. This could for example be done online on a forum, and offline, in working groups. An additional benefit of recording lectures, is that it will reduce the costs of a workspace. Physical lectures have to be held less often, which results in a lower occupation of the lecture halls. But apart from recording lectures, and focusing on individual coaching, digitalization offers much more possibilities. For example, study material can be provided in the way which is best suitable for the individual, making it very accessible and efficient. Since the digitalization of education will most likely continue to grow in the future, more and more possibilities can be found to offer study materials to students.

An educational system based on courses, answers the needs of students regarding flexibility, and accessibility. The possibility to compose an individual study programme, increases the chance to find a connection to the intrinsic motivation of the student. Thereby, it provides the possibility to balance the professional- and private life, resulting in a better work-life balance. An additional benefit of a course-based educational system, is the possibility to specialize earlier, compared to the current educational system in the Netherlands. Earlier specialization, allows students the possibility to enter the labor market in an earlier state, with an identical amount of knowledge compared to the current Dutch educational system. The result of this, is an increment of the labor force, and thereby more tax revenues, which can be reinvested to keep the educational system free of charge. Compared to the current educational system in the Netherlands, a free educational system would strongly increase the accessibility.

A course-based educational system, would not only be beneficial for students, it has significant benefits for companies as well. Companies would get a bigger saying in the educational system, since they can compose professional profiles together with educational policymakers. The professional profiles, could lead to a stronger fit to the needs of companies. Apart from that, the increased flexibility of the new educational system, would increase retraining, and in-service training options, and companies would no longer have to pay additional fees for the training of their employees.

The state benefits from the new educational system for several reasons. To begin with, the needs of the students and companies would more likely be satisfied. Furthermore, an increment of the labor force might result in higher tax revenues. In addition, the strong digitalization of the new educational system, might result in a better work-life balance for teachers, making the profession more attractive and diminishing its high burn-out rate.



## ARGUMENTS AGAINST A COURSE-BASED EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The implementation of the new course-based educational system, would ask for drastic reforms of the educational system as we know it today. The difference between the current educational system in the Netherlands, and a course-based educational system, should not be underestimated. The required reforms, might therefore encounter opposition from both teachers, as the society as a whole.

The new educational system, would demand a lot of flexibility and cooperation from teachers, they might not always be willing to give. Changing the educational system, would include retraining or in-service training of teachers, to fit the courses of the educational system. Since the new educational system would make use of digital applications, a lower workforce of teachers could be the result, leading to uncertainty regarding job security for teachers in the new educational system. Because of the new coaching role of teachers, this problem could be overcome, by giving all teachers a coaching role for a restricted number of students, which could lead to high quality coaching for all students. Besides that, teachers would have the possibility to use the new educational system themselves, and retrain themselves by taking courses to specialize or broaden their knowledge. By doing so, they would make themselves attractive to the labor market again, and find a job within, or outside of, education. Another challenge by implementing the new educational system, would be the change of didactic methods. An increased use of e-learning, would require a different didactic strategy, compared to the current educational system. Not all teachers will be familiar, or comfortable, with the possibilities of e-learning. It might require a lot of in-service training, to provide the teachers with knowledge to make the didactic shift, to an e-learning based system.

Apart from a skeptical approach by teachers, more critical notes can be defined for the new educational system. One of these, is the abolishment of fixed classes. Within the current educational system, students are part of the same class, for the first two or three years of their training. This allows them to make friends more easily, compared to a course-based educational system, where students would compose an individual curriculum supported by distance learning. However, a course-based educational system, can offer many different curriculums. One of these, is by choosing the model where compulsory courses decrease every year, starting on ninety percent compulsory courses. For students who value social interaction with fellow students, this might be a fitting option, to maintain the social benefits of the current educational system.

Another critical note, could be the freedom of choice, when it comes to the composition of a personal curriculum. Children at the age of twelve, might not be in an ideal position to decide what professional direction they would like to specialize in, since motivation develops itself on average around the age of fifteen. To be presented with an extensive variety of courses, might then be very overwhelming. The new educational system, would find a solution to overcome this problem, by excellent coaching from teachers. A programme could then be composed, fitting the current interests or needs of the student. When these would change at some point, the curriculum could be adjusted to suit the new interests of the student. In that way, time and effort will never be wasted, and the student can continue to follow courses that are, at that moment, fitting their interests and needs.

An additional difference between the old and new educational system, would be the didactic style, in which the content of courses is presented. E-learning, provides innovative ways to do so. It allows students to access study materials anywhere, anytime, without being physically present at teaching centers. This freedom might not be beneficial for all students, since some might prefer to go to a physical location to attend classes. Freedom demands discipline, and not all students might be able to find motivation and discipline, when physical presence is not necessary. To overcome this problem, workspaces could be available at teaching centers, to offer students a silent place to work at any time. Moreover, some courses could be offered in a traditional form, where physical presence is required for lectures and groupwork.

Where students could benefit from a course-based educational system, companies would as well. Primarily, as a result of the composition of the earlier mentioned professional profiles. The professional profiles, would allow companies to get a stronger grip on the educational system, serving their needs more than within the, more general, current educational system. Whether this 'commercialization of education' is desirable, can be a point of discussion. If the new educational system would be implemented, educational policymakers would play an essential role in maintaining the balance of the dual function of the educational system. Since companies generally have big financial resources at their disposal, and strong interests in the educational system, the risk of corruption might increase. A transparent system of educational policymaking, would therefore be essential, to guarantee a reasonable balance of interests within the educational system. But apart from internal challenges, the new educational system would face external challenges as well. One of these, would be the geographical distribution of teaching centers. When high-schools would cease to exist, and would be replaced by central teaching centers, the commuting distance might increase for students. The Netherlands, like many other countries, has rural and urban areas, and since the biggest part of the population lives in urban areas, it would be logical to locate teaching centers close to these areas. By doing so, the overall commuting time and transportation costs, would be minimalized. In order to guarantee the accessibility of the educational system, the teaching centers could be distributed within a radius of one-hour commuting time, for all locations in the country. Additionally, a school bus system could be introduced for students living in sparsely populated areas with insufficient public transportation. Together with innovative use of E-learning, physical presence would not always be required, making a longer commute more bearable. As for the costs of transportation, a regional public transportation card could be provided, to cover the costs for commuting to the teaching centers.

Another point of critique, might be the transnational competitiveness of a new educational system, with in particular, the measurement of the quality of the degree. Since courses will be offered at different levels, a solution could be found by demanding certain groups of courses on a certain level, to apply for a bachelor's- or master's examination. The new educational system would then meet international standards, by respecting the bachelor-master structure of academical higher education. An additional challenge, could be the financial aspects of the educational reforms. The retraining of teachers to fit the new educational system, might turn out to be very expensive. By giving students the possibility to constantly change their curriculums, the demand for courses, and thereby teachers, will be less stable. This could lead to constant investments in retraining and in-service training of teachers. However, fluctuations in the demand of courses could stabilize over time, once the new educational system is fully operative. The establishment of teaching centers, would be another financial challenge. Even though universities could form the basis for the new teaching centers, vast investments might be needed to realize the new centers. Together with the costs for a digital study environment, free public transportation for students, and the abolishment of tuition fees, the new educational system would be a welfare project, that has not proven itself yet.

## CONCLUSION

The Netherlands, is a country known for its high standard of living. In order to maintain that quality of life, a strong educational system is very beneficial. The educational system, lays the foundation for a knowledge-based economy of expertise and entrepreneurship, contributing to a strong economy. A competitive educational system, reinvents itself constantly by using technological developments and progressive thinking. In that way, it optimizes its efficiency, by keeping a fine balance between the interests of the state, students, and companies. Accessibility and flexibility, can thereby, be seen as important keywords. A high accessibility of the educational system, motivates students to continue studying after compulsory education stops. Education requires an investment of time and effort, and by lowering the financial barrier to attend classes, the accessibility increases. Together with an optimized flexibility, the educational system will be as attractive as it can, leading to optimal conditions for a highly educated population.

The Dutch educational system, could be more efficient, when it comes to the attractiveness of the system. A concrete example of that, is the abolishment of the student grant in 2015. While the student grant was abolished, promises were made to increase the quality of the educational system. Whether the quality indeed has increased is hard to measure, but the tuition fees continued to rise. As an EU country, Dutch students have the possibility to study elsewhere in the EU, making it attractive for them, to choose for an education abroad. This decision often means, a student will live abroad for two or three years at least, and afterwards, it is highly insecure whether the student will move back to the Netherlands to find a job, and thereby pay taxes. An unattractive educational system as in the Netherlands, increases the chance on a brain drain, which would be devastating for the Dutch economy in the future.

As for the flexibility of the Dutch educational system, there is a lot of room for improvement. Within the current system, students attend a fixed curriculum for the first part of their secondary school training. Afterwards, they get a limited saying in their personal curriculum, by choosing a profile. A profile leaves them the possibility to compose a predetermined group of subjects, in their general interest. Room to fit the intrinsic motivation of students, and the possibility to differentiate is thereby very limited. Students study general knowledge of subjects, they might not be fully interested in. They do not have the possibility to specialize in a specific field of study, but are limited to general subjects throughout the entire secondary school period. When students graduate from high-school, they can choose for a study they would like to specialize in. Higher education, offers study programmes with a limited flexibility as well. Study programmes can be attended full-time or part-time, and elective courses can only be chosen within a minor. Only half of the study programmes is available part-time, which reduces the variety of study programmes that can be followed besides a regular job. Together with the limited flexibility to adjust the study programme to the intrinsic motivation, and the tuition fees to enroll in a programme, reduce the accessibility and flexibility of the Dutch educational system strongly.

Since the educational system in the Netherlands faces many challenges, there is a strong need for educational reforms. A solution for these challenges, would be found in a course-based educational system, in which students have the possibility to compose their personal curriculum. This educational system would consist of a required number of compulsory teaching hours, together with a number of essential training courses, which every student must attend. The number of compulsory courses in the compulsory education should decrease every year to give more room to the personal interpretation of the student. An alternative for the model of decreasing compulsory courses, would be found by choosing a professional profile, which are composed by companies. Professional profiles would allow students to start specializing at a very young age, for a certain profession or professional field of interest. By doing so, students would have the possibility to enter the labor market at a younger age, resulting in an increment of the labor force and thereby more tax revenues, which serves the interests of the state. An educational system which is based on course education, creates endless possibilities for personalization of the curriculum, offering a maximum of flexibility to the student, to find a strong fit with their intrinsic motivation and professional ambitions. An important requirement for the success of a course-based educational system, would be coaching by teachers, to guide students in their decision making.

An important difference between the current educational system, and the new educational system, would be that local schools would cease to exist. Instead, central teaching centers would be established, which might be combined with distance learning when courses are suitable for this. Courses would thereby, be offered at different levels to provide an optimal flexibility. Students of different ages and cultural backgrounds would attend courses together, learning from each other. After compulsory education stops, there would no longer be a fixed number of compulsory hours they must attend. From that moment onwards, students would determine themselves how many courses they would like to attend. This opens the possibility to retrain, specialize, or follow courses out of pure interest, at any time in life. Within the new educational system, companies would get a stronger saying in the curriculum by composing professional profiles, together with the educational

policymakers. And since companies already contribute a substantial amount in tax revenues, they would no longer have to pay for in-service training of their employees as they do now. A course-based educational system would therefore come with strong benefits for students, companies, and the state, and is worth analyzing further.

The implementation of the new course-based educational system, would demand drastic reforms of the current educational system. Teachers would have to be retrained, or attend in-service trainings, to be able to teach a broad variety of courses within the new educational system. Thereby, the new educational system would make use of diverse didactic methods, where e-learning applications would be used whenever possible. These technological innovations would reduce work pressure, but on the other hand, reduce the job security of teachers as well. Whether teachers would be willing to take that risk, is highly doubtful.

Another point of critique, would be the abolishment of a fixed curriculum. Even though it might be beneficial, when students would compose a curriculum matching their interests, abolishing the fixed curriculum, comes with certain disadvantages. One of these, would be the social aspect of education. An individualized educational system, diminishes the amount of time spent with the same fellow students, which might reduce the chance to find friends at school. Since the course-based educational system allows students to compose their own curriculum, a programme consisting of a high number of fixed courses, would be chosen to overcome this problem. Another critical note, would be the freedom of choice that comes along with the composition of a personal curriculum. Being presented with an extensive variety of courses, might be very overwhelming for young students. Therefore, teachers would guide the students in their decision making. When the interests or needs of the students would change at any time, the curriculum can anticipate these changes, by providing different courses fitting the motivation of the student. A combination of distance learning and traditional courses, together with workspaces at teaching centers, would thereby provide students the resources for a motivating study environment. Within the new educational system, educational policymakers would play a central role in maintaining the balance of the dual function of the educational system. Since companies would get a bigger saying in the composition of courses, a transparent system of educational policymaking, would be essential.

Besides earlier mentioned internal challenges, the new educational system would face external challenges as well. The geographical distribution of teaching centers would be one of these. A solution for this problem, would be the distribution of teacher centers within a radius of one-hour commuting, from anywhere in the country. Moreover, school busses would be introduced for students living in rural areas, with insufficient public transportation. Because of E-learning applications, the physical presents of students might not be required anymore on a daily basis. Together with a regional public transportation card, covering the costs of the commute, teaching centers would be accessible from anywhere in the country. Apart from that, the transnational competitiveness of the new educational system, would be guaranteed by introducing bachelor's- and master's examinations, with certain requirements in order to be allowed to participate.

Many arguments, for or against, the educational system, can be approached with logical reasoning, others, require measurements and facts. In order to come to a realistic proposition for a new educational system, it is therefore necessary, to do further research. To begin with, the development of motivation among Dutch children, would be a relevant field of research. The outcome of this research, would be useful for the serve the needs of students as optimal as possible. Besides that, economic research should be done, to make an estimation of the costs and profits of the new educational system. Retraining teachers, the establishment of teaching centers, and implementing the course-based educational system, would for example be rather expensive. On the other hand, merging secondary schools and higher educational institutes, and an increment of the labor force, could generate new budget. In order to get a realistic insight in the possible success of the course-based educational system, a financial overview is vital to make responsible decisions. Taking these considerations into account, a realistic plan could be made for the improvement of the Dutch

educational system.

To conclude, teachers should be included in the design of a new educational system. After all, a new educational system should be beneficial for everyone. As long as that has not been achieved, there is room for new improvements of the educational system.

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