

Tilburg University

IMEN's Functioning and Future

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Published in:

Research in mother tongue education in a comparative perspective

Publication date:

1999

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Kroon, S., & van de Ven, P. H. (1999). IMEN's Functioning and Future: A short report on the IMEN correspondents' week-end in Barchem, the Netherlands, October 24th-27th 1996, In E. Haueis, S. Kroon, & P.-H. van de Ven (Eds.), *Research in mother tongue education in a comparative perspective* (pp. 151-161). IMEN.

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Sjaak Kroon & Piet-Hein van de Ven

**IMEN's Functioning and Future;
A short report on the IMEN correspondents' week-end
in Barchem, The Netherlands, October 24th - 27th 1996**

1. Introduction

The IMEN Correspondents' week-end 1996 took place in the rural atmosphere of the little Dutch village Barchem. The participants were, in alphabetical order: Colette Corblin (France), Maria Amanda Costa (Portugal), Alexandru Crisan (Romania), Carola Feltrinelli (Italy), Antje Fröhlich (Germany), Eduard Haueis (Germany), Wolfgang Herrlitz (the Netherlands; chair), Vibeke Hetmar (Denmark), Sjaak Kroon (the Netherlands), Hristo Kyuchukov (Bulgaria), Sigmund Ongstad (Norway), Euan Reid (England), Sylvana Serra (Italy), Jan Sturm (the Netherlands), Piet-Hein van de Ven (the Netherlands).

The programme focused on three topics:

- 1 The correspondents' experiences with and view on the functioning of IMEN;
- 2 Revitalizing and enhancing the network aspect of IMEN;
- 3 Designing a new IMEN Research Programme.

Each topic was introduced by a member of the Steering Committee and discussed in groupwork and plenary sessions. Not surprisingly, the topics appeared to be that intertwined, that we present the topics 1 and 2 in one section. But even then some elements of the IMEN Research Programme are dealt with in that section as well.

After a brief overview of IMEN (section 2), in our report we focus on the functioning of the network (section 3) and on the proposals for the IMEN Research Programme (section 4). In section 5 we summarize some intentions expressed by the IMEN Steering Committee.

2. A brief overview of IMEN

Countries involved

Involved in the network at this moment, in one way or another, are Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Flanders, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Turkey. The network is open for new participants any time. Membership implies the availability of a national IMEN correspondent.

Network

The main characteristic of IMEN is that it is designed as a network. For the functioning of this network especially the international steering committee, the secretariat, the international correspondents and the activities that are organised are of importance.

- 1 International Steering Committee
Wolfgang Herrlitz (Chair), Frans Daems, Eduard Haueis, Sjaak Kroon, Jan Sturm, Piet-Hein van de Ven
- 2 Secretariat
Carleen van den Anker
work: Instituut Nederlands KUN, Postbus 9103, NL-6500 HD Nijmegen
telephone work: 0031-243612898
home: Ceresstraat 19, NL-6706 AL Wageningen
telephone home: 0031-317420121
e-mail home: cvdanker@hotmail.com
e-mail work: j.sturm@let.kun.nl
- 3 International Correspondents (situation september 1999)

Austria	vacancy
Bulgaria	Hristo Kyuchukov
Czech Republic	vacancy
Denmark	Vibeke Hetmar
England	Euan Reid
Flanders	vacancy
France	Colette Corblin
Germany	vacancy
Hungary	Katalin Juhász-Hortváth
Italy	vacancy
Netherlands	Jan Sturm
Norway	Jon Smidt & Sigmund Ongstad
Portugal	Maria Armanda Costa
Romania	Alexandru Crisan
Russia	Georgii Khruslov
Sweden	Gun Malmgren
Turkey	Gülser Akdogan
- 4 Activities
 - 4.1 Correspondents' weekends: Hengelo 1988, Tisvildeleje 1990, Frascati 1991, Nijmegen 1992, Landskrona 1993, Ankara 1994, Barchem 1996; reports can be found in Occasional Papers in Mother Tongue Education 2 and 5

- 4.2 International conferences: Veldhoven 1983, Antwerp 1986, Ludwigsburg 1990, Hamburg 1993, 1995; reports can be found in *Studies in Mother Tongue Education* 1, 2 and 3
- 4.3 Project meetings: Nijmegen, Hamburg, Leuven, London/Milton-Keynes

Publications

- 1 Book series *Studies in Mother Tongue Education* (1984-now; 6 volumes);
- 2 Paper series *Occasional Papers in Mother Tongue Education* (1989-now; 8 volumes);
- 3 *IMEN Newsletter* (1984-1986);
- 4 *Mother Tongue Education BULLETIN Pédagogie de la Langue Maternelle* (1986-1990 in cooperation with AILA's Scientific Commission on Mother Tongue Education; 1993-1995 in cooperation with the International Association of Research in Mother Tongue Education / Association internationale pour la recherche en pédagogie de la langue maternelle (MTE/PLM));
- 5 Book series *Mother Tongue Education Research Series/Collection recherches en pédagogie de la langue maternelle* (in cooperation with MTE/PLM) (2 volumes; one in preparation);
- 6 Books and booklets by IMEN participants published for a national audience
- 7 Announcements and articles by IMEN participants in national journals.

Membership

After a period in which IMEN had no formal individual membership, membership was introduced in 1993. In this endeavour IMEN cooperated with MTE/PLM. In 1998 IMEN decided to stop formal membership and to continue as a network on an informal basis. MTE/PLM continued the possibility of membership. In 1999, however, the Board of MTE/PLM decided to remove the association and to concentrate again on the activities of AILA's Scientific Committee on Mother Tongue Education (from which MTE/PLM originated).

Research Programme

- 1 General projects, carried out in as much IMEN countries as possible
 - 1.1 Rhetorics of mother tongue education
Nine countries involved; conference Veldhoven 1983; publications *Studies in MTE* 1 and 2. Eight new countries contributed in *Studies in MTE* 6;
 - 1.2 Portraits of mother tongue education
Nine countries involved; conference Antwerp 1986 and Ludwigsburg 1990; publication *Studies in MTE* 4;
 - 1.3 Histories and case studies in mother tongue education and multilingualism
Thirteen countries involved; conference Hamburg 1995; publication in preparation.
- 2 Cooperative projects, carried out in a limited number of IMEN countries
 - 2.1 Hungary - The Netherlands

- Topic MTE and Literature; participants Eva Angyal and Piet-Hein van de Ven;
- 2.2 Hungary - England
Topic MTE and Literature; participants Veronica Kiss-Spira and Stephen Parker;
- 2.3 Sweden - The Netherlands
Topic Literature; participants Lars-Göran Malmgren, Jan Nilsson and Piet-Hein van de Ven; publications Occasional papers in MTE 1, 4 and 6;
- 2.4 France - The Netherlands
Topic MTE; participants Theo Rensman and Colette Corblin; publication Occasional Papers in MTE 7;
- 2.5 Belgium - Italy - The Netherlands
Topic Grammar and Literature; participants Frans Daems, Kris Verbeeck, Ludo Decaluwé, Gabriella Pavan, Giovanni Cesaretti-Collito, Jan Sturm, Theo Rensman, Piet Verhoeven, Erik Blanckesteijn, Resy Delnoy;
- 2.6 Flanders - England - The Netherlands - Germany
Topic MTE and Multilingualism; participants Griet Ramaut, Koen Jaspaert, Euan Reid, Jill Bourne, John Hardcastle, Gunther Kress, Roger Hewitt, Ingrid Gogolin, Sybille Frey, Ursula Neumann, Iris Jäger, Ingrid Evers, Sjaak Kroon, Jan Sturm; publication in preparation; conference Hamburg 1995;
- 2.7 Norway - The Netherlands
Topic Writing; participants Jon Smidt and Piet-Hein van de Ven.

3. IMEN's functioning

We can distinguish between *Network* qualifications formulated by the participants at the one side, and evaluations of the *Research Programme* at the other. Globally seen the network does not function all too well, whereas the research programme functions rather good, at least for those involved.

The Network

The correspondents expressed their experiences with and their view on the functioning of the IMEN network in both positive and more problematic qualifications. The problematic ones are the following. The *network function* is not that clear for all correspondents. Questions that rose during the discussion, are: Who is supposed to be a network member: the IMEN correspondents? The IMEN researchers? Involved teachers? For whose benefits functions IMEN? What about national networks connected to and elaborating the international network? Such national networks (around an IMEN-correspondent) do not function in most of the countries, except perhaps in Sweden. How wide should the network circle be? Some correspondents doubt about their own *functioning as a correspondent*. There are different correspondents' roles: correspondents involved in an IMEN project function differently from those not involved. IMEN functions before all in comparative research, if there is no or little research activity (for the correspondent involved) then week-ends like this correspondents' weekend are not that important

and stimulating. The correspondents' tasks could be more clearly described; it is not always clear what a correspondent is supposed to undertake. The same problem concerns other 'IMEN members': Who are they? What is their task when they are not involved in a research project? Do we have and/or need a formal membership?

The *IMEN status* should be improved. IMEN-activities in which the correspondents/researchers are involved in are not always accepted as important ones by national authorities. IMEN must try to profile itself more positively, e.g. in national and international associations (like NATE). A problem too is that periodicals especially international periodicals on mother tongue education do not exist. Thus it is problematic for IMEN to make itself visible for an international forum. Sometimes IMEN status is sufficient for raising money, sometimes not. IMEN must be more visible, perhaps, but in any case IMEN must go for quality. Perhaps IMEN must link its activities to national initiatives, and choose for an important international publisher.

There were clear positive experiences too. The *communication* functions most times easily, but could be enhanced e.g. by a correspondents' newsletter. The *informal structure*, the informal way of discussing on correspondents' weekends and conferences and especially carrying out comparative research are considered to be productive and stimulating.

In short: the correspondents' experiences show some problems, which can be summarized in four interdependent questions: What is a network? Who is involved in it? Whom is to profit from it? How can it function?

In the discussion there were some tentative but different answers on these questions. Some correspondents prefer establishing a strong network structure, others like to go on with a more loose organisation. Some prefer clear and well described correspondents' roles, the correspondents being the members of IMEN. Other correspondents prefer IMEN to consist of a varying group of teachers and researchers who are involved in projects; IMEN could exist as the IMEN Steering Committee without real 'members'.

Summarizing one could say that the network discussion has to do with three main aspects: the (re)vitalization of the network, the enhancement of the network and the visibility of the network. Revitalization and enhancement are intertwined: by enhancing the network it will become more vital and a greater vitality leads to enhancement. Enhancement and revitalization both lead to more visibility, whereas visibility and enhancement on the other hand also contribute to the network's revitalization.

Proposals for the Network

The participants discussed a number of proposals for the network evoked by the discussion. They are listed here without any further comments.

1 IMEN must before all be an informal and internal, though international network of researchers

IMEN must connect people by research. Personal relations and cooperation are important. Teachers are hardly motivated for research as a basis for their teaching. Building up a teacher network in or as part of IMEN is not expected to be possible. IMEN is not ready for establishing an external network.

2 IMEM must become more visible

The leaflet must be updated. IMEN must elaborate a publishing policy: (internal) occasional papers, an external book series by an international publisher. IMEN must go for quality, perhaps an editorial board, and/or an advisory board. Perhaps IMEN might publish in international journals in a separate IMEN-section.

3 IMEN correspondents could establish a national network around them

At least if they believe in the usefulness of such a national network for e.g. information exchange. A national network could be linked to national periodicals, groups, institutions. This could be (at least partly) a solution for financial problems too. The correspondents also can disseminate IMEN results and publications to national groups, periodicals etc. They can try to use IMEN publications in their own teaching, e.g. in teacher training.

4 The correspondents tasks

The tasks of the international correspondents of IMEN could be to keep in contact with each other and with the Steering Committee. They could look out for teachers/researchers who could be interested in IMEN and/or could contribute to the IMEN Research Programme. They organize national IMEN activities and participation in general and cooperative projects.

5 IMEN must perhaps try to broaden the network

We can try to involve more countries in IMEN by an active policy, choosing for different cultures and traditions. Of course broadening the network raises financial problems and language problems too. A solution for the language problem could be creating three or four European IMEN regions, with English, French or German as a common language. As a solution for financial problems perhaps IMEN should stimulate comparative cooperation between 'poor' and 'rich' countries.

6 IMEN conferences are necessary

Conferences are necessary for visibility, for exchanging research experiences and correspondents' experiences. One could e.g. discuss experiences in using IMEN publications in teacher education. IMEN conferences should preferably be working conferences. They might be organised in the framework of other conferences (Symposium Deutschdidaktik, AILA, NATE, etc.).

The Research Programme

The IMEN research activities in itself (carrying out the research, writing and publishing, exchanging discussions) are interesting and generate knowledge of and insights in topics as mother tongue education, qualitative research, social theory, social linguistics, literacy. The two lines (case study research and historical research in an international comparative perspective) are productive ones.

But the IMEN Research Programme is not clear for every correspondent. Some questions: What is the core of the IMEN Research Programme? What are the academic questions we want to answer? Whose questions IMEN is focusing on: Teachers' questions? Researchers' questions? Students' questions? Is IMEN dealing with standard language teaching only, or is there room for second language teaching and minority language teaching too?

Summarizing one could say that the research programme discussion has to do with four main intertwined aspects: the conceptualization of research (what are the main research questions and objectives), the financing of research (which sources and institutions will provide funding), the strategies for organizing research (through universities, other institutions or organizations, ministries, funding agencies, etc.) and the human resources available for conducting research (the generally speaking limited possibilities of participants involved in IMEN).

Proposals for the Research Programme

The participants discussed a number of proposals for the research programme evoked by the discussion. They are listed here without any further comment.

1 Stick to one main idea, project or theme

Such a main idea or project must be the central point of interest for as many IMEN countries as possible. It should lead to a new conference. It must be of interest for teachers too. It must be initiated by the Steering Committee.

Of course other ideas/projects can be carried out by IMEN-researchers based on individual initiatives and personal relations. So the IMEN Research Programme has one dominant theme, and some 'local' themes, which could function as continuation of old themes. Each project or theme should ensure a framework of comparison.

2 New guidelines for IMEN activities are necessary

For central IMEN projects, leading to a joint international IMEN conference, as well as for other activities the existing practical and methodological guidelines must be rewritten and made available for new participants in the network.

3 Development of research methods

A core activity in IMEN's future must be the (further) development of research methods. Especially key incident analysis and international triangulation could be developed as main tools in IMEN research.

4. The IMEN Research Programme

During the weekend the IMEN Chair, Wolfgang Herrlitz, presented some possible research themes. In his view four areas have had a specific importance for IMEN until now:

1 The content structure of standard language education in different European countries

IMEN projects have tried to answer the question how the learning areas of standard language education are structured and which activities of teaching and learning are characteristic for those areas.

In the future new countries could contribute to this theme. There could be new and better comparison between the old IMEN countries. IMEN also could work on systematization of existing outcomes.

2 The position of teaching the standard language in multilingual/multicultural societies

The central question is how standard language education reacts to migration and growing bilinguality in the classroom. IMEN could carry out more case studies in different countries, and deepen the analysis.

3 The history of European mother tongue education in the last two centuries and its relation to the development of national identity and of European nation states.

The central research question is how the formation of standard language teaching is connected to/integrated into/caused by/shaped by the development of 'nation', of national identity, of national politics, of national culture.

An interesting research perspective here is comparing 'old' with relatively 'new' nation states.

4 The development of an IMEN research methodology

Central here is answering the question how documents (texts, transcripts, interviews, observations) of standard language education can be interpreted in a comparative perspective and how this concept of comparative interpretation can be extended to historical research.

In addition to these main themes, three other areas for future research were proposed by Wolfgang Herrlitz:

5 Teaching national literature

Up to now, IMEN stressed aspects of (standard) language teaching from a linguistic, language proficiency perspective mainly. In future projects, this demands a complementary stress on research in teaching the national literature and the literary canon, in the relationship between literature teaching and the development of a nation

and national consciousness, in the confrontation between the literary canon and the multicultural society, etc.

6 Literacy in pre-school socialization and (primary) language education.

IMEN could join important contemporary developments in this international field of research and could work on comparative projects in different European countries; these projects could integrate aspects of linguistic and cultural development, of primary and secondary language acquisition, of (early) literature education, of multilingualism, of relations between 'learning to read and write', sub-cultures and social background.

7 Multilingual education.

From a comparative point of view, IMEN could participate in projects which cross the borders of standard language education and try to integrate mother tongue education, second language teaching, teaching minority languages, bilingual education, etc.

The participants discussed these themes. We present firstly remarks which were connected to one of the proposed themes. After that we present some more general remarks.

Ad 1: Content structure of standard language education

There is a project starting in this field in England by the SISC Group. Connected with a historical perspective (see 3) research could focus on new developments: textlinguistics, comparative and sociolinguistic grammar, picture grammar, process writing, genre.

Ad 2: Teaching the standard language in multilingual/multicultural societies

Theme 2 and 7 are closely connected, perhaps the development of metalinguistic knowledge could be a research focus. The same holds true for a focus on the relation between grammar teaching and language awareness. In any case these themes will be important ones in the coming years.

Ad 3: The history of European mother tongue education

Historical research must not be restricted to the last two centuries. Lots of aspects have their roots in older periods (e.g. teaching grammar). Interesting object could be the comparison of widely used textbooks, teacher manuals, handbooks. Also teacher training could be an interesting object. An important aspect of historical research is that it is not very expensive. One also can use already existing historical research. A research focus could be the way in which mother tongue education comes into the political arena; a new perspective here is the European integration.

Ad 4: IMEN research methodology

It is clear that the methodology that has been developed until now should be made available for new IMEN participants in a comprehensive volume.

Ad 5: Teaching national literature

Research could focus on the status of literature in different types of schools, textbooks for literature education, didactic approaches. Research questions could be: When does literature teaching start in school as literature? What is the relation between literature reading and narrative writing?

Ad 6: Literacy in pre-school socialization and (primary) language education

Questions could be: What are writing practices? What does teaching writing look like? Which writing abilities have e.g. 12 year old pupils? This theme is also interesting from the perspective of the results of IEA-comparisons.

Ad 7: Multilingual education

See 2.

A general problem could be (the impossibility of) connecting participants' own present research to IMEN perspectives. In such cases perhaps the own research should be finished first and afterwards a comparison via triangulation could take place.

Outside Europe also important developments take place; the PEEL-project in Australia e.g. (Project Enhancing Effective Learning). IMEN could try to hook on such developments. For pragmatic and historical reasons (i.e. the history of mother tongue education) IMEN, however, will primarily be a European network.

All participants stated that they saw possibilities to carry out research in one or more of the proposed themes

The network function of IMEN is closely connected to the Research Programme. IMEN must be a framework for comparative research on mother tongue education. Its members are before all the national correspondents and those who carry out research. It chooses an interpretative research design; it could carry out forms of action research. Sometimes IMEN must choose a pragmatic perspective: connecting to ongoing national/local research and broadening that with additional comparative questions.

5. IMEN's future

At the end of the weekend the participants appeared to be satisfied with the discussions and presentations. There were clear positive evaluations. Different proposals were repeated. Most of them are already reported in sections 1 and 2. The

IMEN Steering Committee promised to think about these proposals and to elaborate (some of) them, consulting correspondents.

The Steering Committee explicitly promised to think seriously about the following proposals:

- 1 To assure and/or co-organise a reflective meeting like the one reported upon here every five years.
- 2 To assure and/or co-organise a so-called 'millennium-conference' (after the year 2000), focusing on the themes 1 en 3 mentioned above, using the concept of a 'national curriculum' as a starting point.
- 3 To assure and/or co-organise IMEN workshops every year.
- 4 To assure and/or co-organise a bigger conference every four years.
- 5 To enhance the communication with and between the correspondents by means of a printed and/or e-mail newsletter, address lists, etc. Also meetings of the Steering Committee could be announced and reported to the correspondents.
- 6 To prepare a new collection of papers on methodological aspects of IMEN research.
- 7 To prepare a report on the Barchem 1996 workshop.