How Culturally Diverse Are Text Selections in Dutch Literary Education? An Analysis of Reading Tips, Teaching Packs, and Student Choices

Jeroen Dera (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)

Abstract. Internationally, the cultural diversity of secondary literary education is often analyzed by examining teachers' text selections. This article broadens this scope by exploring the cultural diversity of text selections in an educational system in which students have much autonomy to choose literary texts themselves. Using Dutch literary education as a case study, the article considers text selections from the perspective of both teachers, teaching packs, and student choices. Specifically, three dimensions of diversity in text selection are analyzed: gender, ethnicity, and national diversity (Netherlands versus Flanders).

Focusing on (1) reading tips given by teachers to students, (2) contents of frequently used teaching packs, and (3) book selections by students in upper-secondary education, the analysis reveals that Dutch literary education has much to gain in terms of diversity. Female and non-western authors are underrepresented, while Flemish authors are considerably less represented than Dutch authors. Almost without exception, this imbalance between male and female, western and non-western, increased when the number of unique authors in text selections was compared with the total number of selections of specific authors. Hence, the article argues that the cultural hierarchy in which 'literature' is automatically associated with male, western authors is very present in literary education.

Keywords. Literatuuronderwijs, culturele diversiteit, gender, canon, receptie; literary education, cultural diversity, gender, canon, reception

1. Research on Diversity in Secondary Literary Education

The contribution that literary education can make to the ideas of young people regarding literature and society is, to a large extent, determined by the texts they encounter at school. After all, the texts chosen influence the conversations teachers have with students about literature, the perspectives to which they are exposed, and the explored social-political issues inspired by literature. In recent years, the concern that western teenagers in secondary education encounter too few texts other than those written by (often dead) white men, has been repeatedly articulated. Such a male-centred, monocultural orientation is problematic, as the student population has become increasingly more diverse with regard to gender and ethnicity. If literature in education is not to be merely a 'mirror' of one's own culture, but also a 'window' into a myriad of cultural viewpoints (Banks, 2006; Galda, 1998; Glazier & Seo, 2005), then it is of paramount importance that a wide variety of perspectives is presented. This is also essential with regard to reading motivation: if students do not recognize any aspects of their personal cultural background or ideology, they might experience a lack of motivation, which then in turn hinders their development of literacy (Alexander & Fox, 2011).

The work of Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) is an important point of reference with regard to research into the diversity of students' reading lists. They studied the extent to which teachers at K-12 schools in Alabama use multicultural literature in their classes, as well as the reasons these teachers give for using, or not using, such texts. They come to the conclusion that one could not speak of a balanced and representative literature curriculum. Although in slightly different terms, Applebee's (1989) inventory of text selection at American schools in the eighties already observed a similar situation. Hence, over two decades there seems to have been little change, and more recent studies looking at the United States (Northrop, Borsheim-Black & Kelly, 2019), the United Kingdom (Dyches, 2017), Australia (Adam & Barrett-Pugh, 2020), and New-Zealand (Hughson, 2020) suggest that a diverse curriculum is still an ideal rather than a reality.

It is important to note that in such research, the primary object of study is the perspective of the teacher, who has the agency to determine what the students will read, and is thus also the one with the responsibility to provide a curriculum that is diverse while stimulating critical literacy. Many factors play a role in the selection of texts, such as the level of the text in relation to the school year, the perceived interests of the students, the accessibility of the texts, the match between the text and the learning goals, the exam culture of the school, and last but certainly not least, the interests and knowledge of the teachers themselves, whose selection mechanisms have now become a field of research in its own right. It is important to note that a large proportion of American teachers experience limited autonomy in the selection of texts, because they work with reading lists that have long been established and are determined on the departmental or district level (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015: 263-264). Darragh and Boyd (2019) reported that especially teachers with limited experience (<5 years) experience such limitations.

This focus on the teacher as the only factor featuring in text selection is, however, too limited. While Darragh and Boyd (2019) did report that teachers find student perspectives very important in the choices that they make, the researchers did not include this perspective in their research. This is also due to the educational setting in the United States, where teachers play a significant role in determining the literary program. With the help of the so-called Common Core State Standards, they establish a curriculum in which students have only limited input (see Boyd, Causey & Galda, 2015). This situation is less common in many European countries, where the

How Culturally Diverse Are Text Selections in Dutch Literary Education?

51

selection of literary texts is often not conducted top-down, but as a process in which students have a voice (Witte & Sâmihăian, 2013: 16). In order to study the diversity of the literary curriculum in such countries, the students' selections as well as the teaching packs through which they encounter the literary works of a large group of authors, have to be taken into account.

Another problem in researching text selections in literary education is of a methodological nature. Studies that examine the text selection process often make use of questionnaires that influence the research results. Two examples taken from the studies cited above illustrate this aptly. Darragh and Boyd (2019), for example, deploy a questionnaire in which teachers are asked three concrete questions about the selection of texts in general: they have to name (1) their favourite book to teach; (2) their least favorite book to teach; and (3) determine six factors – each on a five-point scale – that explain to what extent such preferences influence their text selections. Subsequently, five similar questions about young adult literature are posed. Because this genre is explicitly highlighted and receives more attention than literary texts in general, the respondents might get the impression that the researchers are especially interested in young adult literature, hence inducing socially desirable answers.

The second example is the study by Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006). In this research, they asked a group of teachers (n=142) to reflect upon the diversity of their text selections based on two guiding questions: '1) Do your selections include writers from diverse backgrounds and experiences and if so, how? 2) Do you include book-length works from authors of non-European descent?' (481). The concept 'diverse' is, however, not operationalized here, with leads to predictable outcomes: The respondents either come up with a variety of titles that do not concur with the conceptualization of the researchers (485), or – when they hold very different ideas of diversity (see Silverman, 2010) – overlook authors with particular diverse backgrounds.

In short, the diversity of text selections in secondary education could be brought into sharper focus by a) looking towards teaching systems in which students have the autonomy to choose texts themselves; and b) using a methodology that is less focused on teachers' self-assessment. This article reflects the results of a research that aims to meet these conditions. It examines the diversity of text selections made within Dutch literary education, analyzing three perspectives: (1) those of teachers, (2) those of frequently used teaching packs, and (3) those of students. The concept of diversity is understood here in line with the work of Taylor Cox, who defines cultural diversity as 'the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance' (1993: 6). The focus will be on three dimensions of diversity in text selection: gender, ethnicity, and national diversity.

2. Dutch Literary Education as a Case Study

In Dutch language education, literature is one of the six exam domains within general secondary education.[1] The domain is divided into three subdomains: literary development, literary concepts, and literary history. For the subject of 'literary development', exam candidates must be able to argumentatively report on their reading experience with regard to a selection of literary works of their choice. At the 'havo' education level, this concerns eight works, whereas at the 'vwo'

---

[1] The other domains are (non-literary) reading skills, verbal language skills, writing skills, argumentative skills, and orientation towards studies and professions.

(the highest educational level), it concerns twelve works, of which at least three must have been written prior to 1880. In addition, candidates must show that they recognize and differentiate between different types of literary texts and that they are able to use literary concepts in the interpretation of literary texts (sub-domain 'literary concepts'). They must also be able to give an overview of the most important developments in Dutch literary history and be able to place the literary works they have read within a historical perspective (sub-domain 'literary history').

The Dutch exam program explicitly states that candidates must select their own titles from the reading list. However, in practice, a number of preselected texts—especially those from the literary historical canon—are being read in class (Oberon 2016). This means that most student reading lists are a combination of compulsory and self-selected books. Furthermore, the student choice is also limited, because the exam program prescribes that only 'literary' texts can be read. The concept of 'literature' is not conceptualized into further detail, as is the case in many literary didactical contexts (Schrijvers et al. 2019: 27). As a result, students tend to discuss their choices beforehand with their teacher, who functions as a gatekeeper (Dera 2020). Since there is no official curriculum upon which teachers can draw, Dutch literary education is characterized by a substantial heterogeneity, both in terms of content and text selection (Janssen 1998; Laan 2018). The number of unique titles reported during the most recent large-scale inventory provides evidence for this. The 1616 students who participated in the study jointly reported 1642 book titles (Dera 2019a).

The freedom to choose as well as the ensuing substantial heterogeneity pave the way for a literary curriculum in which text selection is guided by students' own interests, preferences, and life worlds. In theory, this means that there is also much space for diversity in the selection of authors. However, within the Dutch literary field—from which literary education is derived—such diversity cannot be taken for granted at all. This concerns all three aspects of cultural diversity that are central to this research. For example, a recent study into gender in the Dutch literary field shows that female authors are systematically appreciated less than male authors, both in consumers' buying behaviour and in terms of literary recognition by critics and juries (Koolen 2018). In terms of ethnicity, inequalities prevail as well. An analysis by Koren and Delhaye (2019) shows that publishers and other literary professionals promote aesthetic norms that position the work of non-white authors in an identity politics framework rather than a literary framework. In this way, relevant gatekeepers draw an ethno-racial line through the literature on offer, in which non-white authors are marked as less aesthetically relevant. On the level of national diversity, too, one finds an imbalance. While Dutch literary texts from the Netherlands, Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), and the Dutch Oversees Territories are traditionally all counted as 'Dutch literature', authors from the latter two areas are systematically underrepresented on literary prize nomination lists (Van Boven 2019).

Partly because of such tendencies, there are concerns within the Dutch media that secondary education has too little diversity as well. For example, the Turkish-Dutch writer Özcan Akyol (2016) articulated the concern that Surinamese Dutch people can hardly recognize themselves within the school canon, while the prominent young author Niña Weijers (2019) argued in favor of a reading list that contained more than merely dead, white, male writers. Preliminary research into the reading behaviour of teachers of literature and the reading tips that preservice teachers give to students suggests that such concerns are indeed correct. Teachers of literature read relatively few books by women and non-western authors (Dera 2018), while preservice teachers have a tendency to recommend books written by white men to students (Dera & Lommerde,

2020). For poetry in particular, it is known that teaching packs are dominated by white, male writers from the Netherlands—something that is also true for twenty-first-century poetry (Dera, 2019b; Dera 2022). This research will demonstrate how these relations play out across the breath of literary education.

3. Research Design

In this research, the diversity of the text selections made within Dutch literary education (gender, ethnicity, and nationality) is considered from three perspectives: the perspective of the teacher; the perspective of the teaching pack; and the perspective of the students themselves. The research engages with upper havo/vwo (equivalent to 10th-12th grade) and focuses solely on L1-education. Diversity in the text selections of foreign language teaching (traditionally English, German, France, and Spanish) will not be considered as part of this research.

This article focuses first of all on the perspective of teachers, because they perform a gatekeeping role and they often take on the role of advisor, giving students tips on suitable books that match the level of their literary competence (Witte 2008). Previous research has shown that approximately 60 percent of teachers of literature make use of a teaching pack that has been introduced by an educational publisher (Oberon 2016). Since such teaching packs expose students to texts and text excerpts by all kinds of authors that potentially influence their book selections, teaching packs comprise the second perspective. They offer a relevant source of research into diversity because, both textually and visually, they reflect current ideologies and hence often mediate cultural hierarchies (Risager 2018). Finally, this study takes the perspective of the students themselves into consideration, as they are the ones who ultimately determine which texts are included in their reading lists. For each of the three perspectives, the diversity of text selections was studied in separate parts, which will be discussed below.

Teachers' Perspective

In order to research teachers' gatekeeping role, a very brief questionnaire was disseminated in which teachers were asked to note eight book titles they recommend regularly to students in the fourth year of havo and vwo (10th grade). This year was chosen because Dutch students generally start reading for their exams in the fourth year and then also make the step from young adult literature to adult literature. At this moment, the guiding role of the teacher is especially important.

The respondents had to come up with these eight titles by themselves, (there was no list to choose from). In doing so, the active repertoires of the teachers were questioned, while simultaneously trying to increase the ecological validity of the research, because in practice, teachers also have to react on the spot when students ask them for reading tips. In order to limit the risk of socially desirable answers, the respondents were not told that diversity was to be the central focus of the research. Rather, they were told that they cooperated in a data collection for research into book choices in Dutch literary education.

The teachers were approached via the Facebook group 'Leraar Nederlands' (Teacher of Dutch), where teachers exchange ideas for classroom activities, discuss practical situations, and argue about the direction education as a profession is taking. Hence, one could speak of self-selective sampling. This approach possibly led primarily to reactions from teachers with an

affinity for literary education. However, in the context of this research, the potentially negative consequences of such a selection bias do not outweigh the advantages of self-selective sampling, because respondents who have an affinity with the subject generally provide more insights into the process that is being studied (Sharma, 2017).

In total, 104 teachers participated in the research, of whom 91 were women and 13 were men. Of these, 101 were formally authorized to teach Dutch language and literature in upper havo and vwo. On average, the participants had 13 years of teaching experience. In order to analyse the diversity of the titles put forward by the teachers, the gender, ethnicity, and nationality of the authors were coded.

Perspective of the Teaching Pack

In order to study the diversity of text selections in teaching packs, a corpus was comprised of three literary teaching packs for the school course Dutch language and literature. The packs used for the research are respectively *Laagland, literatuur & lezer* (*Lowlands, literature, and reader*; Van der Meulen & Van der Pol, 2011), *Literatuur: geschiedenis en theorie* (*Literature: history and theory*; Dautzenberg, 2009), and *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur* (*New Dutch: literature*; Frank et al., 2018). In the most recent inventory research into Dutch literary education in upper havo/vwo, the first two packs emerged as the two most frequently used teaching packs by teachers (Oberon, 2016). While *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur* appeared shortly after that research, it is quickly winning terrain on the Dutch literary-educative market. All three analyzed teaching packs comprise both a theory book and a workbook with assignments. *Laagland, literatuur & lezer* and *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur* work with separate editions for havo and vwo, and thus differentiate between these two levels of Dutch secondary education. *Literatuur: geschiedenis en theorie* is explicitly aimed towards vwo students and, hence, has no edition for students attending havo.

For this research, an inventory was made of all authors mentioned in the three teaching packs, for both the theory and the assignments books, not including anonymous authors (for example of medieval stories, the authorship of which is often shrouded in mystery). Authors from language areas outside of the Netherlands were also taken into account. The gender, ethnicity, and nationality of the authors included in the inventory were coded.

Perspective of the Students

In order to research the diversity of the students' text selections, a questionnaire was distributed among exam classes at both havo and vwo level in the school year of 2017-2018. In the questionnaire, students were asked to give either eight (havo) or twelve (vwo) books that were on their reading list. For each book, students were asked to state the author and the title. In addition, they gave each book a quality score (on a scale from 1 to 10), and they had to estimate what percentage of the book they had actually read.

The students were given instructions to fill in the questionnaire via their teacher of Dutch. In order to find teachers who were prepared to do so, a call was disseminated via the website www.neerlandistiek.nl, the website of Stichting Lezen ('Foundation for Reading', a center to stimulate reading), the website of the Radboud University in Nijmegen, various newsletters for alumni of teacher training, and the aforementioned Facebook group 'Leraar Nederlands'.

Teachers from 132 schools applied to participate in the questionnaire with their students. Ultimately, the exam classes of 45 schools were included in the research. The remaining 87 teachers did not respond to follow-up messages or withdrew their application due to lack of time.

The teachers were given two months to distribute the questionnaire among their exam classes. They were filled in digitally via the application Lime Survey and on average took 10-15 minutes per student to complete. The teachers were instructed to give students the questionnaire only after all literature exams were finished. This ensured that the students' reading lists were complete and marked. Participating teachers were free to choose the moment of when to give the questionnaire: at the beginning of a lesson, or precisely at the end; in Dutch class, or outside of it. However, the supervising teachers were requested to prepare their students well for filling in the questionnaire. More specifically, the students had to be instructed to bring the titles of the books in their reading dossier to class, so as to limit the risk of forgetting titles.

Before the students were shown the official part of the questionnaires, they were informed that they would participate in a research study and they were asked to give informed consent. Students below sixteen years of age were excluded from participation by Dutch law. Exam candidates who decided to partake in the questionnaire could choose to stop doing so at any moment.

In total, 2489 exam candidates were given the questionnaires. 1886 students filled them in completely, which shows a relatively high non-response. For the data analysis 1616 completed questionnaires were used and 275 questionnaires were left out. Questionnaires mentioning less than four book titles and those that were obviously not filled in seriously, were eliminated. The benchmark of four book titles was used because some schools complete part of the reading dossier prior to the exam year, hence listing only four titles for the final year. Questionnaires deemed to be 'obviously not serious' were those in which students made up comically intended book titles.

The total population of Dutch exam candidates in general secondary education comprised 91,866 students (53,974 havo; 37,892 vwo) for the year 2017-2018. Hence, the number of respondents (1616) easily exceeds the minimum sample size (1055 students, based on a reliability rate of 95% and a fault margin of 3%). On average, the 1616 respondents were aged 17.2 years. Of these, 52.8% took their exams at havo level, compared to 47.2% at vwo level. 56.6% of the students self-identified as women and 43.4% as men. The gender category 'Other' occurred so frequently in questionnaires that had evidently not been filled in seriously, that the questionnaires with this gender indication were ultimately not taken into consideration.

For 1511 respondents it was possible to determine whether they had a western or a non-western background. Students were considered 'non-western' when they indicated that either one of their parents or grandparents originated in a non-western country, in accordance with the guidelines for determining a third generation by the Dutch institute for population studies (CBS). Based on these guidelines, of all respondents, 83.7% had a western background, while 16.7% had a non-western background. The book titles reported by the students were analysed in the same way as those in the other two sub-studies: gender, ethnicity, and nationality of the authors were coded.

4. Results

In this section, I will first discuss the results per perspective. After that, these results will be compared with one another.

Teachers' Perspective

Together, the 104 respondents mentioned 829 book titles in response to the question asking them to name the eight titles they most frequently recommend to students (three teachers only mentioned seven titles). In fourteen cases, authors were mentioned without any specific accompanying book title. Because the research aims to chart diversity by coding author data, these items have still been included in the analysis.

Table 1 shows the top 15 of most frequently mentioned titles in the questionnaire. While the most frequently recommended book—which was mentioned by almost a third of the respondents—was written by a female author, the table shows that male authors are more strongly represented in the higher portions of the rating list. Only three of the sixteen authors are female. Non-western authors are also underrepresented. Only Bouzamour and Akyol have a non-western (respectively Moroccan and Turkish) background. In addition, while the top 5 contains two Flemish authors, authors from Belgium do not occur anywhere else in the top 15.

The remaining data confirmed the results within this top 15. The 829 books mentioned were written by a total of 296 authors. Of these authors, 185 were men (62.5%), 104 were female (35.1%), the gender of five (medieval) authors was unknown, and one author name revealed a writing couple. Roughly, the number of unique authors had a male-female-ratio of 2 : 1, which is concurrent with the ratio in Dutch literary book production after the Second World War (see Vos, 2008). This ratio becomes, however, a lot less advantageous when the total number of times a specific title has been mentioned is taken into account (for example, 31 times for *Alles was wat er was* by Hanna Bervoets, see table 1). Of the 801 items that could be attributed to a male or a female author, 567 were written by a man (69.57%) and 234 by a woman (28.71%). Hence, whereas the number of *unique* authors in the questionnaire resembled the ratio 2 : 1, the ratio for the *total* number of recommended authors more closely resembles 7 : 3. In short, with regard to gender diversity, female authors are underrepresented in the book tips provided by the teachers.

An opposite tendency can be seen with regard to Flemish writers and those with a non-western background. Eighteen unique writers (6.1%) are Flemish, however, of the total number of titles recommended, 12.8% have been written by Flemish authors. And among the 296 unique authors, ten have a non-western background (3.4%). Yet, when the total mentions of a specific title is taken into account, 6.3% of them stem from a non-western author. Hence, while Flemish and non-western authors as a group have a relatively weak representation in the reading tips provided by teachers of literature, the total number of mentioned titles attributed to those same non-western and Flemish authors is much higher.

Perspective of the Teaching Pack

In the three teaching packs that were analyzed, a total of 674 unique authors were mentioned. The highest number of authors were mentioned in *Literatuur: geschiedenis en theorie* (405),

followed by *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur* (284), and then *Laagland, literatuur & lezer* (183). Table 2 visualizes which authors were most frequently mentioned at havo- and vwo-level for all three teaching packs together. The table contains only male, western authors from the Netherlands. In the top ten of the most frequently cited authors in the teaching packs used at the vwo, one cannot find female, Flemish or non-western authors. Similarly, the top 50 does not demonstrate any greater diversity. In total, it contains three female writers, a single non-western (male) writer, and four (male) Flemish authors.

As was the case with the reading tips provided by the teachers, table 2 shows on a microlevel what the numbers on a macrolevel also indicate. Teaching packs are dominated by male writers with a western background and of Dutch nationality. Of the 674 unique authors mentioned in the three teaching packs together, 534 are male (79.2%) and 139 are female (20.6%) – one author name reveals a writing couple. 35 authors have a non-western background (5.2%), compared to 639 authors with a western background (94.8%). 354 of the authors mentioned are from the Netherlands (52.5%), compared to 37 from Flanders (5.5%). A salient detail is that the total corpus contains less unique authors from Flanders than authors from France (59), the United Kingdom (52), and the United States (48).

For gender as well as for ethnicity and nationality, the imbalance is even greater when we consider the total number of times a given author is mentioned (rather than the number of unique authors). The total number of mentions of authors in the three teaching packs together comprised 2920. 2509 of them are male (85.9%) and 405 are female (13.9%). With 114 mentions, non-western authors represent 3.9% of the total, compared to 96.1% for western authors. Dutch authors are mentioned 2079 times (71.2%), while Flemish authors are mentioned 187 times (6.4%). While for the Flemish authors, this percentage is higher than is the case for the number of unique authors, the percentage increases disproportionately for Dutch authors.

The imbalance observed concerning gender, ethnicity, and nationality applies to all of the three analysed teaching packs, although there are differences in emphasis. Table 3 visualizes these differences, showing that the most recent reading pack, Nieuw Nederlands *literatuur* is, relatively speaking, more balanced in the contexts of gender, ethnicity, and nationality.

Students' Perspective

Together, the 1616 respondents mentioned 1642 unique book titles by 725 unique authors. Table 4 provides an overview of the most frequently read texts among the exam candidates at havo and vwo level, including the average rating they attributed to the text and the percentage they self-reported to have actually read. As shown by this table, the most frequently mentioned authors in students' selections are also predominantly male: The top ten only contains a single woman, while the top fifteen lists two. Non-western authors do not occur on the leading list at all; the non-western author highest on the list (Mano Bouzamour) with his novel *De belofte van Pisa* (2013) appears in 28th position. The only Flemish author on the leading list is Willem, a medieval author whose last name is unknown.

Once more, the table is indicative for the broader quantitative proportions of text selections. Among the 725 authors chosen by the students, 443 are men (61.1%), while 281 are women (38.8%). This makes the male-female ratio slightly more advantageous than the average ratio in Dutch literary production. However, here too there is an imbalance, when we take into account all of the separate selections. Together, the respondents named 15,743 selected titles, of which

11,412 are by male authors (76.1%) and 3579 by female authors (23.8%), indicating a profound shortfall in the representation of female authors in student text selections.

The same mechanism applies to non-western and Flemish authors. Among the 725 authors read by the students 683 are western writers (94.2%) while 42 are non-western (5.8%). Here too, the imbalance increases when all items are taken into consideration. Once this is done, the data reveals that 14,346 titles (95.7%) are by western authors, compared to 623 titles by non-western authors (4.2%). Although the relative percentages are less imbalanced when only books published in the 21st century are considered. In this case, there are 6355 titles by western authors (92.3%) compared to 532 texts written by non-western authors (7.7%).

Out of the 725 authors read by the students, 652 originally wrote in Dutch. Of those authors, 65 originated from Flanders (10.0%), versus 587 Dutch authors (90.0%). When the total number of student selections is taken into account, the percentage of Flemish authors is smaller: Of the 14,600 items for which it could be determined whether an author originated in the Netherlands or Flanders, 1059 texts were Flemish (7.3%).

While the text selections of students also demonstrate an underrepresentation of female, non-western, and Flemish authors, students value the texts written by female authors significantly higher, and also finish reading the texts more often than those by male writers. On average, male writers scored a 6.8 (SD=1.47), versus a 6.9 (SD=1.44) for the female authors. Whereas texts by male authors were read in their entirety for an average of 74.89% (SD=38.42), for the female authors, this amounted to 78.19% (SD=36.56). In both cases an independent t-test reveals that the differences are significant (for the difference in rating: t(5493,701) = -4,011, p<0.001; for the difference in percentage: t(6375,304) = -4,453, p<.001). Non-western authors too received higher ratings than western authors. Whereas western authors on average scored 6.8 (SD=1.46) among the students, the non-western authors were rated 7.0 (SD=1.46). An independent t-test reveals that the difference is significant: (t(577,359) = -4,011, p=.016).

Comparing the Three Perspectives

From the perspectives of the teachers, the teaching packs, and the students, we can conclude that cultural diversity in Dutch literary education is in need of improvement, and this on all three researched aspects. The results confirm once again the dominance of male, western authors from the Netherlands when tables 1, 2, and 4 are compared to one another. Five of the titles most frequently recommended by the teachers (table 1) also resurface in the top 15 of most frequently read books among students (table 4): *De aanslag* by Harry Mulisch; *Het diner* by Herman Koch; *Hersenschimmen* by J. Bernlef; *Het gouden ei* by Tim Krabbé; and *De donkere kamer van Damokles* by W.F. Hermans. Without exception, these are all books written by men from a western background and with a Dutch nationality. For the frequently mentioned authors in the teaching packs that also occur in the reading selections by the students, the same is true. The four authors from table 2 who reappear in table 4 (Harry Mulisch, W.F. Hermans, Multatuli, and P.C. Hooft) are all men from a western background with Dutch nationality.

Notably, the overlap between the teachers' perspective and the perspective of the teaching pack is minimal: Only two authors from table 1 appear in table 2 (Harry Mulisch and W.F. Hermans). As these authors also resurface among those highest on the list of students' selections, we can conclude that Mulisch and Hermans are the most prominent figures within the Dutch school canon.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

The goal of this research was to gain better insights into the diversity of text selections in secondary education, by studying a teaching system in which students have the autonomy to choose texts and by using a methodology that is less focused on self-reporting by teachers. Dutch literary education served as a case study for this research, in which the teachers' perspective was complemented with data from frequently used teaching packs and the perspectives of the students.

The results indicate that the concerns articulated in Dutch media concerning the lack of diversity in literary education are justified. Whether it concerns the reading tips given by teachers to students, the teaching packs used, or the book selections made by the students themselves, female and non-western authors are seriously underrepresented and Flemish authors are considerably less represented than Dutch authors. Furthermore, in an educational system in which students have the autonomy to choose books and in which there is no official reading list, there is little cultural diversity in the text selections being made. The pattern that has been observed time and time again ever since Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) within the English language area can thus also be extended towards the Dutch language area – specifically also in a system of literary education in which the teacher has a less decisive role.

This last conclusion points towards the idea that the cultural hierarchy in which 'literature' is automatically associated with male, western authors is very present in education too, apart from the choices by teachers and other educational professionals (such as the creators of teaching packs). This study shines a light on a mechanism that underwrites the power of that cultural hierarchy. Almost without exception, the imbalance between male and female, as well as between western and non-western authors even increased when the number of unique authors in the text selections was compared with the total number of selections of specific authors. In this case, minority groups become even more marginalized when more selections take place (whether in the form of mentions in teaching packs or in the form of students' book selections). This pattern points towards a strong bias in text selection, in which male and western authors surface before female and non-western authors do – and in the specific case of the Netherlands, Dutch authors also take precedence over Flemish writers.

It is important to note that part of this bias is caused by Dutch curricular requirements, in which it is specified that vwo-students should read at least three works from before 1880, and that they should also know the most important developments in literary history. This literary history is in itself predominantly male and western. Until well into the twentieth century, female authors were hardly represented in the standard version of literary history. In this respect, the Netherlands is no exception to other western societies (cf. Bel & Vaessens, 2010). Clearly, this is even more true for non-western writers, because authors with a non-western background only became more strongly involved in the literary field during the final decade of the twentieth century (Behschnitt, De Mul & Minnaard, 2013). For Flemish literature, the situation is more complex: While Dutch and Flemish literature have been entangled for centuries, research has repeatedly shown that the two systems do not overlap, and that Flemish writers are not automatically able to make it into the heart of the Dutch literary field (Grüttemeier & Oosterholt, 2008; Van Renssen, 2013). This research underwrites this: While there are indeed Flemish authors who make it into the bastion of Dutch literary education, the focus lies on Dutch writers.

So, rather than along linguistic lines, literary education seems organized along national delineations.

The research clearly shows that students—who in general tend to be initiated into literature and do not know the full background set out above—make choices that show little diversity. Possibly, this is because they encounter teaching packs that present limited diversity and teachers who recommend a disproportionate number of books by male, western authors from the Netherlands. A comparison between the most prominent texts in the three sub-studies already demonstrated that students choose precisely such authors, which are also put forward by both teachers and reading packs.

An important follow-up question is which direction such an interaction takes. To what extent do teachers allow themselves to be guided by what students often (and enjoy to) read (compare Dera & Van Doeselaar 2022)? We can conclude that more diversity would not obstruct such enjoyment. Indeed, quite the contrary is true. Female and non-western authors score significantly higher among students than male and western authors.

The methodology used in this research has the advantage of taking a broader view of the institution of 'literary education' than the singular perspective of only using teachers would allow, as is used in most studies into text selection. Because the data analysis employed a large number of text selections, coded by the researcher, the validity and reliability of the results are high. Nevertheless, three necessary follow-up steps should be taken to gain more insights into the cultural diversity of literary didactic practice.

First, this study does not include an analysis of the processes that lie at the foundation of text selection. It is not clear what considerations play a role in the reading tips that teachers give to their students; which selection criteria the creators of teaching packs adopt (and why); and what makes students choose a certain book for their reading list. Follow-up research should question the parties concerned in more detail regarding these processes, whether that is through a questionnaire, via (focus group) interviews, or think-aloud tasks. It is an interesting question here whether cultural diversity plays any role at all in their considerations.

Second, this research only provides insights into cultural diversity on the surface of literary education. The phenomenon is addressed by analyzing author data or, more specifically, by researching to what extent a certain group (female authors, non-western authors, Flemish authors) is represented within literary education, which is here conceived as a derivative of the literary field. It remains unclear what views on diversity and connected concepts such as misogyny, stereotyping, and cultural appropriation circulate within the literary didactic practice. What kind of ideas about diversity are mediated by the literary texts that are frequently read in high schools, and what type of moderating effect (if any) do teachers have when they discuss such texts? Such questions could be answered using popular texts from each of the researched perspectives. For example, Stefan Brijs's novel *De engelenmaker* (table 1) is not only about the boundaries of science, but also about life in the Flemish countryside. How do teachers and students deal with such a regional representation? Conversely, *Max Havelaar* by Multatuli (table 2) calls forth questions concerning the history of Dutch colonialism, specifically in relation to Indonesia, and could be used by teachers to encourage discussion on the Dutch colonial past— raising the research question how such discussions take shape. The most frequently read book among students, *Het gouden ei* by Tim Krabbé (table 4), also provokes interesting questions concerning diversity. The protagonist, for example, has a strongly sexist view on women, while the novel also contains cultural stereotypes of a racist nature (Dera, 2021). Whether teachers and

students actually engage with this, and hence whether a didactic method is applied that challenges sexist or monocultural bias based on the novel discussed, could be explored in further detail.

Finally, it would be a missed opportunity not to replicate a study of this sort in other countries, both within and outside of Europe, in order to gain a comparative perspective on text selections in literary education at high schools. In the long term, hopefully, this will not only benefit the diversity of literary education, but also the research practice of this topic.

Bibliography

Adam, H. & Barratt-Pugh, C. (2020). 'The challenge of monoculturalism: What books are educators sharing with children and what messages do they send?' The Australian Educational Researcher. Advance online publication, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00375-7.

Akyol, Ö. (2016). 'Liever Amatmoekrim dan de avonturen van Adelbrecht'. *Nieuwe Revu*, January 22, 2016.

Alexander, P.A. & E. Fox (2011). 'Adolescents as readers'. In M.L. Kamil et al., *Handbook of Reading Research*. Volume IV. New York/London: Routledge, 157-176.

Applebee, A. (1989). *A study of book-length works taught in high school English courses*. Albany: Center for the Study of Teaching and Learning of Literature.

Banks, J.A. (2006). *Race, Culture, and Education: The selected works of James A. Banks*. New York/London: Routledge.

Behschnitt, W., S. De Mul & L. Minnaard (2013). *Literature, language, and multiculturalism in Scandinavia and the Low Countries*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Bel, J. & Vaessens, T. (2010). *Schrijvende vrouwen: een kleine literatuurgeschiedenis van de Lage Landen, 1880-2010*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Boyd, F.B., Causey, L.L. & Galda, L. (2015). 'Culturally Diverse Literature: Enriching Variety in an Era of Common Core State Standards'. *The Reading Teacher* 68 (5), 378-387.

Cox, T. (1993). *Cultural Diversity in Organizations: Theory, Research and Practice*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Darragh, J.J. & Boyd, A.S. (2019). 'Text Selection: Perceptions of Novice Vs. Veteran Teachers'. *Action in Teacher Education* 41 (1), 61-78.

Dautzenberg, J.A. (2009). *Literatuur: Geschiedenis en theorie*. 11th edition. Den Bosch: Malmberg.

Dera, J. (2018). 'De lezende leraar: Literatuuronderwijs in Nederland(s) als onderzoeksobject'. *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 134 (2), 146-170.

Dera, J. (2019). *De praktijk van de leeslijst: een onderzoek naar de inhoud en waardering van literatuurlijsten voor het schoolvak Nederlands op havo en vwo*. Amsterdam: Stichting Lezen.

Dera, J. (2019). 'Gedichten als smokkelwaar: Poëzie in (en buiten) het curriculum Nederlands in het voortgezet onderwijs'. *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 135 (2), 147-158.

Dera, J. (2020). Het begrip 'literatuur' binnen het literatuuronderwijs. Didaktiek Nederlands, 21 maart 2020. Online publicatie: https://didactieknederlands.nl/handboek/2020/03/het-begrip-literatuur-binnen-het-literatuuronderwijs/.

Dera, J. (2021). '*Het gouden ei* in het literatuuronderwijs: van docentopvattingen naar nieuwe perspectieven op een schoolklassieker'. *Vooys: tijdschrift voor letteren* 39 (2), 17-27.

Dera, J. (2022). 'Ruim baan voor het stiefkind! De staat van het poëzieonderwijs op de middelbare school'. *Poëziekrant* 46 (5), 26-31.

Dera, J. & Lommerde (2020). 'Persoonlijke voorkeuren, canonieke werken en leesadviezen: Literatuur volgens leraren Nederlands in opleiding'. *Levende Talen Tijdschrift* 21 (1), 3-13.

Dera, J. & N. Van Doeselaar (2022). 'Leesvoorkeuren van havo- en vwo-leerlingen aan het begin van de bovenbouw: een enquêteonderzoek'. *Levende Talen Tijdschrift* 23 (2), 3-13.

Dyches, J. (2017). 'Shaking Off Shakespeare: A White Teacher, Urban Students, and the Mediating Power of a Canonical Counter-Curriculum'. *Urban Review* 49, 300-325.

Frank, H., M. Kooiman, J. Meerkerk, M. Metzemaekers & M. Schouwstra (2018), *Nieuw Nederlands Literatuur*. Groningen/Utrecht: Noordhoff Uitgevers.

Galda, L. (1998). 'Mirrors and windows: Reading as transformation'. In T.E. Raphael & K.H. Au (eds.), *Literature-based instruction: Reshaping the curriculum*, Norwood: Christopher-Gordon, 1-11.

Glazier, J. & J. Seo (2005). 'Multicultural literature and discussion as mirror and window?' *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 48 (8), 686-700.

Grüttemeier, R. & J. Oosterholt, J. (2008). *Een of twee Nederlandse literaturen? Contacten tussen de Nederlandse en Vlaamse literatuur sinds 1830*. Leuven: Peeters.

Hughson, T. (2020). *Preference, Passing, and Fresh Perspectives: Text Selection by Secondary School English Teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/handle/10063/8884.

Janssen, T. (1998). *Literatuuronderwijs bij benadering: een empirisch onderzoek naar de vormgeving en opbrengsten van het literatuuronderwijs Nederlands in de bovenbouw van het havo en vwo*. Amsterdam: Thesis Publishers.

Koolen, C.W. (2018). *Reading beyond the Female: The Relationship between Perception of Author Gender and Literary Quality*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.

Koren, T. & C. Delhaye (2019). 'Depoliticising literature, politicizing diversity: Ethno-racial boundaries in Dutch literary professionals' aesthetic repertoires'. *Identities* 26 (2), 184-202.

Laan, N. (2018). *Medemakers. Sociologie van literatuur en andere kunsten*. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren.

Northrop, L., C. Borsheim-Black, C. & S. Kelly (2019). 'Matching Students to Books: The Cultural Content of Eighth-Grade Literature Assignments'. *The Elementary School Journal* 120 (2), 243-271.

Oberon (2016). *Lees- en literatuuronderwijs in havo/vwo*. Amsterdam: Stichting Lezen.

Risager, K. (2018). *Representations of the world in language textbooks*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Schrijvers, M., T. Janssen, O. Fialho & G. Rijlaarsdam (2019). 'Gaining Insight into Human Nature: A Review of Literature Classroom Intervention Studies'. *Review of Educational Research* 89 (1), 3-45.

Sharma, G. (2017). 'Pros and cons of different sampling techniques'. *International Journal of Applied Research* 3 (7), 749-752.

Silverman, S.K. (2010). 'What is Diversity? An Inquiry into Preservice Teacher Beliefs'. *American Educational Research Journal* 47 (2), 292-329.

Stallworth, B.J., L. Gibbons & L. Fauber (2006). It's not on the list: An exploration of teachers' perspectives on using multicultural literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 49 (6), 478-489.

Van Boven, J. (2019). *Typisch Libris: Een onderzoek naar de groslijst, longlist en shortlist van de Libris Literatuur Prijs 2010-2019*. Nijmegen: Thesis Radboud University.

Van der Meulen, G. & W. Van der Pol (2011). *Laagland, literatuur & lezer*. Amersfoort: Thieme-Meulenhoff.

Van Renssen, F. (2013). *"Lezer, er zijn ook Belgen!" Interactie tussen de Nederlandse en Vlaamse literatuur via literaire kritiek en uitgeverij*. Antwerpen/Apeldoorn: Garant.

Vos, L. (2008). Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld. Groningen: Thesis Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

Watkins, N. & J. Ostenson (2015). 'Navigating the Text Selection Gauntlet: Exploring Factors That Influence English Teachers' Choices'. *English Education* 47 (3), 245-275.

Weijers, N. (2019). 'Tijd voor een leeslijst met meer dan alleen dode, witte, mannelijke schrijvers'. Brainwash.nl, January 30, 2019. https://www.brainwash.nl/bijdrage/tijd-voor-een-leeslijst-metmeer-dan-alleen-dode-witte-schrijvers .

Witte, T. (2008). *Het oog van de meester: Een onderzoek naar de literaire ontwikkeling van havo- en vwo-leerlingen in de tweede fase van het voortgezet onderwijs*. Delft: Eburon.

Witte, T. & F. Sâmihăian (2013). 'Is Europe open to a student-oriented framework for literature? A comparative analysis of the formal literature curriculum in six European countries'. *L1 – Educational Studies in Language and Literature* 13, 1-22.

Tables

Most frequently mentioned authors in three common Dutch teaching packs

Position	Author (gender, ethnicity, nationality)	Title	Number of times recommended
1	Hanna Bervoets (F, W, NL)	*Alles wat er was* (2013)	31
2	Stefan Brijs (M, W, FL)	*De engelenmaker* (2005)	28
3	Harry Mulisch (M, W, NL)	*De aanslag* (1981)	21
4	Thomas Olde Heuvelt (M, W, NL)	*Hex* (2013)	20
5	Lize Spit (F, W, FL)	*Het smelt* (2015)	20
6	Mano Bouzamour (M, NW, NL)	*De belofte van Pisa* (2013)	19
7	Herman Koch (M, W, NL)	*Het diner* (2009)	19
8	Kim van Kooten (F, W, NL)	*Lieveling* (2015)	18
9	Tommy Wieringa (M, W, NL)	*Joe Speedboot* (2006)	18
10	J. Bernlef (M, W, NL)	*Hersenschimmen* (1984)	16
11	Tim Krabbé (M, W, NL)	*Het gouden ei* (1984)	15
12	Philip Huff (M, W, NL)	*Dagen van gras* (2009)	14
13	Willem Frederik Hermans (M, W, NL)	*De donkere kamer van Damokles* (1958)	11
14	Jaap Robben (M, W, NL)	*Birk* (2014)	11
15	Özcan Akyol (M, NW, NL)	*Eus* (2012)	10
16	Alex Boogers (M, W, NL)	*Alleen met de goden* (2015)	10
17	Bert Wagendorp (M, W, NL)	*Ventoux* (2013)	10

Table 1: Books most frequently recommended to students in the fourth year of havo/vwo. Legend: M = male, F = female, W = western, NW = non-western, NL = from the Netherlands, FL = from Flanders.

Most frequently mentioned authors in three common Dutch teaching packs

Position	Name author	Number of mentions
1	Harry Mulisch (M, W, NL)	81
2	Willem Frederik Hermans (M, W, NL)	50
3	Ferdinand Bordewijk (M, W, NL)	42
4	P.C. Hooft (M, W, NL)	42
5	Gerard Reve (M, W, NL)	37
6	Louis Couperus (M, W, NL)	35
7	Hendrik Marsman (M, W, NL)	35
8	G.A. Bredero (M, W, NL)	33
9	Arnon Grunberg (M, W, NL)	33
10	Multatuli (M, W, NL)	33

Table 2: The most frequently mentioned authors in the three teaching packs for teaching Dutch literature. Legend: M = male, F = female, W = western, NW = non-western, NL = from the Netherlands, FL = from Flanders.

Balance related to gender, ethnicity, and nationality per teaching pack (vwo)

Teaching pack	Aspects of diversity		
	Gender	Ethnicity	Nationality
Laagland, literatuur & lezer (n=183)	91.3% male	97.8% western	67.8% Dutch
	8.7% female	2.2% non-western	5.5% Flemish
Literatuur: geschiedenis en theorie (n=405)	88.2% male	98.8% western	45.9% Dutch
	11.8% female	1.2% non-western	2.7% Flemish
Nieuw Nederlands literatuur (n=284)	73.6% male	94.0% western	66.9% Dutch
	26.4% female	6.0% non-western	8.5% Flemish

Table 3: Balance between male and female authors, western and non-western authors, and Dutch and Flemish authors in the three analyzed teaching packs, based on the number of unique authors.

Most frequently read literary texts among exam candidates havo/vwo

Position	Author	Title	Number of selections	Average rating	Average percentage read
1	T. Krabbé (M, W, NL)	*Het gouden ei* (1984)	558	6.8	80.8
2	H. Mulisch (M, W, NL)	*De aanslag* (1982)	441	7.1	72.1
3	Unknown	*Karel ende Elegast* (ca. 1270)	403	5.9	89.1
4	H. Koch (M, W, NL)	*Het diner* (2009)	38	6.7	71.8
5	J. Bernlef (M, W, NL)	*Hersenschimmen* (1984)	271	7.2	81.7
6	W.F. Hermans (M, W, NL)	*De donkere kamer van Damokles* (1958)	267	6.6	74.6
7	Willem (M, W, FL)	*Van den vos Reynaerde* (ca. 1271)	252	6.2	85.1
8	Multatuli (M, W, NL)	*Max Havelaar* (1860)	245	6.2	85.1
9	J. Wolkers (M, W, NL)	*Turks fruit* (1969)	240	6.6	60.7
10	A. van der Zijl (F, W, NL)	*Sonny boy* (2004)	222	7.2	63.5
11	W.F. Hermans (M, W, NL)	*Het behouden huis* (1952)	220	6.7	81.4
12	P.C. Hooft (M, W, NL)	*Warenar* (1617)	204	5.7	81.6
13	T. Wieringa (M, W, NL)	*Joe Speedboot* (2006)	184	6.9	68.4
14	H. Haasse (V, W, NL)	*Oeroeg* (1949)	177	6.6	75.6
15	R. Vuijsje (M, W, NL)	*Alleen maar nette mensen* (2006)	146	6.8	73.9

Table 4: Most frequently cited titles by exam candidates havo/vwo. Legend: M = male, F = female, W = western, NW = non-western, NL = from the Netherlands, FL = from Flanders