Contested e-literacies in Dutch as a second language: exploring the interface between policy and practice

Jeanne Kurvers, Massimiliano Spotti
Tilburg University/School of Humanities, Netherlands

Building on an overview of the history of civic integration policy in the Netherlands, we show how during the last decade the Dutch integration policy has changed from fairly foreigner-friendly into a policy that, in our view, seems designed to discourage low-educated people from immigrating to the Netherlands and otherwise hands liability for second language learning and integration to newly arrived migrants themselves.

Parallel to the development of a stricter integration policy, we see an exponential growth of ICT in the Dutch as a second language sector. While ICT used to be a means for learning support in second language classrooms, it is becoming a key factor for students to manage their own learning and integration. This stress laid on ICT, though, impinges upon low-educated migrants as a new obstacle: what matters is being literate in the means of learning Dutch.

To back this claim, our contribution looks at three applications and at how they get picked up – or not – by learners. The first application – widespread across integration courses – has set the first steps toward digital learning for Dutch as an L2. The second application is an innovative approach to integration through blended learning and contextualized second language learning. The third is representative of an emerging trend – that of adaptive learning – and is not yet widespread across integration classes.

The contribution concludes by reflecting on the implications that ICT has for newly arrived migrants, also in the context of changing integration policies. It decries that the transformational power of ICT is institutionally adopted as a fast track for learners but is also restricted to drills by the requirements to pass exams. The diversity of migrants’ learning development requires reflection on ’self-teaching devices’ in policy and ICT-applications.

Keywords: adult second language learning, ict, integration policy.