SUMMARY

Research problem

Primary schools differ in the way they organize their education. Schools with a large population of ethnic minority pupils often organize special (curricular) activities for them. They use methods developed for second language learners (L2), provide minority language teaching, organize multicultural activities or pay special attention to ethnic minority parents. Essentially, ethnic minority pupils can benefit both from ‘general’ education and ‘special’ activities. The question is: what education is most effective for them? These pupils perform much lower than their Dutch counterparts. In order to remedy this situation the Dutch government provides extra facilities for schools with ethnic minority pupils and in this context it is important to know how the school can be most effective.

In the study two criteria for effectiveness are considered: quality and equity. The quality of a school is defined as the mean performance of all pupils in the final year of primary school; the equity of a school as the difference in performance between Dutch and ethnic minority pupils, taking into account the influence of relevant individual background characteristics. The assumption is that general education that is effective for Dutch children will also be effective for ethnic minority pupils. So the effectiveness of general education is measured by looking at the quality of the school. Special activities for ethnic minority pupils are expected to be effective only for them. Thus their effectiveness is measured using the equity criterion. In this study we focus on Turkish and Moroccan pupils, for two reasons. First, they are the lowest achievers among ethnic minorities, so they can potentially benefit the most from special activities. Second, they comprise the two largest minority groups in schools (70 per cent of minorities are from Turkish or Moroccan origin) and special activities are often aimed at these.

The research questions are:
- do schools differ in quality, and if so, what characteristics of general education account for these differences?
- do schools differ in equity, and if so, what special activities account for these differences?
- what combination(s) of general and special educational provision characterize effective schools?

**Method**

In order to answer the research questions, secondary analyses were performed on data collected for the national evaluation of the Educational Priority Program. Data were collected between September and December in 1988, 1990 and 1992 in grades 4, 6 and 8 of the same primary schools. Children were tested for intelligence, Dutch language and mathematics, while principals, teachers and parents completed written questionnaires. The analyses for this study were restricted to data collected by pupils who were tested in 1988 in grade 6 (9-10 age group) and in 1990 in grade 8 (11-12 age group), the teachers they had in grades 6 and 7, and the school principal. Ethnic minority pupils had to be no older than two years of age when they came to the Netherlands, so that basically they had the same educational experience as their Dutch classmates. Furthermore, schools were selected which had no fewer than 30 per cent and no more than 70 per cent ethnic minority pupils. Finally, 38 schools and 439 pupils were included in the analyses.

Two multilevel models were used as a framework for the analyses: a ‘general’ and a ‘special’ model. Recently developed integral models for educational effectiveness formed a theoretical framework for the general model. Classroom instruction and its effect on achievement lay at the core of the model. School policy and organization were important conditional factors. Achievement in grade 8 was the dependent variable and achievement in grade 6, intelligence and socioeconomic/ethnic background were the covariates in the model. The quality of the school was measured using the mean attainment of the pupils in two years. The educational model of Cummins was used as a starting point for the special model. Here the interaction-effects of the policy and educational practice aimed at ethnic minorities and pupils’ ethnic background were of main interest.

The data were analysed using the VARCL multilevel program. Separate analyses were executed for Dutch language and mathematics. An outlier-study
was also performed in order to see what combination(s) of general and special educational provision characterize effective schools.

**Results**

**General model**
Schools with a large number of ethnic minorities differ in quality, but the differences are small. Only four per cent of the differences in achievement was left unexplained, after the covariates had been included in the model, both for Dutch language and mathematics. In other research mostly larger quality differences between schools are found. The reason for the relatively small proportion of unexplained between-schools variance probably lies in the sample. Because it consists of schools with many ethnic minority pupils, the achievement range in these schools is smaller than that in a random sample.

Before executing the multilevel analyses it was attempted to cluster schools by the way they organize classroom instruction. The attempt failed because the groups of schools formed as a result of cluster analysis did not sufficiently differ. The few groups that did differ contained only a few schools or could not be clearly characterized.

The multilevel analyses showed that for Dutch language the classroom variables together account for more than half of the between-schools variance, while the school variables account for only a third. However, none of these variables have a significant relation with attainment. For mathematics the picture was reversed: here the school variables account for most of the between-schools variance (about 70%), while the classroom variables only account for a quarter of this. Three school variables have a significant relation with mathematics attainment: time spent on basic skills, use of standard achievement tests to monitor pupils (both positive) and orderly environment (negative).

**Special model**
Although Turkish and Moroccon children clearly performed lower than Dutch children, the achievement difference was about the same at each school. This means that no equity differences were found between the schools analyzed in this study. This finding is in accordance with most other research findings.

However, in spite of this finding, an interaction-effect was found between ethnic background and ethnic minority parents participating on parent councils.
At schools where ethnic minority parents participate, Dutch pupils perform relatively low. This interaction-effect was found for Dutch language and mathematics. A significant negative relation was also found between the use of L2-materials and mathematics achievement.

**Combination of general and special characteristics**

Because no equity differences between schools were found, the outlier-study was exclusively based on quality differences. For each subject the schools were ranked according to their posterior means (covariates-model). The ranking clearly showed that the quality of a school depends very much on the subject. Schools that achieved a high standard for Dutch language not always achieved this for mathematics and vice versa. Only five of the 38 schools had for both subjects a high (two schools) or low quality-score (three schools).

A comparison of these ‘stable’ high- and low-effective schools on general and special educational characteristics does not give us a clear picture. Generally the high-effective schools seem to emphasize basic skills somewhat more than the low-effective ones, but the differences between the two groups are not very pronounced.

**Implications**

The findings indicate that ethnic minorities benefit more from general education than from special activities. Although not many significant relations were found between general education and attainment of pupils, the overall picture seems to indicate that a ‘good’ school for ethnic minorities is one that emphasizes acquiring mastery in basic skills and has a clear evaluation policy. However, this does not tell us much about the actual organization of this education, especially classroom teaching. Because of the way data were collected in this study (written questionnaires), information on classroom organization was not as complete as would have been desired. More research is needed on this subject.

These findings do not necessarily imply that special activities for ethnic minority pupils are completely futile. It seems reasonable to assume that such children will feel more at home in a school that pays attention to their mother tongue and culture than at a school that does not. But this does not suffice for a better performance. In order to accomplish that, these activities need to be
accompanied by a policy that emphasizes mastery of basic skills. Above all, attention for ethnic minority pupils should be aimed at improving performance.

A drawback of the study in this dissertation is that we looked at the effects of actual primary education practice. This does not always concur with theoretical ideas on effective education. At the moment in the Netherlands a few projects have started in which educational models are tested on effectiveness after they have been implemented in practice. The evaluation of these projects will provide more information about effective education for ethnic minority pupils.