

LANGUAGE POLICIES IN NORWAY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MULTILINGUAL COMPETENCE

RALUCA POP¹, RALUCA-DANIELA RĂDUȚ²

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ABSTRACT. *Language policies in Norway and the development of the multilingual competence.* Norway, an increasingly multicultural society, has acknowledged through its language policies the importance of communicating effectively across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. This paper intends to provide a broader picture of the Norwegian education system and the changes it has undergone in order to accommodate to technological advancements and the internationalization of education. In addition, the development of the intercultural communicative competence has become a prerequisite in Norway's multicultural and multilingual society characterized by increased mobility. Therefore, Norway's educational landscape and educational policies needed to accommodate these changes and transfer the acquired knowledge into clear pedagogical aims.

Keywords: *foreign language learning, culture, intercultural communicative competence, language policy, student-centered learning, differentiated learning, multilingual competence.*

REZUMAT. *Politicile lingvistice în Norvegia și dezvoltarea competenței multiculturale.* Norvegia, care a devenit treptat o societate multiculturală, recunoaște, prin intermediul politicilor lingvistice elaborate, importanța comunicării eficiente în diverse contexte culturale și lingvistice. Lucrarea de față își propune să ofere o imagine amplă asupra sistemului educațional norvegian și să indice schimbările parcurse de acesta în vederea adaptării la progresele tehnologice și la internaționalizarea educației. În plus, dezvoltarea competenței comunicative interculturale a devenit o prerechizită în societatea

¹ **Raluca POP** is Teaching Assistant, PhD, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: raluca.petrus@yahoo.com

² **Raluca-Daniela RĂDUȚ** is Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: raluca_daniela_radut@yahoo.com.

Norvegiană multiculturală și multilingvă unde mobilitatea a fost intensificată. Datorită acestor aspecte, contextul educațional norvegian precum și politicile educaționale norvegiene au fost nevoite să se adapteze acestor schimbări și să utilizeze aceste cunoștințe obținute în finalități pedagogice bine definite.

***Cuvinte-cheie:** predarea limbilor străine, cultură, competența comunicativă interculturală, politică lingvistică, predarea centrată pe elev, predarea diferențiată, competența multilingvă.*

Schooling in Norway and the development of the curriculum

Schooling, in a more organized form, finds its roots around 1739 when a royal decree was issued in order to promote Christian faith as a religion. Education was compulsory until learners would be at least ten or twelve years old (Hansen 2008, 128). According to Boyesen, the main feature of these elementary schools was “the system of attendance on alternate days, an arrangement which is again due to the long distances from the farms to the school premises, so that the children cannot manage the journey every day” (1945, 141).

The main subjects in the elementary school were:

- Christian knowledge
- Norwegian
- arithmetic
- writing
- singing
- local knowledge
- drawing, gymnastics, carpentry, sewing
- history, geography
- house-work and gardening (Boyesen 1945, 142).

A weak economy and a scattered population in the Norwegian landscape, characterized by fjords and mountains, made it difficult for local communities to build schools. The scarce number of children in the rural local communities led to the emergence of itinerant teachers who would travel from place to place in order to teach in churches, barns and tents. According to the statistics “from 1837 [...] there were 2024 teachers walking around the countryside, compared to only 118 teachers working in primary education in cities” (Hansen 2008, 129). The number of these itinerant teachers increased to about 7000 in the middle of the 19th century (Hansen 2008, 129).

When Norway became independent in 1814 it had no national education system. Afterwards followed a period of stagnation and only in 1860 “a new legislation concerning rural schools was passed” and “the government became responsible for funding the schools” (Hansen 2008, 130). In the latter part of the 19th century Norway was among the first countries in Europe to establish that schooling should be free and open for all children, regardless of their social background (Hansen 2008, 131). Between the 1900 and 1940 new laws were passed and many changes introduced as a consequence of the constant review and evaluation of the seven-year compulsory education. During the years that followed the Nazi occupation of Norway, the whole Norwegian education system confronted with a set of reforms in order to rebuild a national and cultural identity of the country. It was an important period in the history of Norway which remained a symbol for a great number of reform Acts, written at that time.

In 1974 a new national curriculum was issued in Norway, this time enforced all over the country, no matter whether learners lived in cities or in rural areas. It targeted a 9-year compulsory school and principles of individual adapted teaching were also included. According to Hansen (2008, 132) the curriculum from 1987, in view of an increased work mobility within Norway's borders, promoted more local freedom and encouraged schools to make a closer connection to the local environment and thus provide suitable learning programmes. Because there were specific contents just for blocks of three years (1st grade-3rd grade, 4th grade-6th grade, 7th grade-9th grade) the teachers' work load and decision making increased radically. The critics of this curriculum feared that a curriculum that focused too much on making connections to the local environment and the local identity would hinder the national perspective (Hansen 2008, 133).

The next curriculum reform took place in 1997 and provided another paradigm, namely the focus on promoting national content and maintaining cultural heritage. Beginning with 1997, Norway introduced a 10-year compulsory education starting from the age of six and the curriculum provided a common platform for primary, lower and upper secondary and adult education (Hansen 2008, 133). The foundation of this curriculum laid on some basic values that perceived the learner as a whole being, in need to fulfill his/her potential and as an individual with different spiritual, working, creative or socio-cultural characteristics.

A change in government and the ruling political party brought about a change in the curriculum. In 2006 the Norwegian Minister of Education proposed a new curriculum entitled *The Norwegian National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion* [Kunnskapsløftet] which provided measurable learning outcomes instead of values to be attained. According to Sjøby (2018, 4) the

National Curriculum encourages a more in-depth learning strategy, namely “learning how to continuously acquire new knowledge and skills throughout life”.

In this respect, the curriculum focused on the development of five basic skills that would have to be attained by all the learners enrolled in the 10-year compulsory education. These five skills targeted:

- Speaking skills
- Writing skills
- Reading skills
- Numeracy skills
- Digital skills.

Each subject matter would be evaluated in view of these skills. For example when learning natural sciences or mathematics, learners should be able to demonstrate that they are able to make use of their reading skills or digital skills. Thus, teachers, no matter what subject they teach, have the responsibility to help learners develop all these basic skills.

Digital skills have been added because ICT-related aids used for educational purposes contribute to providing diverse and successful teaching activities and thus, learners should be able to work with these tools in the formal setting environment as they often do in their daily life. A very important aspect regarding the National Curriculum is the *Integration of Digital Technologies*. The Norwegian Ministry of Education developed a digitalised strategy for primary, secondary and vocational education for 2017-2021³. In other words, this plan is centred both on pupils, aiming to improve their digital skills they need at work, in education and in society in general, and on schools which should be equipped with the specific technologies in order to “enhance pupils’ learning outcomes” (Søby 2018, 5).

It is worth mentioning that besides the basic skills other three areas of study were introduced:

- sustainable development
- democracy and citizenship
- health and life skills

The five basic skills together with the three areas of study provide learners with a good start in their working life.

³ http://www.eun.org/documents/411753/839549/Country+Report+Norway+2018_v2.pdf/e8c32816-d56e-4080-8154-d2f6ca6f9961. Retrieved December 10, 2018.

Norway's education system

The education system in Norway begins with kindergarten which is not mandatory, followed by mandatory elementary and lower secondary school that is free of charge. The enrolment of primary school pupils is made at the age of 6 and they leave at the age of 13. At primary school level (from the 1st to 7th grade), the children are taught different subjects, beginning with the alphabet, playing educational games, learning math, gymnastics and basic English. The lower secondary school lasts for three years beginning at the age of 12 or 13 until the age of 16 (from the 8th grade to the 10th grade). At this level the students have to choose an elective course which is usually a foreign language. *SFO (skolefritidsordning)* is a Norwegian after-school programme, dedicated to the 1st and 4th graders.

The upper secondary school is from the age of 17 up to the age of 19 or 20. This level of education lasts for three years and it is not mandatory. However, the students have to go through these three years in order to get a decent job. The new National Curriculum from 2006 gave students the possibility to choose between two different study programmes: vocational studies and a teaching programme that includes a combination of theory and practice. The latter lasts for 2 years and it gives the student the opportunity to make his/her practice at different companies or institutions. The second programme of studies at this level of upper secondary school is the so-called *studieforberedelse* (a general studies path)⁴ that lasts for 3 years. It provides students with the possibility to continue their studies at a university or a college. In this case the teaching programme is focused on giving the student a more consistent theoretical background.

Nowadays, there are very many international schools in Norway, some of them offering an English curriculum, teaching "either the International Baccalaureate or the British GCSE and GCE systems"⁵.

Language policies and the development of the multilingual competence

Although Norway is not member of the European Union, many of the language policies issued by the European Commission have been integrated, under the EEA agreement, in the Norwegian education system (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) 2001; Quality Reform in line with the Bologna Process 2003 etc.).

⁴ <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Norway/Norway-Guide/Education/Schools-in-Norway>, accessed 10th December 2018.

⁵ <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Norway/Norway-Guide/Education/Schools-in-Norway>, accessed 10th December 2018.

The Norwegian National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion (2006) consists of the following elements:

- The Core Curriculum
- The Quality Framework
- Subject Curricula
- A Framework Regulating the Distribution of Periods and Subjects.

The Core Curriculum issued in 1994⁶ indicates, in a humanistic view, seven values and principles that should characterize education (the spiritual and the creative human being, the working and the social human being, the environmentally aware human being etc.) and articulates the schools' responsibility for enabling learners to develop their social competence. The Core Curriculum was included in the Norwegian National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion without any changes brought to it.

The Quality Framework issued in 2006 intended to clarify the responsibilities of all the parties involved in the education system: learners, teachers, parents, schools and local authorities. More "freedom at local level with respect to local curriculum work, teaching methods, teaching materials and organization of classroom instruction"⁷ was granted in order to support each learner's access to differentiated education. The learning poster included in this Quality Framework sets the following goals for schools in Norway:

- "give all pupils and apprentices/trainees equal opportunities to develop their abilities and talents individually and in cooperation with others;
- stimulate the stamina, curiosity and desire of pupils and apprentices/trainees to learn;
- stimulate pupils and apprentices/trainees to develop their own learning strategies and critical-thinking abilities;
- stimulate pupils and apprentices/trainees in their personal development, in the development of identity and ethical, social and cultural competence, and in the ability to understand democracy and democratic participation;
- facilitate for pupil participation and enable pupils and apprentices / trainees to make informed value choices and choices relating to their education and future professions/occupations;
- promote adapted teaching and varied work methods;
- stimulate, use and further develop each teacher's competence

⁶ https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/lareplan/generell-del/core_curriculum_english.pdf

⁷ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/teaching-and-learning-single-structure-education-20_en

- help teachers and instructors to be seen as positive leaders and as role models for children and young people;
- ensure that the physical and psychosocial working and learning environments promote health, well-being and learning;
- facilitate for cooperation with the home and ensure the co-responsibilities of parents and guardians;
- ensure that the local community is involved in the education in a meaningful way” (National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training 2006, 2).

The goals presented above provide some guidelines that enable us to give a brief overview of the Norwegian education system. Nowadays, factors such as globalization, internationalization of education and digitization of information increase the demand for education to constantly adapt and provide successful learning programmes. Bellanca and Brandt (2010) promote a vision for a 21st century education system that strives to prepare students efficiently for complex work environments. They state that in terms of learning skills, all learners should develop in the 21st century creativity, critical thinking skills, communication skills and collaboration skills. In this respect, the first three goals in the above mentioned learning poster emphasize the need for learners in Norway to be able to collaborate and communicate efficiently, to develop their curiosity and their critical thinking skills.

According to Nardon (2017, 4) working in a multicultural world leads one to the awareness that “intercultural encounters are a pervasive feature of our modern workplaces and affect most of us”. Therefore, in order to be a good communicator in a multicultural world one has to become cognizant of both the intricate relationship between language and culture and of the fact that all communication is influenced by its context of utterance. In addition, an efficient communicator has to develop a social and a(n) (inter)cultural competence that would allow him/her to establish relationships with interlocutors that have a different social or cultural background. Thus, the current policies issued by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research target the development of learners’ social and cultural competence, at all levels of education, and promote an understanding of self and identity as a means to contributing to the Norwegian welfare and democracy. Moreover, the emphasis laid in the education system on personal development and on the development of identity is sustained by the fact that learners who have a mother tongue other than Norwegian or Sami have the right to special education in Norwegian until they are sufficiently proficient in Norwegian to allow them to follow the normal teaching. If it is necessary or available in the

school, learners are provided with mother tongue instruction, bilingual subject teaching or both. Consequently, the Norwegian education system promotes an inclusive education, adapted teaching, culturally responsive practices and provides a basis for a learning community where diversity is acknowledged and respected. In this respect, a multilingual or a multicultural classroom which is the norm today in Norway would not represent a challenge for the teacher but a resource.

In addition, another aspect in the learning poster refers to providing more student participation and enabling learners to make informed choices related to their education and future occupations. Thus, the education system in Norway promotes learning autonomy and encourages learners to take responsibility for their learning. Likewise, students are more aware of the consequences of their own actions and develop as independent individuals.

Another goal of the learning poster included in the Quality Framework refers to the teachers' further development of pedagogical subject matter knowledge. Beginning with the autumn of 2017, the Norwegian Ministry of Education⁸ established that all students who want to become teachers must enroll in a 5-year Master programme in didactics and pedagogy in order to be able to teach at any level of education. This measure indicates the increasing role education is playing in the development of the Norwegian society and the country's determination to raise the status of teaching. Without a doubt, a changing world demands a constant review of good teaching practices. Teachers are often perceived as role models by learners and this is why the Norwegian Ministry of Education intends to increase teachers' competence level and their responsibility for the academic environment. In order to develop 21st century learning skills, learners need to be engaged in diverse activities (problem-solving tasks, gap information activities, debates, role plays etc.) that would develop their collaborative skills, their critical thinking or communication skills. Therefore, teachers need to be competent and provide varied work methods that are adapted to the content that is taught. In addition, in a multilingual and multicultural setting teachers "must also have multicultural competence and knowledge on the different points of departure and learning strategies their pupils have" (National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training 2006, 5). The multicultural competence refers to the cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes one must demonstrate when interacting with people who come from a different cultural or linguistic background.

Education cannot be highly efficient if cooperation between school and home (learners' parents or guardians) is not facilitated. A great emphasis is

⁸ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/slik-blir-den-nye-larerutdanningen/id2503270/>

placed in the 2006 *National Curriculum* on making parents and guardians aware of their responsibilities in assisting and helping the learners throughout the compulsory education system.

The White Paper on *Quality in Higher Education* issued in 2017⁹ provides teachers and all the other stakeholders involved in the teaching field with some tools and guidelines in order to raise the quality of higher education. The term 'quality' is a multifaceted concept that encompasses effectiveness and relevance in tackling various teaching activities, development and innovation when it comes to integrating digital technologies in the teaching process or variation and diversity of learning resources. One measure to increase the degree of quality and relevance of education resides in implementing internationalization measures. The Norwegian government outlined in 2009 that all study programmes were required to take measures in order to increase the internationalization of Norway's higher education. This internationalization strategy has become a current national policy (The White Paper on the *Internationalisation of Education in Norway*¹⁰) and it implies designing cooperation projects and establishing international partnerships for providing learners in Norway with the possibility to study abroad. In addition, emphasis is laid on internationalization-at-home that refers to the fact that more and more courses and study programmes begin to be taught in English in order to attract to Norway more international students.

The last goal listed in the learning poster emphasizes the need to involve the local community in order to help learners develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that are appropriate and relevant for the working life.

The third element of the Norwegian National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion (2006) refers to subject curricula and contains clear competence aims for each subject and specific milestones that have to be reached by learners. This paper intended to analyze the subject curriculum for learning English as a foreign language.

The fourth element of the Norwegian National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion (2006) provides a framework regulating the distribution of periods and subjects and indicates the total number of teaching hours for different subjects during each stage of the compulsory education.

The government-initiated curriculum issued in 2006 aimed to meet the needs of a diverse student population. The increasing process of globalization has determined a change from a national teaching perspective to an international one

⁹ <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/ae30e4b7d3241d5bd89db69fe38f7ba/en-gb/pdfs/stm201620170016000engpdfs.pdf>

¹⁰ https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/a0f91ffae0d74d76bdf3a9567b61ad3f/en-gb/pdfs/stm200820090014000en_pdfs.pdf

in order to accommodate linguistic and cultural diversity. This curriculum placed a great emphasis on students' engagement and their responsibility for their own learning, on the development of students' social and cultural competence, on the development of effective teaching practices and guidelines for teachers and on enabling students to achieve social and democratic development.

Foreign language learning and the development of the intercultural communicative competence

Beginning with the 1960s, English as a foreign language has been introduced as a subject starting with the 5th grade. According to the curricular reforms from 1997 and 2006 (Språk åpner dører 2007, 16), nowadays all students in the compulsory Norwegian education system have to learn English. This is a compulsory subject for students ranging from 6 to 16 years old. Beginning with the 8th grade students have to choose a second compulsory foreign language. They can opt for German, French, Spanish or Russian but other foreign languages can also be provided (Språk åpner dører 2007, 15). In addition, the interest in foreign language learning is visible also at lower levels. According to the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017, 47-48), kindergarten children shall be introduced to different languages, dialects, songs, literature and various texts and they shall be encouraged to play with language and symbols in order to stimulate their linguistic curiosity, awareness and development.

A strategy measure to strengthen foreign language learning in compulsory education was enforced between 2005 and 2009. Its name *Languages open doors* [Språk åpner dører] states, in an explicit manner, the paramount importance of learning foreign languages as a premise for good communication and collaboration in an intercultural context but also as a means to get to know other cultures and develop one's intercultural communicative competence. This strategy measure was based on achieving six main aims that intended to improve the quality of teaching foreign languages, to provide a variety of foreign languages to choose from, to raise the competence level of foreign language teachers, to strengthen internationalization and to increase research and developmental work in foreign languages. An increased mobility in Norway, international economic exchanges and a rise in favour of using English as a publishing language and a working language led The British Council to state that Norway is finding itself in a transitional phase towards considering English more of a second language rather than a foreign language (Graddol, 1997 in Språk åpner dører 2007, 14). English is indeed perceived as a lingua franca in Norway, but the Norwegian National Curriculum (2006)

concludes that all foreign languages are relevant in order to offer one a broader perspective and access to communication and participation in many domains of activity (Språk åpner dører 2007, 15).

The contact with a foreign language does not restrict itself to linguistic perspectives. Besides knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, one is faced with a “complex system of cultural customs, values and ways of thinking, feeling and acting” (Brown 2002, 13). Therefore, both teachers of foreign languages and learners should strive to understand how language and culture come into play and how they can become mediators across different languages and cultures, other linguistic and cultural norms. The *Intercultural communicative competence model* proposed by Byram & Zarate (1996) is comprised of a set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that need to be developed in order to use language in socially and culturally appropriate ways:

- knowledge: develop cultural awareness (both of the mother tongue and the target language)
- skills: ability to express cultural values, ability to identify culture-specific beliefs and values
- attitudes: positive attitudes towards the mother tongue culture and the target language culture, openness and curiosity to encounter a new culture.

The formal educational setting should become an arena for developing intercultural communicative competence with reference to demonstrating various levels of cultural knowledge, cultural abilities and cultural attitudes. The multilingual and the multicultural classrooms in the Norwegian education system represent a “micro-cultural context that is comprised of students who have different cultural backgrounds and different mother tongues” (Petruș, Tomescu-Baciu 2014, 161). Thus, the learning needs of every learner should be catered for. In this respect, the Norwegian education system promotes a learning-centered approach to teaching that is also guided by principles of equality of chances, so that every learner has the right to equal education regardless of differences in social, cultural or economic backgrounds. Efficient learning takes place in a safe learning environment. Therefore, Skreftud (2016, 141) considers that classroom interactions need to be orchestrated in “ways that may make it possible for students to explore the complexity of their cultural identities in an atmosphere of communication and mutual understanding”.

The subject of English is structured into four main subject areas: language learning, oral communication, written communication and culture,

society and literature. English has competence aims after the 2nd grade, the 4th grade, the 7th grade and the 10th grade in primary and lower secondary school and after the first year in the programmes for general studies (Vg1) or after the second year of vocational education programmes (Vg2)¹¹. As regards the culture, society and literature main area, reference is made to developing learners' intercultural communicative competence. Learners, in accordance with their age group, have to be able to discuss, among other things, about ways of living, traditions and customs in English-speaking countries and in Norway, to be able to express one's own response to English literary texts, films, pictures or music or to read children's and youth literature in English. Since language and culture are deeply rooted, the English subject curriculum in Norway enables learners to develop both their communicative competence and their intercultural competence.

Conclusions

This paper intended to provide a broad picture of the Norwegian education system and its language policies that acknowledged cultural diversity as a valuable asset brought to the Norwegian society. The development of the intercultural communicative competence has become a prerequisite in the formal multicultural and multilingual educational setting characterized by increased mobility.

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¹¹ <https://www.udir.no/kl06/eng1-03/Hele/Hovedomraader/?lplang=eng>

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