

# The Norwegian Educational System, the Linguistic Diversity in the Country and the Education of Different Minority Groups

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## Abstract

Linguistic diversity has always been and still is one of the current issues in the Norwegian educational system. Norwegian is the official language of the country, but, there have been several distinct dialects and two official written Norwegian languages in the country since 1885. One of them is *Bokmål* and the other is *Nynorsk*. There has also been an indigenous Sami people with three different Sami languages in the country: Northern Sami, Lulesami and Southern Sami in the country. At the same time there are two national minority groups, Kvens and the Roma people, who have their own languages. In addition about 200 languages are represented among linguistic minority children with immigrant parents/grandparents. This linguistic diversity means that almost 15% of Norway's population of 5 million has another first language than Norwegian. This paper gives a brief account of policies and challenges related to multilingualism and multilingual education in the Norwegian educational system.

**Keywords:** Linguistic diversity, Bilingualism, Indigenous Sami people, Language policy, Multilingual education, Linguistic minority education

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## Introduction

Norway is one of the Western European countries whose educational system has always been characterized as linguistically diverse. In addition to the native Norwegian-speaking population, Norway has an indigenous Sami population, but there are also national minorities such as Kvens, Jews, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani people/Tater as well as linguistic minorities (people with immigrant descent and another language background than Norwegian and Sami). About 85% of the population are native Norwegian speakers, whereas about 1% are Sami speakers. The number of national minorities who still use their ancestors' language is extremely small (about 100 children

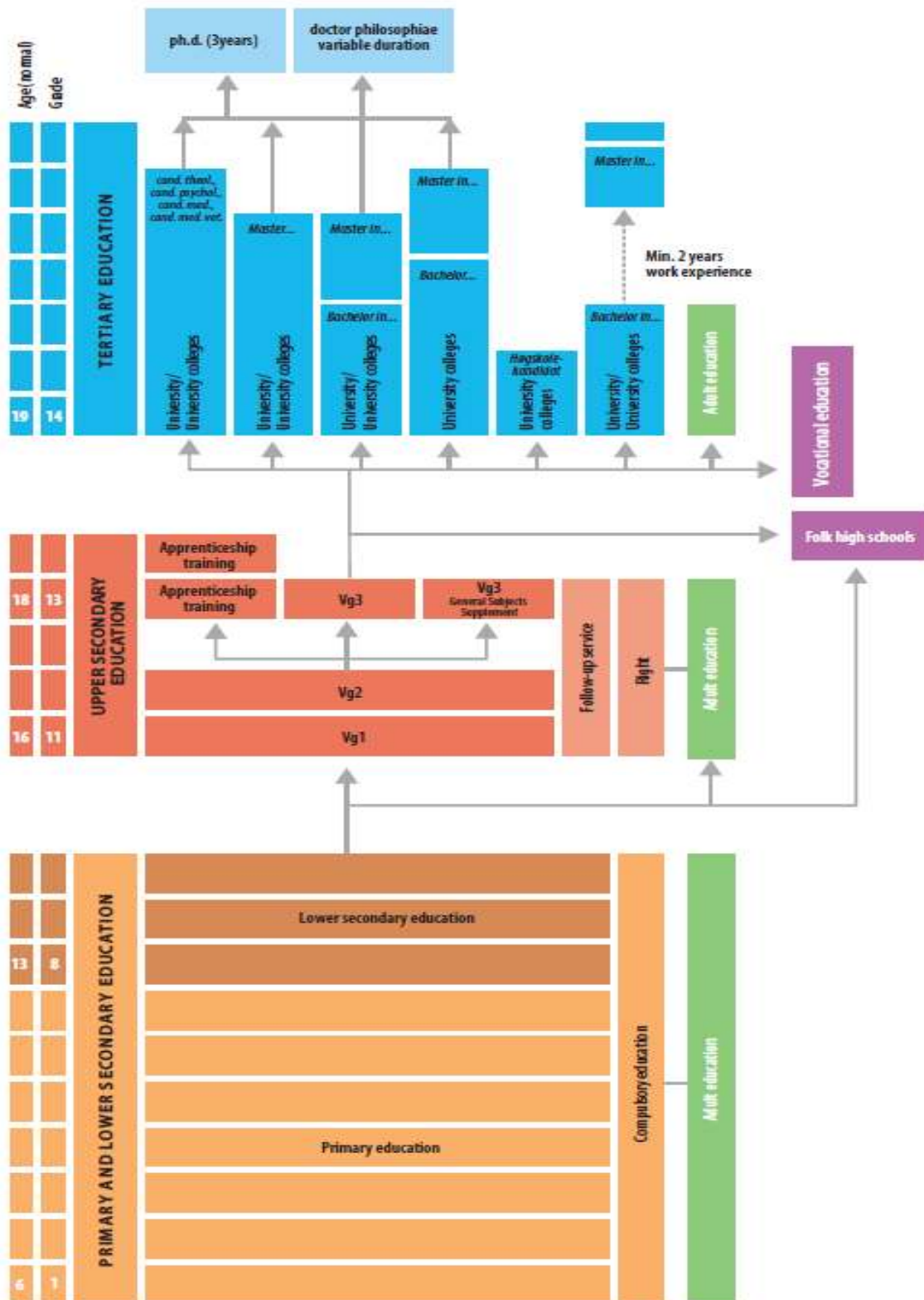
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in total) and about 14% of the population in Norway have another mother tongue than Norwegian or Sami.

The country has about 5 million inhabitants living scattered in an area of 323 800 square kilometres. Thus Norway is a sparsely populated country with about 15 people/square kilometre.

The public administration in Norway is organized in three levels. The higher education institutions are administered at the governmental or ministerial level (i.e. universities and various university colleges, polytechnics etc.). The next administrative level is the provincial or county level. There are 19 counties in Norway. Each one of these regional county offices is responsible for upper secondary education for children between the age of 16 and 19. Upper secondary education in Norway is seen as a right but is not compulsory. The third level is the municipality level. There are 429 municipalities in Norway. The municipalities have the responsibility to provide 10 years of basic school education for children between 6 and 16 years of age. Basic school education is a right but also compulsory in the country. Pre-schools and kindergartens are not compulsory. Tuition for having a child between 1-5 years of age in these institutions is paid by the parents, but a great portion of the expenses of Kindergartens is subsidized by the state.



Source: Ministry of Education and Research (2007): Educational system in Norway

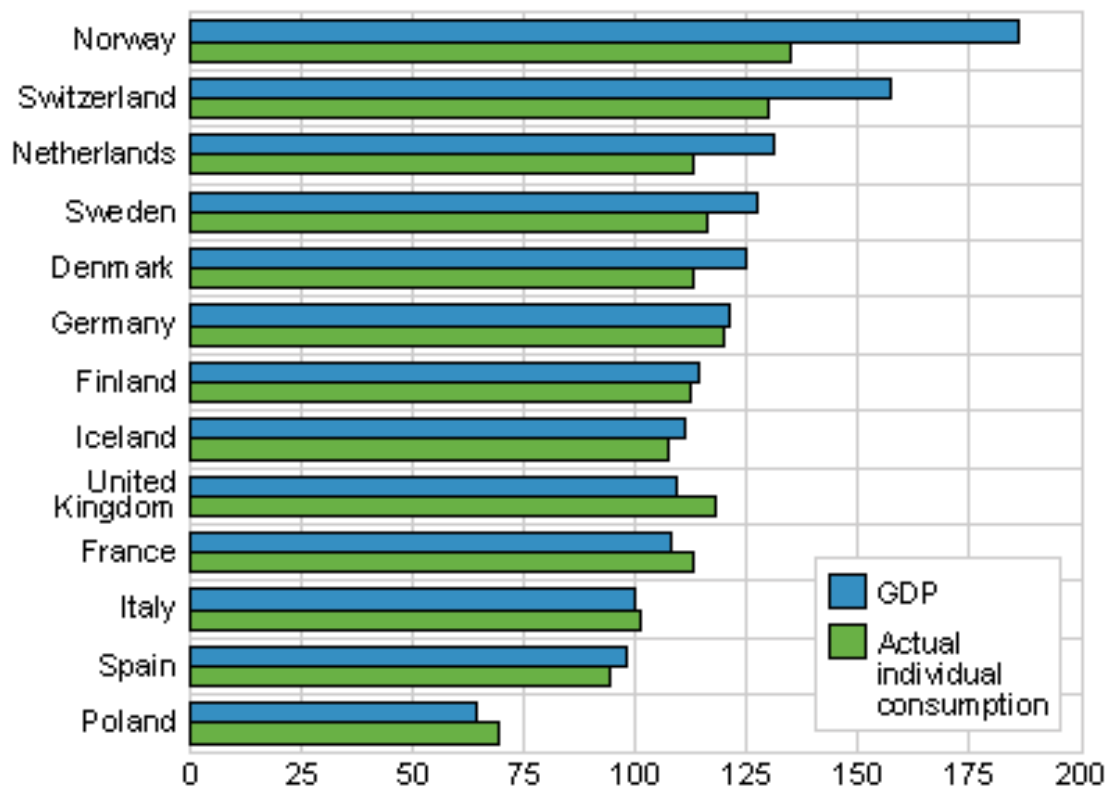
Figure 1. The educational system of Norway

Norway is not a member of the European Union (EU), but has made various agreements on economic cooperation with EU, which means that almost ALL the EU-rules and directives are valid also in Norway. Yet Norway is not entitled to take part in the decision-making processes in the EU-parliament or EU-Council (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2001)

Ever since the 17<sup>th</sup> century up to 1967, Norway was an emigration country. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries about one million Norwegians emigrated to other countries, mostly to the US. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the country was one of the European countries which had the lowest BNP, but the country has always had abundant domestic natural resources. The industrialization of the country and the technological development, especially after World War II, resulted in a demand for manpower. So a shift from being an emigration country to an immigration country took place in Norway in 1967. The net immigration to Norway has surpassed the net emigration from this year onwards.

The exploitation of oil in the North Sea in 1960s led to and increased demand for imported labour force. Technological development, development in the forest industry, hydro-electric powers and fishing industry since the 1960s combined with the prospering oil industry, have gradually increased the country's Gross Domestic Product.

**GDP per capita and Actual individual consumption per capita, price level adjusted. Selected countries, 2011. EU27=100**



Source: (SSB-Statistics Norway: Published: 17 December 2012)

Figure 2. Gross Domestic Product of some European countries

According to the latest figures from the Norwegian Statistic Bureau (Statistics Norway), the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Norway is 86 per cent above the EU average. GDP is a measure of material living standard. In recent years, Norway has established itself firmly in the European top league, even after the high price level in the country is taken into account (SSB Published: 17 December 2012).

*The linguistic diversity in Norway*

In order to give a justified picture of the linguistic diversity of Norway and its educational system, it seems reasonable to divide the population into four different language groups.

*Group 1: People with Norwegian as their first language.* Norwegian is the official language of the country. About 85% of the population has Norwegian as their first language (mother tongue). But, with regard to the written Norwegian language, there is a unique linguistic situation in Norway: There have been two official written Norwegian languages since 1885. The first one is called *Bokmål*, sometimes also called *Dano-Norwegian* due to the fact that it was developed under the influence of Danish during the Danish-Norwegian Kingdom from 14<sup>th</sup> century to 19<sup>th</sup> century. A great majority of the Norwegians uses a Norwegian dialect close to *Bokmål* and uses *Bokmål* also in writing. On the other hand, about 15% of the people with Norwegian as a first language have *Nynorsk* as their written language. The written form of *Nynorsk* is based on studies of the language spoken by ordinary people in the Norwegian countryside. Those who use *Nynorsk* in writing usually also speak Norwegian dialects close to *Nynorsk* (Özerk & Todal, 2013).

Ever since the educational Act of 1892, the local administrative units (municipalities) have the right to decide for themselves by referendums, which of the two written Norwegian languages should be used in basic education schools within their own juridical districts. This principle is still valid and is a part of the recent Educational Act of 1998.

The main purpose of the Act was to give both of the Norwegian written languages equal official status and to ensure their future as living written languages. So the preservation, protection and the development of *Nynorsk*, the version of Norwegian with less speakers, has always been on the educational policy agenda in the country.

According to the findings by Özerk and Todal (2013) there has been a constant decline of the users of *Nynorsk* as a written language among basic school students in Norway.

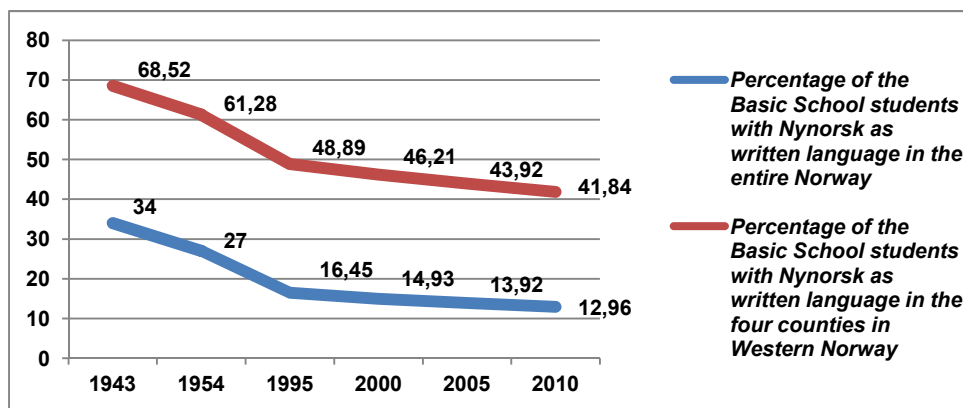


Figure 3. The decline of the percentage of the Basic School students with *Nynorsk* as written language

The graph in Figure 3 shows the decline of the percentage of the *Basic School students with Nynorsk as written language* in the entire country and in the four counties in Western Norway which are considered as the core areas of Nynorsk both in speaking and writing.

*Group 2: People with Sami as their native/first language.* The Sami people are the indigenous people of Northern Norway. The total Sami population is about 80,000, living in a 150,000 square mile region called "Sapmi," which extends from Mid-Norway to the Kola Peninsula in Russia. This rather small indigenous population has been under assault for centuries. Starting in the 16th century, Christian missionaries started to work among the Sami people. Missionary activities made a huge impact on the shamanist beliefs and traditional way of life in Sapmi. At the same time, Norway started to establish itself as a nation. The long nation-building process put the Sami people under severe pressure. They had to accept laws and rules made by the central government. At the same time, Sapmi gradually came to be populated by more and more Norwegians. Industrialization and formal schooling started to have a significant effect on their traditional way of life. Industry began to take an interest in the water, ore, and fishing resources of Sapmi (Özerk, 2009).

Until the 19th century, the majority of Sami people were nomadic. They lived in small groups (called *seidas* or *siidas*) and depended on what natural resources their area could provide. Nowadays, some of the Sami people combine fjord-fishing with other livelihoods such as cattle-raising and berry-picking. Some are engaged mostly in subsistence agriculture, fresh-water fishing, berry-picking, hunting, and tourism. Others herd semi-domesticated reindeer from one grazing area to the next according to the season. But today, the majority of the Sami people work within the tertiary sector, private service sector and the public sector (Hoëm, 2007; Karlstad, 1997).

Since the early nineteenth century, Norwegian authorities have followed an assimilative policy towards the Sami people and have actively restricted the use of the Sami language. The restrictive policies persisted at least until 1969, when a new "Law of Basic Education" was passed which allowed parents who used the Sami language in their daily lives to demand that their children be taught in the Sami language (Dahl 1957, Jensen 1991, Stordahl 1997; Keskitalo 1997). In 1975, some amendments to the school legislation were made, and Sami parents, regardless of whether they used Sami in their daily life or not, were given the right to demand mother tongue teaching for their children.

In 1987, the Norwegian Parliament passed a law called the Sami Law. The law ensured establishment of a Sami-parliament (*Samediggi*) with 39 seats elected by all Sami people in the entire country. A year later, in 1988, the Norwegian Parliament made an important amendment to the Norwegian Constitution. Paragraph, §110A, known as 'The Sami paragraph,' states: "It is the State's responsibility to provide the conditions necessary for the Sami people to be able to safeguard and develop their language, culture and livelihood" (author's translation). There are three Sami languages in the country: *Northern sami*, *Lulesami* and *Southern sami*. All of them have their own written language. To make the presentation more comprehensible, I will only use the term the Sami language.

In 1989, the first Sami Parliament was elected as a consultative parliament for Sami-related issues. As a result of constitutional amendment, several municipalities (6 municipalities in 1992 and 10 municipalities in 2013) were defined as Sami administrative areas for language (SAAL).

The decades-long influx of monolingual Norwegians into Sapmi, coupled with the longstanding state policy of Norwegianization, caused subtractive bilingualism at the individual level, and language-decay at the group level among the Sami population. These historical processes resulted, inevitably, in a weakening of the Sami language. Like the languages of the indigenous minorities in the United States (McCarthy, 1997; Valdés et al, 2006; Fishman, 1991) and in other parts of the world (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), the Sami language is defined as a 'threatened language,' 'language at risk,' or a 'lesser-used language' (Fishman, 1991; Hyltenstam & Stroud, 1991; Garcia & Baker, 1995).

The existence of linguistic diversity in a limited geographical area is a demanding challenge. Garcia (1992) portrays language-planning using a 'language garden' analogy which presents the coexistence of different languages as a backyard gardener might consider his own varied flower plot: coexisting languages, like flower varieties, need different types of care and protection in order to survive. Using Garcia's analogy, we can think of the Sami language as a rare flower that is under threat from the quick expansion of the majority language.

Since the 1980s the central government and the local Sami authorities have tried to strengthen the position of the Sami language in public institutions (Özerk & Eira, 1996) and in the schools. The aim of this revitalization policy is to increase the number of Sami speaking people by spreading the Sami language (Huss, 1999). The measures that must be taken necessitate what Garcia (1992) calls 'landscape engineering'. A major purpose of this engineering is to plan, control, and create the conditions needed for the learning and use of the Sami language by more people in as many domains in the society as possible.

In 1987, Norway introduced a new National Basic School Curriculum document for all schools in the country. This curriculum document was translated into Sami. This happened for the first time in the country's history. In the 90's Norway initiated several reforms in the educational sector. These reforms resulted in two additional changes: a new Curriculum Document for the Education of the Sami Children (1997) and a new Law of Education (1998). Under this new law, all Sami speaking children were given the right to get Sami mother tongue instruction at schools. Additionally, children who live in ten municipalities of the Sami Administration Area for Language (SAAL) were given the right to use Sami as the medium of instruction. As a result of this educational policy, almost all the native Sami speaking children (about 800 in total) are getting Sami-Norwegian bilingual education where functional bilingualism is the official aim.

Several studies (Todal, 2002; 2007) show that language decay has almost stopped and that the number of children who have learnt to use the Sami language along with Norwegian is increasing both in and outside the core areas of the Sami people.

In 1999 (Pettersen & Gaup, 2001) there were only 516 children enrolled SAAL kindergartens for Sami speakers. The latest statistics show that that number has more than doubled. There are now 46 kindergartens for Sami speakers serving 1145 pre-school Sami children. Eight hundred and eighty three (77%) of the children live in families in which Sami is the home language. One hundred and sixty two (18%) live in municipalities which are located *outside* SAAL. Almost 23% of the 1145 children who are enrolled in Sami speaking kindergartens are from homes where at least one of the parents has Sami a background but in which Norwegian is the primary language.

*Group 3: Children with national minority background.* In the year of 2005, the Norwegian government established a new category under the name of **National minorities**. This category was defined as follows:

*“Groups with a long-standing attachment to the country are defined as national minorities. In Norway these minorities are: Kvens (people of Finnish descent in Northern Norway), Jews with long attachment to Norway, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani people/Tater.”* (Minister of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs 2012)

Language policy in the Educational system is only relevant to children with Kven background and Roma background. The Kvens are descendents of Finnish immigration in 1600, and Finnish-speaking fishing communities in Northern Norway. We do not know the population of the Kvens in Norway, but the officials estimate that there are 10,000-15,000 with Kven background in Northern Norway. The number of people who speak the Kven language is much lower. Since the introduction of Educational Act of 1998, section 2-7 ensure some rights to children with Kven-Finnish background. The section states as follows:

**“Section 2-7. Instruction in Finnish for pupils with a Kven-Finnish background**

*When so required by at least three pupils of Kven-Finnish stock (Kvens) attending primary and lower secondary schools in Troms and Finnmark [The two northernmost counties in the country] , the pupils have the right to receive instruction in Finnish. The content of the education and the amount of time allocated to it are laid down in regulations pursuant to sections 2-2 and 2-3 of this Act. From grade 8 onwards, pupils decide themselves whether they wish to receive instruction in Finnish. The Ministry may issue regulations concerning alternative forms of instruction pursuant to the first paragraph when such instruction cannot be provided by suitable teachers at the school.”*

In the year of 2004 there were 1030 students in basic schools who received instruction in Finnish as a second language, but for various unknown reasons, the number dropped to 812 in 2009/2010. When it comes to the teaching of Kven as a mother tongue, there were 24 students who received such instruction.

The second group which is to be found under Group 3: national minorities, is Roma. The official authorities estimate that there are about 400 Norwegian Roma people (St.meld. nr. 35 2007-2008: Mål og mening). It is unknown whether their children receive instruction in their mother tongue in school.

*Group 4: Linguistic minorities: Children with another language than Norwegian, Sami, Kven/Finnish or Romanes.* About 14% of the school children in Norway have another first language/home language than Norwegian, Sami, Kven/Finnish or Romanes. As mentioned earlier, there was a shift in Norway in 1967, from being an emigration country to become a country of immigration. Since 1967 the net immigration has been greater than the net emigration. In 1970 statistics, the biggest immigrant groups were from other Scandinavian countries, Sweden and Denmark, and English-speaking immigrants from England and U.S. as a result of the oil industry in the North Sea. Ever since the 1970s, small industries and the service sector have been in need for labour. Several thousands of young male workers mainly from India, Pakistan, former Yugoslavia, Turkey and Morocco came to Norway. At the same time, the country started to receive refugees from Vietnam and Chile. In 1975 Norway introduced a law of immigration regulation. Prior to this law, many male immigrant workers started to bring their families to Norway. During the period of 1975–2010, the number of



immigrants has increased as a result of family reunion and refugees mainly from Pakistan, Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan. At the same time, many immigrants came from European Union countries like Poland and Germany as a result of the economic cooperation agreement between Norway and the EU. In 2010 new arrivals from Poland made the Poles the largest immigrant group (SSB – Norwegian Statistics - 2010). By 2013 there were 710 465 immigrants or people born to immigrant parents. They represent about 14 % of the country's population of 5 051 275 (SSB: Innvandrerne og norskfødte med innvanderforeldre, 1. januar 2013) . They come from about 200 different countries. However, 50 of those countries are represented by fewer than 20 people. Some 290,000 have a European background, 210,000 persons have a background from Asia, 80,000 from Africa, 25,000 from Latin-America, and 11,000 from North America and Oceania. The fastest growing immigrant population is from Poland, Germany, Pakistan, Sweden, Somalia, Lithuania and Iraq. They have come as labour migrants, as refugees, as students, or as a result of family reunion. About 35% of immigrants have Norwegian citizenship.

Rank	Country of origin	Population (2013)
1.	 <u>Poland</u>	82,601
2.	 <u>Sweden</u>	37,467
3.	 <u>Pakistan</u>	33,634
4.	 <u>Somalia</u>	33,117
5.	 <u>Lithuania</u>	30,540
6.	 <u>Iraq</u>	29,614
7.	 <u>Germany</u>	26,398
8.	 <u>Vietnam</u>	21,351
9.	 <u>Denmark</u>	20,304
10.	 <u>Iran</u>	18,861
11.	 <u>Philippines</u>	18,007
12.	 <u>Russia</u>	17,944
13.	 <u>Turkey</u>	17,004
14.	 <u>Bosnia-Herzegovina</u>	16,613
15.	 <u>Thailand</u>	15,583

Rank	Country of origin	Population (2013)
16.	 <u>Sri Lanka</u>	14,591
17.	 <u>United Kingdom</u>	14,504
18.	 <u>Afghanistan</u>	14,449
19.	 <u>Kosovo</u>	14,064
20.	 <u>India</u>	11,960
21.	 <u>Eritrea</u>	11,758
22.	 <u>China, People's Republic of</u>	9,025
23.	 <u>Morocco</u>	8,844
24.	 <u>Romania</u>	8,666
25.	 <u>Latvia</u>	8,502
26.	 <u>United States</u>	8,424
27.	 <u>Chile</u>	7,865
28.	 <u>Netherlands</u>	7,858
29.	 <u>Iceland</u>	7,756
30.	 <u>Ethiopia</u>	7,096
31.	 <u>Finland</u>	6,711
32.	 <u>France</u>	5,022
33.	 <u>Estonia</u>	4,632
34.	 <u>Bulgaria</u>	4,162
35.	 <u>Spain</u>	4,061

Source: SSB: Innvandrere og norskfødte med innvandrerforeldre, 1. januar 2013, retrieved 9 June 2013

Figure 4. The country of origin of the main immigrant groups in Norway

### *The guiding principles of the Educational system*

The Norwegian public educational policy is based on equality and equity. The principle of equal rights to education for all members of society is the main guiding principle in the country's educational policy.

The 1998 law of education and national curriculum document of 2006 (Knowledge Promotion – 2006) stress the Norwegian concept of equity: "...to provide equal opportunities in education regardless of abilities and aptitudes, age, gender, skin color, sexual orientation, social background, religious or ethnic background, place of residence, family education or family finances."

Furthermore 'positive discrimination,' 'inclusive education,' and 'adapted education' are seen as important strategies to accomplish equity in education: "To ensure Equity in Education for all, positive discrimination is required, not equal treatment. Equity in Education is a national goal and the overriding principle that applies to all areas of education." With regard to 'inclusive education', the officials stress the following: "...everyone should participate in society on an equal basis – academically, socially and culturally. This places demands on the education arena and on each individual, who must be able to build good relations while respecting individual differences and values."

The national curriculum document stresses the following:

*"Adapted education within the community of pupils is a basic premise of the comprehensive school for all. The education shall be adapted so that the pupils can contribute to the community and also experience the joy of mastering tasks and reaching their goals. When working on their school subjects, all the pupils shall encounter challenges that they must strive to master and which they can master alone or with others. This also applies to pupils with special difficulties or particular abilities and talents in different areas. When pupils work together with adults or each other, the diversity of abilities and talents may strengthen the community and the learning and development of the individual. The diversity of pupil backgrounds, aptitudes, interests and talents shall be matched with a diversity of challenges in the education. Regardless of gender, age, social, geographical, cultural or language background, all pupils shall have equally good opportunities to develop through working with their subjects in an inclusive learning environment. Adapted teaching for each and every pupil is characterised by variation in the use of subject materials, ways of working and teaching aids, as well as variation in the structure and intensity of the education. Pupils have different points of departure, use different learning strategies and differ in their progress in relation to the nationally stipulated competence aims. The provisions governing special education shall be applied when more comprehensive adaptation is required than what can be arranged within the framework of the regular teaching." (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2006, p. 4)*

After introducing the national curriculum document in 2006 the Minister of Education announced a strategy-plan for implementation of equal education in practice in 2007 (Ministry of Education and Research: Equal education in practice! 2007-2009).

The main purpose for the strategy-plan has been:

1. Improving the language skills of minority language children of preschool age.
2. Improving the educational achievements of minority language students in basic education.

3. Increasing the proportion of minority students and apprentices who commence and complete upper training.
4. Increasing the proportion of minority students in higher education and creating better opportunities for implementing training.
5. Improving Norwegian language proficiency in adults to increase opportunities for education and active participation in work and social life.

Furthermore, the document stresses that the government will also work against racism and for a tolerant, multicultural society. Everyone shall have the same rights, obligations and opportunities regardless of ethnic background, gender, religion, sexual orientation or functional efficiency. The officials will invest in people by giving them access to development and new knowledge in kindergarten and school, in higher education, continuing education, and through research. From 1980 to 2006 there has been more than a tripling of the immigrant population. Without this immigration, Norway would lack manpower and expertise in several areas (Ministry of Education and Research: Equal education in practice! 2007-2009, p. 7).

*The impact of immigration on the Norwegian schools and the changing educational policies.* As mentioned earlier Norway has 19 counties and 429 municipalities. There is an immigrant population spread in all these areas of Norway, but in 7 out of 19 counties the immigrant population comprises more than 10 % of the population, and the greatest concentration of immigrants is found in Oslo.

The capital city of Oslo has the largest population of immigrants and children born in Norway to immigrant parents, both in relative and absolute numbers. Of Oslo's 587,000 inhabitants, 170,206 have an immigrant background. They represent 29% of the city's population. There are also high proportions of people with immigrant background in neighboring cities and counties: in the municipalities of Drammen (22 per cent), in Lørenskog (19 per cent), and in Skedsmo (18 per cent). Oslo is administratively divided into 15 townships that fall into sections of the city; the East End that has an immigrant population of 34.7% and West End with an immigrant population of 18.5% (Özerk & Kerchner, 2014, in press).

The East and West parts of Oslo also differ economically. The immigrant population is concentrated in the townships with people with the lowest income per capita. Several studies (Brevik, 2001; Özerk, 2003) show that the 10% of the population with the highest income in some West End townships earns 50 times more than the 10% of the population with the lowest income in the some East End townships.

Since the 1970's, different Governments have developed different educational policies regarding Linguistic Minority students (LM students). In the 1970's the main educational policy was based on the provision of supportive teaching, a kind of compensatory language teaching in Norwegian for those who then were defined as immigrant children. Approximately 80% of the extra expenses for these provisions were covered by the government and 20% by the respective municipality or county. At the same time all the 'immigrant students' were offered 2-4 periods a week voluntary mother tongue instruction.

In 1980's a new policy was introduced by a new National Curriculum of 1987. According to the new curriculum, all the children with immigrant background were defined as 'LM students'. At the same time they were offered a new Norwegian subject at the school: 'Norwegian as a second language' along with 'mother tongue' teaching 3-5 periods a week (each period was 45 minutes). Moreover the new curriculum document of 1987 formulated 'functional bilingualism' as the aim for LM students. By

doing so, the new educational policy encouraged additive bilingualism instead of subtractive bilingualism among LM students.

However, in 1990's this pro-bilingualism policy was changed. The field of linguistic minority education became one of the most controversial educational fields. During the period of 1992-1997 several political forces developed educational platforms opposed to other tongue teaching and functional bilingualism as an aim for language development among LM students. When a new curriculum document was introduced in 1997, mother tongue teaching and functional bilingualism were no longer included (Özerk, 2008).

In 2000's a new government initiated a new curriculum reform. In 2006 a new national Curriculum was introduced without mother tongue teaching and functional bilingualism as an aim. The new educational policy was based on compensatory Norwegian language teaching and mother tongue teaching for those LM students who have documented weaknesses in Norwegian language skills.

In the school year of 2010-2011, about 43,900 students with first language other than Norwegian were provided with what is called "supportive language teaching". This was done because their schools defined them as children with weak Norwegian language skills who were unable to benefit from subject teaching where the medium of instruction is Norwegian (SSB-Norwegian Statistics-Utdanningsstatistikker-2012).

#### *Academic achievement among LM students*

High academic achievement for all children is one of the main aims of the educational systems. In a social democratic country oriented towards social justice and welfare like Norway, and in a country receiving immigrants, the academic achievement among LM students has been one of the hot topics during the last two decades.

Heesch, Storaker and Lie (1998) analyzed the national data from TIMSS (The Third International Mathematics and Science Study) and found that 9 year-old children with LM background in Norway scored 10 percent lower than native speakers in natural science and math. Among 13-year olds, the discrepancy was 11 percent in math and 14 percent in natural science

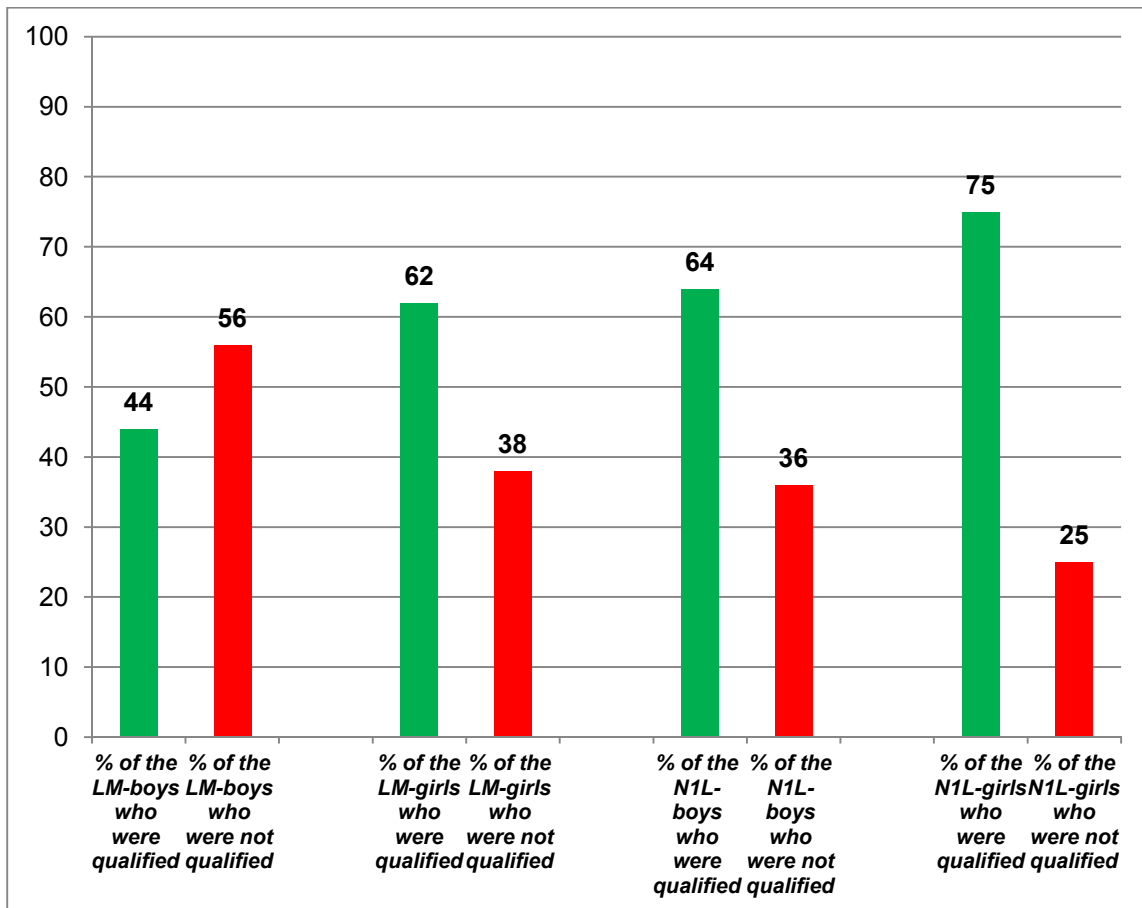
In a small-scale study, Özerk (2005) identified a clear polarization tendency with regard to academic achievement among LM students. The result of the study showed that LM students were most likely to be found *either* among those who do VERY WELL *or* those who do QUITE POORLY. Only a small proportion of LM-students are to be found in the 'average group'.

Hvistendahl and Roe (2003) studied the achievement level of 218 LM 15-year old students who participated in PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) in reading, math, and natural sciences. They found that the average results of LM students from Norway were significantly (about 50-60 points) lower than their Norwegian counterparts.

Wagner (2004) analyzed data from PIRLS-2001 (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2001). She found that among the countries studied, the biggest difference between native speakers and LM students was in Norway.

When the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development released the math test results of PISA 2003, the results obtained by Norwegian students were interpreted as unsatisfactory overall, and the results obtained by LM students were worse. The performance gap between native Norwegian speakers and LM students is about 70 points.

In the latest statistics about the percentage of upper secondary school students who were qualified or not qualified for graduation after being enrolled in five years of high school studies (during the period 2007-2012), we still observe achievement differences between students with linguistic minority background (LM-students) and those students who have Norwegian as their first language (N1L).



Source: Utdanningsstatistikk, Statistisk sentralbyrå (May, 2013)

Figure 5. The percentage of the graduated LM-students and the students with Norwegian as first language (N1L) after five years of study-period (2007-2012)

As one can see in the figure, the majority of LM-boys (56%) and 38% of LM-girls were not qualified for graduation after being enrolled in five years in upper secondary school. On the other hand a higher percentage of N1L-boys (64%) and N1L-girls (75%) who began upper secondary school in 2007 graduated from the high school latest 2012, during a five years of period.

### Summary

The demographic situation in Norway is best characterized as ethnically and linguistically diverse. The education system in the country must deal with several language related challenges like multilingualism and multilingual education. There are two unique situations in Norway: a) Norway is the only European country with one main official native language but with two official written native languages (Bokmål and Nynorsk) b) Norway is the only European country with indigenous people, the Sami people. At the same time the country has 'National minorities' one of which is Kven. All the Sami languages as well as Kven are threatened languages. The educational

system must deal with protecting, preserving and revitalization of these languages while the students are provided academic learning conditions which are pedagogically defensible and just. As a result of the long period of immigration to Norway (since 1960's), today about 15% of the country's student population have another first language than Norwegian and Sami. While several laws, curriculum documents and educational provisions have been established to meet the needs of indigenous and national minorities, the LM students are continuously facing a lot of academic challenges because of the constantly changing educational policies. In the 1980's Norway was in the process of establishing an educational system in which multilingualism/bilingualism and multilingual education also included LM students. Since the 1990's multilingual educational policies and bilingualism are aims valid only for indigenous people and national minorities, but not for LM students. Recent studies show that a considerable number of LM students have difficulties in the system. There is an achievement gap between native Norwegian speakers and LM students as a group although a significant percentage of the former group obtains good academic results. The achievement gap between LM students and native Norwegian-speaking students can be seen as an indication that multilingual populations need appropriate multilingual educational policies and teaching programs that match the needs of all language groups and create conditions for comprehension, participation and academic learning for all.



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