



**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE**

Group of National Experts on the Education of Migrants

Migrant Education: Norwegian perspective

Intervention made by Anne Brit Udahl at the first meeting of the Group of National Experts on Migrant Education

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THEMATIC REVIEW ON EDUCATION OF MIGRANTS

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- **What are the priority policy issues in your country?**

Linguistic and cultural diversity is increasing in Norway. Between 1980 and 2006 the immigrant population more than trebled. Without this immigration, Norway would lack manpower and competence in a number of areas. Cultural diversity not only enriches every single one of us; the immigrant population also provides vital resources to society in general through cultural knowledge and linguistic competence. It is therefore important to the government to make full use of linguistic and **cultural diversity as a resource** in education.

The Government states that **good language teaching is key to the success** of linguistic minorities in education and working life. Targeted teaching of basic Norwegian is seen as vital both for the individual and for the society at large. A good kindergarten and school is essential for the individual and for solidarity, democracy and productivity of society. These arenas are vital for inclusion and participation, and education is seen essential to social mobility and equalisation.

As pointed out in the Norwegian Government's white paper on early intervention for lifelong learning, there is a strong link between social background and learning outcome. Various studies show that immigrant students on average come from less advantaged social background. This is also pointed out in the Norwegian PISA-report. Social background is often regarded as the most important explanation for school performance. Controlled for differences in social background, differences in school performance between the students with immigrant background and majority background often disappear. The importance of social background for learning outcome is a challenge to the

education system, and the government is stressing the work to **improve social equalisation**.

The results from PISA, Pirls and National Tests have last autumn given us alarming results in regard to the general level of basic skills among all students. This has caused great debates in Norwegian media and the government is giving school performance **and quality in education top priority**.

- **What interventions have been undertaken to respond to the issues?**

There has been a strong focus on integration, education and social equalisation the last years. In 2007 several documents on these issues were presented. A revised version of the *Strategic Plan Equal Education in Practice!* Strategy for better teaching and greater participation of linguistic minorities in kindergartens, schools and education, was launched February 2007.

There are five main goals in the plan – one for each level of education:

- 1) Improving language skills among pre-school children of linguistic minorities¹
- 2) Improving the school performance of linguistic minority pupils in primary and secondary education and training
- 3) Increasing the proportion of linguistic minority students and apprentices who commence and complete upper secondary education and training
- 4) Increasing the proportion of linguistic minority students in higher education and improving opportunities for completing education
- 5) Improving Norwegian language proficiency among linguistic minority adults to increase opportunities for education and active participation in work and society

¹ By linguistic minorities we mean everyone whose native language is not either Norwegian or Sami. When this concept is used in the Strategic Plan it refers to pupils or participants whose native language is not Norwegian, Sami, Danish or Swedish and who have special educational needs. However, in public discussions the concept is often used synonymously with students with immigrant background.

Language training and early efforts in kindergarten and school are central topics in the strategy. Several measures focus on improving the training in Norwegian.

Studies show that many linguistic minority children have not received satisfactory teaching in Norwegian in school. In November 2006 a report called *“Evaluation of the practice of Norwegian as a second language for linguistic minorities in primary and lower secondary schools”* was presented. The report pointed out that there were no standardised assessment procedures to clarify whether a pupil had sufficiently good Norwegian to attend the same classes in Norwegian as majority pupils . The lack of competence among teachers who teach Norwegian as a second language was also focussed. Furthermore, the report showed that very many of the students who received Norwegian as a second language continued this through school, despite the fact that many of them had high Norwegian skills.

The government therefore decided to improve this teaching and introduced a new curriculum for basic Norwegian for linguistic minorities, based more or less on the Common European Framework. A new curriculum in mother tongue education was also introduced. A new, standardised assessment tool was established in order to make it easier to decide when students have sufficient proficiency to follow the common curriculum. Guidance material has also been made for teachers who teach basic Norwegian together with qualifying courses.

White paper no. 16

A White paper on early intervention for lifelong learning was introduced in 2006. It presents the Government’s policy for how the education system can make a better contribution to social equalisation. Early intervention in

kindergarten and school related to language training and integration are among the central topics in the paper.

The Ministry of Education and Research will this spring present a proposal to the Parliament (Storting) in order to improve and strengthen the rights of linguistic minorities, like the rights to attend lessons in Norwegian as a second language, mother tongue and bilingual education in upper secondary education. The Ministry is also presenting a White paper on languages in education which discusses all types of language education in school, including Norwegian as a second language and mother tongue education.

As a concrete reaction to the unsatisfying Pisa–results, the Government has focussed further education for teachers and new guidance materials related to teach reading. The Ministry is also preparing a White paper on Quality in Education in which the issue of improving the quality of education and the learning outcome will be a top priority in the coming years. The general and universal measures being taken, such as increased efforts to improve teachers' competences, might prove to be one of the most important measures to rise learning outcome, also for students with immigrant background.

- **What outcomes have you seen?**

It is far too early to conclude on the effects of the changes in curricula, the implementation of the strategic plan and white papers related to these issues.

What we do know about the situation today, is that according to PISA-data, around 6 percent of 15 year-old students in Norway have immigrant background.¹ About half of these students are first generation immigrants. If we look at the PISA-results, students with immigrant background perform significantly poorer than students with majority background. There is only a small difference between the performance of first generation and second generation students with immigrant background when we look at the subjects mathematics and natural science. However, the second generation perform better than the first generation when it comes to reading. This is interesting compared to other Scandinavian countries. In Sweden, descendants perform significantly better than first generation immigrant students in all three subjects, and not far behind the students with majority background.

The Norwegian PISA-results show no significant changes in school performance for students with immigrant background between 2000 and 2006. This we find very concerning.

National Tests also show great differences between schools with a high and low percentage of students with immigrant background. This is, however, mainly a challenge in the bigger cities. (However, there are also differences in performance between the schools with high percentages of students with immigrant background.) Further studies of the data from the National Tests will say more about the findings.

Research has, however, also positive findings. In several studies students with immigrant background perform better than could be predicted by their social background. This can be related to high motivation and high ambitions for further education. Research have also demonstrated that students with immigrant background respond more positively to the teachers' demands and pressure to learn than the majority students.

PISA also points out that the students with immigrant background have higher educational ambitions than those of the majority students. Statistics Norway reports that a high proportion of descendants continue in higher education. It is especially the migrant girls who attend higher education. Almost 37 percent of all female non-western descendants were in 2005 in higher education (aged 19-24). It is just as common for female non-western descendants to study as it is for women in the population as a whole. In general, girls with immigrant background perform better in school than boys with immigrant background, which is also a difference between the gender that you find in the majority population.

- **What data was collected to measure the effectiveness of such interventions?**

In order to monitor the learning outcome in school, Norway has reintroduced National tests in reading, English and mathematics in 5th and 8th grade. These tests give a picture of the general situation in school, but also more specifically of the performance of students with immigrant background.

The Government has also initiated research in order to track the effects of the recent changes in curricula and related measures for linguistic minorities. The investigation will follow the implementation of the new measures for a period of three years. It will provide information on how the teaching of basic Norwegian,

mother tongue education and bilingual subject education is taught and about the learning outcome related to these new changes. It will also give information about the teachers' background and qualifications. The research includes both a quantitative study and case studies.

The Ministry has also started to work on the general statistics within this area, in order to provide better data about education and students with immigrant background. The Directorate for education and training is working on establishing an expanded set of variables to be reported every year. Much of the information we have on effects of programs / policy, are results of various research.

- **Conclusion**

Issues of inclusion and improving learning outcome in school have priority on the Norwegian political agenda. Unsatisfying results proven by various research have led to policy changes and new measures. We will learn about the outcomes of recent changes in the years to come. And we will carefully monitor these outcomes.