

## Uploading, downloading and uploading again – concepts for policy integration in education research

Tine S. Prøitz\*

University College of Buskerud and Vestfold, Norway; Nordic Institute for studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU), Norway

This article focuses on Nordic education policy research, investigating the connections between international and national education policy developments and the consequences of these for curriculum and assessment. Drawing on a study of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recommendations for the development of education policy in Norway, supplemented by a document analysis of a comprehensive OECD review of evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes this article considers the viewpoint of Nordic education research. The aim of the paper is to discuss the potential of adopting a broader viewpoint in education research that utilises theoretical and analytical concepts employed within European integration studies.

Keywords: *education research; policy borrowing; policy translation; policy integration*

\*Correspondence to: Tine S. Prøitz, University College of Buskerud and Vestfold, P.O. Box 235, 3603 Kongsberg, Norway and NIFU, Werglandsvei 7, 0167 Oslo, Norway, Email: [tpr@hbv.no](mailto:tpr@hbv.no)

A central component of global development in educational policy formation during the last 30–40 years is the assessment of learning outcomes to monitor national educational systems (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2001). This development has led to the expanded use of learning outcomes in the curriculum and the assessment of individual achievements (Adam, 2004; Ewell, 2005; Shepard, 2000, 2007). The development has been interpreted as a shift in ideology (Fowler, 2012) and the perception of quality (Adam, 2004; Kellaghan & Greaney, 2001), as well as a change in focus from input indicators to outcome indicators (Fuller, 2009).

These developments can be seen as a response to a globalised world and an economy where production has changed, with new technologies and a society marked by heterogeneity in cultures and beliefs (Lundgren, 2006). In today's knowledge society, traditional ideological and centralised steering of education is challenged by rapid changes in information and knowledge (Aasen, 2012). A growing demand for evidence in decision making and the subsequent continuous need for assessment and data are other aspects of the development of the knowledge society (Lawn, 2011; Lundahl & Waldow, 2009).

As noted by Lundgren (2006), these developments lead to changes in power structures that influence how education is governed. Grounded in an understanding of the

curriculum as '... the basic principles for cultural and social reproduction ...', Lundgren (2006) has pointed out that it is necessary to take current changes into consideration and to form critical concepts for the understanding of how curricula are formed and function today.

Recent changes in European education policy have been described as the development of a *European education space*, shaped by supranational organisations and networks, such as the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Grek & Rinne, 2011; Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm, & Simola, 2011). A particular feature of the developments in Europe is the increased involvement of the OECD in educational policy during the 1990s, especially the introduction of Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which has evolved into an important tool for the justification of change or to provide support for chosen policy directions (Hopmann, 2008; Lundgren, 2006; Pettersson, 2008; Simola, Ozga, Segerholm, Varjo, & Andersen, 2011). The EU has played a central role in the development through its attempts to create a uniform education area. Due to the new focus in the EU on measurement and outcomes in education and the OECD's recommendations to enhance education effectiveness, equity and economic wealth (e.g., through PISA), a shared policy agenda has emerged. This has

significantly increased the strength of the OECD in collaboration with the EU, as well as in other parts of the world, resulting in the construction of a *global education policy field* (Grek & Rinne, 2011).

In this globalised education policy arena, the impact of international education policy developments, for example, the developments toward a stronger performance and results orientation in curriculum and assessment, on national educational policy has recently attracted much attention in education research. Studies have addressed questions concerning how international bodies, such as the OECD (Blossing, Imsen, & Moos, 2014; Lundahl & Waldow, 2009), the EU (Lawn, 2011; Ozga et al., 2011) and league leading countries (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014), influence and define national policies. In the majority of the literature, national developments are interpreted as more or less direct or indirect consequences of international influence. These international influences are often discussed in terms of representing a threat to national characteristics, traditions, autonomy and/or integrity (Antikainen, 2006; Blossing et al., 2014; Møller & Skedsmo, 2013; Rinne, Kallio, & Hokka, 2004; Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). Some studies have examined how international education policies introduce particular topics and concepts into domestic policies (Mausethagen, 2013; Prøitz, 2014a, 2014b; Young, 2009) and legitimise or delegitimise national policies (Pettersson, 2008, 2014). Other studies have investigated how international policies are translated into variations of national policies, depending on national historic heritage, culture, traditions and constitutional mindsets (Hopmann, 2008; Forsberg & Pettersson, 2014; Karseth & Sivesind, 2010; Pettersson, 2014).

There seem to be few studies within Nordic education research addressing questions of if and how national education policies are reflected in international policies and whether and how national policies contribute to the shaping of the international education policy agenda. A previous study described how education policies in Europe are fluid, changing and driven by international pressures, being ‘... simultaneously located in and produced by the global, the idea of the European and the national’ (Grek & Rinne, 2011, p. 48). Another study emphasised that interactions between the international and the domestic are complex and seldom unidirectional (Forsberg & Pettersson, 2014). Nevertheless, among researchers in education, the characteristics of this fluidity, complex interchange and multidirectional relationship seem to attract less attention than the more international influences on domestic policy development.

A substantial number of studies have examined how educational reforms transgress boundaries via *reception* (defined as the analysis of reasons for the attractiveness of a reform elsewhere), *translation* (defined as the act of local adaption, modification, or reframing of an imported

reform), and borrowing and lending (Ochs, 2006; Ochs & Phillips, 2002; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012). The usefulness of the analytical concepts applied within this line of investigations is also discussed but without any conclusions being made (Ochs & Phillips, 2002; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Considering the flow of resources, information, knowledge and people within a globalised education policy field, it seems reasonable to infer that if international policies can influence national education policies through reception, translation or borrowing and lending, then domestic policies may also have an impact on international education policy development. However, these issues seem to be understudied by researchers in education.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this article is to discuss the need for a two-way lens in the analysis of education policy development within a globalised education policy field. The study is inspired by key concepts used in European policy integration studies that emphasise a sequential perspective on policy development. The approach supplements the traditional concepts of bottom-up and top-down perspectives on policy development processes with the key concepts of *uploading* and *downloading*. The use of concepts mostly associated with ICT can also be considered as a reference to the availability and rapidity of information exchange today, which underscores the complexity of these processes. The study discusses these issues, drawing on OECD documents and using the Norway–OECD relationship as an example.

The article is organised in five sections. This first section introduces the topic, purpose and organisation of the article. The second section presents theoretical and analytical perspectives on policy flows between the international and the national. The methodological approach of the article is also presented in this section. In the third section, policy downloading is illustrated through an overview of OECD recommendations in three OECD thematic reviews considered to have had a considerable impact on Norwegian education policy development in the last 20 years. To illustrate policy uploading, the overview is supplemented with the results of a document analysis of a recent and comprehensive OECD review of evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes titled *Synergies for Better Learning* (OECD, 2013). In the fourth section, the results of the study are discussed. The conclusion is presented in the fifth section.

### Theoretical perspectives on policy integration

Europeanisation has become a leading concept in studies of the EU and European integration (Börzel & Panke, 2013). The concept generally refers to the interaction between the EU and its member states or third countries and is broadly discussed in terms of two perspectives: bottom-up and top-down Europeanisation.

Bottom-up Europeanisation refers to how the member states and other national actors shape EU policies. This line of research studies whether and how member states are able to upload their preferences to the EU. Within this perspective, the EU is understood as an arena where actors compete and cooperate in the making of EU policies and the shaping of EU integration processes (Börzel & Panke, 2013). Top-down Europeanisation represents the reverse approach where analyses focus on how the EU shapes institutions, processes and political outcomes in member states and third countries. This perspective focuses on the analysis of whether and how states download EU policies that lead to national change, looking for explanations to domestic change (Börzel & Panke, 2013).

Researchers in this field who study policy cycles or long-term interactions between the EU and member states have introduced a third approach, described as a sequential perspective (Börzel & Panke, 2013). In this perspective, member states are considered proactive shapers of EU policies, institutions, and processes by downloading EU policies and adapting to them (Börzel & Panke, 2013). They also exert significant effects at EU level by uploading when member states try to reduce misfits between the EU and domestic systems by shaping EU decisions (Börzel & Panke, 2013). Within this perspective, a successful ‘uploader state’ makes its own preferences heard, so that policy, political processes, or institutions reflects its interests. As such, the sequential perspective can be considered a synthesis of the bottom-up and top-down Europeanisation perspectives.

The previous can be summarised into three broad notions of integration, as outlined below.

- **Uploading:** A bottom-up approach describing how member states shape EU policies (e.g., by ‘uploading’ their preferences to EU institutions), thereby extending policy content and scope.
- **Downloading:** A top-down approach describing how the EU shapes institutions, processes and political outcomes in terms of whether and how EU policies are ‘downloaded’ and require domestic change.
- **Upload – download – upload:** A sequential approach describing how member states shape the EU (by uploading), how the EU feeds back into its member states (by downloading) and how the latter reacts in changing properties of the EU (again uploading).

As shown in Fig. 1, the three approaches can be illustrated as a circular or spiral process.

The literature offers several explanations for how member states become successful uploaders. Studies have shown that the share of votes a member state (their power) has in the EU is important but that this does not determine processes because informal institutional consensus norms



Fig. 1. Sequential approach of downloading and uploading (figure inspired by Börzel & Panke, 2013).

are also at play. Hence, successful uploader states enter into coalitions with other member states (Panke, 2010). Another important aspect of successful uploading is the ability to take part in negotiation and bargaining and to create arguments that resonate with the beliefs and norms of others in ideational processes. Studies have shown that good arguments can be persuasive, even when a less powerful state takes the lead (Panke, 2010).

## Method

Recommendations made by the OECD in three thematic reviews on education policy developments in Norway (OECD, 1988, 2002, 2011) and a recent OECD report (OECD, 2013) containing recommendations on how to improve school outcomes based on an evaluation and assessment in 28<sup>1</sup> countries were used to analyse uploading and downloading.

The OECD country reviews, thematic surveys, and evaluations and recommendations related to them are considered as central channels of influence and one of the most substantiated tools of the OECD (Rinne et al., 2004). OECD analyses of countries are reported to be the most quoted expression of views on education policy in several countries (Rinne et al., 2004).

The OECD (1988, 2002, 2011) reports in this study were expressly chosen because they have been consistently referred to in Norwegian education research and in key policy documents. They were also selected due to their scope on the curriculum and assessments. The investigation of recommendations presented forms an overview of the Norwegian education policy development seen in

<sup>1</sup>Twenty-five countries were actively involved in the review. Fifteen countries were the focus of country reports and were visited by an external OECD panel.

relation to the three high impact OECD reports and illustrates the phenomenon of *policy downloading*.

The overview was supplemented by a document-based analysis of the OECD (2013) report titled *Synergies for better learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, which was based on a comprehensive OECD review of evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes. This document was chosen because of its extensive coverage of countries and its focus on evaluation and assessment. In total, 28 countries took part in the study, with 25 countries actively engaged in the review. These countries encompass a wide range of economic and social contexts, as well as a variety of approaches to evaluation and assessment in school systems. The countries that actively participated in the review prepared a detailed background report, following a standard set of guidelines to enable comparison between countries. Fifteen countries, including Norway, took part in a detailed review, which was undertaken by a team consisting of members of the OECD secretariat and external experts (OECD, 2013). With this as a backdrop, the document is considered as a suitable source for the investigation into the phenomenon of *policy uploading*.

The present study examined the presence and descriptions of Norwegian (and Nordic) policies in the report. To identify the frequency of specific terms mentioned in the Pdf version of the report, electronic searches were conducted using the key term 'Norway' with the advanced search function of the Acrobat Reader program. The same search was conducted using the names of the other participating countries and one non-participant country (the U.S.). The resulting simple word count was supplemented with in-depth readings of the report. This approach does not provide evidence of the realities of policy or practices, but it offers a systematic approach to which policy problems and goals that are brought forward and which are left aside (Saarinen, 2008). The overview of the discourse in the report illustrates the phenomenon of policy uploading in international educational policy introduced by a supranational authority.

The analysis of the four documents provides a platform to discuss aspects of theoretical and analytical concepts of uploading and downloading in the context of the Norway-OECD relationship.

### Context of the study: the Norway–OECD relationship

Norway has been a member of the OECD since 1961. Kjell Eide, a prominent Norwegian government official and OECD official in the mid-1960s, described how Norway and the Nordic countries clearly inspired OECD messages and recommendations at the time (Eide, 1990). Eide described how the ideas were considered in several countries, including the U.K. and U.S., as well as Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, New Zealand and Australia.

Eide (1990) noted how the same ideas were valuable to Nordic countries as OECD recommendations and 'OECD blessings' for the underlying policy directions in a period of strong expansion and reform domestically. He also describes an agreement made between the Nordic ministers of education in the 1960s to collaborate in international organisations, with Norway given the role of coordinator in the OECD. He recounts how representatives from the Nordic countries met for discussions prior to every meeting and how these resulted in a conception of a relatively homogeneous Nordic education policy that stayed in the OECD.

Today, the Norwegian permanent delegation in the OECD consists of 10 full-time positions.<sup>2</sup> The Norwegian delegation is in daily contact with Norwegian authorities, the OECD secretariat and other OECD member countries. The ambassador of the Norwegian delegation is the permanent representative of Norway in the council. The other members of the Norwegian delegation are responsible for following work in specific fields, as well as maintaining daily contact with the Norwegian ministries engaged in the work of the OECD. Within education, Norway has a traditionally strong relationship with the OECD through participation in a wide range of OECD studies and activities, such as the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI),<sup>3</sup> the PISA and Indicators of National Education Systems (INES).<sup>4</sup> The CERI is one of the most important institutions for education in the OECD. It was initially funded by external sources, but today its budget is directly dependent on funding by the member countries. As such the CERI has been described as more vulnerable to pressure than other departments of the OECD because of its reliance on such funding (Rinne et al., 2004). Norway also has several temporary delegates and experts from the education ministry and the Directorate for Education and Training in secondment positions of up to 2 years in the OECD, which is not unique to the education sector but applies to several sectors in Norwegian policy. Thus, Norway participates with Norwegian policy analysts, national experts, and scholars in discussions and decision-making processes in a wide range of arenas in the OECD.

### OECD recommendations for Norway 1988, 2002 and 2011

Below, the main points of the OECD reports (1988, 2002, 2011) are described, followed by considerations of Norwegian policy development seen in the light of the OECD recommendations.

<sup>2</sup>See <http://www.norway-oecd.org/english/members/#.U99SO14-a> for more information. Retrieved August 1, 2014.

<sup>3</sup>Norway has one representative on the CERI board. Until recently, the director of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training was the Norwegian representative.

<sup>4</sup>See <http://www.udir.no/Stottemeny/Om-direktoratet/Internasjonalt-arbeid2/> for more information (only in Norwegian). Retrieved August 1, 2014.

Over the past 20 years, considerable efforts have been made to develop and introduce a comprehensive system for monitoring the quality of the education system in Norway. In the Norwegian research literature and policy documents, the starting point for these efforts are considered to be the OECD report published in 1988 titled, *Review of National Policies for Education in Norway* (Aasen et al., 2012; Møller & Skedsmo, 2013; OECD, 2002; Prøitz, 2014a, 2014b; Telhaug et al., 2006; Tveit, 2014).

### **1988 OECD review of national policies for education in Norway**

The recommendations made by the OECD review team in 1988 have been widely used to legitimise a wide range of policy initiatives described in a number of documents, such as the annual national budget, working papers, Official Norwegian Reports and reports to the Storting (the parliament) over the last 20 years.

The report highlighted three main concerns:

1. The OECD panel questioned how the Norwegian education authorities could obtain information that was solid enough for decision making in a system as decentralised as Norway.
2. The OECD panel strongly recommended that Norway should develop a system for evaluation of Norwegian schools that clarified the responsibilities of the different levels of the system.
3. The OECD panel also recommended a shift in focus from changes in structure to the quality of the system (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011; OECD, 1988, 2002; Official Norwegian Report, 2002 no 10).

The two later OECD reports (2002, 2011) link back to the 1988 report and seem to follow a specific argumentative logic, pointing in the direction of establishing a more outcomes- and results-oriented system.

### **2002 review of national policies for education – lifelong learning**

According to the review team, Norway ‘in the spirit of co-operation and (...) the exchange of views’ invited the OECD to undertake an examination of lifelong learning to share their experience and learn from others (OECD, 2002). By the end of the 1990s, Norway had implemented an extensive lifelong learning reform, securing all adults with incomplete formal education individual rights to adult education (The Competence Reform Report to the Storting No. 42 (1997–1998)). At the time, Norway was considered a leader within the field of lifelong learning.

The OECD team conducted a comprehensive examination of the Norwegian education system. In the *OECD Review of National Policies for Education – Lifelong Learning*, the OECD (2002) stated that the 1988 report had a great impact on the development of the Norwegian

education system. The team declared that: ‘The evaluation of educational reforms has been strengthened, information systems and better statistics have been introduced, and reporting of results have been underscored’ (OECD, 2002). The 2002 OECD panel recommended that the Ministry of Education, Research, and Church Affairs should shift its emphasis from a supply-driven model to a demand-driven model in its shaping of the educational system. It also recommended that the ministry should shift its focus from inputs to outcomes, noting that: ‘The learning outcomes should not be expressed in terms of grades, course content or performance ratings, but rather descriptions of what an individual knows and is able to do’. The review panel pointed out that this would not be a simple task and that it would certainly require creativity and hard work (OECD, 2002).

### **2011 review of evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes**

The OECD (2011) report focused, in particular, on assessment and evaluation and was part of a larger OECD study titled, *Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes*. Norway was one of 15 countries that participated in the review with a visiting external panel from the OECD.

The OECD panel reported that it was positive about the strong political commitment and political consensus within the education sector to prioritise issues relating to the evaluation and assessment of education in Norway. The OECD also acknowledged the considerable progress that had occurred since 2004, including the introduction and further development of the national quality assessment system (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2011).<sup>5</sup> The review panel recommended that Norway should:

- Clarify learning goals and quality criteria to guide assessment and evaluation
- Complete the evaluation and assessment framework and make it coherent
- Further strengthen the competence for evaluation and assessment among teachers, school leaders and school owners (OECD, 2011)

### **Realisation of OECD recommendations**

The implementation of a system for quality monitoring in education in Norway as recommended by the 1988 OECD panel took more than a decade, despite a range of efforts.<sup>6</sup> Moving from a tradition of input- and process-oriented education policy towards a results- and

<sup>5</sup>Retrieved February 2014 from <http://www.udir.no/Tilstand/Forskning/Rapporter/Ovrige-forfattere/Tre-rad-til-norsk-skole-OECD-rapport/>.

<sup>6</sup>EMIL-project, Report to the Storting no. 33 (1991/92), Report to the Storting no. 47 (1995/96), Resolution by the Storting no. 96 (1996/97), The Moe-report 1997, Report to the Storting no. 28 (1998/99).

outcomes-orientated system represented a significant shift in Norwegian education policy.

Over the past 30 years, on-going tension between governmental ambitions for regulating education and professionals in pedagogy resisting the government's interventions seem to have influenced Norwegian education policy (Telhaug, 1994). Drawing on arguments that schools are special organisations that cannot be governed by market, competition, and production or managed by objectives and controlled by results, professionals in pedagogy have suggested alternative approaches, which emphasise concepts such as 'the professional teacher' and 'school-based evaluation'. The main arguments emphasised that the process of improvement had to start at the school level with teachers who were trusted. In the 1990s, this led to a policy combining external control of inputs and school-based evaluations (Telhaug, 1994). The education reforms of the 1990s focused on broad general goals, with little attention given to mechanisms that could ensure the attainment of these goals. The reforms of the 2000s addressed the challenges of establishing new mechanisms and tools for ensuring that goals relating student results, outcomes and accountability were fulfilled (Hatch, 2013). Norwegian education policy seems to have been based upon a strong belief in the construction of structures and systems, the provision of inputs and the definition of processes through regulations and national curriculums. Over the past 15 years, the increasing focus on results and outcomes and innovations and practices in educational assessment in Norway has challenged this belief and invoked ideological disputes about educational assessment (Tveit, 2014).

The developments in Norway have also been characterised as a halfway move towards accountability, without traditional follow-up mechanisms of high-stakes incentives and rewards trying to find a compromise between answerability for the achievement of goals and responsibility for attainment of broader purposes (Hatch, 2013). Some researchers have argued that the developments in Norway have introduced a system that emphasises a 'softer' approach, which focuses on learning processes through a strong commitment to the central principles of assessment for learning (Norwegian Directorate for and Training, 2011; Hopfenbeck, Tool, Flores, & El Mari, 2013; Throndsen, Hopfenbeck, Lie, & Dale, 2009; Tveit, 2014). The previous suggests several reasons why it was difficult to establish a consensus domestically on the issues raised by the 1988 OECD panel. As pointed out by the 2002 OECD panel, this was no simple task.

Nevertheless, the PISA results of 2001, together with other coinciding events,<sup>7</sup> pushed forward the development of a quality monitoring system at the beginning of the

2000s. The period after the first Norwegian PISA results were published has been described as a time of national shock and a bruised self-image caused by average results. It has also been described as a time when Norwegian education policy lost its innocence and suddenly got busy (Baune, 2007). The National Quality Assessment System was introduced in 2004. In 2006, the extensive 'knowledge promotion reform' was launched in primary and secondary education and training. Central elements of the reform were: a national outcomes-oriented curriculum, national tests, decentralisation, governing by goals and local accountability (Aasen et al., 2012; Prøitz, 2014b).

Since 2007, Norway has initiated a range of measures to improve evaluation and assessment in the education sector. Among other initiatives, it has revised the regulations for assessment, developed guidelines to supplement the outcome-based national curriculum and launched an extensive national project for the improvement of competence in evaluations and assessments by teachers, school leaders and 'school owners' (local authorities). The national project to improve the competence of teachers, school leaders and local authorities is on-going, and work is continuing to further improve the National Quality Assessment Framework.

The different policy recommendations of the OECD reports can be considered to have been downloaded, as most have been realised in one way or another in Norwegian education (Prøitz, 2014a). However, these recommendations likely worked in concert, resulting in a movement that led to the established outcomes-oriented Norwegian education policy of today (Prøitz, 2014a). The list of OECD recommendations formed a platform for changes in Norwegian education policy. They reinforced a results-oriented policy by introducing learning outcomes and assessments designed to improve the learning outcomes of all students and to hold actors accountable (Prøitz, 2014a). The OECD recommendations and a timeline identifying more extensive national activities are summarised in Table I.

The table does not attempt to represent all the recommendations of the OECD panels or the great variety of activities and initiatives taken within Norwegian education policy during the described period. Its purpose is to illustrate what seems to be a consistent line between the OECD's recommendations and more extensive and overarching events in Norwegian education policy development. It also illustrates how the OECD recommendations become more detailed and specific with the growing sophistication of the Norwegian system.

### OECD 2013 synergies for better learning report

The OECD (2013) report titled *Synergies for better learning: An international perspective on assessment and learning* is an international comparative analysis. The aim of the report was to provide policy advice to countries on

<sup>7</sup>A comprehensive national research-based evaluation presented a harsh critique of the last education reform (Haug, 2003), and two official Norwegian reports suggesting a new education policy were published in 2002 and 2004 (NOU, 2002, p. 10, 2003, p. 6).

*Table I.* Overview of OECD recommendations and national activities

OECD reports and recommendations	National activities
<p><b>1988 Review of national policies for education in Norway</b> Shift from changes in structure to the quality of the system Influence through knowledge, good practices and critical evaluation</p>	<p><b>1991–1999:</b> Several enquiries launched and reports produced</p>
<p><b>2002 Review of national policies for education – lifelong learning</b> Shift from a supply-driven to a demand-driven model Shift from inputs to outcomes by learning outcomes</p>	<p><b>2001</b> PISA <b>2004</b> National quality assessment system <b>2006</b> Knowledge promotion reform <b>2009</b> Revised national regulations for assessment <b>2010</b> National assessment for learning project launched</p>
<p><b>2011 Review on evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes</b> Clarify learning goals and criteria to guide assessment and evaluation Complete the assessment and evaluation framework and make it coherent. Strengthen competence for evaluation and assessment among teachers, school leaders and school owners</p>	

how evaluation and assessment arrangements could be embedded within a consistent framework. The stated purpose of the report was to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of school education.<sup>8</sup> The underlying project was introduced in 2009. According to the OECD (2013: footnote 6), the project was an answer ‘to the strong interest in evaluation and assessment issues evident at national and international levels’ among member countries.

#### *Phase I content analysis – simple word count*

The content analysis presented herein examined how Norway and the Nordic countries are presented in the report. First, a simple word count was performed to determine the numbers of times the 28 participating countries were mentioned. This provided a general overview of the frequencies of references to the countries in the report (see Fig. 2).

As per the word count shown in Fig. 2, countries with traditionally strong assessment cultures, such as Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and the U.K., are most frequently mentioned (above the average of 197 times), as could be expected. Perhaps more surprisingly, Belgium and the Netherlands are also frequently mentioned. References to the Nordic countries (Norway, Denmark and Sweden) are around the average point, with Norway and Denmark mentioned most often and Finland and Iceland mentioned less often. The number of references to the Nordic countries all-together amounts to 14%

of all the other countries mentioned. This can be considered substantial compared to the references of the expert countries, which received the percentage of 28 all together.

#### *Phase II content analysis – in depth reading*

Simple word counts provide only an indication of the attention paid to a particular country in the report. Therefore, the word count was supplemented with in-depth readings to provide a closer look on how the Nordic countries, in particular, were described in the report. On reading the report, it is evident that the Nordic countries are relatively often referred to in highlighted self-contained boxes (Fig. 3), described as follows in the report: ‘A number of particularly innovative and promising initiatives . . .’ The Nordic countries are referred to in 20 of 80 boxes presented in the report.

Most of the boxes where the Nordic countries are referred to contain examples of measures taken to promote aspects of evaluation and assessment often described in the report as being holistic and formative approaches. They also emphasise measures involving a high degree of collaboration and involvement of actors that promote dialogue for reaching common views and the involvement of student unions and teacher unions in the creation of formative feedback to teachers. The boxes also refer to the promotion of school self-evaluation to improve school results, as well as the need to take account of factors that affect student learning outside of schools.

In contrast, with regard to countries with traditionally stronger assessment cultures, the boxes emphasise other topics, such as data information systems of objective

<sup>8</sup>See the link for more information and access to the report. Retrieved August 1, 2014 from <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/oecdreviewonevaluationandassessmentframeworksforimprovingschooloutcomes.htm>.

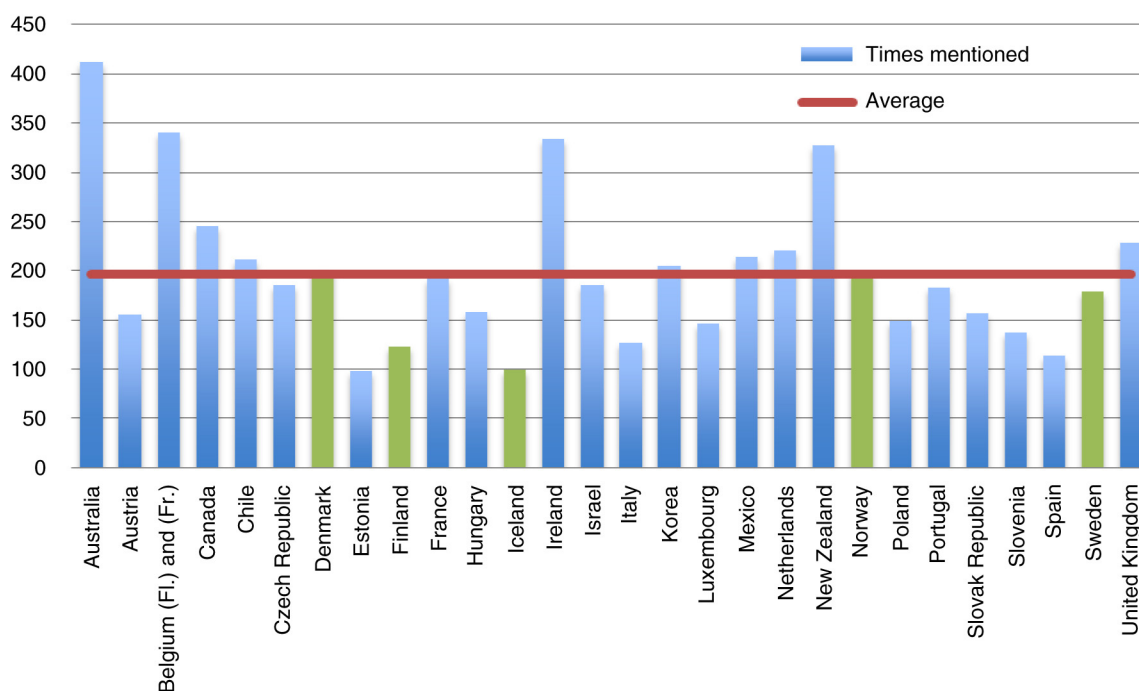


Fig. 2. Frequencies of references to the participating countries in the *Synergies for better learning report* (OECD, 2013).

diagnostic information, policies on reporting student performance, innovations in reporting systems for the standardisation of teachers’ judgement, and appraisal systems for registration and certification of teachers. They also highlight the role of self-reviews and external

reviews in school evaluation and the need to recruit senior educators to join external school evaluation teams and have centrally developed tools for self-evaluation, in addition to targeted training and school self-evaluation, of school principals.

**Box 3.4 Collaboration initiatives and partnerships in Norway**

In Norway, there are many examples of localised collaboration initiatives launched and developed by small clusters of municipalities as well as larger regional or national partnerships that are supported by the Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) or the Directorate for Education and Training. Examples are:

<p><b>Municipal Authorities</b> Government quality monitoring compare data agreement w use results fr bring together in benchmark group of municipalities</p> <p><b>Regional Knowledge Training to</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Box 3.5 Promoting dialogue and reaching common views on educational evaluation in Denmark</b></p> <p>In Denmark, there is a general tradition of involving the relevant interest groups in the development of policies for primary and lower secondary schools (<i>Folkeskole</i>). The key interest groups are diverse: Education authorities at the central level, municipalities (Local Government Denmark), teachers (Danish Union of Teachers), school leaders/ Association), students (Danish associations representing the Council for Evaluation prominent platform for dialog works on collecting and dis on school development. A common views on education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A reference group “<i>Folkeskole</i>”. The group meets on a regular national student tests</li> <li>• The interest group Minister of education</li> </ul>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Box 8.14 Strategy to make education system evaluation results more accessible in Sweden</b></p> <p>The National Agency for Education (NAE) in Sweden has a clear commitment to make key results at the national level more accessible. All official statistics for the Swedish education system are reported on the NAE’s website. Both full reports and statistical tables (in MS Excel format) are available. In 2001 the NAE redesigned its reporting website to present more clearly statistics at the national, local authority and school levels (including analytical tools for comparing school performance [SIRIS database and SALSA analysis tool]). For example, up until 2000 results were published in four separate papers: a summary of main results plus analytical papers by researchers on results in English, mathematics and Swedish and Swedish as a second language.</p> <p>As well as a clear presentation of national assessment results, the annual report on the national assessments includes content analysis of national assessment results for each subject by different researchers (e.g. Stockholm University on mathematics, Göteborg University on English, Uppsala University on Swedish and Swedish as a second language). The content of the reports may</p>

Fig. 3. Examples of particularly innovative and promising initiatives (OECD, 2013).



In general, the recommendations in the OECD report seem to be promoting a holistic approach to the formation of a coherent whole in evaluation and assessment that implies a change in focus, which possibly downplays the focus on testing and assessment for accountability. The OECD clearly recommended maintaining the focus on classroom practices by embracing the value of all types of evaluations and assessments and avoiding problems, such as teaching for the test, created by these due to their role in accountability. The recommendation seems to represent a more balanced approach to assessment and evaluation in education emphasising the importance of holistic, process-oriented and multi-dimensional approaches. This is further emphasised by the recommendation of placing the student at the centre (e.g., by monitoring broader learning outcomes with more wide-ranging performance measures and drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data) (OECD, 2013).

### Arenas for downloading and uploading

The previous sections described how the Norwegian relation to the OECD takes several forms. First, as a membership relation through participation and funding of OECD activities, such as PISA studies and the CERI. Second, Norway is involved in the OECD through national representation and participation in governing bodies, as well as through national experts and policy analysts visiting the OECD for long or short periods. This involvement can be considered a potential arena for both downloading and uploading, as well as sequences of such through a variety of meeting points for dialogue, exchange of educational ideas and decision making for education policy development.

### Downloading of OECD recommendations by Norway

The recommendations made by the OECD in its three reports (1988, 2002, 2013) and the seemingly corresponding Norwegian initiatives and activities can be interpreted as Norway systematically downloading OECD policies over a period of 25 years. At the same time, the analysis illustrates how difficult it seems to have been to make the shift from an input- and process-oriented education system in Norway to a more results- and outcomes oriented system. The main ideas and recommendations of the 1988 OECD panel were realised with the education reform of 2006, nearly 20 years later, illustrating that changing curriculum and assessment practices does not happen quickly.

### Indications of successful uploading

The document analysis showed that the Nordic countries had a significant place in the OECD 2013 report. The simple word count showed that Norway, Sweden and Denmark were mentioned frequently, both individually and together as a Nordic cluster of countries, when compared with that of other more prominent countries

within the field of assessment. Further, Nordic measures emphasised as innovative and promising in the report promoting aspects of participation, inclusion and equity between groups (teacher and student involvement and participation in questions concerning assessment) in general, might have contributed to a holistic and formative approach to assessment and evaluation. These aspects (i.e., participation, inclusion and equity) can be argued to resonate well with Norwegian traditions in education in general (Telhaug et al., 2006). It is also recognisable in terms of a 'softer' Norwegian approach to evaluation and assessment only going 'halfway' in accountability compared to traditional Anglo-Saxon approaches to accountability (Hatch, 2012; Tveit, 2014). The results of the document analysis suggest that Norway (possibly together with the Nordic countries) might have had an impact on OECD recommendations, promoting holistic approaches that emphasises the need to consider the broader range of factors that influence students' learning and results.

However, this could also have been the result of coincidental developments in the OECD or the result of a general movement among the participating countries in the OECD study advocating holistic and formative approaches. Another possibility is that general developments within the field of evaluation and assessment coincided with the characteristics of the Norwegian evaluation and assessment policy. Alternatively, Norway (and the Nordic countries) may have uploaded and thus widened the scope and content of OECD recommendations for evaluations and assessments according to their preferences and, as such, acted as a successful uploader state within the OECD.

Providing evidence for such uploading activity requires rigorous and systematic documentation and investigations of the intermediate processes and sequences of dialogue, as well as of national and international developments. In lay terms, this means closely studying what whom is bringing to the table where, when and for what purposes and with what impact?

### Uploading – downloading and uploading again

Most of the research identified in the review recognises that downloading is not a unidirectional process but complex and fluid (Forsberg & Pettersson, 2014, Steiner-Khamsi, 2014; Grek & Rinne, 2011). Researchers have also argued that the international scene does not represent an external power but rather is a part of domestically induced rhetoric (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Eide (1990) reported that Norway and the Nordic countries influenced OECD recommendations the 1960s and that the same ideas were valuable to the Nordic countries as 'OECD blessings' in a period of expansion and reform. Eide implies a situation of domestic ideas on a journey uploaded to the OECD and later

downloaded as OECD recommendations to support domestic policy directions at the time. This illustrates the complexity of these matters, as well as the importance of identifying drivers, motives and initiating actors underlying education policy development. The review of the literature on issues such as reception, translation, borrowing, and lending and the results and discussion in this article lead to the question of why Nordic education researchers seldom seem to be interested in the processes of uploading in education policy development or in the intermediate processes and sequences of uploading and downloading.

Within the cross-national policy literature on borrowing, researchers have highlighted the need to apply a bifocal lens to local patterns, as well as transnational patterns (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Focusing on the dual processes of policy reception and translation are considered important for the further advancement of policy studies (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). However, these perspectives do not seem to consider the role and actions of the nation states as proactive entities in the meeting rooms of international organisations in the international policy arena. They also seem to fail to consider the possibility of nation states shaping transnational patterns through their powers as members, funders and participants in international organisations, such as the OECD.

### Conclusion and implications

Studies of how international/supranational organisations influence domestic policies in education are important, as these have a growing impact on the lives of students, teachers, school leaders and communities in general. Studies on what makes countries change and reform their education systems, curricula and assessment policies in line with international movements are of importance. Adopting a one-dimensional national perspective offers only a restricted view of the actors, drivers, initiatives and motives involved in change. Steiner-Khamsi (2014) proclaimed that globalisation is not an external force but rather the result of domestically induced rhetoric mobilised at specific times to generate reform and build coalitions. Many studies have documented how domestic policies seem to pick and choose between internationally developed recommendations and advise transforming these into what fits the realities of national policies (Forsberg & Pettersson, 2014; Hatch, 2013; Hopmann, 2008; Karseth & Sivesind, 2010; Prøitz, 2014a, 2014b; Rinne et al., 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). As such, the way in which actors moves on and between domestic and international arenas, as well as how international developments are used domestically, is an important area of study for educational researchers to ensure an informed debate on national education policy developments in the fields of curriculum and assessment.

### References

- Aasen, P. (2012). Accountability under ambiguity. Dilemmas and contradictions in education. In A.L. Østern, K. Smith, T. Krüger, M.B. Postholm, & T. Ryghaug (Eds.), *Teacher education research between national identity and global trends* (pp. 77–92). Trondheim: Akademika.
- Aasen, P., Møller, J., Rye, E., Ottesen, E., Prøitz, T.S., & Hertzberg, F. (2012). *Kunnskapsløftet som styringsreform – et løft eller et løfte? Forvaltningsnivåenes og institusjonenes rolle i implementeringen av reformen (NIFU Report no. 2012/2012)* [The Knowledge promotion reform as a governing reform. The role of administrative levels and institutions in the implementation of the reform]. Oslo: NIFU.
- Adam, S. (2004). *Using learning outcomes. A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing “learning outcomes” at the local, national and international levels*. UK Bologna Seminar 1–2 July, Heriott-Wyatt University, Edinburgh, Scotland.
- Antikainen, A. (2006). In search of the Nordic model in education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 50(3), 229–243.
- Baune, T.A. (2007). *Den skal tidlig krøkes: skolen i historisk perspektiv* [School in a historic perspective]. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk.
- Blossing, U., Imsen, G., & Moos, L. (2014). *The Nordic model. A school for all' encounters neo-liberal policy, policy implications of research in education* (Vol. 1). Dordrecht: Springer Series.
- Börzel, T.A., & Panke, D. (2013). Europeanisation. In M. Cini & N.P. Borragan (Eds.), *European Union politics* (pp. 115–127). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Eide, K. (1990). *30 years of educational collaboration in the OECD*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Ewell, P. (2005). *Applying learning outcomes to higher education: An overview*. Paper prepared for the Hong Kong University Grants Committee, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.
- Forsberg, E., & Pettersson, D. (2014). European educational transfer and curriculum displacement: The Swedish case. In A. Nordin & D. Sundberg (Eds.), *Transnational policy flows in European education*. Oxford, UK: Oxford Studies in Comparative Education, Symposium Books.
- Fowler, F.C. (2012). *Policy studies for educational leaders. An introduction*, (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Fuller, B. (2009). Policy and place – Learning from decentralised reforms. In G. Sykes, G. Schneider, D.N. Plank, & T.G. Ford (Eds.), *Handbook of education policy research* (pp. 855–875). AERA, New York: Routledge.
- Grek, S., & Rinne, R. (2011). Fabricating Europe: From culture to numbers. In J. Ozga, P. Dahler-Larsen, C. Segerholm, & H. Simola (Eds.), *Fabricating quality in education: Data and governance in Europe* (pp. 19–32). New York: Routledge.
- Hatch, T. (2013). Beneath the surface of accountability: Answerability, responsibility and capacity-building in recent education reforms in Norway. *Journal of Educational Change*, 14(2), 113–138.
- Haug, P. (2003). *Evaluering av Reform 97. Sluttrapport frå styret for Program for evaluering av Reform 97*. Oslo: Norges Forskningsråd.
- Hopfenbeck, T., Tool, A., Flores, T., & El Mari, Y. (2013). *Balancing trust and accountability? The assessment for learning programme in Norway, A governing complex education systems case study*. Paris: OECD.
- Hopmann, S.T. (2008). No child, no school, no state left behind schooling in the age of accountability. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 40(4), 417–456.

- Karseth, B., & Sivesind, K. (2010). Conceptualising curriculum knowledge within and beyond the national context. *European Journal of Education*, 45(1), 103–120.
- Kellaghan, T., & Greaney, V. (2001). *Using assessment to improve the quality of education*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Lawn, M. (2011). Governing through data in English education. *Education Inquiry*, 2(2), 277–288.
- Lundahl, C., & Waldow, F. (2009). Standardisation and ‘quick languages’: The shapeshifting of standardised measurement of pupil achievement in Sweden and Germany. *Comparative Education*, 45(3), 365–385.
- Lundgren, U.P. (2006). Political governing and curriculum change: From active to reactive curriculum reforms. The need for a reorientation of curriculum theory. *Studies in Educational Policy and Educational Philosophy*, 1, 1–12.
- Mausethagen, S. (2013). Governance through concepts: The OECD and the construction of “competence” in Norwegian education policy. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 4(1), 161–181.
- Møller, J., & Skedsmo, G. (2013). Modernising education: New public management reform in the Norwegian education system. *Journal of Education Administration and History*, 45(4), 336–352.
- Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2011). *OECD review on evaluation and assessment*. Oslo: Utdanningsdirektoratet.
- Ochs, K. (2006). Cross-national policy borrowing and educational innovation: Improving achievement in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham. *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(5), 599–618. doi: 10.1080/03054980600976304
- Ochs, K. & Phillips, D. (2002). Comparative studies and ‘cross-national attraction’ in education: A typology for the analysis of English interest in educational policy and provision in Germany. *Educational Studies*, 28(4), 325–339. doi: 10.1080/0305569022000042372
- OECD. (1988). *Review of national policies for education in Norway*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. (2002). *Reviews of national policies for education, lifelong learning in Norway*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. (2011). OECD reviews of evaluation and assessment in education NORWAY. Review on evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes country background report for Norway, January 2011. Retrieved September 1, 2012 from <http://www.udir.no>
- OECD. (2013). *OECD reviews of evaluation and assessment in education, synergies for better learning, an international perspective on evaluation and assessment*. Paris: OECD.
- Official Norwegian Report. (2002). First class from first grade - propositions for a national quality assessment system in education. NOU 2002: 10. *Forsteklasses fra første klasse – Forslag til rammeverk for et nasjonalt kvalitetsvurderingssystem av norsk grunnopplæring*. Oslo, Norway: Ministry of Education and Research.
- Ozga, J., Dahler-Larsen, P., Segerholm, C., & Simola, H. (2011). *Fabricating quality in education: Data and governance in Europe*. New York: Routledge.
- Panke, D. (2010). *Small states in the European Union. Coping with structural disadvantages*. London: Ashgate.
- Pettersson, D. (2008). *International knowledge assessments: An element of national educational steering* (Doctoral thesis). Uppsala University, Uppsala.
- Pettersson, D. (2014). National interpretations of PISA – Three narratives. *Knowledge Cultures*, 2(4), 172–191.
- Prøitz, T.S. (2014a). *Conceptualisations of learning outcomes – An explorative study of policymakers, teachers and scholars*. Series of dissertations Faculty of Educational Sciences, No. 194. Oslo: University of Oslo.
- Prøitz, T.S. (2014b). Learning outcomes as a key concept in policy documents throughout policy changes. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 1–22. doi: 10.1080/00313831.2014.904418
- Rinne, R., Kallo, J., & Hokka, S. (2004). Too eager to comply? OECD education policies and the Finnish response. *European Educational Research Journal*, 3(2), 454–485.
- Saarinen, T. (2008). Position of text and discourse analysis in higher education policy research. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33, 719–728.
- Shepard, L.A. (2000). The role of assessment in a learning culture. *Educational Researcher*, 29(7), 414.
- Shepard, L.A. (2007). Classroom assessment. In R.L. Brennan (Ed.), *Educational measurement* (4th ed., pp. 623–646). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Simola, H., Ozga, J., Segerholm, C., Varjo, J., & Andersen, V.N. (2011). Governing by numbers. In J. Ozga, P. Dahler-Larsen, C. Segerholm, & H. Simola (Eds.), *Fabricating quality in education: Data and governance in Europe* (pp. 96–106). New York: Routledge.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2014). Cross-national policy borrowing: understanding reception and translation. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 34(2), 153–167.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Waldow, F. (2012). *Policy borrowing and lending. World yearbook of education 2012*. London: Routledge, 443 pp.
- Telhaug, A.O. (1994). *Norsk skoleutvikling etter 1945. Utdanningspolitikk og skolereformer 1945–1994* [Norwegian school development after 1945. Educational policy and school reform 1945–1994]. Oslo: Didakta Norsk Forlag.
- Telhaug, A.O., Mediås, A.O., & Aasen, P. (2006). The Nordic model in education: Education as part of the political system in the last 50 years. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 50(3), 245–283.
- Thronsdén, I., Hopfenbeck, T., Lie, S., & Dale, E.L. (2009). Towards a standardized national assessment system? Results from a Norwegian evaluation study of teachers’ development and use of assessment criteria in the classroom. EARLI, Amsterdam: 13th Biennial Conference for Research on Learning and Instruction; 25–29 August 2009.
- Tveit, S. (2014). Educational assessment in Norway. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 22(2), 221–237.
- Young, M. (2009). Education, globalization and the ‘voice of knowledge’. *Journal of Education and Work*, 22(3), 335–347.