



Alessandra Dieudè

# Private school policy and practice in Norway

Governing private schools: State  
funding and standardisation

**Dissertation for the  
degree of Ph.D**  
Pedagogical resources and  
learning processes  
in kindergarten and school

Faculty of Humanities, Sports  
and Educational Science

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*Questa tesi é dedicata a Giulio Regeni*

A Giulio, e alla tua mamma che ha dovuto riconoscerti per la punta del naso. La tua verità e giustizia sono legate con un filo sottile al futuro dell'Europa.

This thesis is dedicated to Giulio Regeni, an Italian PhD student at Cambridge University who died slowly after days of inhuman torture by Egyptian security forces while he was researching the development of independent trade unions in Cairo in 2016.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/five-years-after-the-murder-of-giulio-regeni-europes-dangerous-egypt-policy>



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## Abstract

**Keywords:** *privatisation of education, education policy, state-funded private education, standardisation, differentiation, policy instruments, governance*

In recent decades, societal and educational issues have been used to legitimise policies encouraging privatisation worldwide. While in Norway the privatisation of education generates political disagreement due to the historical and social justice ideals embedded in the concept of a common school for all, state-funded private schools are experiencing significant growth. According to previous research, funding occurs in specific and institutional contexts and result from a variety of policy goals; however, the expansion of privately subsidised education seems to contradict with the goal of a common school for all. More knowledge is needed to understand the logic between private schools' goals, regulatory provisions and local enactment of policy.

This thesis explores the legitimation and regulation of state-funded private schools in Norway and how policies are perceived, interpreted and enacted at different operational levels. Drawing on qualitative data from a multilevel study, I compare negotiations of meanings at the policy level and perceptions of autonomy in (two) state-funded private and (three) public schools. At the school level, there is a particular focus on school actors' perceptions of autonomy in the enactment of curriculum and assessment regulations. This study draws on governance theory combined with an understanding of policy as a practice of power and a tool for the coordination of actors.

The findings show that at the state level, between 2002–2018, Norwegian national policy legitimised the regulation of state-funded private schools using international references and policy instruments aimed at promoting equity and quality standards. In particular, the 2003 policy changes liberalising private schooling lost legitimacy due to how the centre-left government referenced PISA and Sweden, a country that has a similar private school policy and poor school results, in order to reverse the proposed regulation of private schools. Thus, this study shows that while degrees of liberalisation regarding the regulation of state-funded private school can change according to political governments, the “old” social-democratic ideal of one common school for all can be



legitimised by negotiating meaning and evidence from international references and international standardised tests. Furthermore, the emphasis of an outcome-based curriculum instrument legitimises state-funded private school by ensuring more equity and quality of education.

At the school level, despite different contexts and the requirement for differentiation (pedagogical diversification), teachers and school leaders in state-funded private and public schools have similar discretion but face different challenges related to interpreting and enacting policy requirements. However, the discretion in state-funded private schools appears even more restricted by both policy requirements and their own governance. By having to enact state policy and follow a curriculum with outcome-based educational approaches and quality assurance instruments such as continuing professional development (CPD) and national tests, state-funded private schools are increasingly regulated in a way that is similar to public schools, which may lead to stronger standardisation. This makes Norway an interesting case, showing how the state uses policy, such as related to funding, as an effective instrument to produce variety of education while maintaining control over the school system.

However, the emphasis on diversity as key to enhancing the quality of education through increased freedom of pedagogical offer is being challenged. The increased emphasis on standards and the standardisation of education illustrates how Norway's regulatory framework for state-funded private schools can take forms that both complement and conflict with policy goals. The findings confirm the construction of a common pedagogical base for all schools and contribute to exposing such trends among state-funded private schools rather than creating a basis for diversified educational provision. If every school profile is similar, what happens to the policy related to the creation of alternative schools? This study shows how public and private schools are regulated similarly through various types of policies. When alternative school profiles, which are supposed to provide diversity, have the same basic pedagogical idea, what constitutes the alternative?

## List of papers

### Article 1

Dieudè, A. (2021). Legitimizing private school policy within a political divide: The role of international references. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 7(2), 78–90. <http://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2021.1963593>

### Article 2

Dieudè, A., & Prøitz, T. S. (2022). Curriculum policy and instructional planning: Teachers' autonomy across various school contexts. *European Educational Research Journal*. <http://doi.org/10.1177/14749041221075156>

### Article 3

Dieudè, A., & Prøitz, T. S. (Under review). School leaders' autonomy in public and private school contexts: Blurring policy requirements.

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# 1 Introduction

In recent decades, societal and educational issues have been used to legitimise policies encouraging privatisation worldwide. The concept of privatisation is usually understood as the result of transferring activities and responsibilities originally provided by the state (public sector) to private actors (Belfield & Levin, 2002). While private actors have typically been more involved in preschool and tertiary education, research suggests an ever-increasing involvement in primary and secondary schooling as well (Verger et al., 2016). This increase is not unproblematic. Experiences in countries in which market-driven reforms have been implemented show that more choice has led to increased socio-economic segregation (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Gutiérrez & Carrasco, 2021), while the positive gains from competition on educational outcomes have been modest (Belfield & Levin, 2002; Wikström & Wikström, 2005). Furthermore, it has been documented that hybrid forms of private–public ownership may grant greater freedom but do not necessarily provide greater autonomy to teachers (Salokangas & Ainscow, 2017).

State-funded private schools are a key example of the privatisation trend, with considerable expansion in student enrolment in a number of OECD countries (Zancajo et al., 2022). In this study, which focuses on Norway, state-funded private schools are defined as privately owned schools that have been certified for teaching pursuant to the national legislative framework. These schools are not run by private tuition but on a voucher system, which is a certificate for government funding related to students. In general, these schools enjoy different degrees of autonomy based on the assumption that this freedom will promote pedagogical innovation and raise educational standards (Chapman & Salokangas, 2012; McGinity, 2015). However, depending on the goals of the regulatory framework, these schools may be regulated to ensure alignment with public goals (Zancajo et al., 2022), potentially generating a sort of autonomy paradox.

Over the last few decades, there has been increased interest in policy studies that investigate why privatisation policies are spreading globally and how privatisation unfolds in different contexts (Koinzer et al., 2017; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016; Verger et al.,



2016; West & Nikolai, 2017). Moreover, a smaller but growing body of research comparing teachers' and school leaders' practices in both private and public school contexts indicates the importance of the relationship between autonomy and control for school development (Braathen, 2008; Gawlik, 2015; Hovdhaugen et al., 2014; Nordholm et al., 2022). Taken together, these studies reveal the importance of a deeper understanding of the private school policies playing out in various national contexts under hybrid governance. Additional research is needed to understand how practitioners interpret and translate multiple policy goals within the cultural and institutional frameworks at the local school level (i.e., the private schools).

This thesis is part of the research project *Tracing Learning Outcomes Across Policy and Practice* (LOaPP), which investigated change in educational policy related to learning outcomes and assessments in public schools. As an individual study within the larger LOaPP project<sup>2</sup>, this study is situated in the field of education policy. In particular, this thesis investigates the interplay between the regulation and legitimation of state-funded private schools by central state politics and policies and school-level actors' policy perceptions, interpretations and enactments in the Norwegian context. This interplay is especially interesting when looking at the Norwegian context, as this is a country that typically has cross-party consensus on various educational policies, such as the role of the state as the primary provider of education (Wiborg, 2013). Nonetheless, disagreement has arisen regarding the degree of education privatisation (Møller & Skedsmo, 2013). Under a liberal market influence, recent developments in educational policy have replaced traditional school visions of fellowship and community with concepts of individual, private good (Aasen et al., 2014). These policy developments highlight an intriguing tension between maintaining traditional state control over education while introducing market-type reforms to, for example, raise educational standards.

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<sup>2</sup> The project was funded by the Norwegian research council project (#254978); for more detailed information about the project, see the end note.

## 1.1 Aim and overarching research questions

Against this backdrop, the aim of this study is to explore the development of the regulatory framework for state-funded private schools in Norway and how private school actors perceive, interpret and enact policy requirements at different operational levels. To do this, the study draws on qualitative data from a multilevel study to compare the policy legitimisation of Norwegian private school politics and the policy enactment between (two) private and (three) public schools. To achieve the purpose of this research, the following overarching research question is addressed:

*How do state policies legitimise and regulate state-funded private school policy and teachers' and school leaders' autonomy?*

The following sub-questions were explored in three sub-studies presented in three articles:

- 1. How did Norwegian national policy legitimise the regulation of state-funded private schools between 2002–2018?*
- 2. How are state policy and governance perceived, interpreted and enacted at different levels in public and private lower-secondary schools?*
- 3. How do contextual factors affect the ways in which public and private lower-secondary schools perceive, interpret and enact policies?*
- 4. How can differences between public and private schools' autonomy in the enactment of similar policy requirements be explained and studied further?*

The first sub-study (Article I) presents how policy changes regulating private schooling were legitimised by successive governments. The second sub-study (Article II) explores how teacher autonomy is enacted under different types of curriculum control in public and state-funded private schools. Finally, the third sub-study (Article III) discusses how school leaders in public and private school contexts perceive, interpret and enact similar policy requirements. Figure 1 provides an overview of how the sub-questions relate to the three articles.

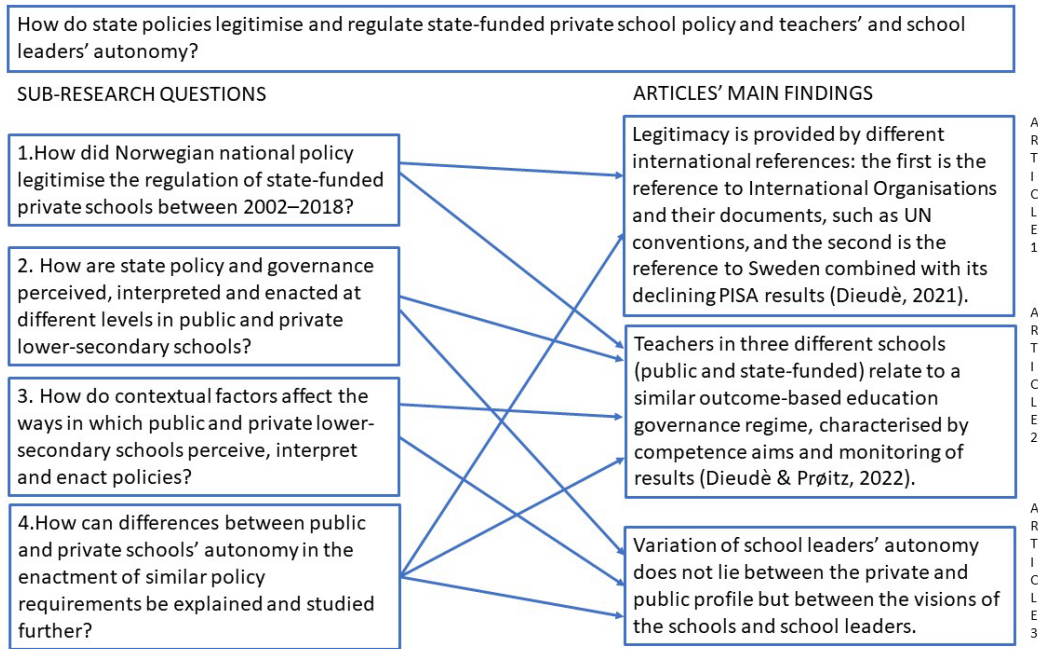


Figure 1. The relationships between the sub-research questions and the three individual articles.

It is important to clarify that this study does not examine private and public schooling through normative and dichotomic categories in terms of equality or quality. Rather, the study is concerned with the tensions and balances that exist in the field of education policy and the understanding of how governance is operationalised for private educational actors. Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction, previous studies have argued that the phenomenon of privatisation is highly context dependent; thus, it should be studied historically and comparatively to understand the differences and similarities of various contexts (Koinzer et al., 2017). Therefore, this thesis adopted a comparative approach, using a single-country study for an in-depth understanding of how private schools are regulated. The historical dimension is investigated through both the political and school contexts of private schooling in Norway.

In this introductory chapter, I first situate the study in the historical and political contexts of private schooling in Norway by briefly presenting the main features of the Norwegian education system, with consideration for the privatisation currents. Subsequently, I present the key concepts and main perspectives of the study. Finally, I discuss how I defined the scope of the study.

## 1.2 The historical and political context: Private schools as a contentious element

Historically, one of the most important characteristics of the Norwegian educational system, which developed in the 1890s, is the *enhetsskole* or “school for all”, meaning a compulsory and comprehensive school (Telhaug & Mediås, 2003; Volckmar, 2010). The *enhetsskolen* represents equal possibilities for all students, independent of background (social class, ethnicity, language, gender, etc.). Already by the end of the 1800s, educational policy had moved towards equity by providing citizens a common school for all students – the *enhetsskole* (Aasen, 2007). A central reason for providing a unified comprehensive school was the importance of education for the creation of a national consciousness and for social integration in which pupils were not differentiated (Imsen & Volckmar, 2014; Telhaug & Mediås, 2003; Telhaug et al., 2004). Throughout the years, the *enhetsskole*, as a nation-building project, has signified the state’s central role in establishing a primarily state-funded and state-run educational system that has little room for private actors (Imsen & Volckmar, 2014; Telhaug et al., 2004).

Until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, private and public schools coexisted without much societal tension (Tveit, 2008). While the comprehensive school was for all students, middle and upper secondary schools (*gymnas* and *latinskolen*) were mostly run by private organisations. Private schools were loosely regulated but could apply for financial support from the municipalities or the central government through subsidies; support was given at the discretion of these entities (Tveiten, 2000). These schools were for those who could afford to pay the fees and would later study at a university (Karlsen, 2006), and they were viewed positively due to their ability to influence radical reforms of public comprehensive schools (Tveiten, 2000). Despite their innovative push, at the beginning of the 1900s, most of these private schools began to disappear, as they lacked sufficient economic support during the financial crisis, and the *enhetsskole* ideal was gaining momentum because of support from the largest political party: the Labour party (Volckmar, 2010). The popularity of the Labour party initiated a series of policies aimed at equality and equity that characterised the social-democratic Norwegian welfare system (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Despite the golden era of social democracy in the aftermath of WWII, in the 1960s arguments for private schooling at the comprehensive school level entered political discourse. These arguments were based on the desire to expand parental rights, such as the right to choose a school based on belief, as well as the desire for alternative pedagogical arenas (Aasen, 2007). In 1965, after 30 years of a government led by the Labour party, the new Conservative government introduced the question of privatisation on the political agenda (Volckmar, 2010). Despite strong opposition from the Labour party, the Conservative party was able to introduce a law on state subsidies to private schools in 1970, marking a significant shift in the development of private schools. This act, which clarified the requirements for private schools to receive public funding, was the first act regulating financial support to private schools. Curriculum approval became a requirement for schools to receive public funds; thus, curriculum became a binding and legitimising document (Stabel, 2016).

In 1985, a new and broader act governing private schools gave the state more responsibility to ensure that private schools could be established (Volckmar, 2010). Despite these policy changes and the modernising trends towards decentralisation and local autonomy in the 1990s, the concept of a common school for all was defended against all attempts of further privatisation (Imsen et al., 2017). However, the national integration project of a comprehensive school for all started to lose ground in the new millennium. This has been accelerated by globalization, the internationalization of education and greater local autonomy and parental choice (Sivesind & Elstad, 2010; Telhaug et al., 2004).

In 2003, a new act called *Om lov om frittstående skolar (The Free School Act)* replaced the term “private schools” with “free schools” for the first time, introducing a political debate over the term. According to Klitgaard (2007), private education has been given different significance by policy makers at different times. Before 2003, in order to be approved by the state and receive funding, private schools had to present a genuine alternative to public comprehensive schools. This could be a pedagogical alternative, such as a Montessori or Waldorf school, or a faith-based alternative, such as a Christian school. The 2003 act marked a political shift, and a centre-right political coalition made

it easier to establish private schools. The requirement to represent a specific alternative was removed to increase the establishment of private schools. However, private schools were not allowed to be run for-profit, as they were in Sweden (Wiborg, 2013). As Table 1 shows, from 2002–2022, the number of pupils attending Norwegian private schools more than doubled (151.7% growth; Statistics Norway, 2022), and from 2002–2017, all regions in Norway experienced growth (see Appendix A).

| Year                           | Public schools | Private schools | % of private share total |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 2002                           | 601,179        | 11,535          | 1.9%                     |
| 2006                           | 606,083        | 14,930          | 2.4%                     |
| 2011                           | 597,729        | 16,648          | 2.7%                     |
| 2016                           | 606,554        | 22,721          | 3.6%                     |
| 2021                           | 605,637        | 29,037          | 4.6%                     |
|                                |                |                 |                          |
| <b>Growth 2002–2021</b>        | <b>4,458</b>   | <b>17,502</b>   |                          |
| <b>Growth % from 2002–2021</b> | <b>0.7%</b>    | <b>151.7%</b>   |                          |

*Table 1. Number of pupils in compulsory education since 2002.*

Furthermore, the table shows that there has been a higher increase in private schools than public schools, and the total share of pupils in private schools rose from 1.9% in 2002 to 4.6% in 2021. Despite these figures, the centre-left government reversed the policy in 2005 by reintroducing the requirement to represent a specific alternative (Lauglo, 2009). After winning the 2013 election, the centre-right coalition government again liberalised the private school policy in 2015, creating more alternative private schools and more schools offering distinct profiles, such as math, sports, music, etc. (Volckmar, 2018). However, a centre-left government shift in 2021 reversed major policy changes that aimed at the liberalisation of privatisation.

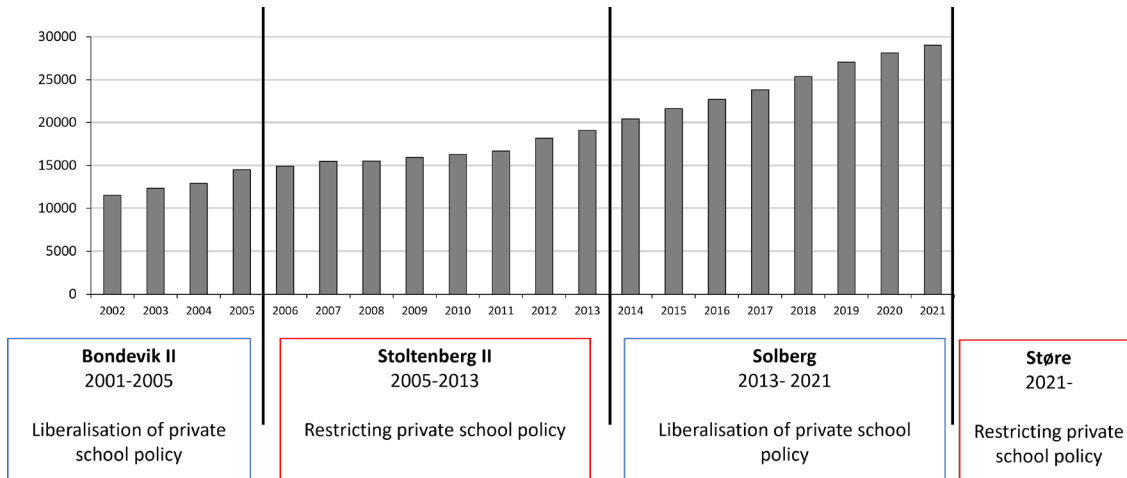


Figure 2. Policy changes and growth in private school enrolment.

While the Norwegian education policy is characterised by cross-party consensus, the topic of privatisation stands out as being contentious. The steady growth in private schooling is interesting; however, even more noteworthy is the typically bipartisan education policy landscape alternating between restricting and increasing private schools, as can be seen in Figure 2. On the one hand, this places Norway in line with global trends in education, such increased private school enrolment, and with reforms advancing school choice or the privatisation of education. On the other hand, Norway may represent a distinctive case for its political will to constantly revise the conditions regarding privatisation and control the private actors in the national education system.

In the next section, I present the key concepts used in this thesis to describe the relationships and processes between the state and school levels, which are central to the research questions of this study.

### 1.3 Key concepts and central perspectives

In this chapter, I explain the key concepts employed in this thesis: legitimacy, regulation and enactment. In addition, the importance of context and school actors’ autonomy as key perspectives for this study are presented.

### 1.3.1 Legitimacy

Policy liberalisation of state-funded private schools under a universal welfare system has been found to be politically contentious, and substantial attempts have been made to preserve the tradition of one school for all. These efforts have succeeded, in spite of the public school status having been diagnosed with a legitimacy crisis already in the 1990s (Aasen, 2003). Thus, the issue of legitimacy is highly relevant to understand policy related to state-funded private schools. *Legitimacy* is defined here using Suchman's broad and dynamic definition: the "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (1995, p. 574). Legitimacy is dependent on the acceptance of shared societal beliefs, but organisations can deviate from societal norms while maintaining legitimacy if the deviation goes unnoticed or draws no public disapproval (Suchman, 1995). However, this does not appear to be the case with education privatisation, as the contentious political debate draws widespread public attention, and Norway is the most sceptical of the Scandinavian countries towards market-type reforms (Wiborg, 2013). Apple (2003) claimed that legitimacy is a part of the practice of power of societally dominant groups to decide what counts as the correct, official knowledge. In this process, which involves conflict and compromise within the state as well as between the state and civil society, only one way of thinking and organising is declared legitimate (Apple, 2003). As a result, one could question whether some schools might be more legitimate than others to deliver the official knowledge.

### 1.3.2 Regulation

Similar to the legitimacy issue, the regulatory aspect of state-funded private schools has resulted from the determination to preserve one school for all. Regulation can be considered as happening when the "relevant system actors coordinate their action" (Altrichter, 2010, p. 148). Here, coordination focuses on the features and direction of the actors' actions. In this study, I focus mostly on regulation and coordination among actors via legislation and policy instruments at the comprehensive school level. In this coordination, the term "policy" indicates a complex and ongoing social practice of power



formed by various actors in various contexts (Levinson et al., 2009). Policy reforms are always related to different strategies and ideologies legitimatising decisions – put simply, considering “who gets what when and how” (Dahler-Larsen, 2003, p. 2). National governments’ decisions to regulate private schools respond to different policy goals, which are communicated and facilitated through policy instruments, such as legislations, documents produced by national educational agencies and representatives (e.g., national tests). These instruments are considered devices with which to exercise control over the private units. The choice of policy instrument is determined by the pre-existing political, social and economic paths of a country (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007; Verger et al., 2017). As such, these policies are considered instruments that are central to understanding the dynamics of coordination between the state and school levels, as they provide evidence of regulation, communication and translation across levels.

### 1.3.3 Enactment

The relation between policy formulation and policy enactment is not a linear process, as meanings can be interpreted differently in different policy contexts and educational settings (Ball et al., 2012). Thus, in this study, policy implementation is seen in a relational, situated way and in light of the complexity of institutional environments in which policies are perceived, interpreted and enacted (Ball et al., 2012). In this sense, policy enactment analysis appears as an alternative perspective to linear implementation analysis to highlight the parallel processes of policy interpretation and translation by a range of policy actors in a variety of circumstances and practices (Singh et al., 2014). In this thesis, I outline a translation process of policy through the processes of perception, interpretation and enactment. The processes of perception and interpretation occur in the initial reading and making sense or meaning of policy texts. In this context, perception and interpretation refer to the process through which school actors decode and respond to policy material (Ball et al., 2012). The process of enacting policy illuminates the operationalisation of policy in and through activities by actors at different school levels. This understanding indicates complexity between the policy arena and the educational space; subjective interests, interpretations and contestation can be found at each layer of the process.

### *1.3.3.1 Context*

In line with Ball's conceptualization, the diverse state-funded private schools and public contexts are an analytic device. In order to make sense of the processes of policy enactment, context can help with capturing the complex ways in which official policies are enacted within and across schools (Ball et al., 2012). Local school contexts are crucial for understanding the rationale behind diverse forms of enactment, which precedes policy. Braun et al. (2011) argued that policy is framed and influenced by the contextual constraints and affordances of a school; however, these aspects are often overlooked in government policymaking and policy research. By acknowledging the importance of context, the research is strengthened, as context can be considered part of policy analysis and greatly contribute to further the field of education policy (Singh et al., 2014).

### *1.3.3.2 School actors' autonomy*

Central to this study is understanding the phenomenon of state-funded private school governance through an actor perspective (Altrichter, 2010), including policy, teachers and school leaders. The governance perspective provides a broad framework for investigating coordination issues among actors (de Boer et al., 2007). While these actors represent various levels of policymaking, they are all involved in the envisioning and enacting of school ideas and practices (Schulte, 2018). Policy makers, school leaders and teachers represent various actors at different levels of educational policymaking. These levels can both limit and enable one another; nevertheless, they allow degrees of discretion for the actors involved in the envisioning and enacting of ideas and practices (Hopmann, 1999; Schulte, 2018; Wermke & Salokangas, 2021).

As stated in the introduction, advocates of state-funded private schools use the underlying claim that greater freedom from school governance will lead to better quality education. However, studies examining school actors' autonomy in different types of private schools have revealed how the autonomy of school actors is actually restricted by monitoring discourse and exam-focused culture (Montelius et al., 2022; Salokangas & Ainscow, 2017). The perspective of autonomy thus becomes relevant for this study,

as it indicates school actors' capacities to make important decisions regarding the content and conditions of schoolwork and the governance or constraints that control such decisions (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2007; Wermke et al., 2018). The focus here is on the forms of control and autonomy that characterise school actors' interpretative work in different school contexts.

#### **1.4 Delimiting the scope of the study: State-funded private schooling**

This study focuses on private schools that are publicly subsidised, meaning they have applied for state funding and must adhere to a set of laws and regulations to receive it (Free School Act [2003] and the Education School Act [1998]). There are fewer private schools that are not subsidized by the government and are thus beyond the scope of the current research since they are not as closely legislated as those that are certified under the Private School Act (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011). In fact, in Norway, the majority of state-funded private schools are based on either religious affiliation or widely accepted pedagogical approaches (Table 2). Moreover, there are international schools often offering International Baccalaureate (IB) programs which began to be subsidized in Norway at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Today, international schools, which are mostly state-funded, are expanding rapidly in Norway and represent an intriguing phenomenon to investigate (Parish, 2018). As presented in the political context (1.2), since 2015, several profile schools have been established. The special profile of most profile schools is sports, though there are also entrepreneurship and science schools. However, the current government is replacing the existing Private School Act and has removed the possibility of creating new private profile schools. Table 2 shows the number of comprehensive education schools (ages 6–16) for each type of state-funded private school that were operational in Norway in 2022.

| School type                             | Number of schools                                  |
|---|--|
| Religious schools (Christian)           | 83   |
| Rudolf Steiner schools                  | 34   |
| Maria Montessori schools                | 88   |
| IB world schools                        | 43   |
| Profile schools                         | 31 (20 sports, 5 entrepreneur, 2 science, 4 other) |
| <b>All state-funded private schools</b> | <b>279</b>   |

Table 2. Types of state-funded private schools in 2022.

Another well-known classification of the different forms of privatisation policies was proposed by Ball and Youdell (2008), who established two major categories emphasising differences between the privatisation “of” and “in” education. The privatisation *of* education, or exogenous privatisation, means that the public sector opens educational services to the private sector, allowing its participation in designing, managing and providing the services of the public sector. Privatisation *in* education, or endogenous privatisation, builds on importing ideas and practices from the private sector to the public (Ball & Youdell, 2008, p. 8). Following this categorisation, the scope of this thesis is limited to the privatisation of education.

State-funded private schools at the comprehensive level were chosen due to the fact that they are experiencing considerable growth in Norway and worldwide (Statistics Norway, 2019; Verger et al., 2016). Furthermore, state-funded private preschool and secondary education schools follow different legislative frameworks. For instance, companies that own private preschools are permitted to operate on a commercial basis, while at the upper secondary school level, they are allowed to offer different educational profiles.

## 1.5 Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of two parts: an extended abstract (part I) and the articles (part II). This introduction chapter (Chapter 1) presented the overarching research questions, the historical–political context and the key concepts of the thesis. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the research on the privatisation of education. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical foundation of this thesis, and Chapter 4 clarifies the methods and research design. Chapter 5 is a summary of the three articles, and in Chapter 6, the results from

the three articles are discussed to answer the research questions. In Chapter 7, a conclusion is drawn, the limitations of the study are discussed and some implications are presented.

## **2 Literature review**

In this chapter, I position this thesis within the field of educational policy research on the privatisation of education, with a particular focus on state-funded private schooling, by reviewing previous studies related to the main topics of the thesis. The research questions addressed by this study focus on private school governance and actors' autonomy; thus, the aim of the review is to examine how and to what extent scholarship discusses privatisation policies and their consequences for practice.

### **2.1 Search methodology**

The topic of privatisation is extensive and context dependent (Verger et al., 2017), so I initially narrowed the geographic focus, concentrating only on literature pertaining to the Nordic countries (Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland), as these countries are part of the Nordic model of education, of which public and comprehensive school systems are a central component (Prøitz & Aasen, 2017). In a subsequent stage, I broadened the overview to position the study and its contributions within the larger international landscape of private schooling. The period under consideration spanned 2000–2018 because this period presents interesting developments in private education policy, particularly for Norway.

The review considered only academic and international peer-reviewed journal articles and books that engage in the topic of interest. Since there is evidence of recent privatisation with significant expansion in primary and secondary education (Verger et al., 2016), the scope was limited to those school levels. During the start-up phase, I began by defining and locating keywords based on the PhD project's theme and research questions. Several search terms and keywords were entered in the database over the course of the study; a search string with search words was developed, and several trial searches were conducted in electronic databases with the help of a professional. The following keywords were entered into ORIA, ERIC, Google Scholar, Web of Science (ISI Web of Knowledge), and the ProQuest databases available in the university digital library: "private schools" OR "independent schools" OR "charter schools" OR "state-funded private schools" AND "policy regulation" OR "policy enactment" AND "middle

school” OR “secondary school” AND “performance” OR “grades” OR “educational assessment”. To ensure the quality of the body of research and to delimit the scope of the literature search, reports and articles published in conference papers were excluded, and only articles written in English or Norwegian were included.

To examine the development of the knowledge of private schooling, I looked up the references cited in the articles (backwards reference search). This technique (often also called “snowballing”) continued until a saturation point was reached and no more new studies were identified (Gough et al., 2012; Randolph, 2009). The categorisation of the body of literature found was inspired by Prøitz et al.’s (2017) use of categories. The categorisation of each article listed the author, the aims of the study, the methods and the findings, as these categories allowed for the material to be analysed in diverse ways (Prøitz, 2023). The categorisation led to the identification of various scholarly traditions and common patterns within the selected articles. In the next section I present the different research traditions around the privatisation of education, their main common traits and the related findings.

## **2.2 An overview**

The field education policy that addresses the phenomenon of privatisation is multifaceted and scattered. This is the result of different ontological and epistemological views on policy (Gutiérrez et al., 2022). The literature is divided into two main traditions. One large body of research focuses on the effects of privatisation policies. This group is not homogeneous, and it is possible to identify multiple subgroups of scholars and traditions. In Figure 3, I have attempted to map these subgroups and scholarly traditions. A prominent group, illustrated in the left circle of Figure 3, is interested in measuring the effects of privatisation policies on the quality and equity of educational systems (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Fryer, 2014; Hovdhaugen et al., 2014; Pianta & Ansari, 2018). Another group, which has a more critical tradition (the circle on the right of Figure 3), discusses how privatisation as a policy change towards quasi-market educational systems has impacted the dynamics of the provision and governance of education in both the Global North and Global South (Ball & Youdell, 2009; Robertson &

Dale, 2013; Volckmar, 2018) and affected professional practices (Dovemark et al., 2018; Lundahl et al., 2013; Montelius et al., 2022; Salokangas & Ainscow, 2017).

A second body of research, which draws on world system and path dependency theories, is more concerned with why and how privatisation policies have spread globally and translate differently at the local level (Koinzer et al., 2017; Schulte, 2017; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016; Verger et al., 2017). These traditions are not mutually exclusive and can, in fact, overlap. As illustrated in Figure 3, the position and main contribution of this thesis are within the circle investigating the enactment of policy. In the next chapter, I review the research tradition examining the effects of privatisation in relation to equity and students' performance.

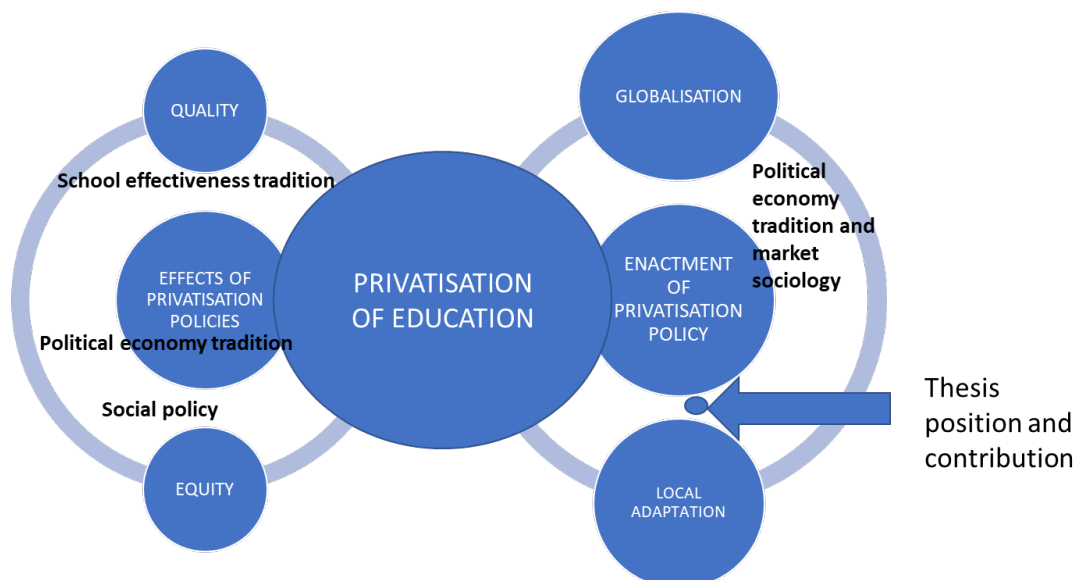


Figure 3. Positioning of the thesis in the field of educational policy.

## 2.3 Research on the effects of privatisation policies

### 2.3.1 Quality

This category includes the bulk of the research that focuses on the effects of privatisation policies on the quality of education. In particular, the link is often between competition and student achievement outcomes. Indeed, arguments for promoting



school choice policies or voucher schemes appear to be based on the premise of improving the overall educational quality. This scholarly tradition originates from both political economy and public policy, which have converged in different strands of school effectiveness research in which quantitative methodology is the dominant approach (e.g., measurement of standardised tests scores).

On the one hand, these studies provide robust and large-scale data; on the other hand, they can be criticised for failing to control for characteristics such as student peer groups, student body composition, parents' financial situation, other types of achievements, etc. Furthermore, defining effectiveness as high standardised test scores may imply a reductionist view of educational quality. Historically, most research on how school choice policies effectiveness has been conducted in the US. Since the 1980s, the works of Coleman et al. (1982) and Chubb and Moe (1990) have addressed private schools as an ideal reference for improving school development because of higher student results (Levin, 1987). Chubb and Moe (1990) contended that the organisational structure of traditional public schools was mostly to blame for the lack of quality educational options, particularly for pupils from low-income families. Their work, influenced by the economic ideas of supply and demand, has provided a foundation for the logic behind school choice policies, specifically through the promotion of autonomous state-subsidised private schools.

Coleman et al. (1982) reported that Catholic schools are more effective than public schools. However, the methodology used to formulate this conclusion has been criticised for not considering the role of "selectivity bias" (Murnane et al., 1985, p. 23). However, while the findings have been challenged for methodological bias, the study has long been used to support the claim that private schools, in particular Catholic schools, are better because their achievement was proven to be higher (Levin, 1987, p. 628).

More recent studies from the same economic tradition have provided mixed evidence that incentives for schools to improve their parent–consumer appeal have a positive impact (Andersen & Serritzlew, 2007; Belfield & Levin, 2002; Bifulco & Buerger, 2015;

Carruthers, 2012; Epple et al., 2015; Fryer, 2014). These studies, which have focused on the impacts of charter school programmes, vouchers and supply-side subsidies on student achievement, include multivariate regression models and lottery-based studies that focus either across several school districts or on a single large urban area. Most of the studies found insignificant, negative or modest impacts, which can be explained by their design and geographic focus, which tends to rely on evidence from urban charter schools.

Another study on the effects of market solutions on education was conducted in Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina; here, market-based educational reforms were advocated, overturning all schools to charter management organisation and improve education through competition (Holley-Walker, 2011). Recent studies have not found competition between schools to be a significant factor improving education. While principals have been found to perceive competition, the extent to which they compete with other school leaders varies significantly (Jabbar, 2015). Despite evidence of improvement in terms of achievement, it may not be correlated with increasing levels of competition. To understand the effects of market-oriented reforms, a study of quasi-markets and changes in the educational system may require a longer timeframe; a longitudinal study in the same context could be interesting.

As non-traditional providers have gained prominence in developing countries, the effects of their involvement have led to more research on whether they actually improve the quality of education (Azam et al., 2016; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Baum & Riley, 2018; Bravo et al., 2010). Depending on the context, subjects and type of school under consideration (high/low tuition fee, charter, voucher, etc.), results have varied widely and shown either no or only modest evidence of better outcomes in private schools.

When focusing on the effects of privatisation policies on school performance, research within the Nordic countries has indicated that private schools provide a small advantage with regard to academic outcomes. Especially interesting is a study from Sweden that employed a longitudinal approach and covered a longer period of time; it found that growth in the number of independent school students generated growth in the average

educational performance (Böhlmark & Lindahl, 2015). There is also evidence from Denmark that grammar and Catholic schools have moderately higher outcomes (Rangvid, 2008). Similarly, when looking at standardised tests in Norway, private schools have shown better results for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Bonesrønning, 2005).

These findings are consistent with many studies conducted in the US and the UK, which have shown a small positive relationship between competition and performance (Belfield & Levin, 2002; Gibbons et al., 2008). However, this positive relationship seems to depend on the measurements and the focus used to investigate student outcomes. For instance, Hovdhaugen et al. (2014) expanded their focus to both external and internal assessments and found higher variation in private schools compared to public schools. The authors suggested that variations between average final grades and exam grades (larger for private than public schools) could be related to students in private schools having opportunities to take tests more than once (Hovdhaugen et al., 2014). Other research on teachers' practices in diverse school contexts has shown that changes towards more child-centred learning enhanced student achievement in both municipal and independent schools in Sweden (Giota et al., 2019). However, the same study also found that independent schools with higher parental education had better student outcomes, showing how socioeconomic status impacting student achievement had increased slightly.

In summary, it is possible that in some contexts, more choice and more private schools have impacted educational performance, but these findings need to be understood in relation to how performance was measured. Shortcomings in the field include the tendency to draw mainly on quantitative data as well as a lack of statistical significance (Belfield & Levin, 2002).

### 2.3.2 Equity

The strand of research focusing on the effects of privatisation policies on school equity originates from an empirical social policy and political economy. Several scholars have paid attention to the policy changes aiming towards the expansion of private providers in the education sector and have questioned whether privatising programmes and

policies may disadvantage students and families with lower socio-economic backgrounds or aggravate their potential educational opportunities. One focus addresses issues related to school segregation and the challenges of educational systems regarding the dimensions of equality and equity. In this line of inquiry, the focus is on whether the removal of catchment areas and increased school choice have a direct correlation with higher school segregation. In European countries, these studies are quite recent; however, in the US, school choice and policy have been studied in correlation as an important driver of educational achievement and desegregation since the 1960s (Fuller et al., 1996).

Studies on the effects of privatisation on equity in diverse contexts have found how the introduction of privatisation mechanisms changes the nature of segregation along socio-economic lines (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006; Yoon et al., 2018). However, public–private school choice does not depend solely on the parents’ socio-economic background but also on their ideological preferences or access to “hot” knowledge from their lived context (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Findings from the Scandinavian context have shown that the development of independent schools, especially in strategic residential areas, fuels and reinforces parents’ search for the “right” school, aggravating divisions (e.g., ethnic) and school segregation (Bunar, 2010; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Rangvid, 2007). Studies from Spain and Holland that evaluated parents’ reasons for choosing private schools have also found that some of the reasons for these choices (e.g., religious orientation) create risk of social inequality and reinforce cultural particularism (Bernal, 2005; Denessen et al., 2005; Escardíbul & Villarroya, 2009). Self-segregation – being part of the same community with same social capital – could have positive implications for students’ achievement (Carnoy et al., 2007); however, this type of segregation can also create challenges for social cohesion.

Changes in who provides and chooses education seem to address concerns for education equality. For instance, in the Swedish context, a positive correlation between choice and increased segregation has been found between immigrants and native students in regions with the greatest opportunities for choice (Böhlmark et al., 2016). Similarly, a study in Australia that drew on school enrolment and participation data from

longitudinal surveys showed how loosely regulated funding schemes improved the quality of private schools and increased socio-economic differences in the access of education (Watson & Ryan, 2010). Even if systemic change was advocated, the funding model is still viewed as a major impediment to equality goals (Volckmar, 2018), highlighting the importance of country-specific regulatory frameworks for allocating public funding to private schools.

With regard to the Norwegian setting, studies at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century found that more private schools (i.e., more choice) did not increase social-class segregation. Lauglo (2009) did not find recruitment bias when studying whether a particular social class (a high SES) was overrepresented in state-funded private schools. Despite this study having been conducted at an early stage of the expansion of private schools and liberalisation of choice policy, it reflects the Norwegian context's highly regulated mechanisms for student admission in both private and public schools. In summary, most research on school segregation has used quantitative approaches; there are only a few qualitative ethnographic studies. The former risks omitting relevant contextual logics, such as governance and policy changes; the latter may be heavily dependent on contextual factors, making claims for systemic change difficult. Despite these limitations, the papers highlight the relationship between more parental choice and the risk of (self-)segregation, and thus challenges for social cohesion.

### 2.3.3 Does privatisation affect quality and equity of education?

The reviewed studies reveal evidence from various contexts that more choice may lead to ethnic and socio-economic segregation as well as self-segregation (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Denessen et al., 2005; Gutiérrez & Carrasco, 2021; Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006; Rangvid, 2007). However, the dimension of choice is quite complex, requiring consideration of multiple factors. For example, school policy and its relationship with equity and equality cannot be viewed solely through segregation indexes.

It seems that there is need to expand the studies on the equity and quality of privatisation, especially when considering that the contexts of these studies have been

limited to urban spaces and do not fairly represent the general privatisation landscape. Studies on the effects of privatisation policies on school performance are conflicting and indicate several methodological flaws, especially with regard to findings related to low education quality based on standardised test measurements. Other studies examining performance in private and public schools have not addressed the reasons for the gap between the two sectors; however, they have suggested investigating whether private schools have more autonomy in relation to assessment practices (Bonesrønning, 2005; Hovdhaugen et al., 2014).

## **2.4 Research on privatisation: Global policy and local enactment**

Scholars in the fields of political economy and market sociology have critically examined the growth of the privatisation of education from a global policy perspective (Robertson & Dale, 2013; Verger et al., 2016). These studies address the logic behind the global education industry, which aims at generating profit by increasing competition, creating new markets and reducing costs. Researchers have also found hidden forms of privatisation in educational policymaking (Ball & Youdell, 2009; Lubienski, 2016), showing the increasingly broad characteristics and reach of some of the edu-businesses involved in educational policy processes through, for example, consultation (Ball, 2009; Kretchmar et al., 2014; Pugh et al., 2006).

Studies focusing on the global ideas, logics and actors behind privatisation policies also highlight the importance of understanding how these are translated by local policy actors (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). Furthermore, drawing on Ball and Youdell's (2008) forms of privatisation policies (described in the introductory chapter), it is possible to distinguish scholars who focus on external privatisation from those who focus on internal privatisation. The former focuses on the liberalisation of the education sector, state-funding or tax incentives for private schools and edu-businesses (Schulte, 2017; West & Nikolai, 2017; Zancajo et al., 2022). The latter focuses on how the norms and logics of the private sector have generated a "standardisation helix", in which the role of the state – standard-setting and monitoring of education – is emphasised (Camphuijsen et al., 2020; Helgøy & Homme, 2016; Skedsmo et al., 2020; Steiner-Khamsi

& Draxler, 2018). This distinction, however, is not rigid, as many studies consider elements of both internal and external privatisation (Lundahl et al., 2013; Verger et al., 2017).

#### 2.4.1 Privatisation policy framework and national variations

In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in the regulatory configurations of privately subsidised education provision (West & Nikolai, 2017; Zancajo et al., 2022). West and Nikolai's (2017) comparative study of different regulatory frameworks highlighted that policymakers can pursue very different policy goals and objectives when adopting state-funded private schools. While some education systems have adopted state-funding private school policies to promote competition and other market dynamics, others use it to support freedom of instruction, pedagogical diversification or educational expansion. Based on regulatory models of OECD countries, Zancajo et al. (2022) studied these differences more in-depth, analysing how these countries enact and regulate public subsidies for private schools. Particularly interesting is their analysis of the model of equivalence, which examines subsidies to private schools based on the goal of freedom of instruction in exchange for tighter control over matters of curriculum, assessment, etc. The authors argue that more research is needed to understand how regulatory modes for private schooling are not always sustained and might change direction; once enacted, these instruments may have limited potential in efficiently addressing equity concerns (Zancajo et al., 2022).

In the Norwegian context, Braathen (2008) compared public and private school teachers' interpretations of regulatory frameworks, finding that private schools seemed to have more freedom. This freedom was the result of the schools' different frameworks, but also fundamental was how teachers perceived these frameworks. Some teachers felt like the framework was fixed, while others felt the framework was flexible and could be manipulated. Thus, it seems important to focus on both the regulatory instrument and the actors' interpretations in order to tackle the complex nature of enactment within varied institutional contexts.

Furthermore, other than Schulte (2017), few studies have investigated processes of counter-privatisation tendencies and reversing privatisation reforms. Schulte's (2017) study, based on five years of fieldwork, examined the reasons the liberalisation of the private school sector in China was considered temporary. For instance, although regulations were vague, a period of liberalisation of private school policy helped the state avoid dealing with the most marginalised students, who were absorbed by private schools (low fee/for-profit private schools). However, recent changes in the central governing bodies' educational discourse on equity as well as increasing high performance of some elite private schools could be reasons for enacting new legislation to end for-profit private schools.

#### **2.4.1.1** *The Nordic context*

Similar to the initial liberalisation of private schools in China, since the 1990s, Sweden has allowed private schools to profit from state funds (Lundahl et al., 2013; West & Nikolai, 2017). Sweden stands out among the Nordic countries and internationally for their market competition approach based on a voucher scheme and decentralisation (Zancajo et al., 2022). In comparative terms, it has been argued that the Nordic path towards education privatisation has been promoted through the welfare state crisis discourse as a source of choice and diversification for the middle-class (Verger et al., 2017). This is especially representative in Sweden, where by the mid-1980s, the legitimacy of the Swedish welfare state had weakened, resulting in cross-party agreement to reform the public sector, which allowed for market-oriented reforms to be implemented (Wiborg, 2013). Currently, with significant tax support and lax regulation, Swedish edu-business is distinctive in certain ways, particularly with regard to allowing owners to earn and extract profits, and it is becoming increasingly important for the Swedish business sector.

A surge of independent schools in the first decade of the 2000s marked a shift towards a more competitive and quasi-market educational system (Holm & Lundström, 2011; Lundahl, 2002). These schools are run by diverse private actors, religious organisations, non-profit organisations and commercial companies that seek licensing from the



National Schools Inspectorate. However, the quality of work of market-exposed schools does not necessarily improve through competition (Hennerdal et al., 2020). On the contrary, teachers and school leaders emphasise that new assignments, such as marketing the school, are overwhelming (Arreman & Holm, 2011; Lundahl et al., 2013).

While all the Nordic countries have gone through reforms aimed at the modernisation and diversification of their public services, there are significant differences and similarities among these countries (Dovemark et al., 2018; Sivesind & Saglie, 2017). In Denmark, the voucher system represents a combination of generous, unrestricted subsidies and a considerable level of autonomy with regard to schedule and teaching methods (Rangvid, 2008). This differs from the Swedish context, where funding binds private schools to follow the national curriculum (West, 2017). Denmark has a long tradition of private schools of different pedagogical or belief orientations, and independent schools can be established without special approval if they meet the regulations and teaching standards required of municipal schools. However, municipalities that face greater competition from private schools have been found to face greater pupil expenditure to meet parents' needs and maintain attractiveness (Andersen & Serritzlew, 2007).

Similar to the Danish context, Norwegian state-funded schools are not allowed to be for-profit. The social democratic egalitarian public sector and high cross-party agreement on state involvement in education are important aspects for understanding scepticism towards market-led reforms (Wiborg, 2013). At the same time, the extent of privatisation that can be permitted to encourage competition among schools is a topic on which the political parties in Norway disagree (Møller & Skedsmo, 2013; Telhaug & Mediås, 2003). Several scholars have shown that reforms inspired by management techniques such as decentralisation, managing by objectives, accountability and competition have been enacted over the last 30 years (Aasen, 2012; Møller & Skedsmo, 2013). In particular, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked the use of new instruments for governing education, describing teachers and teaching and especially regaining control and balancing the negative effects of marketisation on social inclusion and equality (Helgøy & Homme, 2016; Mølstad & Prøitz, 2018; Prøitz, 2015).

As new forms of regulatory governance have been proven to transform the role of state accountability policies at the various system levels (national, municipal and school; e.g., Marjoelien, 2020; Prøitz et al., 2017a; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Skedsmo, 2009), their importance in transforming the relationship between public and private schools has received less attention. In addition, within the context of Norway, which is characterised by high political disagreement about the degrees of privatisation, the choice of instruments for regulating private actors' behaviours is a significant feature of public administration action.

#### 2.4.2 Arguments for the study

Based on the literature, it is clear that aspects of the phenomenon of privatisation are multiple, interrelated and dependent on the broader educational policy context (cf. Belfield & Levin, 2002; Verger et al., 2017). There emerges a general understanding that the markets' involvement in and speculation regarding education can be enhanced or obstructed depending on political constellations. In other words, the question of which "business actors" are allowed to be present in education is heavily dependent on the legal framework (Koinzer et al., 2017). Thus, more research is needed to understand the development of the legal framework for private schooling, as the expansion of private subsidised education seems to contradict with the idea of the common school for all and its equity goals.

When reviewing international and Nordic literature, it appears that countries worldwide have adopted diverse policy instruments to regulate private schooling. This stresses the importance of focusing on a country case in order to better understand logics of implementation as well. In fact, while various studies have shown how state-funded private schools operate and affect teachers' and school leaders' working conditions (Lundahl et al., 2013; Montelius et al., 2022), little is known about how these schools may differ from public schools in terms of implementing diverse educational practices. Thus, how local actors interpret and enact educational policy becomes an important topic, especially in the context of new methods of governing education based on decentralisation and outcomes, such as in Norway. In addition, considering that the

development of several state-funded private schools occurred as a result of local public school closures in Norway (Lauglo, 2009), the importance of the local school context forms an argument for this study.

### 3 Theoretical perspectives

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the theoretical foundation of this thesis and explain how the framework has been used to study policy across levels and contexts. Scholars in policy studies have underscored the benefits of adopting an eclectic theoretical approach based on the assumption that the complexity and scope of policy analysis is in need of a toolbox of diverse concepts and frameworks (Ball, 1993; Ozga, 1999). This study draws on a combination of theories to explore the policy and practices related to state-funded private schools. In the Table 3, I clarify the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the legitimation and regulation of state-funded private schools in Norway and how policies are perceived, interpreted and enacted at different operational levels.

| <b>THEORY/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</b> | <b>OBJECT OF THE STUDY</b>                                    | <b>EXAMPLES</b>   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>GOVERNANCE</b>                  | STATE-CENTRED REGULATION AND LEGITIMATION                     | COORDINATION VIA PRIVATE SCHOOL POLICY FRAMEWORK                  |
| <b>ENACTMENT</b>                   | SCHOOL LEADERS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS | SCHOOL LEADERS' AND TEACHERS' INTERPRETATIONS OF AUTONOMY         |
| <b>PUBLIC POLICY INSTRUMENT</b>    | SCHOOL LEADERS' AND TEACHERS' REGULATION                      | COORDINATION VIA OUTCOME-BASED CURRICULUM, NATIONAL TESTS AND CPD |

*Table 3. The eclectic approach.*

In the following, I explain the study's governance framework and how I adopted the enactment perspective to examine school actors' perceptions and interpretations of policy requirements. Finally, I unpack the policy instrument approach.

#### 3.1 Governance framework

To explore the status and development of private education policy and practice in the last decades in Norway, I draw on the governance perspective. In terms of educational

governance, privatisation policies and public subsidies for private schools show changes in the state's traditionally assumed role related to funding and provision, which allows the state to regulate both publicly and privately owned schools through the allocation of resources and accountability instruments (Ball & Youdell, 2009; Zancajo et al., 2022).

The governance perspective adopted in this study allowed for the analyses of the coordination of actors and what is happening when social processes are governed, regulated or steered (Altrichter, 2010). The study understands the regulation of the school system as the coordination of action between various school actors in complex multilevel systems (Altrichter & Salzgeber, 2000). This definition stresses the idea of increasingly complex arrangements for arriving at authoritative decisions in dense networks of public and private and individual and collective actors (Piattoni, 2010). New theories of governance place less emphasis on the state and more on, for instance, markets, assuming a change in the nature of government (Bevir, 2011). This is because governance arrangements are increasingly characterised by market mechanisms and hybrid public–private actors.

Public and private arrangements have gradually become blurred, leaving an area in which it is difficult to distinguish the actors involved, governance and accountabilities (Robertson et al., 2012). On the one hand, these arrangements have been regarded as challenging the steering capacity and legitimacy of the state, as they blur the boundaries between the private and public sectors (Ball, 2009). On the other hand, some authors have claimed that privatisation could actually mean more government regulation and that changes in the process of governing education, such as privatisation, occur through newer hybrid forms of governance (Hudson, 2016; Jordan et al., 2005).

This thesis, while looking at logics of coordination, does not relinquish its emphasis on the state as a central actor. Here, government and governance are seen as two theoretical continua that interact with each other through complementing, merging, competing and conflicting or replacing one another. Jordan et al. (2005) argued that, far from eclipsing government, governance often complements, and on some occasions even competes with it.

Among other dilemmas that the spread of privatisation policies has brought is the question of legitimacy. While policy initiatives such as privatisation can have international reach, they must be accepted and align with national identity goals (Lundahl et al., 2013). A general definition of *legitimacy* is the “generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). When applying this definition to the work of policy, legitimation translates to the degree to which a decision made by bodies with legal authority is perceived as desirable, proper and appropriate within the value system and norms of its context. In turn, this means that to explore privatisation at the national policy level is necessary to pay attention to local and national values and culture and power relations, which are a prerogative for policy legitimisation. In addition, attention must be placed on the governing bodies’ active roles in adopting policy agenda, especially when it is contested, for instance, by referencing lessons learned from other educational systems (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). In the case of Norway, the question is how the contested privatisation policies can be legitimised with consideration for the cultural and historical values that public education – the *enhetsskole* – represents.

Until now, I have argued for using a perspective of governance that assumes that a multitude of actors from a multi-level system are involved in the formation and legitimation of education policy based on contextual values and histories. Countries’ decisions to adopt privatisation policies respond to different policy goals and depend on how these are harmonized with their cultural and historical setting. Thus, to study state-funded private schools across policy and practice, I have to consider both legitimacy and regulation.

At the same time, governing bodies need to secure alignment between policies and the individual actors responsible for the operationalisation thereof. To examine the coordination of private school actors more closely, I trace issues of legitimacy associated with different policy instruments (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). In general, policy instruments are active and value laden, as they contain scripts for coordinating society and can be used to maintain and expand a specific model of governing (Lascoumes & Le

Galès, 2007; Simons & Voß, 2018). The integration of these approaches is necessary due to the study's aim of examining the coordination of action in a multi-level system. Integrating policy legitimisation and policy instruments is possible because they share a similar policy foundation and tools for analysing governance. In the following section, I present the choice of policy instruments used in this study.

### **3.2 Public policy instruments**

Because private schooling is a recent and expanding phenomenon within a transforming social democratic welfare state, the choice of policy instruments used to govern it is particularly important. By understanding the choice of policy instruments, it is possible to define and map the characteristics of policymaking and the mechanisms of institutionalisation (Le Galès, 2011). In line with the conceptualisation of policy legitimisation, this study conceives policy instruments as carriers of value that organise the relationship between the governing and the governed (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). These instruments carry a certain understanding of what school actors are, as well as of their autonomy and their accountability.

Studying public policy as an instrument allows one to understand the set of techniques and tools used to materialise and operationalise government action. The concept of instruments draws attention to the process that determines “who gets what, when and how” (Dahler-Larsen, 2003, p. 2). Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007) differentiated between four policy instruments: legislative, economic, information-based and best practices. Each policy instrument represents a way of operationalising government action and directing social behaviour, either through legitimate power (legislative) or financial demands (economic) or by communicating the decisions and responsibilities of the actors (information-based) and adjustments within civil society (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007).

As a result, social and political actors' capacity for action varies depending on the instruments used. In terms of school governance, the coordination of action between various social actors has been shown to be provided by the instruments that

communicate the decisions and responsibility of the actors (Camphuijsen et al., 2020; Hopmann, 2003; Mølsted & Hansén, 2013). Altrichter (2010) emphasised Schimank's (2007) dimensions to analyse change in higher education governance. These dimensions include state regulation, external guidance by the state or other stakeholders, self-governance and competition. It is possible to identify similar dimensions within the different policy instruments, especially those of state regulation and external guidance by the state. In this study, self-governance is understood as the discretion and decision-making by teachers and school leaders and is analysed through the lens of autonomy (Wermke et al., 2018).

For these reasons, this study focuses on the actor's perceptions, interpretations and enactments of public policy instruments that convey policy goals, ideals and standards, such as in the curriculum, and the standardisation of policy initiatives, such as formative assessments, national tests and CPD.

### 3.2.1 Enactment of policy instruments

Scholars have studied policy and its enactment from different approaches and disciplines, underscoring the importance of its contextual, social and cultural aspects. As presented in the introduction, this study understands enactment in light of Ball et al.'s conceptualisation (2012). This means that I do not employ an evaluative approach but rather a sociocultural approach to policy that reframes the static conceptualisation of policy text by looking at the policy process as a complex set of interdependent envisioned and enacted sociocultural practices (Levinson et al., 2009; Schulte, 2018). In this approach, the aim is to understand and document how schools respond to diverse and contradictory policy requirements as well as their translation thereof in light of their situated contexts, which often results in some degree of heterogeneity (Ball et al., 2012). Instead of implementation, the social practice approach to policy is characterised by processes of meaning-making produced at different levels with different actors. Figure 4 illustrates the levels of policy implementation developed by Schulte (2018).



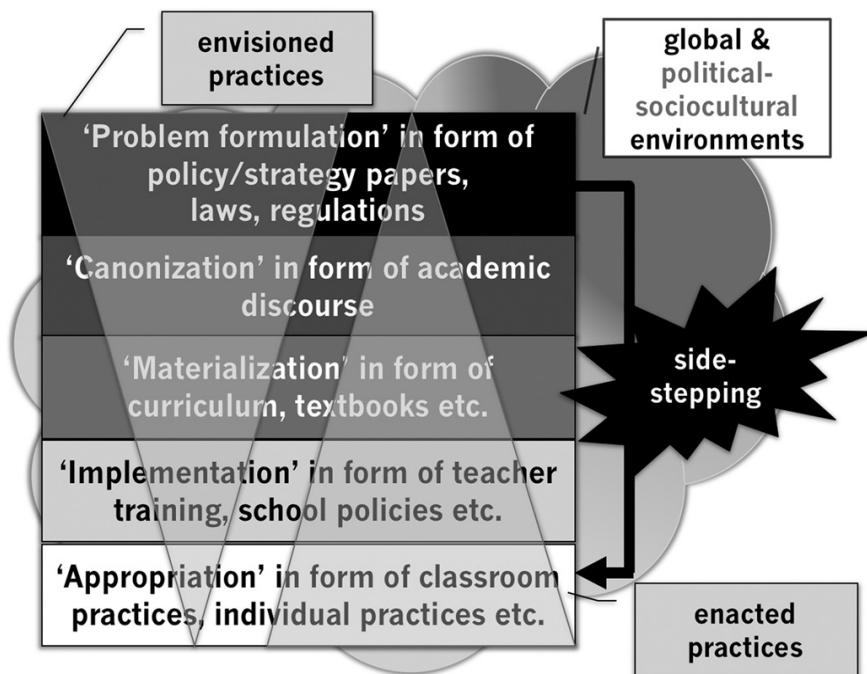


Figure 4. Schulte's levels of policy implementation (2018).

While the vision-making of educational goals has a broader orientation at the top (left triangle), teachers are also involved in the development of the local school vision. Moreover, pedagogical practices are enacted to a larger extent at the bottom (right triangle), but policymakers also indirectly influence the enacted practices. The display of such levels, however, does not imply that policies are processed consecutively from one level to the next, particularly in educational systems with limited autonomy (Schulte, 2018).

Furthermore, the meaning-making process in this approach is represented in “the ways that creative agents interpret and take in elements of policy, thereby incorporating these discursive resources into their own schemes of interest, motivation, and action” (Levinson, 2009, p. 779). Moreover, Ball (2012) asserted that policy enactment must be understood with consideration for the complexity of institutional enactment environments. In other words, institutional factors mediate how policies are perceived, interpreted and enacted. An important aspect of this understanding of enactment is that abstract and ideological policy texts are translated into contextualised practices. However, while policies rarely impose or determine practices, they can restrict the range

of creative action (Ball et al., 2012). In the following section, I describe the policy instruments that are the focus of this thesis in more detail.

### 3.2.2 The curriculum instrument

The national policy goals and ideals conveyed in curriculum documents and additional regulations can be viewed as either a set of policy instruments for educational governance or a pedagogical platform for professional practice (Aasen et al., 2015). In the context of Norway, an outcome-based curriculum was introduced through the Knowledge Promotion Reform in 2006. In this, learning outcomes were defined by central authorities and experts. The reform increased the focus on basic skills (numeracy, literacy, technology, etc.), clearer standards (objectives, competences, etc.; Ministry of Education and Research, 2006; OECD, 2013), inspection and decentralisation. Decentralisation was a particularly important aspect of this reform, as it marked a system change through the establishment of new ways of governing and managing education (Aasen, 2012, p. 78). The reform's intention was to give more power to local authorities and develop a local culture of education wherein schools were viewed as learning platforms. However, this development did not succeed fully, as teachers and school leaders felt less involved in decision-making but more responsible for school results (Karseth et al., 2013).

Conceptually, I refer to this in Article II, as it reflects on the centrality of curriculum as a key instrument in educational policy and practice. This approach is relevant for this study, as it views curriculum as a device that supports and ensures alignment between the policies of governing bodies and the individual actors responsible for policy implementation (Deng, 2010; Hopmann, 1999). Curriculum work and planning can be divided into three parts. The first, which is handled at the institutional and political levels, establishes the framework: a normative and ideological basis of what schooling should be. The second is the programmatic part, which writes and develops curriculum documents and guidelines based on institutional expectations. Finally, the practical part takes place in the classroom, where teachers interpret curriculum materials and guidelines to deliver relevant learning experiences (Deng, 2020; Hopmann, 1999).

As a result, curriculum work is divided into levels that both constrain and enable each other, defining what is and is not possible (Hopmann, 1999). While the three levels are distinct, they are also confluent spaces where macro and micro actors negotiate different logics of action (Schulte, 2018). This can involve different forms of curriculum control. According to Hopmann (2003), there are different forms of curriculum that control teachers' work according to their different approaches to education, such as process- versus outcome-based education and tradition of specific curriculum. The Anglo-American model, for instance, allows for more local autonomy to adapt and choose content and teaching methods (product centred). At the same time, tighter control systems through testing and accountability ensure that aims and curriculum are followed. The process control model, which is associated with the Didactic tradition, has less control over the educational process and almost no external control over educational outcomes.

The literature allows one to understand curriculum as an instrument, emphasising the dimension of external guidance from the state, which coordinates actors' behaviours through goal setting and evaluation (Altrichter, 2010). Furthermore, other instruments can be adopted to exert control over educational outcomes; these are conceptualised as moving from input-regulations of government control towards so-called governance by numbers (Ozga et al., 2011).

### 3.2.3 National tests, assessment for learning and CPD instruments

Concerns about control over the quality of the Norwegian educational system have led policymakers to adopt instruments for assessing the quality of the educational system. In 2004, a national quality system was established, and this has been increasingly used in the last decades to monitor the delivery of standardised curricula and to hold schools, principals and teachers more accountable (Skedsmo et al., 2020). The increase of schools' and local authorities' accountability is related to the fact that learning outcome-oriented policies imply that education is managed by goals and outcomes, and these results need to be measured. The adoption of an outcome-based curriculum includes various measures that control teachers' work (Mausethagen, 2013; Prøitz & Nordin,

2019) and alter assessment trends (Tveit, 2014), for example, teachers' CPD (Kirsten, 2020; Skedsmo et al., 2020).

CPD is a nationally steered strategic policy tool funded by the central state for enhancing teachers' and school leaders' competences in private and public schools. Such initiatives can be represented by rector schooling, competence development initiatives in the programme subjects, etc. (Kirsten, 2020; Møller, 2016). CPD has become a higher priority among policymakers, and professional development prescriptions have become more detailed as a result of decentralisation reforms that have stripped states of many of the policy options that were previously available (Kirsten, 2020). A growing number of reforms are aiming at improving teacher education and teacher quality and ensuring the national standardisation of education (Smepllass & Leiulfstrud, 2022). These reforms have redefined teachers' qualifications, which include a specific number of study points.

In parallel, quality assessment systems as instruments of governance have become a political phenomenon with strong elements of accountability that reflect the tensions and negotiations between political and school actors (Benveniste, 2002; Ozga, 2019; Pettersson et al., 2019). Increased attention on assessment has led to the introduction of a culture of common standards and testing to control and support learning. The use of these measurements and evaluations for accountability purposes can be seen as a way of governing education through results and as a way of managing education and professional development (Prøitz et al., 2017).

Assessment and CPD instruments can be associated with the dimension of external state guidance, as they coordinate actors' behaviours through goal setting and evaluation (Altrichter, 2010). Conceptually, I refer to these quality assurance instruments in Article III. This chapter has presented the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the governance and policy instrument employed in this study to explore state-funded private school policy across levels and actors. In the next chapter, I describe the methodology adopted in this thesis.



## 4 Research design and methods

In this section, the methodological assumptions and research design used in this thesis are presented. The aim is to provide methodological information that supplements the articles. This thesis is part of and builds on the research project *Tracing Learning Outcomes across Policy and Practice*<sup>3</sup> (LOaPP; Prøitz, 2016), to which I contributed by transcribing interviews and collecting document materials from public schools contexts and interview and document materials from private school contexts. In this chapter, I describe the research design of this study and how the collection and analysis of the empirical data were realised in connection and across the three sub-studies. Finally, I discuss some ethical considerations.

This thesis drew on different materials and approaches; however, a common thread was the focus on policy envisioning and actors' policy perceptions, interpretations enactment. An interpretivist approach was used to make sense of the social phenomenon of the governing of private schooling through different actors' interpretations. Multiple realities and actors are involved in constructing social realities in different ways (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). In this study, I was especially interested in identifying how different discourses and actors, (i.e., policy documents, school leaders and teachers) negotiate, perceive and interpret policy instruments that legitimate and regulate private schooling, as well as in capturing differences and similarities compared to the public school policy enactment process. Qualitative approaches aim for analytical generalisations by providing theoretical interpretations and in-depth explanations that involve reasoned judgment about the extent to which the results can be used as a guide for predicting what might happen in similar contexts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

In the following section, I present the research design in detail.

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<sup>3</sup> The project was funded by the Norwegian Research Council, project #254978.

## 4.1 Multilevel study design

In light of the governance and policy enactment frameworks (Altrichter, 2010; Ball et al., 2012), state-funded private schools, as part of a complex school system, can be considered a multilevel phenomenon. Conducting a multilevel study entails considering that each level has its own group of actors with specific rules of action that may vary across levels (Altrichter, 2010). For example, it entails acknowledging that the values and regulations of different policy instruments decided by legislators (for instance, regarding curriculum) can vary from the values and principles that govern school actors' practices. As a result, the research design needed to focus on explaining the diverse levels, investigating the mechanisms between levels and comprehending the multilevel problem (Headley & Plano Clark, 2020). As illustrated in Table 4, I focused on the state level and examined state-funded private school policies and politics (Article I) that are relevant to the study of education at the system and practice levels (Aasen et al., 2014). At the school level, through the study of teachers' and school leaders' perceptions, the interpretation and enactment of state governance via policy instruments in two state-funded private schools and three public schools (Articles II and III) were explored. Table 4 provides an overview of the three articles of this dissertation.

| Overarching research:<br>How do state policies legitimise and regulate state-funded private school policy and teachers' and school leaders' autonomy?     |  |  |             |
|---|--|--|-------------|
| Sub-studies at the different levels   | Qualitative method and main data   |  | Articles    |
| STATE LEVEL   |  |  |             |
| <i>How did Norwegian national policy legitimise the regulation of state-funded private schools between 2002–2018?</i>                                     | Document analysis, comparison of successive governments  | 26 policy documents from 2001–2015   | Article I   |
| SCHOOL LEVEL  |  |  |             |
| <i>How are state policy and governance perceived, interpreted and enacted at different levels in public and private lower-secondary schools?</i>          | Case studies, semi-structured interviews, comparison of teachers' and school leaders' perceptions, interpretations and enactment of policy | 12 audio-recorded interviews with teachers in two state-funded schools and one public school; school fieldnotes                              | Article II  |
| <i>How do contextual factors affect the ways in which public and private lower-secondary schools perceive, interpret and enact policies?</i>              |  | 8 audio-recorded interviews with school leaders in two state-funded schools and three public schools; informal meetings with school leaders. | Article III |
| <i>How can differences between public and private schools' autonomy in the enactment of similar policy requirements be explained and studied further?</i> |  |  |             |

Table 4. Components of the chosen research design.

As can be derived from Table 4, this thesis focused on both state- and school-level action coordination. While the study explored policy legitimisation and the regulation of state-funded private schools at the state level, the micro level explored how different actors negotiated or perceived control in their context. At the state level, I compared successive governments' (2002–2018) logics of negotiation of legislative changes for state-funded private schools through a document analysis of policy documents. At the school level, I compared teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of the enactment of instruments of governance in state-funded private and public schools through semi-structured interviews. The study also relied on supplementary sources, such as school documents, notes from three meetings with school leaders and field notes collected at



the micro-level, which were central to understanding the schools' institutional environments.

#### 4.1.1 Comparative approach

I chose to apply a comparative approach for each state and school level of the study. For educational policy, the comparative context can promote insights into the processes of policy formation and enactment (Phillips, 2000). My studies, rather than undertaking a cross-country comparison, focused on units of policymaking within a country. Despite focusing on the nation–state level, education policy is understood as a complex phenomenon that is also a result of transnational influence and interdependence (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011). Thus, the international dimension is underscored as a central source of legitimacy driving specific types of policy agenda. The adoption of a comparative approach within states was motivated by previous studies on private school policy that have highlighted how the global trend of privatisation plays out differently according to the policy goals and objectives of central governing bodies (Koinzer et al., 2017; Verger et al., 2017; West, 2017). At the state level, I compared successive governments' different ways of legitimising policy changes to liberalise or reverse liberalisation of state-funded private schools. The comparative approach is considered central for the description and classification of a social phenomenon (Landman et al., 2003). Therefore, at the school level, I compared different types of professional autonomy resultant of school actors' perceptions, interpretations and enactments of steering documents.

#### 4.1.2 Situating the contribution of the thesis

This thesis is part of the larger LOaPP research project, which gave me access to data from three public schools in Norway. Being a part of LOaPP allowed me to be involved in the research processes of the larger project and provided access to the data from the public schools, which was important for Articles II and III. The data collected in state-funded private schools, including fieldnotes, informal meetings, documents and semi-structured interviews with both teachers and school leaders, constituted my contribution to the larger project.

While I participated in the data collection process of the LOaPP project, the interviews with the public school actors were conducted by three members of the research team. I transcribed and analysed these interviews, which provided me with first-hand knowledge and in-depth understanding of the material from the public schools. In the next section, I provide insights into the sampling procedures described in the three sub-studies to increase the transparency of the research.

## **4.2 Sampling**

The data collection process relied on data and materials from the state and school levels. The policy documents and case study participants were selected because they could provide in-depth information on the phenomenon of state-funded private schooling in Norway; this strategy can be classified as information-oriented and purposeful sampling (Cohen et al., 2011). In the following sections, I describe the data collection, distinguishing between the state-level and school-level data collection.

### **4.2.1 The state level**

At the state level, data collection was informed by the legitimization perspective (Waldow, 2012) and previous literature on state-funded private schools emphasising the varied goals and objectives of the regulatory frameworks (West & Nikolai, 2017). Thus, the data collection aimed at reviewing policy texts that regulate state-funded private schools in the Norwegian context. At this level, I studied mechanisms of legitimacy through the formulation of policy and political debates, which can be seen in policy texts and its instruments (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). Thus, documents from the digital archives and government databases that functioned as a regulatory frameworks for private schooling were sampled.

The choice of using document analysis for this study had several motives. First, documents are contextually embedded, and in Norway, policy documents are easily available online on the official government website. Furthermore, cross-temporal accessibility of records allows one to study and learn about change and continuity over time (Bowen, 2009; Cohen et al., 2011). I collected policy documents from 2002–2018,

as this period was marked by repeated attempts to change the regulatory framework for state-funded schools.

Document analysis was used to gain insight into the underlying meanings, values and accounts developed in policy documents and parliament debates that legitimised policy changes regulating the establishment of subsidised private schools (Fitzgerald, 2012). It is important to note that the documents presented are different in nature: the national budget (*Statsbudsjettet*, also called Parliamentary Report no. 1), propositions to parliament (*Proposisjonar til Stortinget*), reports to parliament (*meldingar til Stortinget*), official Norwegian reports (*Noregs offentlege utgreiingar*), circulars, guidelines, etc. These documents have different purposes and are produced by different political agencies at different times. Table 5 provides an overview of the document corpus of the study, distinguishing between policy and politics.

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Policy             | 16 state budgets from 2002/2003–2017/2018<br><br>6 propositions<br><br>1 report to the Parliament  |
| Politics in action | 2002–2003 parliamentary processing of the government’s policy proposal the “Independent School Act” (Ot.prp. nr. 33)<br><br>2006–2007 parliamentary processing of the government’s policy proposal on “changes to the Independent School Act” (Ot.prp. nr. 37)<br><br>2014–2015 parliamentary processing of the government’s policy proposal on “changes to the Private School Act” (Prop. 84 L) |

Table 5. Overview of the policy and politics documents included in the study.

These dimensions are important, as they provide a better understanding of the envisioning process. In fact, while there are policy texts that provide information about the government’s decisions to produce expected outcomes (policy), there are also policy texts presenting the typical actions of the political system, such as negotiation, power bases, alliance formation, decision making, etc. (politics; Dahler-Larsen, 2003, p. 2). Examining the two dimensions together provided more in-depth knowledge about the policy formation process, which should be understood as more than the result of a policy

text, as it also includes political debates and political parties' views on state-funded private schools.

The choice of a document relates to its function. State budgets are recurring documents that have roughly the same format every year, which makes them comparable across time (Prøitz, 2015). These documents reflect the economic goals, priorities and intentions for the coming year by establishing a budget for each ministry; thus, they also indicate how these priorities are legitimised. Moreover, propositions to parliament are also indicative of discourse, as they present the proposed resolutions and legislations that need to be discussed and approved. Reports to parliament present issues that are often concerned with a particular topic of development or potential new legislation.

The results of political debates are reflected in the parliamentary processing of governmental policy proposals (Stortinget, 2020). The majority of the documents of this study's dataset were public records produced by national policy actors. The standing committee negotiation documents represent the only exception; these are a stenographic report from the *Storting*. Nevertheless, they are official documents and thus primary sources, as the negotiations are transcribed without interpretation or analysis. The search resulted in the collection of 26 policy documents produced between 2002/2003–2017/2018.

After searching and selecting the documents, a second phase of interpretation and synthesizing through content analysis followed (Bowen, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2012).

#### 4.2.2 The school level

At the school level, data collection was informed by the policy enactment perspective (Ball et al., 2012), which understands policy perception, interpretation and enactment in a relational and situated way and in light of the complexity of institutional environments. Key actors included teachers and school leaders whose responses to policy were mediated by institutional factors.

According to Flick (2009), individuals are chosen as participants in a qualitative study not because they represent the general population but because of their applicability and

relevance to the research topic. Although, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to all state-funded private schools, teachers or school leaders, the study offers analytical generalisations by providing detailed descriptions of the contexts and theoretical interpretations. Furthermore, the study offers a thoughtful review of the extent to which its findings may be utilized as a guide for foreseeing what might happen in comparable contexts (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014).

The selection of state-funded private schools and public schools and their municipalities followed the logic of purposeful sampling and, to a certain extent, maximal variation, with the aim of higher degrees of heterogeneity within multi-sites and the establishment of parameters for comparability (Schofield, 2009). The selected municipalities represent both urban and non-urban settings with challenges and characteristics familiar to the Norwegian landscape that affect student population, school size and municipal governing style (Prøitz et al., 2019). The selected public schools varied in terms of ethnicity (from heterogenous to homogenous student groups), student and teacher numbers (from high to low) and assessment practices. The schools were chosen by the LOaPP research project for having similar score averages on national tests and examinations. Table 6 provides an overview of the characteristics of the two state-funded private schools and the three public schools included in this study. To increase comparison along certain potentially important dimensions, the two state-funded private schools were selected because their locations and school levels were similar to those of the public schools that participated in the LOaPP study.

|                                | <b>International Baccalaureate (IB)</b>               | <b>Waldorf Steiner school</b>                         | <b>Public School N</b> | <b>Public School E</b>                 | <b>Public School W</b> |
|--------------------------------|---|---|------------------------|--|------------------------|
| <b>Area</b>                    | Urban/rural   | Rural   | Urban                  | Rural                                  | Urban/rural            |
| <b>State funding</b>           | 85%   | 85%   | 100%                   | 100%                                   | 100%                   |
| <b>Schools teaching levels</b> | Pre-school, Primary, lower secondary, upper secondary | Pre-school, Primary, lower secondary, upper secondary | lower secondary        | Primary school, lower secondary school | lower secondary        |

Table 6. The schools.

For instance, the international school is located in the same region as Public School W, and the Waldorf Steiner school is in the same municipality as Public School E. This indicates similar governance and, to some extent, gives an idea of the population socio-economic background. Moreover, the state-funded private schools were purposefully similar to each other based on the criteria of similar funding and legislative regulation (e.g., the Private School Act and the Education Act). At the same time, they were chosen for their different pedagogical orientations, which provided variation in terms of teachers' values and practices.

Following ethical approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, I started recruiting state-funded private schools through emails and phone calls to school leaders and school management. In total, I contacted 10 state-funded private schools across the three municipalities in which the public schools are located. I was able to converse with seven school leaders, but three did not respond either by e-mail or telephone. Four of the seven schools I spoke with were in favour of the research but for various reasons chose to not take part in the study. One of the reasons mentioned was that the schools were already involved in numerous demanding school projects. Another reason was that a newly founded, state-funded private school was not yet prepared to host researchers. Access issues could have been caused by resource constraints, but they could also have been caused by the way my project investigated national education policies. Finally, two of the seven schools agreed to participate: a Waldorf school and an International Baccalaureate (IB) school. However, because gaining access to private schools proved more difficult than anticipated, I decided to use the existing sample of state-funded private schools. Thus, for the enactment process, I drew on the collection tools developed in the LOaPP project for the semi-structured interviews (Prøitz et al., 2016). I adapted the interviews for the purpose of my study and to the different state-funded private schools' contexts.

#### *4.2.2.1 The IB school*

As presented in the introduction, IB schools are intriguing to investigate because they have experienced the greatest growth among state-funded private schools. The IB's

ideas of schooling are based on humanitarian values and global sustainable development (Hill, 2007). The aim of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) is representative of their mission and global philosophy “to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect” (IBO, 2014a, p. 12). The IBO originally designed a curriculum for mobile families and to facilitate transnational mobility. However, recent worldwide expansion of the IBO shows its intention to join national education markets (Resnik, 2012) with a curriculum that goes beyond the nation and schools that are governed and operationalised within the nation (Doherty, 2009). This is in line with the Norwegian context, as IB schools are characterised for not having to teach the same curricula of the national hosting country (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). The IB school in this study followed the IB Middle Years Programme (IBMYP), which was designed for the 11–16 age range and has a heavy “emphasis [...] on teacher assessment” (Hayden, 2006, p. 123). The IBMYP is the least popular of the programmes offered by the IBO; as a result, a new assessment model for the IBMYP has been implemented (e.g., a final personal project externally validated by the IB) to increase the academic credibility of the IBMYP and thus improve IB schools’ enrolment rates (Wright et al., 2016). At the end of the IBMYP, grades are aligned to match the national system, and students receive a competency certificate based on grades from upper secondary level 1.

#### *4.2.2.2 The Waldorf school*

The Waldorf school values a spiritual understanding of human nature and the differing development of individuals from infancy to adulthood (Dahlin, 2010). Waldorf schools have distinguished themselves by opposing political ideas that see school as an instrument for economic growth and trends such as the standardisation of education, and they try to keep their process free of grading (see Stabel, 2016). Despite the changes affecting educational systems in general, the Waldorf schools have maintained the basic educational principles outlined by Waldorf Steiner at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Waldorf curriculum is based on 12 years of schooling, with different developmental levels to be met with the appropriate educational method and in the right environment.

In Norway, the first Waldorf school was established in 1926 and had extended freedom to reproduce Waldorf's pedagogical ideas for school practice; however, this freedom decreased considerably when the profile was approved for funding in the 1970s (Stabel, 2016). After recent reforms, Waldorf pedagogical principles and tradition, for example, their principle of adapted learning, were built around a curriculum that follows a framework oriented towards learning outcomes and outputs in line with the curriculum framework for public schools (Mathisen, 2014). Among the interesting aspects of the Waldorf schools is that they do not use grades other than an overall achievement mark at the end of middle school. At the end of lower secondary school (10<sup>th</sup> grade), students receive a written graduation certificate with a final assessment grade to ensure the possibility of admission to a public upper secondary school (Dieude & Prøitz, 2021).

#### *4.2.2.3 Limitations related to selection of these schools*

The most significant limitation of this study is the lack of a denominational school that is representative of the population of state-funded private schools (see Table 2). As described, several schools were contacted without positive response, including Montessori and religious state-funded private schools. A denominational school could have added variation and complexity at the enactment level and with regard to school leaders' and teachers' autonomy. In addition to being small, the sample of state-funded schools in this study may overemphasise the aspect of resilience, as the practitioners were highly committed to their schools' frameworks and their professional communities. Practitioners in denominational schools may not have the same orientation towards a particular framework and may not experience the same struggles in enacting state policy requirements. Similarly, Montessori schools, which are mostly located in small rural communities and were established to retain a local school, may not have teachers that perceive contradicting messages between state policy and their schools' institutional context.

#### 4.2.3 School leaders and teachers

Following the policy enactment approach, school leaders and teachers were selected as central actors in interpreting and translating abstract policy ideas who are enabled and



constrained by local contexts and school-specific factors (Ball et al., 2012). These key actors work with a multitude of policies at different levels. Recent multiple policy messages have placed high demands on school leaders and teachers, who serve as the interpreters of education policies and whose practices are crucial for student learning outcomes (Møller, 2009; Mølsted & Prøitz, 2018; Prøitz et al., 2019).

The teachers and school leaders in the three public schools were recruited by the LOaPP research team during a six-month period of ethnographic field work; a set of field reports from each school were drawn from. The recruitment of teachers from state-funded private schools occurred through strategic sampling to establish parameters for comparability between the private and public schools, despite their different organisational and intrinsic governance structures. School leaders provided me with contact information for the teachers who were available for the interviews. While I asked to talk to teachers from the lower secondary school level, I also received the contact information for teachers at the upper secondary school level. These interviews formed part of the background information for Papers II and III. A total of eight teachers from private lower secondary schools were interviewed.

Before beginning the data collection process, I had three informal meetings with the school leaders, which provided me with useful and rich information about the state-funded private schools' work and contexts. These allowed me to adapt the interviews from the LOaPP project. In general, conversations with the two school leaders were maintained through follow-up questions; the period of communication was from 2019–2021. Furthermore, two teachers were included in Article III as school leaders due to their management positions. The teacher from the IB school had a position as a curriculum coordinator, which included tasks involving leadership, and engaged in more decision-making than teachers. In the Waldorf school context, the teacher I interviewed had served as the school's leader prior to the current school leader.

#### *4.2.3.1 Semi-structured interviews*

The interview is a tool for producing knowledge about a phenomenon by means of dialogue. The dialogue between an interviewer and interviewee aims to generate in-

depth accounts of processes and strategies in organisations and how these are perceived (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). Semi-structured interviews consist of a list of predetermined themes to be discussed, which is recommended when the purpose of a study is to gain insights into participants' perceptions of a phenomenon from their everyday life, such as the interpretation of policy at the micro-school level. The knowledge gathering for the school-level system relied on semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted between 2017–2019 and supplemented with local documents produced at the different schools. The context in which interviews take place can, to some degree, affect how respondents construct their social identity (Sin, 2003). When I contacted the participants of this study, I asked where they preferred to meet, and they all chose to conduct the interviews at school. On the one hand, I believe that being in their own workspace benefited the participants in terms of the power relationship; on the other, the location may have made the informants more aware of the way they presented the school and their work.

The interviews lasted one hour for each informant and were conducted in Norwegian with the Waldorf school participants and in English with the IB school participant. At the start of each interview, I presented the purpose of the interview and the themes I wanted to discuss. The teachers comprised a combination of language and science teachers to cover potential differences in curriculum interpretation. The teacher interview guide was divided into three sections: the first section asked general questions about education and the teachers' role at the school; the second section asked about their work with planning and assessment; and the final section asked about the use of policy documents and national guidelines in their work (see Appendix B for the complete interview guide). The interview guide for the school leaders in management positions was divided into four major sections: the first section focused on leadership education and organisational tasks; the second section was concerned with the use of policy documents and national guidelines; the third section inquired about the organisation's work with curriculum and assessment; and the final section asked about relationships with the school owner and sponsors/networks (see Appendix C for the complete interview guide). Table 7 presents the interview questions in more detail with regard to

how they operationalised the theories and the following sub-research questions: (2) *How are state policy and governance perceived, interpreted and enacted at different levels in public and private lower-secondary schools?* (3) *How do contextual factors affect the ways in which public and private lower-secondary schools perceive, interpret and enact policies?* (4) *How can differences between public and private schools' autonomy in enactment of similar policy requirements be explained and studied further?*

| <b>Structure Of Interview Guide</b>     | <b>Central questions</b>   | <b>Purpose</b>   | <b>Operationalising to theory</b>   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <b>General Section</b>                  | Professional and educational background (formal education)   | Governance<br>Contextual factors   | Policy instrument framework in relation to CPD  |
| <b>Policy section</b>                   | Which guiding documents are the most central for your work?<br><br>How would you say you relate to the curriculum in your work as a teacher / in the planning of teaching?   | Perceptions, interpretations and enactment of governance<br><br>Contextual factors | Policy instrument framework<br><br>Autonomy analytical framework<br><br>Management gap analytical framework |
| <b>Curriculum and assessment</b>        | How do you work when preparing/planning your teaching?<br><br>What decides/determines which topics you include in your teaching?<br><br>How much freedom do you have in planning your teaching?<br><br>What plans and documents do you use in teaching planning as a teacher?<br><br>How do you work with assessment?<br><br>What forms of assessment do you think are best suited to your teaching and why? | Perceptions, interpretations and enactment of governance<br><br>Contextual factors | Policy instrument framework<br><br>Autonomy analytical framework<br><br>Management gap analytical framework |
| <b>Governance (school leaders only)</b> | Who owns the school?<br><br>How do you experience the collaboration with the school owner?<br><br>Who sponsors or supports the school?<br><br>What is your relationship with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (UDIR)?  | Perceptions, interpretations and enactment of governance<br><br>Contextual factors | Policy instrument framework<br><br>Autonomy analytical framework<br><br>Management gap analytical framework |

Table 7. Operationalisation of the adapted LOaPP interview guide (Prøitz et al., 2016).

4.2.3.2 *School documents*

Documents were also collected at the local school level; these documents had limited circulation because they were institution specific, but they constituted a significant record on behalf of each institution, including detailed information about everyday practices and the schools’ values (Cohen et al., 2011). One example is the goal sheets, which are a central tool for planning (Mølsted et al., 2020). Moreover, documents produced at the school programmatic level were collected; these were produced for the subjects involved in the phenomenon. These documents varied in form and aim, from regulations about assessment to general communication of school values. Table 8 provides a summary of all the materials collected, including interviews and documents.

|                                   | Article II  |  |                     | Article III   |                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|---------------------|---|-------------------|---|
|                                   | Waldorf School                                      | IB School  | Public Schools      | Waldorf School  | IB School         | Public Schools  |
| Interviews                        | 4 Teachers  | 4 Teachers   | 4 Teachers          | 2 School Leaders  | 2 School Leaders  | 4 School Leaders  |
| Local Documents                   | Goals Sheets  | Assessment Policy  | Goal Sheets         | Parents Handbook  | Assessment Policy |   |
| Documents From Programmatic Level | Overview – Ideas and Practices in Waldorf Education | Programme Standards and Practices Myp: From Principles into Practice | National Curriculum | Essential Document for Assessment in the Waldorf Primary and Lower Secondary School |                   | National KL06 Curriculum and Guidelines to Local School Policy and Instruction Material |

Table 8. Summary of the school-level data collection.

### 4.3 Data analysis

This study drew on toolbox of diverse concepts and frameworks that do not endorse any particular research design or specific methods for data collection or analysis but permit theoretical eclecticism (Ozga, 2000). Thus, transparency and clarity in linking methods of data collection and analysis is key to increasing the quality of the study. Data analysis turns data into findings; the process is complex and reflexive, and it has to be fit for a purpose (Cohen et al., 2011). In other words, it must be relevant to answer the research question. Qualitative data analysis was applied in this study since it involves “the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (Flick, 2013, p. 3). Data analysis allows the researcher to move from having raw data to a scenario where they can understand, explain and interpret the phenomena being explored (Cohen et al., 2018). Different data does not always require different data analysis; however, in this study, the analysis was driven by the different purposes and conceptual frames defined by the sub-research questions. In the next sections, I present the rationale behind the data analysis of each article.

#### 4.3.1 Content analysis of policy texts

The analysis of policy texts in Article I (Dieudé, 2021) drew on the concept of external references (Waldow, 2012). The aim was to investigate how different references can figure into the policy documents of successive governments, providing legitimisation for changes in private schooling reforms. I organised the content analysis in two phases. In the first, I conducted a word search, drawing on theory and previous studies to identify words and categories to map the prevalence of relevant words regarding how they were used to support arguments for private schooling. For instance, values such as freedom of choice are likely to appear in policy agendas that attempt to justify the privatisation of education policies (Arreman & Holm, 2011; Ball, 2007). Examples of word search strings used included (a) reference to values (e.g., freedom of choice), (b) international references (e.g., Finland) and (c) reference to scientific results (e.g., PISA’s cross-national research).

This method provided an overview of the types of references used by the different governments and also the sections of the extended documents where these references were applied. As the documents included sections that were not relevant for this study (such as those considering particular financial aspects or legal issues), not all sections of the policies were relevant to the mapping. The parliamentary processing represents a debate on whether the proposed policy changes were legitimatised through a visible political process; thus, the entire document was relevant for the study. In the second phase of the content analysis, an in-depth reading of the identified relevant sections was undertaken, leading to further investigation (Prøitz, 2015a). The references identified as linked, for instance, to the value of choice, displayed several references in the documents.

#### 4.3.2 Thematic analysis of interviews and school documents

The analytical process used in Articles II and III was inspired by Braun and Clarke's (2006) principles of thematic analysis, including familiarisation, coding, categorisation and writing up. In Article II (Dieude & Prøitz, 2021), the aim was to investigate teachers' interpretations and enactment of curriculum documents to understand and compare teachers' autonomy in public and state-funded public schools. I analysed the material (interviews and steering documents) by employing macrocodes informed by theories of curriculum control (Hopmann, 1999). The macrocodes were identified through a deductive approach. Following Hopmann's models of curriculum control, I found it relevant to identify different power structures that were apparent in the ways they controlled teachers' work. The macrocode was associated with a specific mode of curriculum control and included the following: philanthropic model, licence model, examen-artium model and assessment model (Hopmann, 1999). The macrocodes provided contextual information about who controlled the curriculum, what was controlled and how.

Furthermore, I developed subcodes through a inductive dialogical process between the theory of teacher autonomy (Wermke et al., 2018) and the data. The levels of decision-making and control were operationalised to analyse how teachers experienced

autonomy in planning and organising their teaching at the three schools. A thematic analysis driven by the coded material highlighted the similarities and differences within the data for teachers' interpretations of curriculum in their different governing and educational profiles.

In Article III, I began analysing the data through organic and recursive coding processes. In addition, I engaged in deep reflection on and engagement with the data to analyse school leaders' perceptions and enactments of policy requirements in various school contexts. After the direct transcription of the interviews and meeting notes, the first inductive analysis phase was to familiarise, reflect and focus on select aspects of meaning within the data. In this phase, the coding process of the interview materials was conducted descriptively to map the school leaders' work. Here, I discovered a recurring coding pattern in the analysis that showed school leaders' emphasis on what they perceived and interpreted to be a source of tension between their internal school work and external accountability demands.

In the second phase, the analysis was informed in dialogue with the policy instrument and a gap management approach to identify how and which enacted policies were part of this tension. I asked the following analytical question: How does gap management occur in public and private school contexts? According to the school leaders' accounts, the tension discovered in the first phase could be traced in varying ways from policy initiatives for standardisation, including assessment policies and CPD for school leaders and teachers. Therefore, these became the themes representative of the findings and structured the analysis.

#### **4.4 Ethical considerations**

Ethics are concerned with the normative aspects of research and are indispensable to all scientific activity. According to the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH), there are different normative aspects that researchers should consider in order to practice and promote integrity in research: the truth norm, the methodological norm and the institutional norm (NESH, 2022). While



the truth norm is a commitment to academic integrity, the methodological norm is about presenting the research method applied in a transparent and accurate way. Ethics are also concerned with the regulation of openness and the independence of research (NESH, 2022).

Articles II and III involved interviews with teachers and school leaders, which were conducted following the NESH's guidelines. After the Norwegian Centre for Research Data approved my PhD project, I began sending invitation letters to state-funded private schools, asking them to participate in the larger LOaPP study and my project. I detailed the projects' goals and methods, as well as the ethical principles the projects were following, such as the right to withdraw and access to data material (see Appendix D for the invitation letter sent to the schools). As mentioned, the communication was initially with school leaders, who shared with me the email addresses of the teachers who were available to be interviewed. There may be an ethical dilemma related to the participants not being selected directly by the researcher but through school leaders, who can be seen as powerful "gatekeepers" (Dahlke & Stahlke, 2020).

I emailed each participant the informed consent and invitation letter and gathered signed copies of these at the physical interviews (Appendix E). Personal information about the participants, such as their names, schools and local communities, was not audio-recorded. In addition, before I started each interview, I made sure that the participants were aware of their right to withdraw from the project and what the data would be used for. As soon as the interviews were transcribed, the audio recordings were deleted; transcripts were anonymised. To protect participants identities, the file name of each tape was coded through the LOaPP storage strategy (Prøitz et al., 2016) and adapted to my research (Silverman, 2017).

The use of documents in Article I raises fewer ethical concerns than using other qualitative methods may have done (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Although using documentary analysis may reduce some ethical concerns associated with other qualitative approaches, I am aware that issues might occur when people are mentioned

negatively or if there is suggestion of malpractice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). These issues did not arise in the documentary analysis of this study.

Although anonymity of and transparency with informants were ensured, dealing with schools reluctant to participate in the research project led to some ethical reflections. The negative answers from many schools could imply that school actors might be afraid to reveal information that could reflect poorly on their school's profile or damage the image of state-funded private schools. In fact, school actors in such cases belong to a larger social group (Summers, 2020). The fact that state-funded private schools are a minority in the Norwegian school culture and are facing scepticism towards them places high demands on the relationship with the research participants. Trust in the researcher is central for participants to feel that they are treated appropriately during the data collection and analysis. For this reason, I avoided taking normative positions or ideological stands in favour of or against private schools.



## 5 Summary of the articles

In this chapter, I summarise the three articles' main findings, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to the overarching research questions of this thesis.

### 5.1 Article I

Dieudè, A. (2021). Legitimizing private school policy within a political divide: The role of international references. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 7(2), 78–90.

The first problem addressed in this article is that the ideas behind the privatisation of education contradict social democratic educational ideologies and thus the Norwegian context. The focus here is on the political level; shifting governments seem to have been similarly concerned with the issue of private schooling and implemented changes to legislation. Since 2002, four different governments have initiated policy changes to modify the act regulating private schooling. Previous centre-right governments liberalised private school policy to different degrees, allowing for more alternative schools and schools offering distinctive profiles. Currently, the government coalition has changed the legislation to control and restrict the privatisation of different levels of education and types of alternative educational offers. This corroborates the claims of several authors who have described political parties in Norway as disagreeing on the degree of privatisation allowed in education (Møller & Skedsmo, 2013; Telhaug & Mediås, 2003). This article investigated successive governments (2002–2018) and how they negotiated policy changes in policy documents that regulated who was eligible to establish private schools and the terms for regulating financing and curricula for private schools.

The article asked the following research question: How were policy changes that regulated private schooling legitimised by successive governments in a period of comprehensive reform (2002–2018)?

The findings revealed that international references were consistently present when legitimising private schooling policy across successive governments. The analysis revealed two different preferred international references. The human rights framework

and the UN conventions functioned consistently throughout the studied period (2002–2018); all three governments during that period used these as an international source for legitimising private schools. This included the centre-left governments (Stoltenberg I and II), which passively legitimised private schooling by referring to the international commitment to human rights and UN conventions but at the same time questioned whether actively providing economic support to private schools was a human right. This formed the basis of the agreement to legitimise state-funded private schools.

This article also outlined how similar references to other countries' educational systems, such as Sweden, were used to accommodate different political ideas for the legitimisation and delegitimisation of desired policy changes in the Bondevik II and Stoltenberg governments. The origin of the proposed policy liberalising choice and diversity was inspired by the Swedish equivalent (Wiborg, 2013). Thus, references to Sweden were effective for the centre-right coalition (Bondevik II, 2001–2005) because they reflected the desired liberal policies for private schooling and the introduction of market-oriented values. In fact, Sweden is portrayed as a good example in terms of greater freedom of choice and similar social democratic traditions.

Sweden was also an effective reference for the succeeding centre-left government (2005–2013) because of their declining PISA results. This reference was combined with other countries', such as Finland's, positive results. The performance of Finland was then linked to its educational policy for private schooling. These international references, in combination with references to science (e.g., PISA results), allowed the centre-left to delegitimise Sweden as an educational model. In fact, Sweden represents an unwanted scenario (e.g., social segregation and low academic results), while Finland represents the preferred politics of the party – almost no private schooling combined with high performing public schools. References to Sweden did not appear in the Solberg government's argumentation. The analysis showed how references to Sweden were effective within the political divide but were omitted when they no longer provided legitimisation. The use of international references could be interpreted as a temporary policy strategy that served the purpose of legitimatising ideas and practices in

education, especially when those ideas and practices were contested (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

The analysis also showed that concepts like free choice, diversity and competition were central in the Solberg government's legitimisation of private school policy. These values are increasingly seen as enhancing the policy and practice of the Norwegian public school model. In summary, the findings indicated that policymakers were actively negotiating meaning and evidence from international references and revealed how effective references to large-scale assessments were.

While there are differences in the degree of liberalisation that should be granted to state-funded private schools, the findings revealed a common understanding or platform. For instance, the centre-right did not support the idea that private schools can profit, while the centre-left recognised the importance of offering an alternative to the comprehensive school. Thus, state-funded private schools' legitimacy lies in the international argument for the value of diversity and evidence of good results for the overall educational system.

## 5.2 Article 2

Dieudè, A., & Prøitz, T. S. (2022). Curriculum policy and instructional planning: Teachers' autonomy across various school contexts. *European Educational Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041221075156>

The aim of the second article was to gain a better understanding of the differences and similarities in private and public schools' contexts in relation to the envisioned practices of education diversity reported in Article I. Moreover, it aimed at understanding the forms of control and autonomy that characterise teachers' interpretative work in different school contexts. This was a qualitative case study; it used semi-structured interviews and school documents (school policy for teaching and planning) to study the phenomenon of private school governance in a real-life context (Yin, 2012) and an interpretive approach emphasising individual meaning-making to highlight the process of policy interpretation (Ball et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2013; Wagenaar, 2011). More

specifically, the article asked *how and in what ways teacher autonomy is enacted under different types of curriculum control of public and independent schools in Norway.*

Article II showed how teachers in three different schools (public and state-funded) related to a similar outcome-based education governance regime characterised by competence aims and results monitoring. Since 2006, the educational regime shift in Norwegian public and state-funded private schools has led to an increased standardisation of the curriculum structures of the different school contexts, drawing on varying pedagogical ideas. State-funded private schools that do not have an outcome-based approach, for example, those with a pedagogical orientation (e.g., Waldorf schools), have had closer follow-up by educational authorities to ensure they are fulfilling the new policy framework.

The analysis indicated a shift towards a new institutionalised and programmatic pedagogical idea initiated by the national policy framework's focus on the outcomes and assessment of teaching and learning. This shift can be understood as having created a common pedagogical base for all schools and teachers rather than a basis for diverse educational provision. This contradicts the education policy legitimising the liberalisation of private school policies in Norway based on the logic that increased diversity and freedom of choice can increase the quality of education.

In addition to relating to state governance, teachers' planning in private schools happens within a school's framework and ideas of learning. The Waldorf school gives teachers pedagogical freedom and freedom of method; however, teacher autonomy is formed within the Waldorf didactics model, which guides their licensing and contradicts the traditional freedom associated with this profile. The IB school, which does not have a top-down formal curriculum, can work flexibly if it ultimately leads to the preconditions of the DP. Not having a fully developed curriculum could make teachers' autonomous planning work more complex (Wermke et al., 2018); however, IB teachers are largely supported by the assessment system, comprising objectives and criteria as well as additional planning tools. In the international school context, teacher autonomy is affected by the accountability logic of the assessment system and the restrictive

format of the planning platforms. There is consistency here between the programmatic-level intentions of pursuing world class standards and the responsibility that teachers carry to reach them (Hopmann, 1999).

In summary, Article II reflected on the educational space wherein the expectations and premises for teacher autonomy are increasingly regulated by different actors and instruments. This can also be applied to the state-funded private school context and can be understood as positive support for teachers to deal with the complexity and risks of professional work and cope with the contingencies in education. However, this also means that the educational space becomes more controlled, and multiple policy messages are directly used and transferred into the teaching practice.

### 5.3 Article 3

Dieudè, A., & Prøitz, T. S. (under review). School leaders' autonomy in public and private school contexts: Blurring policy requirements.

Using insights from the first two articles, the third article addressed the phenomenon of private school governance by comparing school leaders' autonomy in various contexts. The study drew on documents and interview data from interviews and meetings with school leaders from three public and two state-funded private schools in Norway. The analysis and discussion focused on the concept of gap management to examine school leaders' perceptions, interpretations and enactments of state policy requirements in relation to securing local schools' needs and freedom (Knapp & Hopmann, 2017). More specifically, it asked the following: *How do school leaders in public and private school contexts perceive and enact similar policy requirements?*

The findings highlighted important variations between school leaders' autonomy. However, the differences seemed to lie not between the private and public profiles but between the visions of the schools and school leaders. The analytical framework outlined two types of gap managers: 1) those with limited space for self-governance, which presented greater challenges with regard to standardisation pressures related to CPD/national assessments and schools' diverse educational goals; and 2) gap managers with extended self-governance when combining national requirements, such as



CPD/national assessments, and internal school visions. While the former was represented in the case of the Waldorf school leader, the latter was exemplified by the IB school leaders and public school leaders A and B, who perceived fewer challenges in dealing with national requirements and internal school visions. Both contexts were characterised by a greater emphasis on assessment and learning outcomes. While this is part of the IB school's profile, public schools have dealt with increasing policy initiatives related to formative, learning and national assessments over the last 20 years, which have clearly impacted school leaders' work. Moreover, the IB school leader followed the national requirements for national tests, which may conflict with the internal standards required by the IBO.

This policy tool is "ensuring legitimacy by using the vocabulary of the reform and showing that their school meets the norms that are demanded of a modern organisation" (Knapp & Hopmann, 2017, p. 249). The Waldorf school leader dealt with similar national requirements that contradict the school's values; however, behind the reform talk, the local pedagogical autonomy of the school was ensured. Whether such assessment tools are further affecting state-funded private school practices may be an interesting topic for further research.

In terms of school governance, it could be argued that while there is little overall difference between state-funded private schools and traditional public schools, school leaders in state-funded private schools find themselves in a parallel system with similar accountability. This system is characterised by parallel laws with a parallel funding system, a parallel curriculum understanding and parallel practices/culture of assessment. While school leaders in state-funded private schools were found to perceive policy requirements as not fitting this parallel system, they enacted gap management strategies to deal with the dual contract of differentiation (understood as *pedagogical diversification*) and standardisation between state-funded private schools and the state. Previous studies' contexts, such as Sweden and the US, have shown that school leaders, in particular those in state-funded private school contexts, experience higher degrees of autonomy (Gawlik, 2008; Nordholm et al., 2022). However, studies of autonomy in the Norwegian public-school context have shown that after the

introduction of a product-oriented curriculum, ideas of teacher autonomy were challenged (Lennert da Silva & Mølsted, 2020; Mausestagen & Mølsted, 2015). In line with these studies and the analysis conducted in Article II, this thesis sheds light on how increased standardisation of competences and assessment challenges school leaders' autonomy, and school leaders turn to gap management strategies to close the gap between desired performance and actual results.

Interestingly, these findings raise the question of whether the standardisation strategies examined in this paper may conflict with policymakers' differentiating policy rhetoric. Although there are differences in what Waldorf and IB schools provide in terms of curriculum, the analysis presented here revealed that the emphasis on diversity and increased freedom of pedagogical offering as key to enhancing education quality is being challenged. Two reasons may explain the blurred lines between standardisation and differentiation. On the one hand, the differentiation policy rhetoric, which is aligned with international trends, may serve to increase the growth of private schools; on the other hand, this policy trend is calibrated to the existing local values and practices (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). Furthermore, standardisation could represent a deliberate political move to preserve the one-school-for-all model (Volckmar, 2018). In both cases, policymakers may face tension, indicating a need for gap management. This occurs also at the policy level, where policy makers are unable to bridge the gap between their own requirements for differentiation and standardisation.

These three sub-studies refer to different levels of policy envisioning and enactment, as well as the meaning-making related to the educational governance for state-funded private schools. In the next section, I explore how these three articles were used to answer the overarching research questions of this thesis.



## 6 Discussion

With these articles as a backdrop, I return to the overarching research question: How do state policies legitimise and regulate state-funded private school policy and teachers' and school leaders' autonomy? In the following section, I answer the question by discussing the four sub-questions that guided this study.

### 6.1 Norwegian national policy envisioning of state-funded private schools

1. *How did Norwegian national policy legitimise the regulation of state-funded private schools between 2002–2018?*

Between 2002–2018, Norwegian national policy legitimised the regulation of state-funded private schools in two ways: international references and policy instruments aimed at increasing equity and quality standards.

#### 6.1.1 Legitimacy through international references and academic standards

In Article I (Dieudé, 2021) in particular, the findings indicated that international references were used to both legitimise and delegitimise the regulatory framework for state-funded private schools. The weakening of the nation states' ability to govern has been explained in governance theory as decision-making shifting to international and supranational bodies (Hudson, 2016). Norway is required by international human rights commitments (e.g., the right of school choice) to provide an alternative to public school. Previous research has shown that this offer may be reflected in regulatory models that are dependent on specific institutional and historical characteristics and can change according to the contextual circumstances (Verger et al., 2017).

In this study, I found that the policy changes beginning in 2003 aimed at liberalising private schooling lost legitimacy due to how effectively the centre-left government actively negotiated meaning and evidence from international references and standardised assessment results to reverse the proposed regulation of private school policy (Dieudé, 2021). The new regulatory framework was promoted through different

international references, providing great legitimation to the policy. Although the policy may be viewed as contrasting with the Norwegian context due to historical scepticism towards private schools, the references to PISA and Sweden, a country with a combination of a similar private school policy and poor school results, were effective in ensuring that the previous policy changes were seen as less legitimate. In 2014, the centre-right government denied similarities between the Swedish and Norwegian policy contexts, and although they promoted profile schools, the extent of liberalisation was minor compared to 2003. While regulatory modes for private schools can shift due to institutional and contextual circumstances (Verger et al., 2017), how nation states negotiate the meanings of international references has the potential to reverse these regulatory modes by making them less legitimate. In this case, Sweden's decreasing PISA scores were an effective means of delegitimising the liberalisation measures. Therefore, in addition to contextual factors, I argue that how nation states, negotiate meaning and evidence from international references and standardised tests can alter the direction of regulatory modes for private schooling (Prøitz, 2015; Steiner-Khamsi, 2012).

### 6.1.2 Legitimacy through curriculum control

I found variations in how state policy regulates state-funded private schools. I also uncovered how these regulations have led to the convergence of different profiles into a similar model of school governance, which is outlined at the national discourse and programmatic levels and characterised by competence aims and results monitoring (Dieude & Prøitz, 2021). This was reflected in the 2006<sup>4</sup> changes to the Waldorf national curriculum, which had to be updated for the first time as a response to the Knowledge Promotion Reform. This reform required that the objectives of education in terms of learning outcomes be emphasised. For the Waldorf schools, this reform meant structural changes to the curriculum, although the same policy requirements did not apply to international schools. In fact, the requirements for international schools are

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<sup>4</sup> Although not part of this study, I want to point out that other state-funded schools, such as Montessori schools, had to go through the same curriculum changes.

less specific, and their curriculum is approved if it is in accordance with a relevant international curriculum, for example, that offered by the IB. In other words, an international curriculum is approved if it fulfils the policy requirements of the Knowledge Promotion Reform. Thus, despite variations in state requirements for school governance, there is a similar underlying model regulating state-funded private schools through the same outcome-based educational approach.

Hudson's (2016) research on governance appears to explain the phenomena of state-funded private schools in the Norwegian setting. Public policy instruments in this study are seen as carriers of values (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007), driven by one interpretation of the school actor and ways to regulate it. Previous studies in Norway have shown how similar types of policy instruments have been adopted to secure equity and quality standards (Camphuijsen et al., 2020). Similarly, the mode of regulation envisaged through curriculum control could indicate that state policy sees a similar underlying outcome-based approach as ensuring more equity and quality within state-based private schools, thereby increasing their legitimation. Thus, privatisation here actually means increasing government regulation, and changes in the process of governing education, such as privatisation, occur through newer hybrid forms of governance (Hudson, 2016; Jordan et al., 2005).

Policy instruments are envisioned to check the quality of and legitimise state-funded private schools. The following chapter examines the school level's enactment of such instruments more closely.

## **6.2 Teachers' and school leaders' interpretations and enactments of policy instruments**

- 2. How are state policy and governance perceived, interpreted and enacted at different levels in public and private lower-secondary schools?*

### 6.2.1 Different profiles, similar discretion for interpreting policy instruments

At the school level, I examined the perceptions, interpretations and enactments of policy, studying how teachers and school leaders in various contexts related their decisions regarding instructional planning (teachers) and managing internal and national expectations (school leaders) to governance documents. In the analysis, I found both variations and similarities among the different contexts with regard to how teachers and school leaders perceived, interpreted and enacted similar policy instruments and requirements. Teachers, for example, reported using the curriculum directly in their planning; this could indicate a limited degree of interpretation, leaving decision-making and control to the programmatic level. However, as policy interpretation is seen as a practice of power (Levinson et al., 2009), this could be a self-determined decision made to allow teachers to cope with the complexity of their job (Wermke et al., 2018).

School leaders at the Waldorf and IB schools enact state policy regulating formal assessments, national tests and teachers' CPD. However, the school leaders seemed to perceive different challenges related to enacting such instruments. For example, the IB school leader perceived fewer challenges in enacting national policy requirements related to teachers' CPD, as it did not hinder the school's profile or the internal school vision, as was perceived by the Waldorf school leader. In addition, while the IB school leader perceived the national testing framework as "useless", he incorporated the instrument to show school performance (how well the school is doing), thereby taking advantage of it. This shows the actor's capacity of self-governing within the framework provided by the state (Wermke et al., 2018) and that actors can appropriate policy elements into their own scope of interest (Levinson et al., 2009).

In sum, newer governing strategies, such as outcome-based curriculum, assessment policies and CPD, enacted by teachers and school leaders can affect state-funded private schools' capacities to make decisions within state-based regulations and the needs of local schools to varying degrees. Nevertheless, despite tension between political and

professional discourse, these state policies are enacted, as they are fundamental to, for instance, receiving funding and creating organisational legitimacy (Spillane et al., 2002).

By having to enact state policy through a curriculum with an outcome-based educational approach and quality assurance instruments such as CPD and national tests, state-funded private schools are increasingly regulated similarly to public schools; this may lead to stronger standardisation of the different profiles. In turn, the choice of policy instrument aims at increasing standardisation between public and private schools, which can indicate a contradiction with previous policy goals of differentiation and can challenge private schools' pedagogical foundations. This makes Norway an interesting case, as it shows how the state uses state policy (funding, etc.) as an effective instrument to produce some variety of education while maintaining control over the school system and its premises. In this way, the state can grant citizens equitable access to education. Standardisation across public and private schools may mean that old beliefs about using private actors to improve quality may lose appeal; however, it may also challenge the possibility of a real alternative for parents and students.

### 6.2.2 Different contexts affecting enactment

#### *3. How do contextual factors affect the ways in which public and private lower-secondary schools perceive, interpret and enact policies?*

Despite having to enact similar policy instruments in different contexts according to what is applicable, there are distinctive characteristics of the different contexts, which condition teachers' and school leaders' interpretations and enactments in different ways. The variations in state-funded private schools' policy enactment is related to how the schools are structured and institutionalised (Ball et al., 2012). Schools may be understood as systems that develop meaning via the use of specific regulative, normative and cultural elements (Scott, 2003). In this study, the focus was limited to the regulative elements. For instance, state-funded private schools have different governance configurations and educational agencies developing concrete goals that guide and regulate teachers' and school leaders' work in line with their preferred educational ideas. Similarly, the national curriculum defines the competence goals that



public school teachers must deliver by adapting their teaching to a heterogeneous classroom in a one-school-for-all ideology. These governance configurations are important to consider to understand the complexity of institutional policy enactment in such contexts (Ball et al., 2012).

When looking at the regulative elements of curriculum control (Hopmann, 1999), the Waldorf school provides teachers with pedagogical freedom and freedom of method, and teachers' perceptions, interpretations and enactments of policy are formed within the Waldorf didactics model. In other word, according to Hopmann (1999), teachers are licenced to do the "right thing" according to the Waldorf model. The IB school, on the other hand, does not follow a top-down formal curriculum but promotes teacher flexibility, as long as it ultimately leads to the preconditions of the DP. I found the work of teachers in the IB school to be largely guided by the assessment system comprising objectives, criteria and planning tools designed by the IBO. Because of these characteristics, the IB school context seems to represent elements of both product and process control (Hopmann, 2003).

Despite many of the public-school teachers' attempts to enact the national policy framework in their instructional planning, their decisions were less bounded by an educational framework than those of the teachers in the state-funded private schools. In fact, the Waldorf and IB schools' didactic backgrounds and explicit educational frameworks, while supporting teachers in their planning, may leave less time and space for negotiation and translation.

The international and public-school contexts are characterised by the accountability logic of the assessment system, while the Waldorf school context is not. Thus, the teachers and school leaders in these schools may respond more quickly to accountability policy. While this variation appears greater in the Waldorf school, the different perceptions of policy enactment do not appear to be distinct solely between public and private schools; they also appear to be influenced by the local schools' and school leaders' visions, independent of school type or context.

### 6.2.3 Policy alignment and legitimation

4. *How can differences between public and private schools' autonomy in the enactment of similar policy requirements be explained and studied further?*

State-funded private schools are not regulated only by national governance, as teachers and school leaders make decisions in relation to the school owner's governance as well. Thus, based on the findings of Articles II and III, the IB school appears to have a high degree of legitimacy, which is supported by the organisation's international recognition within Norwegian politics (Dieudé, 2021). This legitimacy could also be due to the fact that, in terms of governance, the IB school lacks a curriculum that has been determined by either the national framework or the IBO. However, it is precisely because of the school curriculum that the international profile is legitimised in state policy. Here, it is possible to observe alignment of the IBO and public school discourse, as teachers and school leaders are affected by a similar accountability logic (i.e., proving high consistency between the programmatic-level intentions; Hopmann, 1999) regarding the pursuit of world class standards and the teachers' responsibility to reach them.

Drawing on the findings related to school-level policy enactment, I found that teachers and school leaders in the IB school face greater accountability demands from their school's governance, and their work is largely supported by an assessment system comprised of objectives and criteria as well as additional planning tools. Therefore, high legitimacy does not mean low regulation or high autonomy; rather, the same tools that provide legitimacy may also be restricting teachers' and school leaders' processes of interpretation and enactment.

With regard to the Waldorf school's didactics and curriculum content, the enactment of policy instruments aimed at standardisation (outcome-based curriculum, national tests and CPD) was perceived as challenging, especially for school leaders. This could be because the pedagogical profile does not enjoy high levels of legitimation due to the lack of a stronger accountability logic. Even if a national curriculum reforms were to adopt learning theories such as deep learning, which has been a common core practice in the Waldorf pedagogy, it would likely not provide more legitimation to the profile.

Moreover, based on the findings related to enactment, teacher autonomy is formed within the Waldorf didactics model, providing guidance and to some extent contradicting the traditional freedom associated with this profile.

As schools' frameworks seem to be gradually becoming standardised and the core ideas diminishing, what remains to create diversity is primarily teachers' working methods, which seem to be, paradoxically, more flexible in public schools. Based on the data from the public schools, school leaders' and teachers' decisions are formed within their professional experience and competences. However, as shown in previous studies (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015; Prøitz et al., 2019), their work is also affected by instruments of standardisation, such as outcome-based education governance and assessment policies. It is important to note that the degrees of governance do not follow normative inferences. While increased standardisation has brought some challenges, it has also been perceived as supporting school development.

In general, the findings related to the envisioning and enactment processes indicate degrees of overlap. In this study, one of the starting points of policy enactment theory was that implementation is a non-linear process, and the negotiation and translation of policy requirements happens in complex and creative ways, resulting in a heterogeneity of practices across diverse levels of policy implementation (Ball et al., 2012; Schulte, 2018). Although there are variations between state-funded private schools and public schools, teachers' and school leaders' interpretations and enactments of policy seem to conform to the envisioning of policy instruments. While teachers' and school leaders' practice variations are highlighted in the theory of enactment, my findings indicate a larger overlap. It is important to note is that, contrary to expectations, private education is more top-down than public schools. The cost of public funding in the Norwegian system (Article I) is paid through a certain governmentality in private schools (Articles II and III).

The degree of overlap seems to be higher if schools are affected by lower legitimization. Thus, the lower the legitimization of an organisation due to a high variance of practices (such as in the Waldorf pedagogy), the more a practitioner must document that they

follow the public interest. This is in line with teacher autonomy research and can be interpreted as the high price of autonomy (Wermke et al., 2018). Moreover, based on standardised tests, there seems to be a connection between high legitimacy and student academic performance. It can be argued that due to the IB's origins of an international and Anglo-Saxon context, it might have resulted in less legitimacy press. For example, the IB profile aligns more with the larger international discourse on global rankings and curriculum approach than the Waldorf profile, which was shown in Articles I and II to provide greater legitimacy. As previous studies have shown (Ball et al., 2012), performance represents a powerful discourse driving policy enactment and the making of good schools.

#### 6.2.3.1 *Heuristic*

Based on the findings and previous studies, one way to study the differences between public and state-funded private schools' enactments of similar policy requirements is through the perspective of legitimation and regulation. As shown, legitimation and regulation are becoming increasingly important due to a national context characterised by scepticism towards privatisation and high state-control. These elements are central to capturing the governing of state-funded private schools, in particular how teachers and school leaders in these schools relate to state governance with regard to their capacity to make decisions. Drawing on the analysis conducted for this study, I offer a heuristic (Figure 5) with which to compare and analyse state-funded private school governance.

The discussion derived from the illustration is a frame of reference based on this chapter's empiricism. The figure depicts the heuristic components: two related continua, a vertical axis (y) representing degrees of legitimation, and a horizontal axis (x) representing degrees of regulation. At the government level, legitimacy seems to be provided by the international and differentiation argument, while regulation is provided through instruments of governance such as curriculum, quality assurance instruments (e.g., national tests) and teachers' CPD.

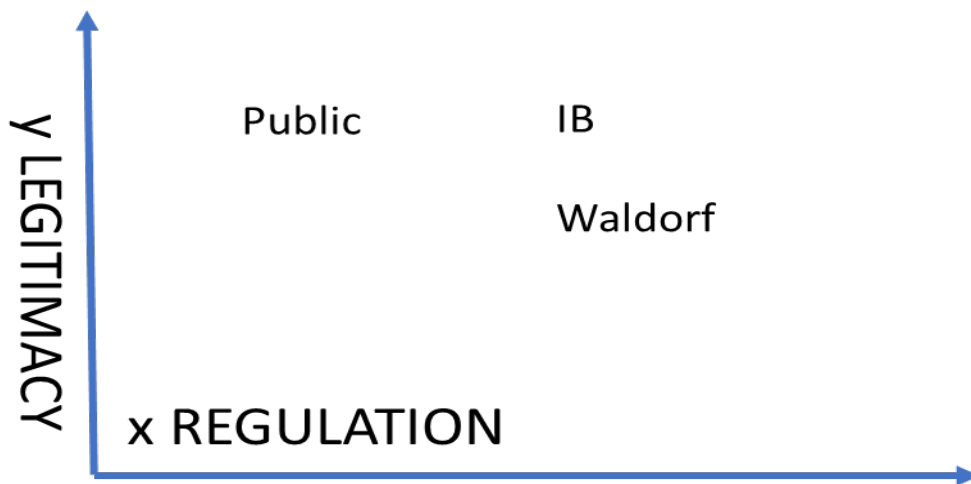


Figure 5. The analysed data according to the heuristic.

As can be seen, the IB framework has been proven to have high levels of legitimacy but also significant regulation, as school governance and state policy represent double restriction. The Waldorf framework is also constrained by double governance and has lost legitimacy in the last decades. In comparison to the other frameworks, the public schools seem to still grant teachers and school leaders professional autonomy. Moreover, the connection between high legitimacy and students' academic performance based on standardised tests reflects the position of the IB school and the Waldorf school in the heuristic. Drawing on the three articles of this thesis, it seems that the extent of legitimation is larger when higher degrees of standardisation and alignment with public schools are enacted. This might mean that the present standardised processes in the Waldorf profile will lead to enhanced legitimacy, although this remains to be seen.

To return to the overarching question (*How do state policies legitimise and regulate state-funded private school policy and teachers' and school leaders' autonomy?*), state policies legitimise state-funded private schools using international references and policy instruments aimed at promoting equity and quality standards. Compared to the public

school context, teachers' and school leaders' autonomy in the context of state-funded private schools is restricted by two parallel governances: their own and that of the state. While teachers and school leaders in state-funded private schools perceive, interpret and enact state requirements similarly to their public-school colleagues, they are more challenged by public policy instruments. These instruments, in addition to increasing the standardisation and therefore the likeness of the public–private profile, hold state-funded private schools accountable, despite their different approaches to or structures for learning.



## 7 Conclusions

In this study, I have explored the legitimisation of the regulatory framework for state-funded private schools in Norway (the state level) and how private school actors perceive, interpret and enact policy requirements at different operational levels (the school level). To do this, I drew on qualitative data from a multilevel study to compare negotiations of meanings at the policy level and perceptions of autonomy in (two) state-funded private and (three) public schools. The findings of the study lead to the following conclusion: at the state level, the regulatory framework for state-funded private schools is legitimised using international references and policy instruments aimed at promoting equity and quality standards. At the school level, despite different contexts, teachers and school leaders seem to have similar discretion but face different challenges when interpreting and enacting similar policy requirements. However, the discretion in state-funded private schools appears more restricted by both state requirements and their own governance, which confirms the findings of previous studies on private schools' autonomy in international contexts (Salokangas & Ainscow, 2017).

As previous studies have shown, successive governments have agreed (Aasen et al., 2014; Wiborg, 2013) on degrees of privatisation, including the exclusion of forms of external privatisation and the enhancement of public schools as the natural school choice. Using the Norwegian case as an example, this study shows that while the degree of liberalisation of state-funded private school regulation can change according to political governments, the "old" social-democratic ideal of one common school for all can be legitimised by negotiating meaning and evidence from international references and international standardised tests.

However, the emphasis on diversity as key to enhancing education quality through increased freedom of pedagogical offerings is challenged. As shown in previous studies, the emphasis on standards and the standardisation of education (e.g., Marjoelien, 2020; Prøitz et al., 2017a; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Skedsmo, 2009), which can function as an equalisation instrument (Zancajo et al., 2022), ensures that state-funded private schools follow public policy instruments, but at the same time, standardisation competes with



government goals of differentiation, showing how instruments aimed at standardisation may generate outcomes that contradict initial policy goals. This is a good illustration of how Norway's regulatory framework for state-funded private schools can take forms that both complement and conflict with the original policy goals (Jordan et al., 2005; Le Galès, 2011). In line with the public policy instrument approach, these tools have an existence independent of the decisions that created them. The findings confirm the existence of a common pedagogical base for all schools and contribute to exposing such trends, which also exist for state-funded private schools, rather than creating a basis for a diversified educational provision.

Enactment theories argue the importance of context to explain differences in policy implementation (Ball et al., 2012). The findings of this study show that more standardisation can be explained as a consequence of the Norwegian context's high state control and the influence of international trends in education that emphasise learning standards and accountability (Ozga, 2019; Prøitz, 2015).

## **7.1 The contributions of the thesis**

This dissertation contributes to the existing knowledge base on the privatisation of education by exploring state-funded private education policy and practice. Considering the historical foundation of the Norwegian one school for all, Article I provides insights into the policy mechanisms used by nation states to negotiate meaning and evidence from international references to legitimise reforms that are in continuity and discontinuity with the one-school-for-all legacy. Moreover, Articles II and III show differences and similarities between private and public school actors in enacting similar policy requirements and instruments for planning and assessment. In line with previous research on teacher autonomy (Wermke et al., 2018; Wermke & Salokangas, 2021), I argue that contextual elements are important when studying how school actors perceive their autonomy, and I highlight how the legitimacy associated with the local school system and its practices is particularly important when considering school actors' autonomy.

Methodologically, this study provides a multilevel audit trail to research and compare the complex social phenomenon of state-funded private schools' policy and practice. This methodology was particularly challenging because it involved multilevel dynamics of national policies, local authorities and individuals. As there is a paucity of qualitative multilevel research, the thesis contributes by adding conceptualisations of a multilevel design to the interpretative paradigm.

Theoretically, this thesis provides an eclectic approach to studying state-funded private school governance, synthesising the state-centred governance framework (Altrichter, 2010) and its communication across levels using public policy instrument theory (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). Furthermore, the thesis offers an empirically grounded heuristic with which to compare and analyse state-funded private school governance. The findings contribute to enhancing the importance of legitimisation and regulation across multiple levels of policy implementation. In this process, policy instruments are particularly central to legitimise and regulate state-funded private schools. At the government level, legitimacy seems to be provided by the international and differentiation arguments; however, the extent of legitimisation is greater when higher degrees of standardisation and alignment with public schools are enacted. Regulation is provided through instruments of governance, such as curriculum, quality assurance instruments (e.g., national tests) and teachers' CPD. Moreover, degrees of regulation for state-funded private schools are not dictated only by national governance, as teachers and school leaders make decisions in relation to the schools' owner governance as well.

This study suggests what happens when standardisation is increased. Instead of diversity, we see harmonisation and equalisation, which creates conflict, for example, for the Waldorf context, as this school is concerned with whether changes will allow them to maintain their pedagogical integrity. Less conflict was perceived in the IB context. Paradoxically, public schools are increasingly absorbing Waldorf pedagogical practices and practices from other pedagogical alternatives (e.g., Montessori). Recent examples include deep learning, less focus on grading and assessment in place of results, all of which are typical of Waldorf education. Future studies could investigate if the IB

school would maintain high legitimacy if they were to face more process-oriented assessment demands.

## **7.2 Limitations, implications and recommendations for further research**

This dissertation explored the phenomenon of privatisation, limiting the focus to state-funded private schools; other types of private schools, such as those that do not receive state funding, were not part of this study. Examining degrees of autonomy regarding policy enactment in non-funded private schools could be a task for future research.

As indicated, the three articles were limited by the data, so the findings do not offer an exhaustive account of state-funded independent schools' practices. Instead, the emphasis was on analytical generalisation; thus, to some extent, the findings of this study could be employed to predict how other state-funded private schools in similar contexts might respond to similar policy requirements (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In Article I, the documentary analysis was limited to arguments and positions negotiated in policy texts that were considered the most relevant for the study. Adding interviews with policymakers would have provided in-depth information about the negotiation processes related to regulating state-funded private schools; however, the study would not have been able to cover the policy process in a similar cross-historical way as was done using documentary analysis (Bowen, 2009).

This study primarily investigated national-level private school governance. Articles II and III focused on the enactment process, revealing tensions between state policy enactment requirements and the communal level. Interestingly, school leaders across various contexts perceived that governing bodies are not sufficiently involved or visible in schools' pedagogical work. This is in line with previous research highlighting the complex and important role of school leaders and municipal administrators in school development (Datnow et al., 2012; Parke, 2012). Both private and public schools have been found to perceive a lack of support from their boards of governors and municipalities. Thus, an analysis of the municipal-level governance of state-funded

schools and their role in supporting alignment between private and public schools could be an interesting topic for future research.

The findings suggest that although policy awareness is required when the number of private schools is increasing, the state-funded schools that are approved according to the Private School Act are supported at the policy level to enact diversity. This requires recognising the complexity of institutional enactment environments wherein state-funded private school actors operate. If every school profile is framed alike, the policy of creating alternative schools is disregarded. The current study has shown how public and private schools are regulated similarly by various types of policy. What are the consequences when, rather than diversity through alternative profiles, schools are aligned across the same basic pedagogical idea? What constitutes the alternative? The findings indicate an alternative paradox.

This study also examined aspects related to public school governance; studying state-funded private schools leaves public school teachers' and school leaders' autonomy and control – and also how certain concerns about education are different – open to examination. For instance, while assessment is a central aspect governing teachers' work, the findings indicate that teachers' working methods are more flexible in public schools. In fact, despite teachers' reliance on the national policy framework, their autonomy in public schools seems to be formed within their professional experience and competences.

The findings have further implications, as policy instruments, such as funding and state policies aimed at ensuring quality and equity challenges, define education in public and state-funded private schools. In other words, in line with Aasen (2007), the understanding of equity has once again been proven to focus on individual student performance instead of fellowship.



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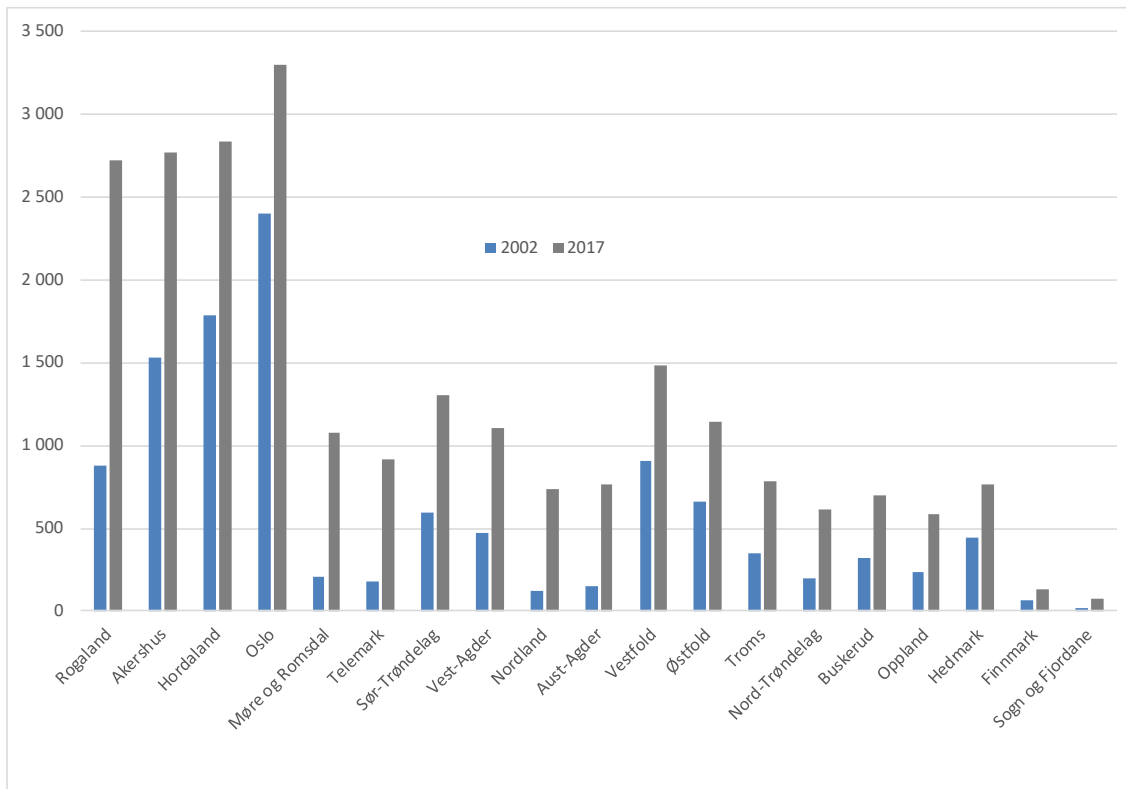
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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Growth of pupils attending private schools across counties.



*Pupils attending private schools across counties (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2017).*

### Appendix B. Interview guide, teachers.

General about school work:

Can you tell me about your work here as a teacher?

Subject, class, main teacher, other responsibilities?

How long have you worked here?

What is your professional and educational background?

Earlier experiences as a teacher? Public schools?

Have you taken any further education/courses/academic updates lately?

Teaching planning:

Can you tell me how you work when preparing/planning your teaching?

Design of activities directed to criteria, descriptor (expand/share doc.)

When do you plan your teaching?

What decides/determines what topics you include in your teaching? To what extent are they similar to your colleagues who teach the same grade?

How freely do you stand in teaching planning?

What determines the methods you use in teaching?

Where do you usually get inspiration when planning your teaching?

Do you have any examples?

What plans and documents do you use when planning teaching?

Are these common to you and your colleagues?

Assessment practices:

How do you work with assessments?

How do you do when you evaluate students in your subject area?  
What forms of assessment do you think are best suited to your teaching and why?  
I read that you have conferences here at school. What is that?  
What is the purpose?  
Positive and negative aspects?  
Are you satisfied with the way you work (when it comes to planning and assessment)?  
Are there other ways you would like to do things (in terms of planning and assessment)?  
Use of documents and national guidelines:  
Which guiding documents are the most central for your work as a teacher?  
How do you relate to the curriculum in your work as a teacher/in the planning of teaching?  
Do you often discuss learning outcomes with students? How do you do this? Can you give an example of a time you've worked this way?

### Appendix C. Interview guide, school leaders.

General on leadership and organisation:

What is your professional and educational background?  
Do you have any formal education on leadership?  
Are there required courses or education in order to be principal of a(n) X school?  
Experience as teacher?  
How long have you worked here? How long have you worked as principal?  
What are your most important tasks?  
What do you spend most of your time on?  
What are your biggest challenges as principal?  
What does the organisation structure look like?  
Could you draw it?  
Organisation of work with curriculum and assessment:  
How does the school work to operationalise the curriculum?  
Who is responsible for working with the curriculum?  
How is management involved in this work?  
New curricula were introduced in 2020; is this something you are concerned about?  
Are you following the progress of producing new curriculum?  
How does the school work with assessments?  
Who is responsible for assessment work?  
How is management involved in this work?  
How do you work with grading and exams?  
Can you tell me how you work with grading here?  
How is management involved in this work?

School owner, sponsors and networks:

Who owns the school?  
How do you experience the collaboration with the school owner?  
How do you experience the school owner's support for your pedagogical work?  
What does it take for this collaboration to work?  
Who sponsors or supports the school?  
What is their role?  
How do you experience the collaboration with them?

Appendix D. Information for teachers and school leaders.



To the principal of XXXXX school,

Bakkenteigen, 21.03.2019

### **Invitation to research project on learning outcomes and assessment in school**

With this letter, I would like to invite XXXXXX school to participate in the research project Learning outcomes across policy and practices (LOaPP). In the project, we study how national education policies and goals for student learning are translated into practice in teaching and in assessment in schools and in the classroom. The project, which is funded by the Research Council of Norway, had its start in 2016 and will continue until 2020. The project is carried out by a group of researchers at the teacher education at the University of Southeast Norway (USN) led by Professor Tine S. Prøitz.

In the project, we have followed three public secondary schools (ungdomsskoler) in three municipalities for one and a half years, and seen how these work to ensure learning in different ways in their schools. Now Alessandra Dieude, a PhD student in the project, wants to include the perspective of private schools in her study. Dieude studies teachers' room of action - both in teaching planning and in the assessment work. There are few studies on the work of teachers in private schools. With an increasing number of pupils in Norwegian private schools, it is very interesting to study the conditions and room for action of school leaders and teachers in the day-to-day school. Dieude wants to study the work in the school based on documents that the school uses in its work (management documents, annual plans, semester plan, etc.) and interviews with a selection of teachers and the head of the school.

I will give thorough information about the project to all involved and especially seek approvals for participation in the project from teachers. For the school leaders and teachers, participation in the project means that we get to interview some teachers and collect plans and documents in the spring and/or autumn of 2019.

The project has been reported to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and follows the current guidelines for confidentiality and anonymization for privacy by participation in research projects prepared by the Data Inspectorate. This means, for example, that all participation must be voluntary and that participants can withdraw from the project when they wish within the project period. All information collected is stored in a separate data area at the University of South-Eastern Norway, where only the researchers who participate in the project have access. Through participation



in this project, you will at all times have the right to access what kind of data material is collected, and you can request that it be deleted if you wish to do so. We ask for consent to use the information collected for dissemination of research, e.g. in articles or in lectures. In such contexts, the research is presented in an anonymised form; the school, school leader and teachers are always anonymised and should not be recognizable in the publication of the research results. It is important for me that participation in the project should not entail extra work for teachers or school leaders a part from participating in an interview.

It is important for the project that this is a rewarding collaboration for all parties involved, and we will gladly contribute in meetings if more information is desired, and present findings from the study.

We hope you will be willing to attend and that we will have the opportunity to work with you in this project.

Appendix E. Informed consent.

**Would you like to participate in the research project**  
***“Subsidized private schools and public schools in Norway: a comparative study of the interpretation and enactment of recent learning outcomes-based policies”?***

This is a question for you to participate in a research project where the purpose is to study how national education policy and goals for student learning are translated into practice in teaching and in assessment in schools and in the classroom. In this letter we give you information about the goals of the project and what participation will mean for you.

**Purpose**

The purpose is to study (using interviews and document analysis) how national education policy and goals for student learning, are translated into practice in teaching and in assessment in schools and in classroom.

Issues / research questions:

How do teachers in free schools experience that they can use the space provided by the education policy in their practice?

This is a PhD study.

**Who is responsible for the research project?**

USN (Universitet i Sørøst-Norge), Tine S. Prøitz (professor at USN) og Alessandra Dieude (PhD student at USN).

**Who is asked to participate in the project?**

Teachers and principal (or others from the management) who want to participate. Participation is voluntary. I want approx. 4 teachers and 1 school leader from each school participating in the study.

**What does it mean for you to participate?**

If you choose to participate in the project, this means that you will be interviewed. An interview will take about 45 minutes. In the interview, I will ask, for example, which documents are important for teaching planning, which forms of assessment are most suitable. In addition, I want to collect documents, such as semester plan and curriculum. Your answers from the interview are recorded on audio tapes.

**Participation is voluntary**

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

**Your privacy - how we store and use your information**

We will only use the information about you for the purposes we have told about in this text. We treat the information confidentially and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

- There is Alessandra Dieude and supervisor, Tine S. Prøitz, who has access to your information
- I will replace the name and contact information with a code that is stored on its own name list separate from other data; the data is stored on a research server that is protected. Participants will be anonymized in order to not be recognizable. Interviews will not be published in their entirety, but anonymised quotes from the interviews may be relevant to publish in research articles.

**What happens to your information when we close the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end on 30.04.2021. Data is stored until 2025, and deleted after that.

**Your rights**

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you are entitled to:

- insight into which personal information is registered about you,
- correcting personal information about you,
- delete your personal information
- get a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- to send a complaint to the General Data Protection Regulation or the The Norwegian Data Protection Authority about the processing of your personal data.

**What gives us the right to process personal information about you?**

We process information about you based on your consent.

On behalf of the USN, NSD - the Norwegian Center for Research Data AS has considered that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

**Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the study, or would like to exercise your rights, please contact: *USN* through *Alessandra Dieude and Tine S. Prøitz*.

- Our data protection officer: Paul Are Solberg
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost ([personvernombudet@nsd.no](mailto:personvernombudet@nsd.no)) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Best regards

Prosjektansvarlig  
Alessandra Dieude  
Tine S. Prøitz

---

**Informed consent**

I have received and understood information about the project «Subsidized private schools and public schools in Norway: a comparative study of the interpretation and enactment of recent learning outcomes-based policies», and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I consent to:

- to participate in interviews
- that my personal information is stored after the project end, for further research until 2025, and deleted after that.

I agree that my information is processed until the project is completed, approx. 06/30/2025

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(Signed by project participant, date)

## **Part II**

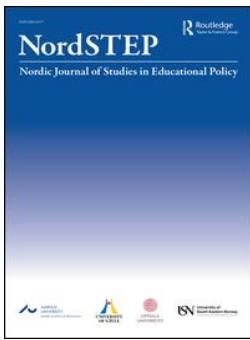
### **The articles**



## Article I

Dieudè, A. (2021). Legitimizing private school policy within a political divide: The role of international references. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 7(2), 78–90.





## Legitimizing private school policy within a political divide: the role of international references

Alessandra Dieudé

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## Legitimizing private school policy within a political divide: the role of international references

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### ABSTRACT

Researchers are increasingly emphasizing the importance of international actors' influence on defining education policy in different contexts. The article argues that referencing international organizations is a way of legitimizing changes to private school policy. Using Norway as an example, the article investigates how international references are used by the political divide: first, a centre-right government liberalized private school policy. This was reversed by the successive centre-left government, before the successive centre-right government again liberalized private school policy. The study draws on content analysis of policy documents from 2002 to 2018. The analysis displays the eclectic nature of how international references are used to (de)legitimize private school policies. Different governments have used similar international references either to legitimise the liberalization of private schooling policy, or to delegitimise such policy. However, the analysis also shows that concepts like free choice, diversity and competition are central in legitimising private school policy. The study of international referencing in the education field indicates several consequences for the Norwegian education welfare state ideal, such as emphasising a stronger market-orientation. This study shows that analysing how actors position political arguments is important when understanding how nation states, as proactive entities, negotiate meaning and evidence from international references.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### KEYWORDS



Private schooling policy; legitimacy; international references; Norway

### Introduction

This article explores recent policy changes concerning the privatization of education in Norway at a time of comprehensive reforms in the public and private education sectors. Policy changes are understood as the changes in the legal framework that regulates who is eligible to establish private schools as well as the terms for regulating financing and curricula for private schools. Other studies have focused on the regulations and funding to examine the governing of private schooling (West & Nikolai, 2017). In the field of educational policy, researchers are increasingly questioning what type of knowledge policy-makers use as evidence to legitimize education reforms (Baek et al., 2018; C. Lundahl & Serder, 2020; Ozga, 2019; Wiseman, 2010). Drawing on international and comparative policy studies (Steiner-Khamsi, 2002; Waldow, 2012), the main thesis of this article is that international references are used to legitimize contested education reforms, as, for example, the liberalization of private schooling. Studying the use of references in education policy-making provides insight into mechanisms of legitimacy production (Ringarp & Waldow, 2016; Steiner-

Khamsi, 2002; Takayama et al., 2013; Wermke & Höstfält, 2014).

The aim of the study is to investigate how successive Norwegian governments have produced legitimacy for contested policy reforms, such as the privatization of education. Within this policy debate there are two main positions which can be recognized as a political divide. First a position arguing that the privatization of education should be limited and regulated, and a second position arguing that privatization of education can contribute positively to the quality of the Norwegian education system. From 2002 to 2019, the number of pupils attending Norwegian private schools more than doubled, growing by 135%, from 11 535 to 27 027 pupils. As of 2019, there are 261 independent schools with 27 027 pupils, and 2538 public schools with 609 223 pupils (primary and lower secondary school) (Statistics Norway, 2019). These trends have placed Norway in a global education context with reforms that are advancing school choice or privatization of education. However, recent studies have shown that the phenomenon of privatization and pro-privatization policies unfold and affect countries differently depending on their political, social, cultural and

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economic configurations (Koinzer et al., 2017; Verger et al., 2017). In the Nordic context, privatization of schooling has been highly contested for centuries as education is valued as a universal public good. In particular, Norway has been less inclined than Sweden and Denmark to follow market-oriented approaches when it comes to schooling, instead preserving its emphasis on public comprehensive schooling (Dovemark et al., 2018; Sivesind & Saglie, 2017).

The study focuses on the period from 2002 to 2018, a time when three private school reforms were introduced by three different governments. First, the centre-right government's school reform from 2002–2003 made it easier to establish private schools. Next, the centre-left government's school reform from 2005–2006 reversed the centre-right policy by reintroducing specific requirements for establishing private schools. Finally, the school reform from 2014–2015, introduced by another centre-right coalition government, again liberalized the private school policy, allowing for more alternative private schools and schools offering a distinct profile. In the past, Norway has made few central policy changes to revise the regulations for private schools, however, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, such revisions have increased. These recent policy developments and the growing number of private schools and students in these schools indicate that the more traditional public and political opinions regarding private schooling in Norway are shifting. Education is highly regulated by the state in Norway as part of the public welfare system. Policy changes in the direction of liberalization of private schooling can as such be an early sign of changes in the social democratic Norwegian welfare state ideal and a movement towards a more market-oriented approach. An investigation into these policy changes might provide important insights into the policy legitimization of such developments.

Bearing this in mind, the article scrutinizes the recent policy developments towards privatization of education in Norway through a document and content analysis of government propositions and the parliamentary processing of the governments' proposals. In particular, the aim is to investigate policymakers' use of references in policy documents and how the policy changes that regulate private schools are legitimized, as initiated by each of the governments in a period characterized by comprehensive reforms dealing with the decentralization and efficiency of education. The research question of the study is: *How are policy changes that regulate private schooling legitimized by successive governments in a period of comprehensive reform?*

## Context of the study

After World War II, the Nordic countries began to place even greater value on education and dedicated a larger share of their state's budget to education and the promotion of nation-building, common values and social equality in a comprehensive public school (Telhaug et al., 2006). The focus on a strong public school is reflected by the concept of the comprehensive school for all – which represents the ideals of the free, public, comprehensive school model accessible to all (Imsen et al., 2017). Norway has been able to maintain this focus on equality, for instance, through the social-democratic-oriented policies of the 1970s and due to a fairly high level of agreement between the political parties (Wiborg, 2013), and various Norwegian governments have aimed to have an educational system that avoids social inequality and social segregation (Lauglo, 2009; Volckmar, 2018). Most private schools<sup>1</sup> are in fact highly subsidized by the government, which currently covers 85% of student expenditures. The policy reforms related to private schooling in 1970 and in 1985, however, only granted funding to the private schools that presented an alternative approach to schooling, either as a pedagogical alternative, such as the Waldorf schools, or as a faith-based alternative, such as Christian schools.

In the last 15 years, however, school policy reforms have extensively changed the education sector, focusing less on the 'school for all' (Aasen, 2007; Imsen & Volckmar, 2014; Møller & Skedsmo, 2013). These policy developments are usually understood in light of increasing influence from international actors and international education policies. For example, recent educational reforms have shifted their focus towards clearer accountability measures through monitoring the quality of education and using an outcome-based approach with greater focus on individual performance (Prøitz, 2015a). One of the most indicative policies that has followed this trend is the Knowledge Promotion Reform of 2006 that affected primary and secondary education (Aasen, 2007, 2012). However, the recent focus on individual performance, which envisions education as vital for successful competition in the global market, did not explicitly encourage the introduction of for-profit and business actors in tax funded education/schools, as is the case in the Swedish school system (L. Lundahl, 2002).

## Studying policy legitimization

A growing number of studies have focused on how the international actors and international policy trends in education are used to legitimize or delegitimize the politics of national education (C. Lundahl

& Serder, 2020; Ringarp & Waldow, 2016; Tveit & Lundahl, 2018). The international aspect, also understood as an educational phenomenon observed from elsewhere, may be used to scandalize the situation, thus justifying the need for policy change. In particular, this can be used to legitimize national reforms that are perceived as controversial at home (Steiner-Khamsi, 2002). The study of the complexity of education policy requires an understanding of the different political forces that compete to define goals, problems and solutions for the education project at the system and classroom level. These forces have been proven to work concurrently in the Norwegian education reforms, across time and with varying external influence (Aasen et al., 2014). The study investigates the legitimization of the liberalization of policy for private schooling, a controversial reform due to national characteristics.

The article argues that the references to international organizations or other countries' policies function as a way of legitimizing such contested education reforms as the liberalization of private schooling. To examine policy legitimization, the study is inspired by the interpretative framework often adopted to analyse the borrowing and lending of policy in education (Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012). In the past decades, research on educational policy borrowing has attempted to understand why and how educational ideas and practices are transferred across national contexts. Recently, within the field of comparative research, borrowing can be more generally understood as policy influence across countries (C. Lundahl & Serder, 2020) and as a part of the process of legitimation or delegitimation of educational ideas in the national reform contexts, with international references (Waldow, 2012). In this paper the international references are considered to be in line with Steiner-Khamsi's conception, where, rather than looking at borrowing, the focus is on the use of international references as a part of a 'domestic induced rhetoric' (2012).

The interpretative framework, developed for the purpose of this study, makes it possible to identify and analyse how a country can legitimize its policy agenda by using selective references from other national education policies or international organizations (Waldow, 2012). International references are understood as 'references to other countries and international organisations (IOs) or data, material, recommendations, etc. produced by other countries or IOs' (Ringarp & Waldow, 2016, p. 1). International references can be seen as the consequence of the complexity that the educational system is experiencing. This complexity places higher demands on the legitimization of educational policymaking (Steiner-Khamsi, 2002), meaning there might be a need for an additional authority to justify current educational

reforms and decisions (Schriewer, 1992). However, an international reference does not automatically imply external influence or that some content, practice or idea has been borrowed. The international references in this case, are not an external force, 'but rather a domestically induced rhetoric mobilised at particular moments of protracted policy conflict, to generate reform pressure and build policy advocacy coalitions' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). It is important to note that the actual reference can provide legitimization for education reform just as much as when the original source (of the international reference) is left unreported (Waldow, 2009, 2012).

Nonetheless, other educational systems or other international trends are not the only types of references available to policymakers. References to science can be used in a political argument to prove the effectiveness of a reform, for instance, through cross-national research (Waldow, 2012). In particular, IOs such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) play a key role in identifying effective education systems through international standardized tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Sellar & Lingard, 2013; Steiner-Khamsi, 2003). The publication of PISA results presents powerful models for justifying contested reforms. Legitimacy can also be produced by referring to values, for example, when reforms are justified as representing a set of values, e.g. social justice, equality and equity. Since education is connected with power and ideology in multiple ways value-based ideologies are often found to advance policy agendas (Aasen et al., 2004). Reforms can also be legitimized by drawing attention to the countries' great history and past achievements, projecting this on to domestic solutions that are considered to have worked previously. Usually, such references can indicate that the influence from abroad is reduced (Schulte & Wermke, 2019). The references presented are usually found in policies, either alone or combined. However, international references combined with references to science can help value-based policymaking to gain more legitimacy. It has been showed in fact, that these references, such as PISA, are used as authoritative evidence even when they are not providing actual evidence for the reform (C. Lundahl & Serder, 2020; Tveit & Lundahl, 2018). All the different types of references presented in this section provide education policymakers with several opportunities to legitimize or delegitimise educational agendas.

## Materials

The data for this study comprise an extensive body of policy documents that function as a regulatory framework for private schooling (see Table 1 for an

**Table 1.** Overview of the policy documents included in the study.

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| Policy   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 state budgets from 2002/2003 to 2017/2018</li> <li>• 6 propositions</li> <li>• 1 report to the parliament</li> </ul>   |
| Politics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2002–2003 parliamentary processing of the government's policy proposal for the Independent School Act (Ot. prp. nr. 33)</li> <li>• 2006–2007 parliamentary processing of the government's policy proposal for Changes to the Independent School Act (Ot. prp. nr. 37)</li> <li>• 2014–2015 parliamentary processing of the government's policy proposal for Changes to the Private School Act (Prop. 84 L)</li> </ul> |

overview of the document corpus of the study). It is important to note that the documents presented are different in nature. The documents that are the result of government processes constitute the policy, whereas the documents stemming from the political debates and, hence, the political parties' views on the matter represent the political aspect (Dahler-Larsen, 2003). The results of the political debates are reflected in the parliamentary processing<sup>2</sup> of the government's policy proposal (Stortinget, 2020).

Document analysis was used to gain insight into the underlying meanings, values and accounts developed by the policy documents (Cohen et al., 2011; Fitzgerald, 2012). Policy documents are produced by the government: the Proposition to the Parliament<sup>3</sup> or the Report to the Parliament. Propositions to Parliament present the proposed resolutions and legislation that need to be discussed and approved by the Parliament, often in terms of judicial or fiscal concerns. Reports to the Parliament present issues often related to a particular topic of development and potential new legislation. The government submits these propositions and reports to the Parliament, where they are dealt with by the appropriate standing committees.<sup>4</sup> In the standing committee, remarks and recommendations are submitted to the Parliament for the parliamentary processing of the proposal. The parliamentary processing of the policy proposals comprises publicly available documents, such as official reports from the Parliamentary sessions. These documents are treated as official policy documents because they are part of the Norwegian democratic process of transparency. The parliamentary processing selected for this study focused on the propositions that debated policy changes for the regulatory framework of private schooling in 2003, 2007 and 2015 (Table 1).

Another document presented in the Parliament is the national budget, which is the annual budget proposition presented in the parliament's autumn sessions by the Minister of Finance, who presents an overview of the national economy and justifies the government's priorities and budget proposals (Prøitz, 2015a). The budget has more or less the same format

every year, making the annual budgets comparable across time. Each budget reflects the economic goals, priorities and intentions for the coming year by sharing appropriations between the various sectors and ministries. Furthermore, each ministry, for example, the Ministry of Education and Research, produces its own economic plan with its own priorities and goals for the year in question. Because the documents are 'an updated source of political priorities at the time' (Prøitz, 2015a, p. 278), they are expected to provide solid indications of how priorities are legitimized, which is highly relevant for the present study.

Searches for relevant documents were conducted in the archives of the official government website with search queries used in Norwegian to refer to private schools and related policy: private schools, free schools, free school policy and private school policy. The documents identified by the searches were downloaded in PDF format. In the first phase of skimming through the texts, documents that dealt with changes in private schools' legislation were selected for further analysis. Through this search, 35 governmental documents produced by the Ministry of Education and Research were identified, all of which – in different ways – dealt with the financial or legislative aspects of private schools in Norway. Documents with a scope outside the research question of the current study were excluded from the analysis.

### Analysis of the material

The analysis was based on the concept of references. The aim was to investigate how different references can figure in the policy documents of successive governments, providing legitimization for changes in the private schooling reforms. There were two phases in the content analysis. The first was a word search drawing on both theory and previous studies to identify words and categories of references to map the prevalence of relevant words in the ways they were used to support arguments for private schooling. For instance, values such as freedom of choice are likely to appear in policy agendas that attempt to justify the privatization of education policies (Arreman & Holm, 2011; Ball, 2007). Examples of word search strings used are: (a) reference to values, for example: freedom of choice, (b) international references, for example: Finland and (c) reference to scientific results, for example: PISA's cross-national research. This method provided an overview of the types of references used by the different governments and also the sections of the extended documents where these references were applied.

As the documents consist of sections that were not relevant for this study (such as those considering particular financial aspects or legal issues) not all

**Table 2.** References from the entire database.

| Types of references                             | Word search  |
|---|--|
| Reference to values                             | freedom of choice, parents' rights to choose, right to choose, school choice, human right(s) diversity, alternative, different, diverse, competition, challenging equality, equal                |
| International references and scientific results | International conventions, International commitments<br>Human rights Act<br>United Nations<br>Sweden/Swedish<br>Denmark/Danish<br>Finland/Finnish<br>OECD<br>PISA/International studies/ results |

the sections of the policies were relevant for the mapping of the words used. The parliamentary processing instead represents a debate on whether the policy changes proposed are legitimized through a visible political process of 'interests, representation, bargaining, negotiation, power bases, alliance formation, decision making, etc'. (Dahler-Larsen, 2003, p. 2). Thus, the entire document is relevant for the study.

In the second phase of the content analysis, an in-depth reading of the identified relevant sections was undertaken, then leading to further investigation (Prøitz, 2015a). The references identified as linked to the value of choice, for instance, displayed several references in the documents (see Table 2 for example).

## Findings

In the following, the role of references used by successive governments to legitimize policy changes for private schooling is highlighted. The findings are structured chronologically and follow the three periods during which the governments in office introduced the policy changes into legislation. Extracted statements from the material in each period are shown to exemplify some of the different legitimization strategies used to promote policy changes for private schooling.

### Bondevik II Government (2001–2005)

The right-centre coalition government under Prime Minister Bondevik's second government (Bondevik II) consisted of three parties: the Conservative Party, the Christian Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. As mentioned above, this government facilitated the establishment of private schools.

### Private schools: market-oriented values and international references

The Bondevik II government legitimized the liberalization of private schooling by using references to values of choice and diversity. Furthermore, these values were found to be supported by such international references as the international conventions of the United Nations. In several policy documents, the core argument was that increased autonomy for schools, combined with increased freedom of choice for students and parents, would lead to a more diverse education system that would be more meaningful for the students (Ministry of Education, 2005, 2006; Ministry of Education and Research, 2003a, 2004). According to the coalition government, private schools were an important way of ensuring 'diversity' and 'school choice', and 'challenging public schools', thereby improving them. This is exemplified in the extract below, where it is argued that private schools would improve the diversity of the educational system by providing a more varied educational programme.

The point of strengthening the public school is that it must be developed. New things must be tried out. Within the boundaries of the public school, it is not always possible to try new things (Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2003, p. 574) (Author's translation).

The reference to choice can be considered to belong to a market-oriented language (Ball, 2007). Diversity, however, usually refer to the meaning of a variety and co-existence of many different elements (values, ideas, races, cultures etc.) which are not necessarily market-oriented. In this case, following the government's arguments it can be argued that diversity in this case also is related to market-orientation since it is strongly linked with choice.

Furthermore, to justify the liberalization of private schooling, the Ministry of Education argued that the establishment of private schools is a democratic right, emphasizing the importance of 'freedom of choice' (Ministry of Education and Research, 2003b, p. 7). This is a reference to a specific set of values based on the human rights discourse promoted by the United Nations. Going even further, the government linked the parents' freedom to choose a school with their moral and religious beliefs – directly referencing the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (Ministry of Education and Research, 2003b, p. 7).

While the references to choice and diversity is here linked to a market-oriented language (Ball, 2007), the reference to the human rights framework falls into the category of international references as the convention document has been produced by an IO.

Moreover, in additional instances the values of choice and diversity are supported by an international reference, as in the National Budget of 2006, where the international reference to the ICESCR and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provided supplementary authority to the pro-privatization argument, as illustrated in the following extract:

This (human rights) convention has the premise that parents should be able to choose an education for their children based on their own religion or belief system, something that must be able to be achieved through the establishment of private schools. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2007/2006, p. 84) (Author's translation from Norwegian)

Another international reference used to strengthen the references to choice and diversity values and thereby legitimizing the government's liberalization policies is the reference to Sweden and its liberal private school policy. In fact, politicians from the coalition government referred to Sweden as a successful combination of private schools and free school choice. They argued that this combination had reduced social segregation in Sweden because pupils living in areas with a high proportion of immigrants could choose to attend better schools. Because of free school choice, parents did not have to move away from the catchment area to attend the school of their choice (Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2003, p. 578). The reference to Sweden is used to prove that private schools can be instrumental in promoting social justice while at the same time increasing competition between schools.

The Bondevik II government appears to use values that are common to a market-oriented language by importing ways of thinking from other areas than the education sector (Waldow, 2012). The observed referencing uses a certain logic of causality based on a market-oriented vision, where increased diversity and choice will increase competition between schools, that will then in turn raise quality and benefit the entire education system. Moreover, these market-oriented value references were accompanied by international references, as for example, the human rights framework, or other similar education policies liberalizing funding for private schooling (the case of Sweden). These were quite possibly used because market-oriented values were more difficult to justify in the Norwegian education policy as they break with the belief in the welfare state ideal. A market-oriented language could be more in line with the education policy of the Anglo-American tradition whereas, in the Norwegian tradition, these market-oriented arguments for reforms need to find legitimization through an external and higher authority, as for example, a supranational organization. Using international

references, however, does not mean that the Norwegian education system is now entering on a liberal welfare ideal path or putting its faith in a quasi-market approach. Schools are not allowed to be run as businesses, but are allowed, within the state regulations, to compete with public schools to raise the quality of educational standards. In this case, the reference allows the government to open for mechanisms of market-oriented education whilst maintaining a highly state-regulated education system. It appears that the key values promoted by the government are those of diversity and freedom of choice, the emphasis of which, in line with recent education policy, aims at raising the quality of education and its standards. Furthermore, the government used international references to obtain additional authority to legitimize changes in the private schooling regulatory framework, which opened for more market-oriented values within the Norwegian education welfare state ideal.

### **Stoltenberg I and II Governments (2005–2009 and 2009–2013)**

The coalition government under Prime Minister Stoltenberg's first and second governments (Stoltenberg I and II) was composed of the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party. The coalition changed the policy that liberalized private schools by reintroducing the regulations first introduced in 1985.

#### ***Private schools within the social-democratic tradition: values of equality and international references***

In the Stoltenberg I and II coalition governments, references to the values of equality and the social democratic tradition of one school for all (the comprehensive school) are key elements in the policy for legitimizing stricter regulations for private schooling. The new policies were an adjustment away from the market-oriented values of the previous government.

When presenting a new plan for private school policy for 2007, the Stoltenberg government declared that the main goal was to strengthen the public school system since 'the vast majority of Norwegian children and youth will receive education in public schools, reflecting the diversity of Norwegian society' (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 10) (Author's translation). In line with the new government's vision for the Norwegian school, public schools were represented as an important priority because they could ensure the equality of learning outcome amongst the diverse groups in society. The government, here, referenced its own social democratic tradition of

one school for all and equality values to legitimize a new private education policy based on stricter financial requirements for the establishment of private schools.

In the documents produced during the two periods of the so-called red-green coalition, references to the social democratic tradition of the comprehensive school are recurrent. It appears that to preserve the value of equality, the government's aim was to stop the growth of private schools. References to the value of equality and to the social democratic tradition were used to legitimize the re-introduction of regulations that would limit the growth of private schools and re-establish the importance of the comprehensive school. These references appear in several instances (Ministry of Education, 2006, 2007c, 2007a), as is also evident in the following extract:

An important pillar in Norwegian society has been that everyone, regardless of background, goes to the same school, and learns to work together and respect each other. The school is the most important venue for building fellowship in Norway, helping to reduce differences and equip students to function in a diverse society. The public comprehensive school has room for everyone and an eye for the individual, regardless of social and cultural backgrounds, skills and values. The responsibility of society is to ensure that everyone is given equal opportunities so that the right to education is genuine. Education should therefore be a public responsibility under democratic control and accessible to all. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 7) (Author's translation)

Within its policy propositions, the government acknowledged the international commitments that Norway was obligated to follow, for example, giving parents the right to choose other schools according to their religious or belief systems. To legitimize private schools, the Stoltenberg II government made several references to IOs, such as the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights. The government noted, however, that Norway was not obligated to contribute financially or otherwise to the operation of these schools.

As with the previous government, international references were also used in parliamentary processing to re-establish the importance of the comprehensive school, for instance, referring to an OECD report on the effects of free school choice and private schools, thereby supporting this government's argument that free school choice and private schools led to segregation and lower than average test results (Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2007, p. 651). The document produced by the IO framed this problem through quantitative research evidence providing scientific legitimacy to the government's argument. The nature of the evidence-based data provides high legitimation since it is perceived to be more accurate and trustworthy

(Wiseman, 2010). The government also used international references addressing the educational systems of Sweden and Denmark. However, these references were used to prove that the liberalization of private schooling can lead to school segregation (Denmark, cultural segregation) and lower pupils' competencies (Sweden), in contrast to the previous government's opposite argument. In the case of Sweden, competition might have stimulated schools, but also reduced the quality of education by offering choices in the school sector that were disconnected from genuine job opportunities (Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2007, p. 644). On the other hand, Finland was referenced because of its PISA results and its very few private schools (Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2007, p. 644). The international references, combined with scientific evidence from large-scale assessments and evidence-based research, further served the new government's vision for school by promoting the importance of school as a common good, thus, the value of one school for all.

The main focus of the government's position was to re-establish the importance of the comprehensive school and in doing so legitimize policy changes to restrict eligibility for private school funding. For instance, the government argued that only private schools that offered a religious or pedagogical alternative were eligible for school grants since it was argued that these schools did not create inequality. Based on the references to equality and international references, the government legitimized the reintroduction of the regulations first introduced in 1985. Furthermore, these references support a causality approach based on a social democratic tradition where a school for all is the best way to treat students and avoid the risk of developing inequality.

### **Solberg government (2013 to present)**

The government under Prime Minister Solberg is a centre-right coalition of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party.<sup>5</sup> It was supported in Parliament by the Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party through a cooperation agreement. In 2015, the government liberalized private school policy by accepting new types of private schools.

#### ***Private schools: diversity, choice, freedom and healthy competition***

Through this policy change that liberalized private schools, the government pointed to the importance of giving more freedom to private schools so they could offer a special profile that opened for the implementation of diverse teaching approaches. The new types of private schools that the policy change

aimed to approve made it possible to direct special academic attention on one subject or facilitated the implementation of a pedagogical approach that differed from what was used in public schools or other private schools, as described in the following extract:

By proposing a profile school as the new basis, the ministry aims to open for approval of schools that wish to offer something beyond the scope of the Knowledge Promotion reform (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 24) (Authors' translation)

The value of freedom can also be understood in line with a market-oriented approach, where liberalization can allow the system to improve and grow. The focus of this policy change was to allow private schools to implement their specific profiles and to create a genuine alternative to public schools.

Compared to the previous governments, from 2015 to 2018 there has been a shift in the use of international references to legitimize the liberalization of private schooling. In the parliamentary documents, international references, in particular those that refer to other countries' approaches, are not used to justify the new regulatory framework which would allow for more state-subsidized private schools. The reference to Sweden, for instance, seems to have lost its authority, possibly due to the fact that it has been depicted on several occasions by the previous government and current opposition as one of the OECD countries that had experienced the largest decline in students' achievement-test results, i.e. the PISA results for all subjects (Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2015, p. 4084). Moreover, the international references might have lost their legitimizing effect because the opposition had used evidence-based research during parliamentary proceedings to argue that threats to inequality and segregation are present in the Swedish context (Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2015, pp. -4079–4084).

The reference to the UN convention (ICESC) (Ministry of Education, 2015), on the other hand, appears consistently to support the argument that the right to choose is a human right. In the parliamentary debates, such international references were only mentioned to note that the policy changes would ensure that Norway is committed to the human rights conventions.

At the same time, and similar to the Bondevik II government, the Solberg government's standpoint on promoting policy changes was supported consistently through the references to the values of diversity and choice. In fact, according to the government, additional state-subsidized private schools could increase diversity and learning amongst schools while, at the same time, it could ensure the individual's

opportunity to choose a private school, thereby benefitting students (Ministry of Education, 2015; Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2015). Here, diversity is understood both as a diverse profile of schools and diversity of choice. Furthermore, the government coalition more explicitly advanced the argument that diversity would lead to competition between schools, which would improve the quality of the entire education system (Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2015, p. 4082). Following the government's argument, more private schools will create quality and incentivize teachers' development work. It thus appears from the referencing observed that more market-oriented values have resurfaced with a keener emphasis on competition. In fact, the values of diversity, freedom of choice and competition are concepts found together as part of the supply (competition) and demand (choice) approach of education quasi-markets (Ball & Youdell, 2009; L. Lundahl, 2002). This finding indicates that market-oriented values have been reintroduced from the era of the Bondevik II government. The difference between the new and previous government is that these market-oriented values are not combined with international country references, such as Sweden. In the parliamentary processing, however, it is repeatedly noted that international education plays an important role for Norway. International in this case is associated with a specific international curriculum developed by a well-known global actor: the International Baccalaureate. According to the coalition governments, schools like the International Baccalaureate create 'healthy' competition for public schools and also benefit Norway when competing in the global market (Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2015, p. 4089). The extract below exemplifies through one concrete case how an international private school can stimulate healthy competition and private schools can stimulate healthy competition between public school Y and international school X:

(X international school) (.) is widely accepted as one of the country's very best [private] schools. Not many metres away is (Y public School) upper secondary school. Should we believe the Left, this school should be so strongly threatened by the scary private school that it should barely be able to cope – yes, almost ready to fall. The opposite is the case. (Y public School) upper secondary school is the country's largest upper secondary school – a modern school with happy students, good results (.) (Ministry of Education, 2015) (Authors' translation)

The references to values of *diversity*, *choice*, *freedom* and *competition* were used as vehicles to legitimize policy changes. These legitimizing strategies differ from the previous governments because they do not



appear to be combined with references to other countries with similar educational policy for private schooling. Instead, a more appropriate international reference can be found in a global pedagogical actor who is recognized worldwide as a 'gold standard' in education (Resnik, 2012).

## Discussion

This article has focused on how successive governments have legitimized policy changes for private schooling in Norway from 2002 to 2018. The main argument of the study has been that international references were used to legitimize a contested reform: the liberalization of private schooling. Below follows a discussion of how the successive governments made use of international references (UN conventions and references to other countries) and what role they played in legitimizing the policy changes that regulate private schooling.

### The eclectic nature of the role of international references

International references are consistently present when legitimizing private schooling across successive governments. The analysis reveals two different preferred international references. First, the human rights framework and the UN conventions functioned consistently throughout the studied period (2002–2018) as all three governments used them as an international source for legitimizing private schools. This includes the centre-left governments (Stoltenberg I and II), which 'passively' legitimized private schooling by referring to the international commitment to human rights and UN conventions, but at the same time questioning whether actively providing economic support to private schools is a human right.

Particularly interesting is how similar references to other countries' educational systems, such as Sweden, are used for accommodating different political ideas for the legitimization and delegitimation of the desired policy changes concerning the regulation of private schooling in the Bondevik II and Stoltenberg governments. The origin of the proposed policy liberalizing choice and diversity was inspired by the Swedish equivalent (Wiborg, 2013). Thus, the references to the neighbouring country of Sweden served as an effective reference for the centre-right coalition (Bondevik II, 2001–2005) because it reflected the desired liberal policies for private schooling and the introduction of market-oriented values. In fact, the country is portrayed as a good example from abroad in terms of greater freedom of choice and similar social democratic traditions.

At the same time, Sweden is an effective reference also for the succeeding centre-left government (2005–2013), because of Sweden's declining results in the PISA ranking tests. This reference is then combined with other countries' positive results, such as Finland. Their performance was then associated with the countries' educational policies for private schooling. These international references in combination with references to science (PISA results) allowed the centre-left to delegitimize Sweden as an educational model. Sweden in fact represents an unwanted scenario at home, e.g. social segregation and low academic results, while Finland represents the preferred politics of the party, with almost no private schooling combined with high performing public schools. By displaying Sweden as a low-performer country through international large-scale assessments (reference to science), the Stoltenberg government changed the status of Sweden as an international reference for Norway.

Finally, references to Sweden do not appear in the Solberg government's argumentation. According to Waldow, politicians can deliberately silence the international references if they are not perceived as effective legitimizing strategies (Waldow, 2009). It is therefore possible that even though Sweden was the country that inspired Norway's policy for private schooling, references to Sweden have now, in the Solberg government, been 'silenced' due to the shift in how Sweden is perceived in relation to its performance in the international comparative studies (PISA). Another explanation for Sweden losing its legitimacy status might be that Sweden has gone too far in its marketization and privatization project, and in the Norwegian educational context it might not be acceptable to be influenced by one of the most liberal school systems in the OECD.

The analysis displays how the reference to Sweden has been an effective reference within the political divide, and how the reference has been silenced when it no longer provides legitimization. The use of international references could be interpreted as a temporary policy strategy that serves the purpose of legitimizing ideas and practices in education, especially if those ideas and practices are contested (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). According to Steiner-Khamsi, when an educational reform has been internalized, international references are removed. The shift in the use of these legitimizing strategies may thus imply that liberalization of the policy for private schooling has become less contested across the studied period and has been now internalized (Steiner-Khamsi, 2002). These findings show a gradual tendency in Norway towards liberalizing policy for private schooling, in line with a market-liberal knowledge regime (Aasen et al., 2014). Under the influence of this regime, having more private schools

is seen as a way to boost competition, increase the quality of education and incentivize teachers' development work. In line with this reasoning, the IB curriculum is a good example (often provided by private schools) as, according to Resnik (2008), it aims to give students the competencies needed to deal with the growing demands of the global job market.

### **The tension between long-standing ideologies**

Research on education policy also shows how it is difficult to see the political process of legitimization through dichotomies (Dahler-Larsen, 2003). Together with other studies (Aasen et al., 2014), the findings highlight the arguments for reforms where Norwegian policymakers have appeared to simultaneously incorporate contradicting elements from their different values. For instance, even if the centre-right may be critical of public comprehensive schools because of their lack of diversity, they still consider their primary goal to be to strengthen public schooling. Furthermore, they do not support the idea that private schools can make a profit; they must be not-for-profit institutions. In the referencing observed, however, the centre-right governments use selected international references to support a market-oriented vision, where increased diversity and choice will lead to more competition amongst schools, and through this competition, quality will be improved to the benefit of the entire education system.

Through the study of references, it is possible to see how the centre-left has apparently accepted that private schooling is a human right, and the state is responsible for offering an alternative education to the comprehensive school. At the same time, it is clear that the party still draws on the social democratic tradition as a fundamental building block, where the school for all is seen as the best solution to threats of social inequality. Drawing on the interpretative framework of this study, reforms can also be legitimized by drawing attention to the countries' great history and past achievements, projecting this on to domestic solutions that are considered to have worked in the past (Schulte & Wermke, 2019). There is a tension identified in both the long-standing ideologies within the social aspects of education, i.e. shifting from the collective to the individual good, and from ensuring equal opportunities for all to diverse education for all.

Private schools are growing probably because they aim to offer something that public schools are not providing. The liberalization of private schooling which concurs with the process of diversifying the quite monolithic Norwegian model allows for more than the one school for all system to be accepted. For example, the IB programme challenges the

Norwegian model through its results and its advanced curricula, and the Waldorf approach to education is a source of inspiration for national education policies through its learning theories. The former model is based on the Anglo-Saxon educational tradition and the latter is the German model modified to fit the Norwegian model. Other types of private schools with a particular profile are also introduced and open to international influence and differentiation of the Norwegian culture. On the one hand, this study gives insight into how private schools are increasingly seen (through a diverse pedagogical approach and more competition) to enhance the policy and practice of the Norwegian public school model. On the other hand, the study sheds light on the importance of the contextual political configurations in the choice of references, highlighting both contradicting elements and the political tensions in contexts where education is considered a public good.

### **Concluding remarks**

This article has examined how a political divide has used international references to legitimize policy changes that regulates private schooling. First, the analysis displays the eclectic nature of the role of international references, e.g. Sweden which has shown to be an effective reference that can accommodate both sides of the political divide. This can be seen in how the first government emphasized the Swedish example to liberalize policy for private schooling while the next government used the same example to delegitimise such policy. Second, the article shows how the Solberg government silenced the reference to Sweden when the reference no longer provided legitimation. However, the analysis also shows that concepts like free choice, diversity and competition are central in legitimising private school policy. The implications of this analysis raise important reflections about the actual authority of international references, as it has been shown here that the very same example can be used for very different and even contradictory legitimizing purposes. As previous research (Prøitz, 2015b; Steiner-Khamsi, 2012), this study shows that analysing how actors position political arguments is important when understanding how nation states, as proactive entities, negotiate meaning and evidence from international references. This policy legitimation process is central to understand the meaning making in national education policy. Furthermore, the analysis indicates several consequences of studying international referencing, such as highlighting a stronger market-orientation within the Norwegian education welfare state idea. In fact, the analysis has found how the policy for liberalizing private schooling is gradually gaining more acceptance interpreted by the fact that previous

used international references are no longer visible in the policy documents and thereby indicating no need for such referencing to make the argument.

Finally, the analysis has illustrated that in the private schooling debate today there is a cross-party understanding that diversity is a key element for enhancing the quality of education. In particular, policymakers of the Solberg Government have emphasized the importance of increased freedom, both within the national curriculum and in the private schools' operation. Whilst these are policy assumptions based on the expectations of linearity amongst system levels, policy needs to be further 'translated from text to action – put into practice – in relation to history and to context, with the resources available' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3). An important finding in this study is the need to further investigate whether the increase in the number of private schools actually leads to differentiation of the school system reflected in a diversity of pedagogical choices and practices that can meet the needs and wishes of different students.

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## Notes

- 1 In Norway there are two types of private schools, one type receives state funding and is regulated by the Free School Act, and the second type does not receive state support. This study focuses on the former type, which is more representative of the private schools in Norway.
- 2 The parliament processes the government's policy proposal through a recommendation (*innstilling*) from the parliament's standing committee which is consequently debated in the parliament (the so-called First and Second Readings).
- 3 The Norwegian Parliament is called *Storting*.
- 4 The Church, Education and Research Committee is a cross-party committee consisting of members of Parliament. From 2017 Church affairs were moved to another ministry and today the name of the committee is Education and Research.
- 5 The Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party entered the government in 2018 and 2019, respectively, while the Progress Party exited the government in 2020.

## Disclosure statement

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## Article II

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# Curriculum policy and instructional planning: Teachers' autonomy across various school contexts

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## Abstract

International trends promoting school diversity and choice have reshaped education across Europe, leading towards a multiplicity in ownership structures and varied governance configurations. More recently, this can also be seen in European countries with a long history of state-owned and governed public schools, such as in the Nordic states. The aim of this article is to explore autonomy and curriculum control in teacher's work in public and independent schools within a country context where there are long traditions of 'one public school for all'. The article draws on interviews with school leaders and teachers on a Waldorf school, an IB school, and a Norwegian public school as well as analysis of local school documents. The analysis shows that varying school contexts present both different and overlapping characteristics of curriculum control and teacher autonomy. All schools have accommodated to educational outcome governed regimes, however, teacher autonomy in the school context appears to differ. Teacher autonomy is more related to teachers' practices, not the educational outcomes required. The study shows how policies intending for the standardisation of schooling may work in conflict with policy intentions of educational diversity, provided by independent schools of different character.

## Keywords

Curriculum control, teacher autonomy, policy instruments, marketised education, varied school contexts

## Introduction

Decentralisation and recentralisation reform waves starting in the 1990s have opened up for the development of national school systems that are characterised by multiple governance configurations at the national, municipality and private owner levels (Moos et al., 2004; Naumann and Crouch, 2020; Telhaug, 2003; Turner, 2004). With these reforms, the private actors have been seen as

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important to fulfil the goals of diversity in public schooling, which is actually needed to promote public choice. Related to this, there is also an assumption that increased diversity and freedom of choice can lead to improved quality of education and practices of citizenship, which can be understood as democratic control over services (Sivesind and Trætteberg, 2017). At the same time, privatisation and market-oriented approaches in the education sector can impact the fundamentals of public schooling, for example, the equality of access (Verger et al., 2017).

It can therefore be stated that, teachers' work by a multitude of policies on different levels. Not only from national policies, but also of local policies in the landscapes of diverse schools, and indeed also of international influences (which are provided by owners, municipalities or national education agencies). Multiple policy messages put high demands on teachers, who must serve as the interpreters of education policies and whose practices are crucial for student learning outcomes (Mølstad & Prøitz, 2018). However, little is known about how teachers negotiate and interpret such multiple and eventual conflicting policy requirements within different governance configurations. Researchers have argued for the necessity of enhancing knowledge about how local practices both construct and instantiate organisational routines and processes (Apple, 2018; Deng, 2010; Little, 2012; Mausestagen et al., 2018; Spillane and Anderson, 2019). In fact, teachers' policy interpretation and enactment of policy requirements can often be seen in their regular instructional planning, for example, when teachers relate their decisions to governance documents (Mølstad et al., 2020).

Drawing on such issues, in the current paper, we examine teachers' interpretations and enactment of curriculum documents in public and independent schools. As curriculum in this paper is understood as public policy instrument (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2007), the study focusses on different curriculum for public and independent schools. Recently, the introduction of a more result oriented and a strong accountability script reform, teacher autonomy has been noted to be challenged (Mausestagen and Mølstad, 2015). In this context central documents aim to regulate teachers' enactment. Through the analysis of teachers' meaning-making work we can highlight the process of policy interpretation (Ball et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2013; Wagenaar, 2011). It follows that teachers within different policy frameworks will form meanings which they will enact in the classroom and shape the school. The purpose is to investigate the differences and similarities in these varied school contexts in relation to envisioned practices of education diversity in the Nordic countries. Moreover, the paper aims to understand the forms of control and autonomy that characterise teachers' interpretative work in different school contexts. The national context of the presented study is Norway. The case of Norway in regard of the issue stated is very interesting for an international audience. Norway constitutes a unique case for its low but fast-growing enrolment in independent schools,<sup>1</sup> a traditional cross-political agreement on education change and reform including the objectives of education and a national curriculum largely adopted without major debates. These processes of education reform have also been found to be highly connected to global trends and developments promoted by a traditional close relationship between Norway and the OECD (Pettersson et al., 2017; Prøitz, 2015). This paper compares a Waldorf school, an International Baccalaureate school and a municipal school. In general, all the schools are required by law to follow the national regulations of the Education Act; the national curriculum covers age 1–13, however grade 1–10 is compulsory for all Norwegian students, while 11–13 is not mandatory but all students have the right to fulfil upper secondary education and training. Private schools are also required to follow the Education Act, however, they have more autonomy on whether to follow the national curriculum, but, they have to ensure equally good education. After recent reforms, Waldorf pedagogical principles and tradition, for example, principle of adapted learning, have been built around a curriculum that follows a framework oriented towards learning outcomes and outputs in line with the curriculum framework for public schools (Mathisen,

2014). The Waldorf school context have distinguished themselves as opposing political ideas that saw school instrumental for economic growth and trends such as the standardisation of education, trying to keep its process free of grading (see Stabel, 2016). At the end of lower secondary school (10th grade) students receive a written graduation certificate with a final assessments grade to ensure the possibility of admission to a public upper secondary school. The international schools (IB licenced) context is characterised for not having to teach the same curricula of the national hosting country (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). The international school in this study follows the IB Middle Years Programme (IBMYP), designed for 11–16 age range and with ‘the emphasis heavily on teacher assessment’ (Hayden, 2006: 123). Similarly, to Waldorf schools, at the end of the IBMYP (11 cohort), grades are aligned to match the national system and students receive their competency certificate based on grades from VG1-upper secondary school. Only the municipal public school of this study is required by law to follow the outcome-based national curriculum which goals and objectives are defined at national level, while school actors’ autonomy is traditionally recognised by deciding content and method. Thus, the base of the comparison is teacher autonomy as it evolves in the three different school contexts complex policy configurations.

The study asks: *how and in what ways is teacher autonomy enacted under different types of curriculum control of public and independent schools in Norway?* Further, the overarching research question is supported by two subquestions enquiring about (a) what characterises the curriculum control of public and independent schools in Norway as defined in school policy documents and (b) how teachers experience their autonomy in planning and organising their teaching in the three schools of this study.

### ***Education policy and independent schools: The context of the study***

In general, independent schools represent a diversified offering in different countries across Europe. Generally, these schools are characterised by a particular belief, pedagogical visions or practice and receive state funding without being owned by the state. This trend has been accelerated by neoliberal oriented educational policy based on decentralisation, choice and accountability. These developments can challenge professional authority (Hall et al., 2015). As in most Western education systems, the Nordic countries are affected by the performativity and accountability agenda. However, while these developments can be found in different degrees, the commitment to the comprehensive school project remains strong (Dovemark et al., 2018; Telhaug et al., 2006). At the policy level, this contradiction is attributed to the current need to compete within the global economy (Aasen, 2007; Imsen and Volckmar, 2014). For Sweden and Norway, adherence to the global economy and neoliberal trends has brought about changes to the role of teachers, the classroom practices and the learning processes (Carlgren et al., 2006). For instance, in the current Norwegian policy context, greater accountability demands for student results are placed on teachers’ work (Aasen, 2012; Hatch, 2013; Mausethagen, 2013; Møller and Skedsmo, 2013; Prøitz, 2015).

In Norway, the very context of the study, the policy process of the past few decades has gradually increased the legitimisation of diversified educational provision beyond public school. This legitimisation is grounded both under human rights conventions and expectation that practices and competition between schools with different pedagogical profiles can improve the overall educational system (Dieudé, 2021). The issue of school choice is increasingly seen as a democratic right that allows parents and students to pursue active citizenship within the educational space (Sivesind and Trætterberg, 2017). Thus, schools and their stakeholder have offered diverse types of content and practice, which can be understood, for instance, by public school teachers transforming state

policy and national curriculum into practice, while private school teachers transform the principles and curriculum guidelines of the private school into practice.

Since we know that teachers interpret the curriculum differently in different contexts and that independent schools represent an alternative to the public sector offer, studying how teachers in varied school contexts interpret the curriculum for classroom practice has great importance for understanding teacher autonomy. Also, how the changing educational landscape with a stronger outcome orientation and accountability script may affect teacher autonomy in different school contexts is a central empirical question.

## Research overview

We have identified studies that explore teacher's practices in various educational contexts and the multidimensional nature that governs teachers' work. A central question within these fields is how teachers relate to policy messages and the complex and multidimensional relationship with policy and practice.

*Research on autonomy in diverse school contexts.* Research has become increasingly focussed on understanding the developments and characteristics of private schools and their classroom practices from a historical<sup>2</sup> and comparative perspective (Giota et al., 2019; Koinzer et al., 2017; Salokangas and Ainscow, 2017). For instance, in Sweden, scholars have found that independent schools tend to emphasise more teaching practices based on self-regulated learning than public schools (Giota et al., 2019). Other studies challenge the logic assuming that more autonomous schools would improve the process of education (McGinity, 2015; Salokangas and Ainscow, 2017). In fact, the case of the English Academies shows that these schools are autonomous just in theory because the national examinations can set a tight frame limiting practitioners in relation to their influence over curriculum planning and teaching practices (Salokangas and Ainscow, 2017). Taking a step further, the authors conclude that it is curious to claim that teachers working in contexts characterised by an exam-focussed culture are autonomous in relation to their teaching practices (Salokangas and Ainscow, 2017). Moreover, the authors also show that autonomous schools do not necessarily lead to autonomous teachers. An issue related to research on independent schools, in particular in the North, is that independent schools in such research are often seen as uniform group – often associated with international chains of school companies –, despite a tremendous variance within the sector (Montelius et al., forthcoming). The paper at hand aims to cope with this by comparing different independent and municipality school forms with each other.

*Teacher autonomy: The multidimensional nature of controlling teachers' work.* Locally, teachers' work has had space for various degrees of autonomy based on how the national curriculum is designed, and this curriculum work can comprise activities for the further development of national curriculum (Dale et al., 2011). However, this presupposes that local actors possess professional and adequate curriculum language and models, which can vary to a great extent (Dale et al., 2011).

The curriculum provides opportunities to define teachers' work (Gerrard and Farrell 2013), and the teachers themselves and their activities can be framed in different ways, leading to varied interpretations and practices. Various aspects of control and decision making have also been raised as crucial in the literature when investigating what autonomy means for actors operating in various national and local contexts where comprehensive reforms have occurred (Bergh, 2015; Priestley et al., 2015; Wermke et al., 2018). Across the literature, teacher autonomy and teacher agency are both defined as the capacity to act by the individual teacher or school actor, however while

autonomy is studied by acknowledging that teachers' capacity is framed within a system of rules set by the state; the achievement of agency instead is mostly studied by emphasizing teachers' capacities combined with ecological conditions (Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2015; Cribb and Gewirtz 2007; Priestley et al. 2015; Wermke et al. 2018). Recent empirical studies have discussed conceptual issues regarding teachers' role as street-level bureaucrats, particularly related to their work with curriculum (Wermke and Prøitz, 2019) and to understand teachers' policy enactment through the concepts of 'politics of use' (Schulte, 2018). For instance, Schulte (2018) reveals the importance for teachers and school leaders to possess policy literacy skills to decide which values to implement in a context where strong ideological force(s) affect professional autonomy. Rather than examine autonomy through dichotomies, these studies point to the multidimensional nature of teacher autonomy (Mausethagen and Mølstad, 2015). Looking at autonomy from different viewpoints has also shown that increased decision making leads to more complexity and risks for teachers' professional work (Wermke and Salokangas, 2021).

Here, though, there may be more room for the individual teacher, student or parent to influence the direction of development, forming a conglomeration of influences rather than a singular state-based governance. Thus, within a context characterised by new forms of governing emphasising accountability and results, multiple influences and expanding differentiation and more varied provision of types of schools, the question of how teachers interpret curriculum and plan for teaching and learning in varied school contexts has become an important topic.

## Theoretical and analytical framework

The analytical perspective for the current study sees the centrality of curriculum as a key instrument in education policy and practice (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007). Within this understanding, the curriculum is considered a device that supports and secures the alignment between the policies of governing bodies and individual actors responsible for operationalising the policy (Deng, 2010; Hopmann, 1999). With this curriculum work and planning can be divided into three parts: the first, which is handled at the institutional and *political level*, sets the framework, the normative and ideological basis of what schooling should be. A *programmatic part* that writes and develops curriculum documents and guidelines based on the expectations of the institutional level. Finally, the *practical part* unfolds at the classroom level, which involves teachers' interpretation of the curriculum materials and guidelines to deliver relevant learning experiences (Deng, 2020; Hopmann, 1999). Drawing on this understanding, in the study at hand we focus on the nexus between the policy messages communicated from the institutional and programmatic level and teacher interpretations of these in their practical work with planning.

### *Curriculum control*

The work of Hopmann (1999) is also useful for studying variation in the ideas and values of different school systems and educational contexts. Variations can be attributed to different curriculum modes, which control the work of teachers according to their different approaches to education for example, process versus outcome-based education, and tradition of curriculum, for example, didactic versus curriculum. Hopmann (1999) identifies four basic modes of curriculum control in Western countries: *the philanthropic model*, *licence model*, *examen-artium model* and *assessment model*.

Within the *philanthropic model*, the main actor controlling educational ideas through the curriculum is the state. This model is based on a double strategy in which the state (through its educational agencies and representatives) stipulates teaching ideas through curricula and school rules combined with information on content and methods of lessons. One central feature is

represented by the explicit expectations towards teachers to align the planning, learning and results (Hopmann, 1999).

In the *licence model*, the state also controls the content of teaching but mainly through framing the subject matter, while schools and teachers are responsible for the implementation by their own pedagogical means. Within this model, state certified teachers (e.g. by state regulates teacher education) receive a licence to design their instructional in relation to pedagogical freedom, indeed within the frames of the curriculum and also, indeed, school laws. Typical for this model is the division of levels between the state, administration, schools and teachers.

In contrast, the *examen-artium model* is not characterised by a state-binding curriculum or state intervention to frame the content and teaching methods. Curriculum control is set by other educational institutions, such as colleges, which define and formulate the preconditions for high school entrance. Characteristic of this model is that results and teaching are linked to the admission requirements, reducing the relevance of the planning discourse.

The *assessment model*, as in the previous model, does not present state control via curriculum or direct forms of content control. The model controls the teachers' work through standardised tests that are planned and provided by external educational agencies. The tests' requirements guide schools and teachers on what to teach. Consequently, the publication of the tests' results exposes teachers and schools to their negative or positive accomplishments.

Hopmann (1999) warns that these models cannot be found in their pure form, they must be seen in a Weberian paradigm of ideal types. In fact, these modes of curriculum control often overlap. In any case, they offer a general understanding of curriculum control that occurs in varied school contexts and different educational institutions. Within this understanding of curriculum control, two main models are outlined: a model with a curriculum focussing on the content of the lessons and a model without a defined curriculum by a governing actor focussing on the results of the lesson. Both models of curriculum control give different spaces for teacher autonomy and will be used to frame this study. These models do not strictly relate to the Norwegian context, but they are models of reference to study spaces for teacher autonomy in diverse contexts for curriculum control.

### *Teacher autonomy*

Finally, each model leaves teachers' different spaces of autonomy for interpreting policy messages. To further investigate this at an empirical level, we are inspired by the analytical framework of Wermke and Salokangas (2021). Here, autonomy is understood as the teacher's capacity to make important decisions over the content and conditions of schoolwork and the governance or constraints that control such decisions (Ingersoll, 1996, 2003). Thus, the analysis draws on the aspects of decision making and control of teachers' professional work. To investigate teacher autonomy, we look at the levels of decision making over the interpretation of curriculum for planning in daily professional work and what may control such decisions in accordance with the research question.

The analytical device builds on the assumption that teacher autonomy is multidimensional and context dependent (Wermke and Salokangas, 2021). This means that different types of autonomy can be acquired through several dimensions and domains of teachers' professional work depending on school characteristics, such as a steering system. For instance, teachers can exercise autonomy in relation to the content of the lessons (classroom dimension), to the collegiality and school leadership (school dimension) and to the state and other actors in the school system (professional dimension). Moreover, teachers can develop autonomy through the domains of instructional planning and assessment (education), discipline and special needs (social), professional development

(development) and administrative tasks (administration). Although it is important to acknowledge the multidimensionality of teacher autonomy, to reduce complexity, we only zoom in on the dimensions and domains emphasising teachers' autonomy over curriculum interpretation for planning.

Therefore, relevant to our study is using the analytical framework to analyse teachers' abilities for deciding their work with planning at different relational and individual levels. Here, we understand dimensions more than levels where teachers operate, as in the classroom and school level. The classroom level allows for an analysis of the scope of action and context in which the teachers directly operate. The school level is considered the larger context in which teachers also operate in relation to other actors, such as colleagues, leadership, parents and so forth. These levels are seen in relation to the educational domain, which encases a rich spectrum of teaching activities and responsibilities. In other words, the educational domain shows the most important decisions over teachers' pedagogical work for planning, such as the content, method, material of instruction and end-of-term examinations (at classroom level). At the same time, teachers' interpretation work with school documents, such as the local curriculum, can be restricted or supported by school stakeholders (school level).

## Method

### *Three different contexts*

In the current article, we analyse teachers' interpretations of curriculum compared across three school contexts with different governing and educational profiles. The schools were selected through strategic sampling to establish the parameters for comparability in private and public schools, despite their different organisational and intrinsic governance structures. To explore different teachers' interpretations in different contexts, we have chosen schools based on different educational frameworks: a Waldorf school, an international baccalaureate school and a public school. The international baccalaureate's (IB) ideas of schooling are based on humanitarian values and global sustainable development (Hill, 2007). The Waldorf school values the spiritual understanding of human nature and different development of individuals and their needs through specific stages from infancy to adulthood (Dahlin, 2010). The Norwegian public school has been historically based on school-for-all principles, where everyone has equal possibilities, independent of background (social class, ethnicity, language, gender, etc.).

Despite the fact that the three schools have different ideologies and curricula, organisational equivalence bases are likely because these curricula must be framed in accordance with the national curriculum where student outcomes are clearly expressed through aims and learning goals according to the Norwegian Education Act and national regulations. Further, all the schools participate in international and national tests. Teachers were selected from the same level of lower secondary school. The equivalent level of instruction for lower secondary school in the IB schools is the 'Middle Year Programme' (MYP), which is offered from year 7 to 10 (ages 11–16).

Norwegian public schools have played a prominent role in the development of the country. These schools have been an important factor in nation-building, modernisation, welfare and community development (Imsen and Volckmar, 2014). Norwegian education policy has traditionally been based on a strong belief in the construction of structures and systems, the provision of inputs and definition of content and processes through regulations and national curricula (Prøitz, 2015b). However, the combined influence of several events, such as a national evaluation of the education reforms of the 1990s, average PISA results and changes in governments, opened for the reforms of the 2000s and the introduction of new mechanisms for ensuring that goals relating to student results, outcomes and accountability were fulfilled (Hatch, 2013).

Despite the educational changes affecting the educational systems in general, the Waldorf schools kept their basic educational principles outlined by Waldorf Steiner at the beginning of the 19th century. The Waldorf curriculum is based on 12 years of schooling with different developmental levels, each to be met with the appropriate educational method and environment. In Norway, the first Waldorf school, which was established in 1926, had extended freedom to reproduce Waldorf's pedagogical ideas for school practice; however, this freedom decreased considerably when the profile was approved for funding later in the 1970s (Stabel, 2016).

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) designed a curriculum originally developed for mobile families and to facilitate transnational mobility. However, IBO recent expansion worldwide shows its intention to insert the national education markets (Resnik, 2012) with a curriculum that goes beyond the nation while schools are governed and operationalised within the nation (Doherty, 2009). The aim of the IB is representative of the mission and global philosophy of the IBO 'to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect' (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014a: 12). In Norway, international schools (IB licenced) were subsidised from the beginning of the 21st century, but the first school registered by the IB organisation in Norway dates back to 1978. The IB curriculum has recently attracted political attention because schools offering the IB are seen to improve public schools through their competition (Dieudé, 2021).

The current study draws on semistructured interviews<sup>3</sup> with 12 teachers. The interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2019 and supplemented with local documents produced at the different schools. The participants represent a combination of language and science teachers to cover potential differences in curriculum interpretation. The interviews<sup>4</sup> cover a range of questions, such as the following: 'Can you tell me how do you work when preparing/planning your teaching? What decides/determines what topics you include in your teaching?' (see Appendix 1 for interview guide).

Our analysis draws finally to the different documents produced by national and international actors, which range from curriculum (such as the national KL06 curriculum) and guidelines to local school policy and instruction material (Cohen et al., 2011). 'Programme Standards and Practices', which is produced by the IBO, is relevant because it describes the MYP requirements for the implementation of the programme (IBO, 2014b). Another key document providing instructions to teachers and schools is the 'MYP: From Principles to Practices' (IBO, 2014a). The IB learner profile is also considered since it describes the school's philosophy, organisation, formal and informal curriculum. Among the key documents available for Waldorf schools is the document 'Overview—Ideas and Practice in Waldorf Education' (Mathisen, 2014), which presents the founding principles and practices of the Norwegian Waldorf curriculum and the Waldorf curriculum, which comprise an account of expected learning outcomes for the Waldorf schools.

### *Analytical approach*

Inspired by Spillane and Anderson (2019), we developed macrocodes and subcodes. We see the macrocode as an overarching category of coding reflecting the theoretical assumption of curriculum control; therefore, macrocodes are identified through a deductive approach; the subcodes are a result of an inductive dialogical interpretive process requiring an exchange between the theory of teacher autonomy and data. A thematic analysis driven by the coded material highlights the similarities and differences within our data for teachers' interpretations of curriculum in their different governing and educational profiles.

Following Hopmann's models of curriculum control, we find it relevant to identify different power structures that are more apparent in the way they control the teachers' work. Hence, we

establish the *macrocode* describing curriculum control. The macrocode is associated with a specific mode for curriculum control and is the following: philanthropic model, licence model, examen-artium model and assessment model. The macrocodes provide contextual information about who controls the curriculum, what has been controlled and how, hence dealing with subquestion (a): What characterises the curriculum control of public and independent schools in Norway as defined in school policy documents?

Furthermore, the analysis of teacher autonomy is inspired by Wermke and Salokangas (2021); the interview data become the foundation for the subcodes. We only focus on the educational domain. The levels of decision making and control are operationalised to analyse how teachers experience their autonomy in planning and organising their teaching in the three schools, hence answering subquestion (b).

## Analysis

### *Curriculum control*

*Different models of curriculum control in the three school contexts.* For the individual school contexts, we can observe three different modes of curriculum control with characteristics that overlap the four models theorised by Hopmann (1999). In line with Hopmann (1999), the public school can be characterised by the philanthropic mode of curriculum control because it is regulated by a national curriculum prepared by government officials and amended by the government the public school. The national curriculum defines the competence goals that public school teachers must deliver by adapting their teaching to a heterogeneous classroom in a 'school-for-all' ideology. However, the curriculum also indicates the content to be taught and supplemental regulations and the guidelines define the standards for assessment. Similarly, the Waldorf school presents a model for curriculum control where the curriculum and its guidelines, as designed by the Norwegian Waldorf Federation, govern its educational profile by providing both the general aspects of Waldorf education and description of the expected outcomes for the subjects across the years of instruction. At the same time, both the public and the Waldorf curriculum can be characterised by the licence model, where teachers are given degrees of autonomy for choosing the pedagogical approach and methods of teaching. For instance, in Waldorf schools, through the core principal of adapted learning (Mathisen, 2014), teachers and schools can adapt the curriculum to the abilities and potential of each individual child. Public school teachers are also given this type of licence, though studies show how there is a shift towards a political will increasingly steering such professional licence (Mausethagen and Mølsted, 2015). Differently, the IB school profile is not bound by a formal written curriculum laid out by the IBO representatives because the curriculum is developed at the school level. The overarching goal of the educational profile is governed by the preparation and entry controls for the IB college. In other words, the preconditions to enter the Diploma Programme (DP), the IB college, characterise what governs the IB educational profile, hence resembling the examen-artium model. At the same time, the amount of learning material and instructions produced by the IBO that are available for international schools also indicates how to operationalise planning and organise assessment at the classroom level.

*Similar model of curriculum control across the three school contexts.* Building further on Hopmann's models, we find a more nuanced picture of how different and overlapping aspects of curriculum control are within varied school contexts. We understand these aspects to be related to the country context, the governing of the Norwegian education system and the international trends that influence Norwegian policy. In the Norwegian context of a highly regulated school sector, the



independent schools' curriculum must adhere to the legislation set by the state and educational authorities. For instance, in 2006, the Waldorf national curriculum had to be updated as a response to the Knowledge Promotion Reform, which emphasised the objectives of education in terms of learning outcomes. For the Waldorf education, this reform meant structural changes in the curriculum. In particular, it had to spell out the final competences and competence aims for each subject, and these had to be as equally good as the one in the core curriculum in Norwegian public schools (Stabel, 2016; Steinerskoleforbundet, 2015). The Norwegian Waldorf Federation collaborated with Norwegian educational authorities both to safeguard Waldorf pedagogy and be accepted as an alternative curriculum. For the first time, educational authorities required Waldorf education to specify the new curriculum framework, showing a shift from a focus on the process of learning to what competences students should achieve (Stabel, 2016). The Knowledge Promotion Reform of 2006 brought several changes to the Norwegian Waldorf educational system, including changes in the leadership structure, teaching competences and new focus on nationally induced assessments. Although the Waldorf curriculum was affected by the changes and regulations of the reform, the same policy demands did not apply to the international school. In fact, the requirements for international schools are less specific,<sup>5</sup> and the curriculum is approved as long as it is 'in accordance with a relevant international curriculum', for example, IB (regulations attached to the Free School Act). In other words, the international curriculum is approved because it may already fulfil the policy demands of the Knowledge Promotion Reform. In addition, the globally undiscussed status of the international curriculum, which flexibility lends itself to easily adapting to national curricula and regulations, could also indicate curriculum approval (Resnik, 2012). State and educational authorities – by regulating both public and Waldorf curriculum through the same outcome-based educational approach – may lead to a stronger standardisation of the different profiles. This approach is more typical of the Anglo-Saxon tradition from which the international curriculum originates.

To sum up, all three schools, although of different profiles and varied contexts, refer to an underlying similar model that is outlined at the national discourse and programmatic level and that focusses on the results of teaching and learning. In the next section, we present how these modes of curriculum control are perceived by the teachers and whether they might provide different spaces for teacher autonomy in the varied school contexts.

### *Teacher autonomy*

A very interesting finding is that the teachers across the varied school contexts seemed to perceive similar discretion for interpreting the curriculum in the planning of educational activities for the class. One important similarity is that the teachers, despite their different models of control, used the curriculum directly in their planning, which may limit their interpretation by leaving decision making and control to the programmatic level (the criteria for examination are the curriculum in the IB). In the public school, this level is represented by the state and in the Waldorf and IB schools by the representatives of the organisation. These different governance configurations have their own educational agencies that develop concrete goals that guide teachers' work in line with the preferred educational ideas and epistemology. In other words, teachers, while experiencing some forms of autonomy, for instance, in deciding some of the contents and how to present them in the classroom, seem to be controlled by the already defined goals set by the educational authorities. These goals appear in the form of the educational competences or assessment criteria. Within this similar autonomy for curriculum interpretation, there are however variations of how the curriculum and educational framework limits the teachers' autonomy.

*Teacher autonomy in the Waldorf profile.* At the classroom level, the Waldorf teachers' decision making for their teaching activities seemed to be confined within the framework provided by the Waldorf pedagogical tradition, which is supposed to be tailored around students' needs and development. This approach, which is in line with the licence model, implies that teachers get a considerable amount of professional autonomy to decide what is best for each child. The teachers had significant decision making in the choice of teaching material and methods; because they are not bound by textbooks, they can draw on a wide range of activities that often can be of an artistic nature. The teachers seemed to have even greater decision-making discretion when it comes to assessment; while working with formative assessments daily, they work autonomously over the design of class examinations. Even though in the lower secondary schools there are no grades until the last year (10th grade), following the principles of assessment for learning, Waldorf teachers noted they regularly evaluate their students without a formal assessment process.

The individual workbook is one of the examples of the Waldorf school's ideas about adapting their planning to the students' individual development. The individual workbook functions as a substitute for the subject textbook and is the result of the handwritten notes and elaboration of the learning content that students get through the main lesson periods. As a teacher described, the main purpose of the Waldorf pedagogy is that teachers present the subject matter to the class in the 'main lesson' through in-depth experiences and then 'the approach is such that they will take the academic work and process it at home, and sleep on it overnight'. The visual quality of the workbook has as much importance as the language; both characteristics are a source of assessment. This structuring of teaching is based on the traditional key factors that form Waldorf pedagogical didactics and ideas on learning. At the same time, the Waldorf teachers claimed that within this pedagogical tradition, they have significant decision making in the choice of content when they work with the curriculum. A teacher described being able to modify the subject framework depending on aspects related to students and society to give space and draw into global issues:

We have a framework to which I relate to (for planning). But I can move in and out of that framework (. . .) now we have this climate change action with Greta Thunberg. And the students in the eighth grade have an awakening, some of them will strike (. . .), and then, I have to include that (climate change) in my planning. I didn't know that this autumn when I planned this period.

However, this autonomy is important because it fulfils the goals of adaptive learning and of 'linking the curriculum to events that happen in the contemporary society', which are the main goals of the Waldorf tradition.

At the school level, teachers' decision making is manifested in weekly meetings for discussing teaching activities and responsibilities, such as the planning of their local subject matter plan for the next year. Different sources of control of teacher work may be represented by parents, national exams and, to some extent, the county governor. Parents in the school may have a twofold role; while they are highly involved in the school's welfare, they also may come with high demands regarding the teachers' schoolwork. Finally, even if the nationally defined learning outcomes do not prescribe or direct teachers how these goals should be attained, all schools participate in the Norwegian national test<sup>6</sup> despite the two independent schools following a different framework. Although the national test does not affect the work with planning, teachers' autonomy for interpreting the curriculum is controlled by students' performance on national tests. County governors<sup>7</sup> may come into play when there are important and sensitive matters between the parents and school.

*Teacher autonomy in the IB profile.* When describing their work, the IB school teachers emphasise that instructional planning must be integrated with their criterion-related assessment system and

directly connected to the aims and objectives of each subject. Within this assessment system, teachers are directed on how to use the criteria to design appropriate tasks and monitor student performance. An IB teacher exemplified how the working with planning is based on this assessment system: 'I know the finishing point which is their criteria for assessment and then I work (plan) backwards from that'. More explicitly, another teacher from the international school described how the assessment system guides the unit and the organisation of the teaching:

The whole unit is led by that end assessment.(. . .)So, assessment kind of leads, it is quite clear, yes, it's quite good to have that as end game.

These criteria are very visible and constantly discussed with students, for instance, at the beginning of every unit, as one teacher noted: 'This unit is working towards criteria A) analysing and B) organising and that's what I am looking at'.

Further, the teachers' choices of method are related to the IB-specific approach; thus, the teaching methods used need to ensure the interplay of enquiry, action and reflection guiding the learning experience. This approach and the IB framework condition teachers' autonomy for planning but leaves teachers also discretion to design their own learning enquiry and learning experiences throughout:

The MYP programme is prescriptive to a point, so there are ideas that need to be covered. . . but it's really just an idea so there is not really a guide as to as much depth you need to go into, so it's very open, and so, as long as you are posing questions and making students think about that topic, the content is not prescribed.

Teachers' work with planning at the classroom level is strictly linked with the IB requirements for curriculum development; however, teachers within the limits of the framework also experience degrees of decision making over the teaching contents and methods.

At the school level, collaborative planning is an important standard and practice of the IB programmes that must be implemented by the IB schools and that requires the participation of all the teachers (IBO, 2014b). This means that the teachers are required to work together in collaboratively planning teams, which happen in a variety of ways (after school, tabled time, etc.) throughout the year. These meetings are usually led by the curriculum coordinator, who must facilitate and direct the teacher to follow the IB requirements. In these meetings, the teachers reflect, discuss and share their opinions and experiences on curriculum development and classroom practices; however, these meetings are run by the curriculum coordinator, who decides what teachers must collaborate on, limiting teachers' decision making. Collaboration also happens digitally through an online platform called 'ManageBac', IB software used both as a curriculum planning tool and for documenting student performance. Parents have direct access to the platform and are given an account of their children's formative and summative assessment data, homework and basic information about what is being studied during the school year. This planning software can be seen as a two-fold instrument, giving the opportunity to support and control teachers' professional practices. Another form of control is exemplified by the competencies established by the Udir for the fifth year of the MYP (the Norwegian VG1). The MYP fifth year is meant to prepare students for entry into the DP or further studies within the Norwegian school system. Ultimately, the teachers must consider the competencies for the first year of upper secondary school (VG1) as criteria for what they offer in the MYP. As in the Waldorf school, teachers' autonomy in interpreting the curriculum is controlled by students' performance on national and international tests. Even if the international benchmarks set by IBO do not prescribe or direct teachers on how these goals should be attained, IB schools participate in the Norwegian national test and are monitored through these exams.

*Teacher autonomy in the public school.* Much like the independent schools, teachers' autonomy for planning in the public school was also expressed within the boundaries set by the national curriculum. Public school teachers' framework, however, is not based on a pedagogical tradition. The public teachers referred to relying directly on the competence aims that come from the subject frame. At the same time, they expressed the desire to use their experience and self-knowledge (courses) to plan different activities that concretely support and facilitate student learning. For instance, one teacher noted the understanding of challenging scientific concepts:

I know through experience which areas within the various topics in the curriculum can be challenging. So, you try to work concretely, whether it is illustrations, simulation or exercises, which I know are good for their understanding of the topic. And also, conceptual understanding, that you do not just read the definition of a term but actually apply that concept, that you associate action with theory. In natural science, I prefer, like Dewey says, 'learning by doing'.

This approach is not determined by a prescribed pedagogical framework; teachers in public schools have apparently an extended autonomy to follow different learning theories and methods. However, this discretion makes them rely on the competence aims and, to some extent, can be bound to the textbook for their instructional planning. This use of the policy framework seems to provide teachers legitimation for their work with their selection of content, activities and assessment: 'They get an awareness [students, the authors] that there is some [the policy, the authors] who thinks something about what is important and it is not just me that thinks that'. Public school teachers' pedagogical decision making is also expressed by their choice of sources of inspiration for their teaching as the other schools' contexts. For instance, they do not get as IB teachers, already structured learning materials and instructions for planning. These varied sources of inspiration can come from digital platforms or textbook. However, again, the teachers are very clear that what guides the lessons is the policy framework: 'The classes should not be dictated by the textbook, it is the competence aims and the purpose of the subject which is the matter at hand here'.

The use of a textbook seems to be important for teachers because it allows them to focus on the diverse population of the public comprehensive school (*felleskole*). For instance, one teacher emphasised the importance of the textbook for students who have not been living in Norway for a long time, especially because Norwegian language and science are often difficult subjects for these students. Similar to the IB school, teachers in the public school needed to allocate time for collaborative planning both across subject grade, grade groups and school levels. Planning within the subject grade group tended to occur currently throughout the year, supporting the operationalisation of the national curriculum, but these meetings are dedicated discussing assessment. The teachers would plan similar assessment tasks and develop assessment criteria, too; however, the planning of teaching happened individually. Moreover, some teachers described using audio-visuals to provide feedback on students' work, indicating that the teachers were autonomous regarding deciding what assessment works best for their classroom. Collegial decision making is usually considered positive for the development of professional practices; however, it is important to understand whether these practices are actually ensuring teachers' decision making or represent just another space to discuss top-down pedagogical content to be implemented in the school.

In the public school, parents are not a source of external control. Just in one teacher's account, when describing the challenges of grading teamwork, were parents the focus on the fairness of grades. However, performance in national tests works as an external control of teachers' work for planning teaching. Public schools are also bound to the national examination system finalising students' 10th grade. Although the teachers in the two independent schools claimed that the assessments do not affect their work with planning, the public school teachers instead emphasised how the Norwegian national exams are an integral part of their work: 'We know that the national exams

come eventually and so it is natural that there is focus on talking about learning strategies directed to that'. This similar form of control through assessments, which is introduced in the varied school contexts, affects teachers' work differently.

## Discussion

### *Varied school contexts framed by a common pedagogical idea*

As the analysis indicates, we can find distinctive characteristics determining the different contexts for curriculum control which conditions teachers' autonomy in different ways. However, because of the specific Norwegian context of high state control along with the influence of international trends in education, we also find similar aspects in how the curriculum control takes form in different schools' contexts. In particular, we observe how the teachers in the three schools relate to an outcome-based education governance regime valid in Norway, characterised by competence aims and monitoring of results. The educational regime since 2006 shift implemented both in the Norwegian public school and independent schools<sup>8</sup> have apparently led to an increased standardization of the curriculum structure of the different school contexts, drawing on varying pedagogical ideas. Independent schools that did not have an outcome-based approach have had closer follow-up by educational authorities to fulfil the new policy framework, as we could see for our Waldorf school example. The analysis indicates a shift towards a new institutionalised and programmatic pedagogical idea initiated by the national policy framework, one focussing on the outcomes and assessment of teaching and learning; this shift can be understood as constructing a common pedagogical base for all schools and teachers rather than creating a basis for a diversified educational provision.

This somewhat contradicts the education policy legitimising the liberalisation of private school policies in Norway based on the logic that increased diversity and freedom of choice can increase the quality of education. Yet the regime shift towards stronger standardisation in private and public schools questions the basis of this logic, which can have an indirect impact on parents' real opportunity to exercise their right to choose (Sivesind and Trøtteberg, 2017). At the same time, in the current study, the parents in the two independent schools seemed to show greater influence over teachers' work than in public schools, pointing to higher control over the educational service which is an important aspect of active citizenship. To better understand this type of influence, further research is needed on the nature of parents who send their children to independent schools. Research shows that in the Norwegian context parents with higher education tend to use private education to a higher extent than other parents (Lauglo, 2009). However, there is no overall tendency for students in private schools to have wealthier parents (Lauglo, 2009). One implication of this study may be the need to further investigate different parents' view on education to better explore their willingness to question and challenge what teachers do.

Nevertheless, the Norwegian case represents an example for the European context, where a highly regulated education system, through curriculum control, can restrict the role of marketisation and private actors and their educational offers. Tensions within schools arise when spaces for diversity in practice become too limited and the regulated system has increasingly been based on a stronger logic of accountability. This might have led to varying consequences. On the one hand, it may appear that certain independent schools are in danger of losing their long tradition pedagogical ideas, such in the case of our Waldorf school. On the other hand, regulation and restriction of diversity has been seen by both teachers in public and independent schools as

something rather positive. This is in line with research that show how an autonomy restriction can enable teachers to deal with the complexity and risks of teachers professional work. Wermke and Salokangas (2021) call this an autonomy paradox where restrictions have a positive impact on teachers' work.

### *Autonomy in different school contexts-restrictions and varying degrees of interpretation*

The analysis shows varying teacher autonomy for deciding on classroom content, methods and materials. At first, the independent school teachers appeared to have extended autonomy, while public school teachers seemed more guided by the national policy framework. Nevertheless, independent school teachers' autonomy can also be considered as restricted, but more so by their independent school's framework and the ideas of learning from it. Still, the independent school teachers perceived and stated more explicitly as having extensive autonomy in their work with planning than the public school teachers. This perception of autonomy seems to be explained by the high commitment to their schools' framework and to their professional community. The didactic background and explicit educational frameworks support the teachers in their planning by allowing self-determined decision making based on principles and rules (Wermke et al., 2018).

In more detail, when we relate the findings of curriculum control with teacher autonomy, it is possible to identify aspects of consistency and differences. The Waldorf school gives teachers pedagogical freedom and freedom of method (Hopmann, 1999). However, the teachers' autonomy is formed within the Waldorf didactics model, leaving the licensing with guidance, contradicting the traditional freedom associated with this profile. Teachers are licenced to do the 'right thing' according the Waldorf model. The IB school without a top-down formal curriculum can work with flexibility as long as it ultimately leads towards the preconditions of the DP. Not having a fully developed curriculum could make teachers' autonomous work for planning more complex (Wermke et al., 2018); however, the teachers are largely supported by the assessment system made of objectives and criteria, along with the additional planning tools. At the same time, in the international school context, teachers' autonomy is affected by the accountability logic of the assessment system and restrictive format of the planning platforms. There is consistency here between the programmatic-level intentions of pursuing 'world class standards' and the responsibility that teachers carry to reach them (Hopmann, 1999). The public school curriculum control, which is categorised as the philanthropic model, seems to be followed by loosening (Hopmann, 1999). In fact, despite teachers' reliance on the national policy framework, teachers' autonomy in the public school seems to be formed within their professional experience and competences.

### **Curriculum control, teacher autonomy, risks and responsibilities within a marketised democratic education**

Our study shows that the basic ideological profile of the schools' context is affected by the outcome-based educational system and that most variations seem to remain in the teacher's choice of method and content. At the same time, a highly regulated system can restrict the private actor and market-oriented approaches in the education sector that impact the fundamentals of public schooling. Further, the educational space wherein the expectations and premises for teachers' autonomy lie are increasingly conditioned by different actors and instruments. These, in turn, can also be understood as a positive support for teachers to deal with the complexity and risks of professional work, by coping with the contingencies in education. However, this comes at the price that the

educational spaces become more controlled, and these multiple policy messages are directly used and transferred into the teaching practice. With the rise of populist regimes worldwide and across Europe, it is important to further debate how these spaces can safeguard issues of democracy, citizenship and accessibility of education and the role of autonomous teachers.

Finally, if every school profile is framed alike, what happens to the policy purpose of creating alternative schools? The core ideas may diminish, and what remains are primarily the teachers' working methods, which seem to be, paradoxically, more open in the public school. At the same time, the current study shows how public and private schools are regulated by various types of curriculum control and autonomy. What are the consequences when what is supposed to provide diversity through alternative school profiles are all aligned across the same basic pedagogical idea? What constitutes the alternative then, and can this development be considered an unintended consequence of national policy decision making? Instead of diversity to choose from, students and their parents get more of the same.

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### Notes

1. Pupils in private schools in Norway more than doubled (+120%) from 2002 to 2018 (Statistics Norway, 2019a). As of 2019 there are a total of 261 independent schools with 27,027 pupils, and 2538 public schools with 609,223 pupils (the primary and lower secondary school) (Statistics Norway, 2019b). In Norway, the financial support and approval of private schools is highly regulated through restrictive legislation.
2. Private schooling plays out differently according to the context and depends on the socio-historical configurations of the country.
3. The interviews were audio-recorded after receiving participant consent and transcribed verbatim. The study has been approved by the Norwegian Data Protection Service (NSD), and all participants and data have been treated in accordance with the guidelines of the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH).
4. The interview guide is an adapted version of the interview guide developed and used in a larger project (author).
5. This does not mean that international schools are not supervised by the Norwegian government officials. There can be, for instance, the supervision of aspects as the content subject in the Norwegian language or civic education.
6. Conducted in the fifth, eighth and tenth grades.

7. The county governor provides supervision and handles appeals in accordance with the Education Act and the Independent Schools Act. <https://www.statsforvalteren.no/en/portal/Nursery-schools-and-education/>
8. Also, other pedagogical oriented independent schools such as Montessori school.

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## **Appendix I**

Extract of interview guide

30.05.17

General on school work:

Can you tell me about your work here as a teacher?

Subject, class, main teacher, other responsibilities?

How long have you worked here?

What is your professional and educational background?

Earlier experiences as teachers? Public schools?

Have you taken any further education, courses, academic updates lately?

Teaching planning:

Can you tell me how do you work when preparing/planning your teaching?

Design of activities directed to criteria, descriptor (expand/share doc)

When do you plan your teaching?

What decides/determines what topics you include in your teaching? To what extent are they similar with your colleagues that teach the same grade?

How freely do you stand in teaching planning?

What determines the methods you use in teaching?

Where do you usually get inspiration when planning your teaching?

Have you any examples?

What plans and documents do you use in teaching planning as a teacher?

Are these common to you and your colleagues?

Assessment practices:

How do you work with assessment?

How do you work when you evaluate the students in your subject area?

What forms of assessment do you think are best suited to your teaching and why?

I read you have conferences here at school. What is that?

What is the purpose?

Positive and negative aspects?

Are you satisfied with the way you work (when it comes to planning and assessment)?

Are there other ways you would like to do things (in terms of planning and assessment)?

Use of documents and national guidelines:

Which guiding documents are the most central for your work as a teacher?

How would you say you relate to the curriculum in your work as a teacher/in the planning of teaching?

Is it often you discuss the learning outcomes with the students? How do you do this? Can you give an example of a time you've worked this way?

## **Article III**

Dieudè, A., & Prøitz, T. S. (Under review). School leaders' autonomy in public and private school contexts: Blurring policy requirements.

Unpublished article, not included in  
online publication.

**Private school policy and practice in Norway**

Governing private schools: State funding and standardisation

Alessandra Dieudè

- 1) Where applicable I will add to the sub-research questions clarifications of school level and school contexts, so that sub-research questions 2 and 3 read as:
  2. How are state policy and governance perceived, interpreted and enacted at different levels in **public and** private **lower-secondary** schools?
  3. How do contextual factors affect the ways in which **public and** private **lower-secondary** schools perceive, interpret and enact policies?
- 2) Figure 1 page 4: The second arrow from the box with sub-research question 1 is misdirected and it should be changed to point at the findings from the second article.
- 3) The numbering of the tables. The numbers of the tables are incorrect several places in the thesis. Subsequently, I will readjust the numbering of the remaining tables in the thesis making sure that the adjustment in numbering is also reflected in all referrals to the list of tables and in the main body of text.

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