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Teachers as national curriculum makers: does involvement equal influence?

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of curriculum reform in Norway, this article presents a study of teacher involvement and influence in national curriculum making through participation in official commentary processes. Education policy documents presented teacher involvement in the reform as essential to the legitimacy and ownership of the curriculum in schools, but a central question in this study is whether involvement in the process also means influence over the final curriculum. The study focuses on a central new element of the curriculum, the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship, and analyses how teachers influenced the content of the new curriculum. Qualitative document analysis and reflexive thematic analysis were applied to curriculum drafts, responses to an official commentary process, and the final curriculum. The analysis shows that teachers' opinions were backgrounded throughout the development process, while the content suggested by educational experts was foregrounded. In the final curriculum, the teachers' suggestions for content were omitted. The findings may have consequences for future reforms as well as for curriculum interpretation and operationalization in schools.

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Curriculum making; school reform; teacher involvement; education policy; co-creation

Introduction

National curriculum making typically involves selecting the values, ideas, skills, competences, and types of knowledge that a society wishes to pass on to future generations (Deng, 2010). Modern curriculum making is a social practice undertaken in different sites and across layers of the education system, which allows a variety of actors to participate (Priestley et al., 2021). Thus, involving and consulting teachers has become an increasingly common strategy in macro curriculum reform internationally (Humes, 2013; Soini et al., 2021; Vitikka et al., 2016; Westbury et al., 2016). Teachers or teacher representatives will often be invited to participate in different parts of the process, such as in curriculum committees, workshops, arenas for dialogue, or as members of reference groups (Almeida & Viana, 2023; Humes, 2013; Kneen et al., 2023; Sinnema et al., 2020).

Teachers can be valuable contributors to national curriculum making through their subject-matter knowledge and their intimate understanding of students, pedagogy, and every day-life in schools (Carl, 2017). Knowing and understanding the content of a school subject lies at the core of teachers' professionalism (Deng, 2012), and the inherent distinction between academic disciplines and school subjects (Deng, 2007) underscore their significance as a partner in macro curriculum making. From a political perspective, it can also be advantageous to involve teachers in reform work, as reform implementation studies have emphasized that teachers need ownership of a reform to

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implement it in their practices (Aasen & Sandberg, 2010; Kirk & MacDonald, 2001; Mikser et al., 2016). Still, other interests also need to be considered (Thijs & van den Akker, 2009). In addition to teachers, subject experts from higher education are often involved in creating subject curricula (Sivesind & Westbury, 2016). Their voices have traditionally been important, as they are highly knowledgeable in their fields and can pull both social and political legitimacy (Levin, 2008). However, involvement and consultation strategies can be difficult, as they must balance generating legitimacy with the risk of tension and conflict between different interests (Eyal, 2019, p. 113). Who the influential actors are and whether involvement equals influence thus become central questions.

This study presents a case of teacher involvement and influence in curriculum making through participation in official commentary processes (Vitikka et al., 2016). In 2020, Norway introduced a new national curriculum under the Knowledge Promotion Reform 2020 (LK20). During the development of the LK20 curriculum, all interested actors were invited by central authorities to participate in official, digital commentary processes over a period of two years where they could give feedback on curriculum drafts and provide input on the new curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017). The process was open to anyone who wished to participate, and individual teachers were by far the largest group of participants. The broad involvement was meant to give legitimacy to the curriculum and enhance local ownership, particularly for schools and teachers (Report to Parliament 28 (2015–2016)). However, teacher involvement and consultation does not necessarily equate to teachers having actual influence on the final curriculum (Priestley et al., 2016; Theodorou et al., 2017). The aim of this article is therefore to illuminate the complex process of involving teachers in curriculum making and to investigate the influence that individual teachers might have on the final curriculum through their participation in official commentary processes. *Influence* is here understood as an actor's ability to shape a decision in line with their preferences (Dür, 2008). The study was guided by the following research question:

How were teachers involved in national curriculum making through participation in an official commentary process, and what was the result of the process in terms of teacher influence?

The primary study object of this investigation is teachers and teacher influence. Another actor group in this study is subject experts from higher education. The study zooms in on an important and central new element in the national curriculum: the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship within the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Norwegian education policy, in line with Byram (2008), emphasizes how English is paramount to coping in the contemporary globalized world, and the subject of EFL is an interesting and relevant case in a broader international academic context since English is a common foreign language in schools in many parts of the world.

This study contributes to curriculum research by illuminating recent developments of teacher involvement in national curriculum making. Theoretical concepts of foregrounding, backgrounding and omission (Huckin, 1997; Saarinen, 2008a, 2008b) inform the analysis. This was investigated through document analysis (Bowen, 2009) of curriculum drafts, responses to an official commentary process, and the final LK20 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum. The article begins with a review of the literature on teacher involvement in curriculum making and then describes the Norwegian curriculum context before outlining the theory and methods used in the study. Finally, the results of the investigation are followed by a discussion of issues that arose from the analysis and some concluding remarks.

Teacher involvement in curriculum making

The notion of teacher involvement in curriculum making has been termed 'elusive' (Carl, 2017, p. 216), and capturing the voices of teachers in curriculum reform has been considered an 'unresolved issue' (Elliott, 1994). However, teachers' role in curriculum work is of interest to researchers across the world. As the literature attests, examples of such studies can be found from a range of countries: Norway (Sivesind & Westbury, 2016); Cyprus (Kontovourki et al., 2018; Theodorou et al.,

2017), Finland (Soini et al., 2021; Vitikka et al., 2016), Estonia (Mikser et al., 2016), the Netherlands (Huizinga et al., 2014; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2021), Jamaica (Roofe, 2022), and South Africa (Carl, 2005; Ramparsad, 2001; Swanepoel, 2008).

Recent curriculum research and policy emphasizes the importance of teacher agency in curriculum making (Mølsted & Prøitz, 2018; Priestley & Biesta, 2013; Priestley et al., 2012, 2016). Participating in curriculum work can be positive for professional development as well as for curriculum implementation (Handelzalts, 2019; Kontovourki et al., 2018; Simmie, 2007; Voogt et al., 2016). Studies have also found that teachers are highly motivated and willing to participate in curriculum making both inside and outside the classroom and local contexts (Mulenga & Mwanza, 2019), and that they have sufficient subject-matter knowledge to participate in curriculum design (Huizinga et al., 2014). Simultaneously, research on teachers' curriculum work, particularly in classroom and local contexts, has shown that there are complex, non-linear social practices for curriculum making (Grundén, 2022) and that teachers have to balance their professional autonomy against external pressures for accountability (Alvunger, 2018; Hughes & Lewis, 2020; Mellegård & Pettersen, 2016).

One way of involving teachers in macro curriculum making is through participation in curriculum committees, which are often highly influential in reform processes (Westbury et al., 2016). At the same time, studies on teacher participation in curriculum committees have found that the teachers can feel subordinate to other actors on the committee and that the process consolidates existing hierarchies of expertise in which teachers' expertise is perceived as less valuable than that of academic experts (Theodorou et al., 2017). Even when policy clearly aims for teacher involvement, teacher participants have been excluded from certain aspects of the development process (Mikser et al., 2016).

Another, and more recently invented, way of involving teachers in national curriculum making is through open, digital commentary processes, as the current study investigates. A similar process was conducted during the most recent Finnish curriculum reform (Lähdemäki, 2019; Soini et al., 2021; Vitikka et al., 2016). The transparency and broad involvement of school practitioners aimed at making all relevant actors 'experts' of the new curriculum (Lähdemäki, 2019) and the process contributed to shared understandings of the curricular changes (Soini et al., 2021). However, few, if any, have studied the influence of the different actors in such co-creation processes.

Teacher involvement is an intricate phenomenon, and, with a few exceptions, a similarity in the research seems to be that reflecting the perspectives of teachers is difficult, and that the systems surrounding teacher involvement in these processes are not adequate to secure teachers' influence. The literature presents arguments for why teachers should be involved, such as knowledge of daily classroom practices and subject content, for professional development, and for ownership and faster implementation of curricular changes. However, how and when in the process and to what extent teachers should be involved is unclear, as is how to secure teacher influence on the curriculum content. The study contributes to and continues these discussions on teacher involvement by presenting an empirical study of teacher involvement and influence in the most recent Norwegian national curriculum reform, the LK20.

The context of the study: developing the LK20 curriculum

Norway has a long tradition of national curriculum making (Sivesind & Karseth, 2019). In 2006, the Norwegian school system underwent a national curriculum reform under the Knowledge Promotion Reform 2006 (LK06), which introduced explicit learning outcomes (called *competence aims*) in each subject (Prøitz, 2015). The overall structure of the LK06 was maintained in the 2020 reform, but the content was revised. Aligned with international trends in education policy (OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2014), the LK20 aimed to meet societal challenges by focusing on interdisciplinary work, thus marking a shift in curricular thinking in Norway. A new orientation towards interdisciplinary topics was meant to strengthen students' understanding of the connections between subjects and ensure that overarching societal challenges are dealt with throughout their educational trajectory (Report to

Table 1. Overview of the first official commentary phase from September 2017.

Actor group	Number of responses
Policy agencies	6
Counties and Municipalities	19
NGOs and interest groups	74
Subject Experts	80
Teachers	494
Private citizens	43
Other	10
Total	726

Parliament 28 (2015–2016)). Three interdisciplinary topics were introduced: health and life skills, sustainable development, and democracy and citizenship. The topics were to be divided between subjects and permeate the whole school system.

In accordance with the Norwegian tradition of national curriculum making (Sivesind & Karseth, 2019), the LK20 curriculum was developed through and legitimized by a long process over several years, starting with the government decision to revise the core curriculum in 2013 (Report to Parliament 20 (2012–2013)) and followed by another decision to revise the subject curriculum in 2016 (Report to Parliament 28 (2015–2016)). The new core curriculum was the first part of the reform to be finished and was published in 2017; this formed the basis for the development of subject curricula (Karseth et al., 2020). Following the amendment of the core curriculum, subject curriculum committees consisting of teachers and subject experts were appointed to work alongside government officials from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training in developing subject curricula. Teacher unions, student associations and other important stakeholder organizations were involved through reference groups.

A strategy for the curriculum making was outlined (Ministry of Education, 2017), emphasizing broad involvement and encouraging all actors in the education sector to engage in official, digital commentary processes. The involvement was described as ‘crucial for the implementation of the reform’ (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 6, authors’ translation). Between September 2017 and March 2019, five phases of commentary took place. In each phase a curriculum draft and a digital questionnaire were published on the website of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Individuals could easily access the documents and provide feedback and input on the drafts. The transparency of the process and the extensive involvement of relevant actors as well as the general public was a new and innovative way of developing national curricula in Norway. The commentary process was open for anyone who wished to participate, and this resulted in massive response from interested actors, where individual or small groups of teachers from across the country formed the largest group of responders. Table 1 presents an overview of the first commentary phase in September 2017, showing the different actor groups and the number of responses from each group, displaying how teachers gave the most responses.

The number of comments increased with each of the five commentary processes of the curriculum reform. In total, the Directorate for Education and Training received more than 20,000 responses during the two years this process lasted (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021).

Theoretical framework: foregrounding, backgrounding, and omission

As illustrated, participatory approaches to curriculum making involve different actors trying to influence decision-making processes by providing suggestions for content and interpretations of curricular concepts. The choices of actor representation can thus play a significant role in the construction of the curriculum. According to Saarinen’s (2008a, 2008b) work on policy construction, actors, such as teachers and experts, may present competing conceptualizations of curriculum content based on their roles, backgrounds, and understandings of society, and actors may

foreground certain views while narrowing the space for competing views. Here, *foregrounding* refers to emphasizing certain concepts through textual prominence, while *backgrounding* refers to the de-emphasizing of other concepts by giving them limited space in texts or placing them towards the end of a text (Huckin, 1997). The ultimate form of backgrounding is omission, in which certain elements are excluded completely from the final document in question. In the curriculum context, content selection will often be a process of deliberation, discussion, or consideration, during which certain interpretations, views, or ideas are foregrounded and included, while others are backgrounded or omitted from the final curriculum. The logic of the applied analytical approach to teacher involvement in curriculum making is based on the idea that insights into the different actors' views can reveal which actors have been influential in the curriculum making and which have not. By analysing which ideas and understandings of a specific policy were used at the different stages of the curriculum making process, the analysis aims to shed light on actor influence using the concepts of foregrounding, backgrounding, and omission.

Materials and methods

This article focuses on the processes of national curriculum making, and specifically on the involvement of teachers in the LK20 through the open commentary processes described in the context section above. For comparison, we studied the influence that subject experts from higher education had in the same process. Both teachers and experts have been emphasized by research and by the government as the most relevant actors in curriculum reform (Mølsted & Prøitz, 2018; Report to Parliament 28 (2015–2016)).

The process was studied by focusing on a central and new element of the curriculum: the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship which was introduced as a mandatory topic into the subject of EFL. EFL has a long history in Norwegian schools (Simensen, 2019) and is the most central foreign language subject in the national education system. Indeed, together with literacy and numeracy, English is one of three skills tested in national tests (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019c). Both research and policy emphasize the role of foreign language education in the contemporary globalized world (c.f. Byram, 2008; Kramsch, 2014; OECD, 2011). Thus, EFL is a natural framework for studying the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship.

The primary method is document analysis (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis can provide a means of tracking change and development, and where different drafts of a particular document are available, they can be used to identify changes that have been made (Bowen, 2009). The approach of the study aimed at identifying the involvement of teachers and experts and empirically tracing their opinions through the development process to the final curriculum document. The sampling strategy entailed including all drafts of the EFL curriculum that were published for commentary during the curriculum making process, as well as the final LK20 EFL curriculum. To enable analysis of the involvement of actor groups and their preferences, the responses to the first official commentary is a central point of departure. In this commentary phase, actors were asked to write their opinions in a questionnaire, clearly stating what they believed were important aspects of the interdisciplinary topic under study. The documents and responses were published between September 2017 and November 2019, and were publicly available on the website of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Table 2 provides a chronological overview of all the documents analysed in this study.

The five drafts, the final LK20 curriculum and the responses to the first commentary process, which are presented in Table 2, were uploaded to NVivo 12 for analysis, and the document analysis was done in the following four steps:

Step 1: The point of departure was the first commentary process for EFL, which took place in September 2017. A total of 103 actors responded. All responses were listed by name of the individual and/or the name of the institution they represented. The teachers were either individual teachers

Table 2. Overview of documents.

Type of document	Title of document	Draft Number	Date of publication
Curriculum draft	Input on core elements of the school subjects [Innspill til kjerneelementer i skolefagene]	Draft 1	6 September 2017
Responses to commentary	Responses to first draft of core EFL elements [Svar til Første skisse av kjerneelementer i engelsk]	-	Commentary closed 27 September 2017
Curriculum draft	Second round of input on core elements [Andre innspillsrunde til kjerneelementer]	Draft 2	23 October 2017
Curriculum draft	Interdisciplinary topics [Tverrfaglige temaer]	Draft 3	5 March 2018
Curriculum draft	First draft of EFL curriculum [Læreplan i engelsk]	Draft 4	18 October 2018
Curriculum draft	Second draft of EFL curriculum [Læreplan i engelsk]	Draft 5	18 March 2019
Official curriculum	EFL curriculum [Læreplan i engelsk]	-	18 November 2019

who responded on behalf of themselves, or small groups of teachers responding on behalf of the EFL department at their school. No teacher union responded within the EFL subject. The responses were grouped together under the actor code 'teachers' (total responses $n = 73$).

Only two universities responded to this question. However, when reading through the responses, we noticed that several well-known researchers in the field of EFL education in Norway responded as private citizens. Therefore, we also reviewed all the responses of private citizens and identified 12 responses from people who work in EFL language education in Norwegian universities. Together with the two university responses, these were grouped together under the actor code 'experts' (total responses $n = 17$). The rest of the responses were from municipalities, private citizens, and organizations (total responses $n = 13$). These responses were not included in the analysis, as they do not represent teachers or experts. Since the scope of the study is interdisciplinary topics, the analysis only included responses that related to this. As some of the selected actors did not give an opinion regarding interdisciplinary topics in the digital questionnaire, the total number of responses included in our analysis was 65 (51 teacher and 14 expert responses). Table 3 presents an overview of the actor group involvement.

The first draft formed ground for identification of which actors were involved, but also opened for further scrutiny into their preferences for content regarding the interdisciplinary topic in EFL in the next step of analysis. The Directorate for Education and Training asked the question, 'Do you have suggestions for content and perspectives on the interdisciplinary topics that are central to the subject?' (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). The responses to this question provided valuable insights into which interdisciplinary topics the actors deemed relevant and how individual teachers and experts conceptualized the different topics. In turn, this provided evidence for claims regarding which groups that were influential in developing the LK20 curriculum.

Step 2: The preferences of the two biggest actor groups involved, teachers and experts, were identified in the document analysis. Thematic analysis inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied in the analysis of the responses to the question 'Do you have suggestions for content and perspectives on the interdisciplinary topics that are central to the subject?'.

Table 3. Overview of responses to the first official commentary phase regarding interdisciplinary topics in EFL, September 2017.

Actor group	Number of responses	Relevant for this study
Teachers	73	51
Experts	17	14
Other	13	0
Total	103	65

The responses lay the foundation for further analysis of foregrounding, backgrounding, and omission in the development process that followed. The thematic analysis of the responses involved reading, forming initial codes, re-reading, and forming larger themes. Examples of initial codes that arose from the data were *civil rights, elections, forms of government, American politics, British politics, values, cultures, and communication*. After several re-readings, we identified two major themes in the teachers' and experts' responses to the question about content: *political aspects* and *intercultural competence*. Interestingly, these two themes also marked a division between the teachers who suggested *political aspects* and experts who suggested *intercultural competence*.

Step 3: The two themes identified in the thematic analysis formed the basis for further analysis and process tracing of actor involvement and preferences. The themes were traced through the succeeding curriculum drafts in chronological order based on when the documents were published. This involved careful reading of all five curriculum drafts that were sent out for public commentary after the first round. In these drafts, we were able to trace how *intercultural competence* and *political aspects* were foregrounded and backgrounded towards the final curriculum.

Step 4: The final step was a document analysis of the final LK20 curriculum for EFL. In analysing the final curriculum, the whole document was carefully read and coded using the codes *intercultural competence* and *political aspects* to map how the two main themes identified in Step 2 potentially occurred in the final national curriculum. The results of Steps 1–4 are presented in the following section.

Results

Conceptualizing democracy and citizenship

The thematic analysis of the teachers' and experts' responses to the question regarding content showed clear discrepancies in the conceptualizations of democracy and citizenship. A recurring theme in the teachers' responses was that democracy and citizenship should be related to knowledge about politics, democratic values, and democracy as a form of government, as shown below: Do you have suggestions for content and perspectives on the interdisciplinary topics that are central to the subject?

'Democracy and citizenship in connection to political systems, etc. in English speaking countries'.

'Democracy and citizenship: political systems, election, freedom of speech, different systems of government, rights, duties, human rights, equality, religions, freedom of religion'. Quotes from teachers.

As can be seen from these examples, the teachers emphasized the political perspectives connected to the interdisciplinary topic. Themes such as ways of governing, elections, and rights were common in their responses. A recurring theme among the experts, however, was that democracy and citizenship should be framed by intercultural competence:

'Intercultural competence [...] supports even more democracy and citizenship'.

'Communicative competence, including intercultural competence, I believe, goes hand in hand with democracy and citizenship'. Quotes from experts.

This apparent distinction between the teachers' and the experts' views on what democracy and citizenship should entail, as shown in [Figure 1](#), warranted a closer investigation related to foregrounding and backgrounding of the topics in the process that followed.

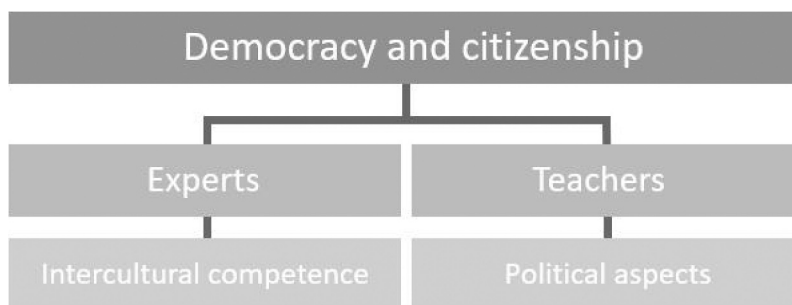


Figure 1. Suggestions for the content of democracy and citizenship between teachers and experts.

Foregrounding and backgrounding in curriculum drafts

Regarding the four drafts of the curriculum that followed the first commentary process, both political and intercultural perspectives were present in the process of developing the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship in the subject of EFL. Throughout the process, minor changes were made to each draft; however, seen together, these changes appear as a clear foregrounding of one idea. In the following, evidence for this development is shown through two examples: draft 3 from March 2018 and draft 5 from March 2019.

Draft 3 is a short document comprising both political and intercultural perspectives in the description of democracy and citizenship. The phrase ‘aspects of intercultural understanding and competence are central to preventing prejudice and developing tolerance for others’ (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2018) can clearly be linked to intercultural competence, which was suggested by the experts in the first commentary process. In addition, a statement was found that focuses on the political aspects of democracy and citizenship: ‘Insight into different forms of government can enhance students’ oral and written competency in the EFL subject and lay the foundation for becoming active citizens’ (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2018). Although both themes are present in this document, the analysis suggests a slight foregrounding of intercultural competence, as this is the focus of the beginning of the text. Meanwhile, political aspects are at the end of the text, which is an indication of backgrounding (Huckin, 1997).

An even clearer foregrounding of intercultural competence is evident in draft 5, published in March 2019. This is a comprehensive draft outlining all elements of the EFL curriculum through primary and secondary education. The paragraph conceptualizing democracy and citizenship is longer and more extensive than in previous drafts:

In EFL, the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship is about developing students’ tolerance and understanding that our view of the world is culturally dependent. Learning English and being able to communicate with others across the world, independent of a common mother tongue, and experience culture open up more ways of interpreting the world. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a)

This excerpt clearly describes intercultural competence. Tolerance, awareness of world views, communication, and culture are all elements that are important to being interculturally competent (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). Similar to the previous draft, this draft also includes a sentence related to political aspects, focusing on democracy as a form of government: ‘Through working with different types of texts, students can gain insight into the fact that democracy has different forms and expressions, and that democracy cannot be taken for granted’. However, this is a much shorter passage than the one about intercultural competence, and it is placed at the end of the paragraph, thus putting it in the background and signalling that this theme is less important (Huckin, 1997).

Omission of political aspects in the final curriculum

The final LK20 curriculum was published in November 2019 and introduced in the 2020–2021 school year. The text in the curriculum that conceptualizes democracy and citizenship within the frame of EFL is clearly influenced by intercultural competence, although the term ‘intercultural’ is not specifically mentioned. This text is similar to draft 5, presented earlier in this article. However, a noticeable difference is that the aspects related to politics and democracy as a form of government, which were suggested by teachers in the first commentary process, are absent. Thus, these aspects were not only backgrounded but omitted completely. Compared with the previous draft, this drastic change in the final national curriculum warranted further investigation to discover if the political aspects suggested by the teachers had been placed somewhere else in the curriculum documents. Therefore, the entire national EFL curriculum was scrutinized for both political elements and elements of intercultural competence that can be linked to democracy and citizenship to uncover the potential foregrounding and backgrounding of ideas and thus teacher involvement in the curriculum making process.

We found clear instances of the foregrounding of intercultural competence in the final LK20 curriculum. The concept permeates the curriculum for all 11 years of mandatory EFL in the Norwegian school system. From the first paragraph, it becomes apparent that intercultural competence is an important part of EFL. The text describing the central values of the subject states that English is important when it comes to cultural understanding and communication, that it lays the foundation for communication with others regardless of cultural and linguistic background, and that EFL ‘shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking, and communication patterns’ (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019b, p. 2). This is continued in the description of core elements, where it is stated that through work with different types of text, students will develop intercultural competence that enables them to deal with different ways of thinking, living, and communicating.

In the competence aims, intercultural competence is foregrounded and plays a prominent role. In the second year, students are expected to acquire cultural knowledge through working with children’s literature. Later in elementary school, they should be able to talk about (year four) and investigate (year seven) different ways of life, traditions, and customs in the English-speaking world, and they should be able to reflect on identity and cultural belonging. In secondary school, intercultural competence seems to be an even larger part of the national curriculum. After year 10, students should be able to reflect upon the situation of indigenous peoples, and they should also be able to explore and describe ways of living and thinking, communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world. In addition, they are expected to explore and present the content of cultural forms of expression from different English-speaking media sources. Finally, in year 11, students should be able to explore and reflect upon diversity and social conditions in English-speaking countries based on historical contexts.

To sum up, the analysis suggests that the opinions of EFL experts about intercultural competence were thoroughly foregrounded in the final curriculum, while input from teachers about political aspects was omitted. Intercultural competence is clearly foregrounded in the LK20 EFL curriculum, comprising a large and important part of the competence aims, core elements, and central values. However, we could not find any element directly encouraging working with the political aspects of democracy and citizenship. Politics, rights, and democracy as a form of government are not mentioned at all in the national EFL curriculum. Terms such as ‘ways of life’ and ‘social conditions’ might create paths for working with different ways of structuring a society politically. However, these terms are combined with terms such as ‘diversity’ and ‘communication patterns’, which indicates that they should be read as a part of intercultural competence. Based on these observations, it can be said that the political aspects of democracy and citizenship were omitted from the EFL curriculum.

Discussion

Involving teachers in national curriculum making is a way of increasing the credibility of and commitment to the curriculum, as well as rendering the decision-making process more accountable and transparent, thereby increasing trust in authorities (Eyal, 2019, p. 111). As mentioned, policy documents and the strategy for the development of the LK20 curriculum clearly state that teachers should be involved in the process to enhance ownership, prepare schools for the new curriculum, and give legitimacy to the reform (Report to Parliament 28, (2015–2016)). However, involving teachers, experts and other actors can lead to difficult negotiations in which some ideas are foregrounded, while others are backgrounded or omitted (Saarinen, 2008b). This document analysis has uncovered a contradiction between a national strategy for curriculum making emphasizing teacher involvement, and the actual outcome of the process which resulted in the omission of teachers' suggestions for content in the final national curricula despite extensive involvement of teachers. The fact that the teachers' suggestions were included in several drafts before disappearing in the final version is highly interesting, and how and why this happened is an empirical question that needs further investigation. In the following, we discuss potential reasons for the contradiction between the policy intentions and the curriculum making process, as well as some consequences of downplaying teachers' role in curriculum reform.

Generic competences and hierarchies of expertise

The analysis displays how teachers' suggestions focused on an understanding of democracy and citizenship that seems to be anchored in how societal and cultural elements have traditionally been taught in EFL in Norway. The focus has been on the social issues, politics, history, and geography of English-speaking countries (Rindal et al., 2020). From a curriculum-making and assessment perspective, building citizenship education into language education can potentially create tensions. Still, this type of content is known to many EFL teachers and can easily be translated into teachable material. The teachers' suggestions for content focusing on concrete elements, such as the rights and duties of democratic citizens; current and historic events, and political and democratic practices in English-speaking countries, resonate with the tradition of the subject and with the previous LK06 curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2006; Rindal et al., 2020). Yet, as the analysis has shown, the teachers' suggestions for political aspects were omitted in favour of intercultural competence, which focuses on interpretations of the world, cultural understanding, and respecting differences. A possible reason for this can be the type of curriculum that the LK20 is. Norway, as many other countries, has developed a curriculum that emphasizes broad competences and skills. Intercultural competence fits well into such a curriculum. However, more specialized, knowledge-based content, which is what the teachers suggested, is often difficult to include in such curricula (Sundby & Karseth, 2021). Thus, a competence-based curriculum might imply less specific content and more generic orientations towards democracy and citizenship. Another possible interpretation of the finding is aligned with the findings of Theodorou et al. (2017). They found that teachers participating in national curriculum making found themselves caught between worlds of expertise. The process was characterized by negotiations between teachers' and experts' differently valued types of knowledge. Teachers brought practical, hands-on knowledge about the subjects and their students, but this knowledge was deemed less valuable than the knowledge of experts. It could be that different ways of producing knowledge—research-based in academia or experience-based in schools—have different hierarchical statuses (Nowotny et al., 2003), which again may impact the process of selecting content for curricula.

Consequences for teachers' interpretations of the curriculum

Deng (2012) argues that knowing the content of a school subject lies at the heart of teachers' professional understanding and entails selecting, formulating, framing, and transforming subject matter into meaningful and educational content for students. Further, Deng (2012) argues that a school subject is not the same as the academic 'parent discipline'. The aims, methods, and content might overlap in certain areas, but fundamentally, a school subject is developed to facilitate learning and teaching within the specific context of a school, while academic disciplines are formed to facilitate research and studies. An aim of the LK20 reform was to clarify what is at the core of each school subject (Report to Parliament 28 (2015–2016)). When different actors or stakeholders have opposing views on what the essence of a subject is, the curriculum making becomes a 'battle of the subject'. In the case of EFL in the LK20 curriculum, the battle seemed to be between the experts' suggestions and the teachers' suggestions, where the experts' suggestions became a very central part of the curriculum. Intercultural competence is a central issue in modern foreign language education internationally (Byram, 2008; Deardorff & Jones, 2012). But although intercultural competence is well known in the academic field of foreign language education, the concept is rather new in the national EFL curriculum for primary and lower secondary schools in Norway, and as such is likely unfamiliar for many teachers. Intercultural competence is also less concrete and consequently more difficult to operationalize in the classroom. Seen from the teaching perspective, the more easily teachable content has, in this case, been omitted in favour of more academic content. The LK20, like many modern curricula, consists of aims or learning outcomes, and teachers need to interpret and recontextualize the national curriculum by selecting suitable methods, materials, and so on. If the conceptual framing and language used in the national curriculum become too distant from teaching and classroom practices, there is a risk that the national curriculum does not make sense in the practical context of schools and becomes an ineffective tool for lesson planning. Thus, a consequence of ignoring teachers' ideas in macro curriculum making is the risk of missing a link between the national curriculum and the teachers' interpretations thereof, which, in turn, may influence the implementation and operationalization of the curriculum.

Consequences for future curriculum reforms

A potential pitfall of involvement and consultation strategies is that, unless the involved actors are given some form of influence, the strategy can appear superficial (Eyal, 2019, p. 113). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to think that a political aim of involving teachers in curriculum reform to such a large extent as was the case with the LK20, should include a commitment to giving teachers actual influence over the results. In reform work, it is necessary to manage differences of opinion in a manner that builds trust, understanding, and consensus if the aim is to create policy that the teachers consider legitimate (Eyal, 2019, pp. 113–114). However, if the impression and experiences of commentary process of the LK20 were that teachers' opinions mattered little, it is not unlikely that, in future reform work, teachers will be less willing to contribute. Participating in these types of commentary processes is time consuming and involves reading drafts, reflecting, discussing with colleagues, and writing responses. Considering that thousands of teachers across the country participated in the commentary process, a significant number of teachers' working hours have been allocated for this work. This is time that teachers could have spent on preparing teaching, supporting students, doing assessment work, collaborating with colleagues, and so on. So, in future reforms, why should teachers spend time engaging in national curriculum activities if they are not heard? If teachers are involved in the process to create legitimacy for the reform without having an actual influence over the final curriculum, we risk that strategies of involvement and co-creation become little more than policy 'buzzwords' (Stenersen & Prøitz, 2020).

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to illuminate the complex process of involving teachers in national curriculum making and to investigate the influence that individual teachers might have on the final curriculum through their participation in official commentary processes. The study was guided by the question *How were teachers involved in national curriculum making through participation in an official commentary process, and what was the result of the process in terms of teacher influence?* The findings showed that teachers were involved to a large extent in the curriculum making through the official commentary process. Teachers comprised a large majority of the groups that engaged themselves in responding. This shows eagerness and commitment to take an active part in curriculum making. Nevertheless, their suggestions were backgrounded throughout the development process, and in the final curriculum, the teachers' suggestions were omitted in favour of suggestions made by experts. This shows that the teachers were not able to influence the national curriculum despite their involvement.

This study contributes to an enhanced understanding of what teacher involvement and influence in national curriculum making can entail and which issues still need to be discussed. The study also contributes to future curriculum work by informing on the complexities of teacher involvement. An implication of this study is a call for further research on teachers' role in curriculum reform. How teachers are involved in other parts of the process, for instance in curriculum committees, is an important aspect of this theme. Such research could shed light on the different ways teachers are involved in and able to influence curriculum making. In addition, studying documents and development processes reveals little about how a curriculum is operationalized in schools. How teachers use national curriculum frameworks to create local curricula and which methods and content they choose need to be investigated to gain a broader understanding of how the national curriculum works in schools.

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