

## Second Language and Mother Tongue Education for Immigrant Children in Nordic Educational Policies: Search for a Common Nordic Dimension

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to investigate whether and how a common Nordic dimension underlies existing policies on second language (L2) and immigrant mother tongue (L1) education. Our research question was: What do policy documents in the five Nordic countries say about L2 and L1 instruction? The theoretical foundation lies in the research fields of language policies and social justice. Document analysis was used to analyze policy documents. Our results show that there is a common Nordic dimension

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regarding L2 and L1 instruction, demonstrated through an explicit ambition to provide opportunities for the education of immigrant students in L2 and L1. However, there are differences between the Nordic countries in their commitment to principles of social justice, and how the policies are implemented.

**Keywords:** *second language (L2), mother tongue (L1), educational policies, social justice, document analysis*

### 1. Introduction

Over the last decades, the Nordic countries have experienced an increase in immigration and thus, an increase in linguistic diversity within the population. In some of the countries, up to 26% of the inhabitants have an immigrant background, meaning that they were born abroad or were born in the country of residence with two parents born abroad. For about fifteen years, there has been a joint Nordic language policy (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2007), and as we write this article, a new, more succinct version is in the making. Both versions highlight the equal value of all languages, yet stress that mastery of the countries' national languages is crucial for access to important parts of society, such as education and the labor market. Immigrant mother tongues, sign languages, and Indigenous languages ought to be maintained, supported, and developed, and all citizens are encouraged to learn other Nordic languages. Furthermore, the policy states that knowledge of a global language is crucial because it opens possibilities for communication internationally. In this article, researchers from the five Nordic countries examine whether and how the shared Nordic language policy is reflected in the respective national policy documents when it comes to second language and mother tongue instruction for students with an immigrant background.

Various labels are used in policy documents for students with immigrant backgrounds (e.g., *plurilingual students, multilingual students, students with diverse cultural and language backgrounds, second language learners*) as well as for their languages. In this article, we will use these student labels interchangeably. Our focus is on immigrant students and, therefore, we use the term "L2" for the national Nordic language, learned by the immigrants as their second/additional language, and "L1" or "mother tongue" for immigrant students' first languages or mother tongues.

Nordic education leans on values of social justice, equity, and inclusion, and the treatment of second languages and mother tongues can be seen as a test of how well these Nordic values are implemented. While second language instruction is a tool to provide students with immigrant backgrounds with equal access to education, and mother tongue instruction is a recognized human right, local circumstances influence how the instruction is organized and provided. The purpose of this article is to investigate if and how a common Nordic dimension underlies existing policies in L2 and L1 instruction in the five Nordic countries. Our research question is: What do policy documents in the five Nordic countries say about a) second language (L2) instruction and b) immigrant mother tongue (L1) instruction? In the following sections, we briefly present our theoretical framework and method. Our findings are presented in five subsequent national sections that contain relevant information from analyzed texts.

These are discussed and connected with social justice theory in the discussion section where the research question is also answered.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical foundation of this article lies in the research fields of language policies (Spolsky, 2005) and social justice (Cleave, 2020; Piller, 2020). An explicit written language policy is closely tied with language beliefs and ideologies. Language management – trying to control language practices through language policies – can happen at the state level through legislation, regulations, and institutional provisions, yet also at the level of multilingual families. Interventions in language practices must take into account an array of non-linguistic factors such as religion, demography, and politics, and they might have no effect or even unexpected effects. National and school language policies are further determined by the sociolinguistic situation, national ideologies, the presence of English in the society as a global language, and linguistic rights (Spolsky, 2005).

Social justice is a complex and broad concept that refers to ideas related to fairness, equity, inclusion, and the level of equality within the education system (Piller, 2020). Schools should be places that challenge and respond to social injustices, and nowadays this is one of the greatest challenges that the school sector faces. The recognition of power relations is an important element in understanding social justice, and approaches towards social justice always have the aim to make the situation of people more equitable. The recognition of power relations within the educational system aims at creating more equitable schools. In inequitable schools, factors such as social and economic level, gender, race, and languages determine the education that an individual receives. A school system that fails to cater for the educational needs of a certain group of students is an example of social injustice (Cleave, 2020).

In a recent case study of five education systems (New South Wales, California, Illinois, New York State, and Ontario), Cleave (2020) found that “systems that engage multilingual learners and their families directly in policymaking are more likely to have an equitable approach to language education and diversity, with policies that are conceived, designed and owned by diverse, multilingual communities themselves” (p.5). The study also highlights that a system change is needed to improve educational outcomes for multilingual learners. One of the main findings is that the challenge of working towards an equitable education system requires all teachers to see themselves as teachers of languages who recognize students’ assets, e.g., the linguistic diversity that they bring to the classroom. This agrees with what Freire (1970) argued decades ago, that education should be centred on the resources that students bring to learning rather than on established knowledge mandated by the dominant groups. Multilingual students have been viewed as a challenge to the educational system (Piller, 2020) because schools tend to adopt a monolingual ethos, even if they serve highly linguistically diverse student populations (Ellis et al., 2010). However, recent research has encouraged a shift in the way that multilingual students are perceived: away from the notion that they are a “burden” in need of additional time and resources, to a broader

focus on the importance of equitable access to the language of the curriculum and quality-first education for all learners (Cleave, 2020). In the context of language education, social justice includes curricular elements as well as the instructional choices implemented by teachers (Randolph & Johnson, 2017).

### 3. Methods and material

The current Nordic Language Policy was approved in 2006 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2007) and thus marked the beginning of a common vision of the Nordic countries as a multilingual region. We collected the most recent policy documents, all introduced after the year 2007, from our individual countries for the document analysis. The documents that were used to analyze the policies of each Nordic country included policy reports, legislation, curricula, and external evaluation reports related to schools. To analyze the documents and answer the research questions, we used document analysis, which is a “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic ... material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). It combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis. The document analysis takes place in several steps: skimming, thorough reading, and interpretation. Data are examined and interpreted to render meaning, understanding, and empirical knowledge. Subsequently, information is categorized and related to research questions (Bowen, 2009). Table 1 lists the major policy documents used in the data analysis of our respective countries.

**Table 1:** Overview of policy documents from individual countries

<b>Denmark</b>
The national curriculum for Danish subject (2019)
The national curriculum for Danish as a second language subject (2019)
The national curriculum for minority mother tongue subject (2019)
BEK no. 689. Executive order on the mother tongue teaching in the primary and lower secondary school (2014)
<b>Finland</b>
The national core curriculum for basic education (2014)
The national core curriculum for preparatory education (2015)
<b>Iceland</b>
The national curriculum guide for compulsory schools (2013)
Guidelines for the support of mother tongues and plurilingualism in schools and afterschool programs (2020)
The first action plan of the education policy 2030 (2022)
<b>Norway</b>
The core curriculum – Values and principles for primary and secondary education (2017)
The Norwegian education act (2020)
Guidance material from the Norwegian directorate of education and training (2016; 2021)
<b>Sweden</b>
The national curriculum for compulsory school (2022)
The Swedish education act (2010, 2015)
Guidance material from the Swedish national agency for education (2015a; 2015b; 2018)

The selected documents were scrutinized for indications of the status of L2 and L1 and searched for obligations, recommendations, and provisions of the states, municipalities, and schools to provide teaching of L2 and L1. The curricula were further inspected for detailed information about requirements for competencies in L2 and L1. In the analysis, we read these policy documents alongside the social justice-oriented research on second language acquisition and mother tongue instruction, in national contexts.

#### 4. National contexts of Nordic countries

In this section, a broad overview of policies in national contexts is given regarding second language (L2) and immigrant mother tongue (L1) instruction. Under the headline of each country, there is a description of national policies. The aim is to give a holistic overview, as well as to highlight what is relevant for each country since each country has a specific context. A brief overview of the countries' approaches to L2 and L1 instruction is depicted in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Nordic countries' approaches to L2 and L1 instruction

COUNTRY	L2 APPROACHES	L1 APPROACHES	NEWLY ARRIVED STUDENTS
Denmark	L2 Danish subject; mandatory national tests for all students	L1 immigrant subject for students from EU and EEA; no testing	L2 Danish and other subjects are taught outside of regular classes
Finland	L2 subject is either Finnish or Swedish. It gives equal access to higher education	The right to study L1 as a non-mandatory subject if certain conditions are fulfilled	Learning in preparatory education for one year
Iceland	Schools decide how L2 instruction is organized. Competence levels in L2 are described in the National Curriculum Guide	L1 instruction is provided by volunteer-based NGOs; students with L1 Swedish, Norwegian and Polish can study L1 within school system	Inclusion in regular classes; standard curriculum within 2–4 years
Norway	L2 Basic Norwegian for maximum 2 years. The right to L2 instruction until proficient	The right to L1 instruction if certain conditions are fulfilled	Usually learning in introductory classes for up to 2 years
Sweden	L2 Swedish subject is equivalent to L1 Swedish subject, they both give equal access to higher education	Municipalities are obliged to offer L1 instruction if certain conditions are fulfilled	Inclusion in regular classes yet schools sometimes organize introductory classes for up to 2 years; study guidance in L1

##### 4.1 Denmark

In Denmark, the population is 5.8 million (Statistics Denmark, 2022). The three largest immigrant groups in Denmark are from Poland, Syria, and Turkey. The Danish language is the official language. Statistics Denmark does not register the background and language of pupils in primary and lower secondary school.

Danish primary schools have two Danish language subjects, one for the majority of Danish students and the other for students who do not have a Danish background. In addition, there is an L1 (immigrant mother tongue) subject that is aimed at students who come from the EU and the EEA (Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein). This, however, means that students from non-Western countries do not receive L1 instruction.

The two Danish language subjects and the immigrant mother tongue subject are fundamentally different regarding weekly lessons, tests, and status at school as well as in a political context. In the policy documents, the majority Danish language subject is allotted a fixed number of hours. Danish as a second language is a subject without a fixed number of lessons. The requirements for final skills in the mainstream Danish subject are explicit. All students must participate in the Danish language subject and complete all tests in it by the end of Grade 9. These are mandatory national tests for all students, including students with Danish as a second language. In the Danish language subject, students deepen their experience and understanding of literature and other aesthetic texts, subject texts, language, and communication as sources for the development of personal and cultural identity (The national curriculum for Danish subject, 2019).

On the contrary, there is decentralized management of how much instruction in L2 Danish each student can receive (Busch, 2020). Students who learn L2 develop language skills based on their overall linguistic prerequisites so that they can understand and use spoken and written Danish. Teaching L2 is closely linked to the school's other subjects, and the aim of the L2 subject is to make students aware of language and language acquisition with the goal of active and equal participation in school and society, as well as preparation for further education. The L2 studies strengthen students' sense of self-esteem and promote their experience of language as a source for the development of personal identity (The national curriculum for Danish as a second language subject, 2019).

Newly arrived students do not participate in regular teaching in primary school at first. The students receive instruction in L2 Danish and other school subjects. Basic education is offered in the following three forms: reception classes, special teams, or extended reception classes. Teaching is based on individual students' needs and prerequisites. The school's leader is responsible for ensuring that the student is offered teaching that supports the individual language support needs (BEK no. 689. Executive order on the mother tongue teaching in the primary and lower secondary school, 2014).

The aim of L1 is that students develop skills to communicate in the mother tongue both orally and in writing. At the same time, L1 teaching develops students' linguistic awareness. The subject of L1 contributes to promoting students' desire to deal with language and culture from a global perspective. It further develops students' prerequisites for active participation in school and community life and prepares them for further education. The subject gives the students insight into the cultural and social conditions of the country of origin, among other things, to facilitate the students'

possible return to this country (The national curriculum for minority mother tongue subject, 2019). The L1 subject is not offered by all schools, but it is provided by different municipalities. There are no tests or national tests in the L1 subject. The schools do not administer the subject and they do not necessarily know which pupils receive L1 instruction. Typically, immigrant mother tongue classes take place on Saturdays or late in the day. The mother tongue teacher is not employed at the school but comes from another school or institution (BEK no. 689. Executive order on the mother tongue teaching in the primary and lower secondary school, 2014).

## 4.2 Finland

Unlike the other Nordic countries, Finland registers people's L1. More than 92% of Finland's whole population (5.5 million) speak one of the two official languages – Finnish (86.5%) or Swedish (5.2%) – as their first language (OSF, 2021). In addition to the official bilingualism, also North, Inari, and Skolt Sámi have official status in the four northernmost municipalities of Finland. At the end of 2021, the other main language groups in Finnish basic education were Russian, Arabic, Somali, and Estonian (Vipunen, 2022). The percentage of people with L1 other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi is 8.3%, but in younger generations it is slightly higher. Of the total number of students attending compulsory education in Finland, 8.5% had “immigrant background” in the 2020–2021 school year (Statistics Finland, 2022).

Newly arrived students mainly start their schooling in preparatory education the first year after migration. However, it is up to the organizer (municipality) to decide whether preparatory education will be offered and how the arrangements will be implemented. The Finnish National Agency for Education (2015) outlines that all newcomers should get a personalized curriculum and learning objectives corresponding to the students' schooling, including a plan for integration into an age-appropriate regular classroom. The main goal of the first year in Finland is “learning the Finnish or Swedish language, supporting the student's balanced development and integration to the Finnish society, and preparing the student for basic education” (author's translation, Finnish National Agency for Education, 2015).

Multilingual children have the right to study their L1 at school as a non-mandatory subject. The municipality is entitled to governmental funding for mother tongue teaching groups for a minimum of four students, for two weekly lessons. In the national core curriculum (NCC), the Finnish National Agency for Education (2014) gives language-specific curricula for Sámi and Romani Kalo, but only a general outline for a curriculum for all other languages spoken as the “student's own mother tongue.” The municipalities are responsible for writing language-specific mother tongue curricula. According to the evaluation (Venäläinen et al., 2022), the challenges in L1 education have remained similar since the 1990s. Lack of legitimate curricular status leads to a shortage of L1 teaching in municipalities, partly due to the unavailability of competent teachers.

For the subject named “Mother tongue and literature,” the NCC presents twelve parallel syllabi, which does not include “student's own mother tongue” (L1).

The syllabi are Finnish, Swedish, Sámi, Romani Kalo, sign language and literature, “student’s other mother tongue” (for schools using a foreign language, e.g., French or Russian, as the language of instruction), Finnish/Swedish as a second language and literature, Finnish/Swedish for Sámi speakers, and Finnish/Swedish for sign language users. As Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, the mandatory “second domestic language” is tied up with the chosen mother tongue path. The most frequent syllabus is Finnish language and literature; Swedish language and literature is the second most frequent. Finnish/Swedish as a second language and literature can, according to the NCC, be seen as a consistent and whole path from compulsory to upper secondary school, legitimizing equal access to the highest level of education. The L2 syllabus is thus comparable with the Finnish/Swedish language and literature syllabus.

### 4.3 Iceland

The total population of Iceland is 376,248 inhabitants (Statistics Iceland, 2022). Icelandic is the national language of Icelanders and the official language in Iceland. Icelandic sign language is acknowledged as the first language (L1) of its users (Act No. 61/2011). Iceland today is a multilingual society where about 17% of the population has an immigrant background. There are over 100 immigrant languages spoken by children in preschools and schools in Iceland (Móðurmál, 2021). Polish, Lithuanian, and Filipino are the largest minorities (Statistics Iceland, 2022). Icelandic as a second language has become a part of the linguistic landscape, and it is considered of utmost importance that new Icelanders learn it to be able to participate in society. It is an educational goal for plurilingual students<sup>1</sup> to achieve an age-appropriate level of Icelandic (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2021).

The Icelandic education policy is based on principles of inclusive education and aims to provide equal opportunities to learn and study for all students. According to the latest amendment to the National Curriculum Guide from the year 2021, maintaining and supporting students’ active plurilingualism is seen as valuable both for individual students and for society (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014). New competence criteria in Icelandic as a second language set goals for newly arrived students who are expected to join the standard Icelandic curriculum within two to four years, which is seen as the shared responsibility of the school community (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014).

The first action plan of the Education Policy 2030 consists of nine large actions, highlighting for example integration of school services, targeted support for students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and active student democracy at all

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1 Plurilingualism implies a constant use of all linguistic repertoire and semiotic resources creatively with the goal of co-constructing meaning. It builds on the understanding that language shapes the human perception of the world and that language and culture are closely tied together. It also contains a critical and creative dimension, necessary for reinforcing “conceptual, communicational and cultural awareness” (Piccardo & North, 2020, p. 289).



school levels. That action plan states that the school system urgently needs to meet the educational and social needs of students with diverse backgrounds so that they can enjoy the same opportunities as their peers to learn and to take an active part in Icelandic society. There is a need, for example, for suitable educational materials, improved teacher education, and further development of professionals throughout the educational system (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2021).

Guidelines for the support of mother tongues and active plurilingualism in schools and afterschool programs from 2020 is the first nationwide, state-issued document that discusses the rights of plurilingual children to mother tongue instruction and the value of active plurilingualism for children in schools. The guidelines offer an overview of practical ideas for the support of mother tongues and of active plurilingualism, with simple methods that raise awareness and show symbolic recognition, as well as with more complex paths to active plurilingualism (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020).

In Iceland, L1 instruction is in the hands of community-based mother tongue schools and groups, some of which collaborate under the umbrella of Móðurmál – the Association on Bilingualism. Mother tongue schools work independently of the school system, municipalities, and governmental institutions. They mostly operate without regular funding and depend on the volunteer work of mother tongue teachers (Emilsson Peskova & Aberdeen, 2020). They offer L1 teaching outside of school hours, and the languages are usually taught on Saturdays (Móðurmál, 2022). Children whose L1 is Swedish, Norwegian, or Polish can study these languages instead of the compulsory subject Danish through the language lab of the City of Reykjavík, and some schools offer Polish classes to their students.

#### 4.4 Norway

The population of Norway is 5.4 million (Statistics Norway, 2022). Norwegian and Sami are the official languages. Nineteen percent of children in primary and lower secondary schools have an immigrant background (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021), and more than 150 languages are spoken in Norwegian schools (Ipsos, 2015). The largest immigrant groups come from Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Syria, and Somalia (Statistics Norway, 2021).

The Norwegian core curriculum asserts that “teaching and training shall ensure that the pupils ... develop their language identity” and that “[a]ll pupils shall experience that being proficient in a number of languages is a resource” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 7). Furthermore, it states that “language skills and cultural understanding are growing in importance” and that “[s]chool shall support the development of each person’s identity” (p. 8).

Students’ linguistic rights are embodied in law, though not without restrictions. The Norwegian Education Act asserts that pupils in primary and secondary school “who have a mother tongue other than Norwegian or Sami have the right to adapted education in Norwegian until they are sufficiently proficient in Norwegian to follow

the normal instruction of the school” (Education Act 2020, Sections 2.8 and 3.12). The Education Act (2020) further states that “[i]f necessary, such pupils are also entitled to mother tongue instruction, bilingual subject teaching, or both.” While mother tongue instruction refers to the teaching of the student’s L1, bilingual subject teaching refers to the teaching of subjects in Norwegian and in the student’s L1 by bilingual teachers. Although students have the right to such teaching, the Education Act also specifies conditions for when these rights are applicable (“until they are sufficiently proficient in Norwegian” or “if necessary”). These conditions signal that policy sees students’ home languages primarily as a tool that is useful in a transitional phase (Aarsæther, 2013).

The right to L1 instruction and bilingual subject teaching is further restricted due to practical concerns such as lack of staff, which is a hindrance that is especially relevant outside of big cities. Thus, the Education Act (2020) states that “[w]hen mother tongue instruction and bilingual subject teaching cannot be provided by suitable teaching staff, the [school owner] shall as far as possible, provide for other instruction adapted to the pupils’ abilities.” While signaling that the learner still has the right to adapted education, the Act does not impose action. The expression “as far as possible” reduces the school owner’s duties and limits the students’ rights.

The organization of adapted language education is largely up to local authorities. The instruction can take place in special groups, classes, or schools.

Newly arrived immigrant children are typically placed in an introductory school or classroom where the instruction follows a special curriculum called Basic Norwegian for language minorities (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2020). Students can stay in such classes for up to two years but may also have the right to adapted language education after entering mainstream education. Local authorities are responsible for monitoring students’ language skills in order to decide when students have reached the sufficient proficiency level in Norwegian to follow mainstream education and to decide for whom bilingual subject teaching and mother tongue teaching is necessary (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2016). About 6% of pupils in primary and lower secondary school receive adapted education in Norwegian<sup>2</sup>. Only 27% of these pupils also receive L1 and/or bilingual subject teaching.

#### 4.5 Sweden

The population of Sweden is 10.5 million (Statistics Sweden, 2022). Of the students in compulsory school, 26% had a multilingual background in the school year 2020–2021 (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022a). About 150–200 languages are spoken in Sweden, and in 2020, the largest minority languages were Arabic, Finnish, Somali, Dari, and Persian (Institute for Language and Folklore, 2020). There are five official minority languages of Sweden: Finnish, Sami, Romani, Yiddish, and Meänkieli.

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2 There are large geographical differences: In Oslo, this percentage is 20% (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021).

Students are considered as newly arrived up to four years after arrival (The Swedish Education Act, 2015). Newly arrived students should be placed in a regular class, usually with students of their own age (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2015a). Initially, the students' knowledge, literacy, and previous schooling are assessed. Sometimes the schools have so-called "introductory classes" or "preparatory classes," where the students learn Swedish in groups that are separate from the mainstream classes. Since 2017, there is a two-year limit on introductory classes, so that the students do not spend too much time outside of the regular curriculum (The Swedish Education Act, 2015). Multilingual children's right to learn and develop their mother tongue at school, alongside Swedish, was acknowledged through the home language reform of 1977. The mother tongue subject (L1) is a non-mandatory subject and is offered to students who speak a language other than Swedish at home and who have a parent/caregiver who speaks a language other than Swedish at home. Municipalities have the obligation to offer L1 instruction, but there must be at least five students of any one language group and there also has to be a "suitable" teacher (The Swedish Education Act, 2010). Municipalities are not obliged to offer instruction to less than five students of any one language group in their mother tongue. In contrast, instruction in the national minority language must be offered even if there is only one student. The L1 subject is usually taught outside of the ordinary school schedule by L1 teachers who often work at several preschools and schools.

In addition to L1 instruction, the Swedish school system offers study guidance in the L1, primarily for newly arrived students. Guidance in L1 aims to scaffold content learning in Swedish (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2015b). The extent to which schools use the opportunity to offer study guidance in L1 to students differs. Each school must apply for how much study guidance they need, and this is not governed by legislation.

In Swedish compulsory schools and upper secondary schools, there are two Swedish core subjects, Swedish (SWE) and Swedish as a second language (SSL), that are in many ways equivalent and give the same eligibility for higher education, both upper secondary and tertiary education. SSL was established in the Swedish school system in 1995. This educational design is quite unique, and the content and the goals of SSL and SWE are to a great extent similar, with both language and literature as the main content. However, a revised curriculum was implemented in compulsory school in the autumn of 2022, and in the revised syllabi, the difference between SWE and SSL increased significantly. In the revised SSL curriculum, there is a clear second language perspective throughout the school years, which was not the case before. SSL is arranged "if necessary" for students with L1 other than Swedish (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022b; The Swedish Education Act, 2010). The decision whether a student is to study SSL or SWE is made by the principal of the compulsory school. In upper secondary school, after Grade 9, students can make the decision themselves.

## 5. Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate whether and how a common Nordic dimension underlies existing policies in L2 and L1 instruction. Nordic countries, which today form a multilingual region, share a language policy that encourages multilingualism as the basis for skills, creativity, perspective, and international contact to an extent that is impossible in monolingual societies. The policy suggests that developing a multilingual society requires a unified, long-range, and effective language policy effort (The Nordic Council of Ministers, 2007, p. 89). There is an ambition in the Nordic language policy to highlight the value of multilingualism in Nordic countries. In agreement with Spolsky's theory, the existence of a common language policy plays a crucial role in language management on the national and local levels. However, implementation of the Nordic policy and national policies as well as practical work with multilingualism in the educational systems remain a challenge as they are largely subject to national and local measures. Spolsky (2005) cautioned that these measures partially result from non-linguistic factors, such as politics, national ideologies, and sociolinguistic circumstances. As Cleave (2020) pointed out, systemic changes are needed to improve educational outcomes for multilingual learners, and to recognize students' assets, e.g., the linguistic diversity they bring to the classroom. Our results show that there is an overall common Nordic dimension in the Nordic policies regarding L2 and L1 instruction, which is demonstrated through an explicit ambition to provide opportunities for the education of immigrant students, both in the students' L2 and L1. However, our analysis also shows that there are differences regarding the provision of L2 and L1. The Nordic countries differ from each other in how the value and status of L2 and L1 are depicted in national policy documents.

Regarding L2 instruction, the major difference emerges as a continuum: from an autonomous subject to additional support to a mainstream language subject. The Swedish curriculum displays SLL (L2 Swedish) as an autonomous, independent school subject. The Finnish curriculum reflects similar L2 status, although L2 has no subject position unless it is an alternative syllabus to Finnish language and literature. In both countries, students can apply for higher education equally from the L2 path, without attending mainstream language education, and the grade in L2 is valued equally with the mainstream language subject grade in the entrance tests. At the other end of the continuum is Denmark, with a mandatory test in L1 Danish subject and unspecified policies in L2 Danish instruction, and Iceland with underdeveloped L2 instruction and support. The language policies in Denmark, Iceland, and Norway articulate L2 instruction as a temporary support for students who are not yet sufficiently proficient in the majority language. These three countries view L2 instruction as a bridge to the national language curricula, thus implicitly imposing the "monolingual ethos" (Ellis et al., 2010) paradigm and the mainstream language as a linguistic norm, although the concept of a "native-like speaker" as a prototype (Seidlhofer, 2022) is culturally marked (Pawley & Syder, 2014). Ahlholm et al. (2022) show that the L2 school subject may have a lower status than the mainstream language syllabus. If the system does not

encourage the students to switch from L2 subject to a mainstream language subject, the indirect result may appear negative for the students' further studies. Although the policies in Sweden and Finland grant L2 students the same access to further education, Kalalahti et al. (2017) argue that studying in the L2 syllabus in Finland may lead to lower expectations after compulsory school, a tendency that has been criticized as othering (Kurki et al., 2018). However, neither Sweden nor Finland restrict the switch between L2 and the mainstream language subject.

The Nordic countries' policies also differ in regard to the multilingual students' right to learn their L1. The variation is featured as a continuum from curricular and state-funded L1 subject to a charity club-like voluntary home language activity. Again, Sweden stands at one end of the continuum, and Denmark and Iceland at the other end, with Finland and Norway falling in the middle. Even in Sweden, L1 is non-mandatory, but it is included in the curriculum, and also accompanied by L1 study guidance resources, which is parallel to "bilingual subject teaching" in Norway. In Finland, L1 is a non-mandatory subject with state funding, but it is not included in the canon of curricular subjects, and therefore L1 teacher education is not fully developed (Yli-Jokipii et al., 2022). In Norway, L1 is connected to Norwegian L2, and only those students who are still in need of additional support in Norwegian, have the right to L1 instruction. In Denmark, only children from the European Union and European Economic Area are granted the right to mother tongue instruction. Iceland does not provide L1 instruction as a part of the formal education system, except for Swedish and Norwegian L1 instruction, which can replace compulsory Danish lessons.

All of the Nordic countries have articulated policies for newly arrived students. The organization and number of years of special instruction for the newcomers vary not only between the countries but also internally. Due to decentralized practices, the policy documents do not alone give a comprehensive view of all the variations of options that take place for newly arrived students. The policy documents communicate the intention to include all students, but as Tajic and Bunar (2020) show, investigating how two primary schools organize education for newly arrived students, inclusion can be interpreted in different ways. Their results show that both schools have the intention to include the students, but they use different strategies. One of the schools places the students into mainstream classes and the other school places them in separate classes. Tajic and Bunar conclude that there are both advantages and disadvantages with the two models, and they stress that the individual needs of the students must be in focus.

Students enjoy different rights depending on their residence status and other circumstances as opposed to what is stated in the Nordic language policy (Council of Europe, 2007). Multilingual students' rights in Norway and Iceland are recognized in policy documents but relativized by reducing school administrators' and state/municipality's duties. According to Kulbrandstad (2018, p. 20), whether a student receives mother tongue and/or bilingual subject teaching depends on where the student lives

in Norway. Also in Finland, options for studying L1 depend on the place of residence (Venäläinen et al. 2022, p. 103). There are various implementation issues connected with the policies on L1 instruction as well. A lack of qualified mother-tongue teachers is one of the barriers to implementing children's linguistic rights. This is in contrast to Piller (2020), who states that fairness and equity characterize socially just, inclusive school systems.

The provisions for students along the L2 continuum and the L1 continuum are closely related to social justice ideas in education. Our study revealed differences between the Nordic countries in their commitment to principles of social justice. Regarding the L2 continuum, the systems that guarantee equal access to higher education with L2 certificates stay closer to the point of social justice than the systems that are indifferent to the question of students' diverse linguistic repertoires. As for the L1 continuum, the right to study one's L1 without categorizing languages according to their global origin is on a par with the idea of equality. The five Nordic countries make unequal provisions to fulfil common values, stated in the Nordic language policy (2007).

Research generally indicates that school systems are challenged by the need to include students with various linguistic and cultural backgrounds and to meet the educational and social needs of these students. These challenges are often related to legislation, given that policy documents are open to interpretation. This means that the help that multilingual students should have in order to be able to participate in school and society depends on difficult and unequal conditions (Busch, 2020; Gunnþórsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2020; Kristjansdóttir, 2006; Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). The key question is how policies and measures are implemented, keeping the individual student's best interests in focus. Considering individual circumstances in addition to the contexts of the classroom and school can provide some answers as to the implementation of policy documents, regulations, and laws. Democracy is not a self-evident state of affairs, but it must be reconstructed through societal changes again and again. The concepts of inclusion and power in the Nordic countries need to be further scrutinized to better understand related concepts of equity and social justice in education (Cleave, 2020; Piller, 2020).

Although the Nordic countries are not perfect in ensuring linguistic rights and inclusive education for all students, they do indeed continue to struggle to achieve this ideal, unlike many other regions in Europe and the world, where immigrant mother tongues are not taught at all and only limited support is provided for L2 learning. We conclude that the Nordic countries share common values that they aim to fulfill. At the same time, the differences outlined above might indicate that the Nordic countries are drifting apart. In the future, we might even see increased differences, depending on societal and political developments in each country. However, the doors are also open for a future with a stronger Nordic dimension in inclusive education.

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