UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

Masteroppgave

Social inequality and the Norwegian education system: defining issues differently

Kaja Wiig

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Abstract

One of the most defining features of the Nordic model is an education based on high knowledge quality with universalism at its core, which is a way to strengthen the knowledge base of the citizens and is considered to be a reason for the success behind the Nordic model. The reasoning is that, with the addition of various social benefits, there is a small wage gap between the different social groups within the Nordic societies where education is an important factor. However, there is evidence and speculation that the modern education system is actually one of the greatest facilitators of social inequality, as well as its reproduction. To examine this phenomenon closely, the Norwegian education system will be used as an example to look into the different wording present in various reforms. In addition to how they are experienced in the practical work within the educational organisational field, as well as how themes about social inequality are perceived. The themes presented lead to the research question "How does different logics conflict within the educational organisational field in terms of mitigating social inequality in the education system?". To be able to answer the research question, two qualitative methods were applied. Such as literature studies and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, literature studies were used to get an overview of the Norwegian educational history as to get a better understanding of particular reforms of interest. Additionally, to see whether there were other issues that could be of interest to discuss in an interview setting. This was also used as a preventative measure as to not hinder a natural flow of conversation by asking too many questions given lack of knowledge. Otherwise, the literature study was applied to create a theoretical framework for the analysis and discussion part of the thesis. Comparative analysis was applied as a reference point of how international educational movements play out today. But also, as a tool to compare and contrast successes and failures of reforms. As mentioned, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This type of interviews would make it possible to establish certain "controlled questions", which made it possible to find similarities and differences in answers within and across populations but ensuring that there was enough open-ended question to give room for reflections and deeper meaning explanations of the different issues that may occur. The interviewees consisted of two populations: one for the top governmental body and one consisting of educators. The findings suggest that dialogue between the public administration and the individual schools with individual teachers were perceived as lacking. Whereas one of the public administrative informants talked of teachers and principals could utilise different communication channels for dialogue, such as social media, curriculum driven

events and such, there seemed to be little knowledge of such resources among the teachers that were interviewed. This could be an indication that the flow of information, and to some extent the communication, are lacking. Solutions to obtain better dialogue processes, differed between the populations. As the public administrative employees talked more of strategic communication practices, the teacher was more interested in events or different gatherings focusing on co-operations between teachers, schools, and different levels of local government as something to be desirable. In other words, there was a bigger want by the teachers for the possibility of improving and expanding on the resources that were already available. This could indicate furthermore that even though the public administration and the schools have a mutual goal of creating good learning environments, there seems to be a disconnect in how this shall be achieved. Whereas teachers have an understanding of the role the public administration has as a guiding authority for goal and knowledge attainment for the students, they still wish to enforce their own autonomy. This results in a loosely coupled state within the educational organisational field. In other words, the teachers do follow the guidelines set to a certain point, but they put individual understandings forward as they teach their respective classes. One would postulate that this will make it harder to ensure that knowledge is equally distributed between students in regard to individual classes and between schools. Furthermore, given such an individualistic view – either in a school setting or by each teacher – this could lead to lack of understanding for systematic problems regarding the intricate ways social inequality present itself today. On the other hand, the public administration had too much of a structural view which results in making policies targeted at the majority of students, resulting in those of special needs not having their needs met. And given how most students that require special education are of lower class, this might be a factor into how social reproduction continues. As a result, conflicting logics within the educational organisational field are not cooperating in finding a common understanding of how social inequality occurs. Therefore, mitigating this phenomenon will be troublesome if not impossible unless changes in practices occurs.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude to my thesis counsellor Haldor Byrkjeflot for insightful advice and meaningful discussion. I am truly grateful for the patience given throughout the writing of this thesis. Additionally, I wish to express my outmost thanks to my wonderful parents who encouraged me along the way with their continuous support throughout my education journey.

Introduction

In modern societies today education attainment is seen as an important tool for social mobility. Furthermore, more countries adopt the ideal of universalistic values regarding education. Additionally, education shall meet the new demands of industrialisation and the increase of the knowledge society by lifting the competences of its citizens (Zhong, 2013; Thuen, 2017). To be able to successfully achieve this equity in opportunities within the educational system must occur. Therefore, barriers behind social inequality in society must be hindered or demolished. However, definitions and understandings of the mechanisms behind social inequality varies. This is especially true for the complex structures that the education system consists of, as there are many different cultures, understandings and procedures ensuring continuous operation. Therefore, this thesis postulates that the education system is actually an organisational field as it constitutes a multitude of organisations, institutions, professions and cultures. This also entail that within the educational organisational field there are multiple logics that are interdependent and in conflict (Reay & Hinings, 2009). This makes it so that policies are a complicated process where one is to make interpretations and definitions to ensure legitimacy (Bacchi, 2009). The Norwegian education system also faces such complexities, particularly with social inequality. Hence, the research question was formulated: "How does different logics conflict within the educational organisational field in terms of mitigating social inequality in the education system?". To answer these quantitative methods of such as literature review, comparative analysis and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The literature review would give a framework of appropriate theory on organisational fields and institutional logics perspective. In addition, it would provide research on the topic of education and its role in reproduction of social inequality. Comparative analysis was used as a tool to showcase how international testing exemplifies how educational systems differed and in terms of academic achievement. Especially in how it informs, or not, educational policies. Lastly, semi-structured interviews were conducted as to gauge what different logics one could find between the public administration and teachers working in classrooms. The identified logics were that of reform logic and educator logic. Both logics pertained to the idea of ensuring education of high quality and a fair system, which backs up the idea of an organisational field operating within a mutual goal. However, approaches to how academic performance occurred were fundamentally different. As reform logic is closely linked to political beliefs, they must abide and assist policy reforms presented by politicians. Therefore, they must ensure that these politics reaches the majority of the

constituents as to ensure favourability and re-election. In other words, most policies tend to rear towards middle-class citizens. This would entail those children of lower class, which is more likely to underperform academically and need intensified assistance, are not being prioritised. Because of this practice social inequality is not being addressed properly. However, public administration is far better equipped at providing structural assistance in form of economical and specialised competences. In opposition to this is the logic of the educator that takes a far more individualistic approach. This ensures flexibility and adapted learning benefitting the individual student. The downside, however, is that such a perspective might negate real structural reasons for why learning differences occurs. This may create undetected biases that will in the end put a struggling student at a disadvantage. The conclusion is then that conflicting logics within the education system is a factor in how social inequality is being reproduced as they have not found a common understanding of what factors causes it. By having a pure structural or individual understanding one cannot find common ground in how it should be solved. In addition, the findings suggested that the teachers interviewed did not feel like they even had a way to communicate, or even less influence, policies targeting curriculum or pedagogical methods. They were talking over each other heads, so to speak. If changes are to occur one must consider how the logics operate, finding better ways of communicating and finding a common goal and definition of how social inequality should be mitigated. However, the newer curriculum reform "Kunnskapsløftet 2020" brings hope as it opens for more academic freedom for the teachers and more direct communication outputs when evaluating its functionality. Suggestion for further research implies that looking into mental health issues as an increased element of why academic progression is ended might be of interest. Especially when looking at the link between mental health and class.

Background

As to keep up with the modern ideal of a high-quality education as to respond to the increased international competition, one must ensure that the majority of the citizens are well equipped to keep up with the new competence demands that the knowledge society requires to function. Underlying this is to ensure that all citizens are lifted to not only a higher standard, but even attempt that these standards are equal – not quantifiable, but at least subjectively. Though some countries have just began with this sort of equality access

conundrum, as some countries were highly hierarchical with schooling being the most visible representation besides wealth. The Nordic countries have built on the idea of equal access to school since the 1700s. This will be referred to as the 'Nordic education model'. This model has often emphasised the importance of limiting barriers that would prevent an individual from performing well in school, or in the earlier days, even be able to attend (Thuen, 2017). As it evolved from being strictly about ensuring Christian morality in society, the value of the Nordic education model relies on the ideas of universalism and meritocracy, that shapes how policies are created through implementation of reforms, programmes and other political 'solutions' to ensure not only equality, but equity. Equity is often referenced in how educational systems tries to limit how social barriers can influence how individuals acquire educational attainment. In the case of the Norwegian education system universalism is not only present in educational politics, but in general most welfare politics such as health, elder care, and such. The universalistic ideal bases itself on the fact that people should be granted equal access to different arenas regardless of social status or background. In the education system one can see this through the ideal of free schooling, free school materials and monetary support for those who are in need (for example transport costs, favourable student loans etc) which promotes that financial burdens should not be a hinder (NOKUT, 2023). In other words, Norwegian education reforms are tools to help mitigate social inequalities in society. Especially wordings in the new core curriculum emphases the importance of equal access to education attainment regardless of outcomes (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2023). However, in present time the idea of education equating to social mobility is flawed thinking as of today. It does not appear that education equates to eliminating social reproduction. Research on the topic of social inequality reproduction, in the context of school, shows how education could hinder or contribute to the maintenance of social inequality in terms of social background (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023). In this regard, one could argue that given how politics so heavily leans in to the ideal of universalism, as the term is operated today, it is problematic as it looks good on paper, but seem inefficient in term of practical execution.

In the beginning stages of the research for this thesis focus on reform and how universalism and meritocracy presented itself in text. However, throughout the development of the thesis, it appeared that this was not as relevant as understanding how social inequality is being understood. Problems of cohesion in mitigating social inequality in school seems to be rather a communicative issue. What is meant is that teachers felt unsupported in their work and felt lack of resources made differentiated teaching nearly impossible. The very ideal that

supposedly took into regard children's different outcomes to learning. Further development into this theme made it so that a communicative angle was tried. However, through further research into organisational theory, it appeared that viewing the education system as an organisational field were far more useful. In addition, by applying the institutional logics perspective, one could also identify underlying assumptions and approaches to how apparent solutions and understandings of social inequality were to be met in the Norwegian education system today. In this way it could also be possible to postulate why changes in mitigating social inequality have not occurred yet, as rather than working together within the system, their approaches to best methods of ensuring equity in outcomes for learning differentiates rather than converge in terms of goal attainment.

Social class and educational attainment

In order to answer the research question, it is fruitful to understand the link between social inequality and education. Research on the topic on educational attainment and societal positions imply heavily that it is the parental economic status and socialisation that factors into what social positions the child will attain at a later state in life. However, there needs to be an understanding of how social position and inequality is understood in theoretical terms as it will influence how political policies for change is understood and targeted policies towards the hinderance of social inequality. In other words, it is about how problems are defined (Bacchi, 2009). A cultural class perspective is particularly interested in how family background is factor on academic performance, not only in mandatory education but also if one wishes to pursue tertiary education. It is argued that social background may determine whether the child has learned the 'unspoken codes' perpetuated by the school system (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.8 & 18). One clear example of this is how parents will guide their children to behave in a certain way within the context of school, for example how children should approach their teachers as a figure of authority. Those of middle- and upper-class will instruct the children from a young age to demand assistance from teachers to learn the subject at hand. In other words, these parents have made it so that their children understand that the teacher has a specific job of meeting their needs to advance their knowledge and understanding of what they ought to learn. With this understanding, children of upper and middle class have an easier time demanding assistance and advocating for their needs. In terms of learning the aforementioned codes of the school system, children of well-

to-do parents are also encouraging hobbies or interests that will benefit them in academic pursuits (for example reading, painting, music and so on) (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Calarco, 2014). All of these factors can also make it so that those who have mastered these codes are perceived in more favourable light by teachers, which is particularly of importance as some speech and behaviour are more preferable and accepted than others. These values then also align with middle- and upper-class culture (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.8). The nature of how working-class parents approaches school regarding their children can be summarised into two understandings: 1. The child should be adept at finding a solution to an education problem on their own, or 2. The teacher is a person of authority and will know better of what should be demanded or needed to know (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Calarco, 2014). In other words, children of lower class parents are not encouraged to advocate for their needs. Furthermore, more resourceful parents are more vocal about their children's need and will demand more of the school as an institution. One explanation of this is that they are far more aware of what resources are out there and what to ask for, which is not always readily available information (Calarco, 2014). In other words, parents with a higher education will have easier access to and utilize more effectively welfare benefits (Heckmann & Landersø, 2022; Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.9). A good example of the vocalness of the parents is that of being able to advance in a particular subject (known as 'forsert løp' in Norweigan) for particularly 'gifted' children. This could be considered a future investment for higher education or applying for jobs. The result of this practice can however have a negative outcome when considering the ideal of giving everyone 'a fair chance' as universalism states since it provides an advantage. Especially considering as stated earlier that it is middle- and upper-class children are far more likely to be 'gifted'. All these factors accumulate in effective coaching as whereas children learn their parents techniques of making demands and will be able to utilize these skills in the future in the labour market (making demands for pay, work benefits etc.) or when needing to negotiate in institutional settings (Calarco, 2014). Though that social backgrounds provide could be negated, it is as Swift (2004) explains, other factors of parents giving their children advances in the privacy of their homes is trickier to deal with in a political manner regarding factors related to class specific advantages if one is to reduce social inequality. As Swift gives examples of what parents' wishes to give in inheritance or through simple acts of reading a bed-time story seems rather invasive of private life if the state would try to enforce any regulations regarding this. Hence, he believes that giving a more normative perspective on justice might be more fruitful (Swift, 2004, s. 7-8). Therefore, politics with a cultural understanding gives a more complicated understanding

of how social inequality should be handled. In other words, simple economic incentives are not enough to truly diminish social inequality in society. Hence, reforms must find a balance in how it constitutes barriers of educational attainment in relation to social backgrounds.

It is important to note that educational attainment and access to the labour market, and with-it social positions, are intimately intertwined. This as some jobs will require certain credentials as to be even able to apply, unless the job description is that of 'unskilled labour'. Though not to be inherently a bad thing, one could argue that unskilled jobs tend to be rather looked down upon in society when regarding one influential understanding; societal goods are often distributed on the matter of one's position within the labour market, as cultural belief states that some jobs are more 'demanding' or 'more important' and similar ideations. Because of these beliefs one has also created a social-labour hierarchy determining earnings and benefits linked to the specific labour position. One main justification for this is the meritocratic belief. It prides itself with being an "effective" and "just" way of determining "fairness". This being that distribution of societal positions should be determined by talent and effort (White, 2007). In other words, those who possess the most of the two should have the highest positions, and those with less should have lower status. However, the labour market seems to be a bit more than just acquiring the proper credentials. As mentioned, parents' own education of the children is important as most job recruiters will be looking for additional qualities, they deem important such as personality and hobbies (Rivera, 2012). In this regard it is important to look at all the different resources guardians possess when it comes to how a child is influenced in making informed choices within the context of the education system as it is where it is first applied in practice.

Current research on social inequality and school in Norway

Recent studies on the link between social background and school achievements shows that parental status still has an impact on school performance. This is also true of Norway. Children of lower classes, and those especially in poverty, still underperform when compared to those of middle- and upper- class. A significant determinator of school performance is also linked to the education level and income of the parents, patterns of settlement and other similar factors that determine wealth and social position (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.6-7). In terms of education of the parent, it is prevalent that children of lower-class status, where parents have only completed mandatory schooling, is about three years behind in academic progression compared to those of higher class that have completed at least three years of

higher education (Hattie, 2023; Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.13). In fact, there is systematic almost linear links between academic progression for children according to their parent's level of education in Norwegian, maths and English (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.13). Hence, reforms aiming to reduce social inequality, with its legal repercussion, cannot be deemed to be effective as it does not make way for equity in opportunity nor ensure equality (Pinar et al., 1995; Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.6). As a possible explanation for this, provided by Heckman and Landersø (2022), is that higher educated parents are more likely to take advantage, exploit and influence the nature of welfare benefits than those of lower class (Heckman & Landersø, 2022; Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.17). This entails that the scale of resource allocations is still tipped towards the benefit of those already privileged. Hence, policies as they are made today do not work as intended.

The differences between students makes it so that those who 'underperform' lacks sufficient knowledge and skills required for furthering their education and what is necessary to succeed in the labour market. For example, in regard to credentials 6% of Norwegian students will not have met the requirements to have a completed degree in primary and lower secondary schooling due to lack of completed grades. In addition, almost 20% of students will not have sufficient reading skills (termed 'non-sufficient' in Nordahl & Nordahl (2023)) even after completed ten years of schooling (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.6). Progression in school, or lack of progression, is also linked to age. Children of parents who are less educated fall behind in academic performance the older they get, hitting its peak in lower secondary school (in Norway this is referred to as 8th through 10th grade). The opposite happens with children that have higher educated parents. However, there seems to be little differences in primary education (Hattie, 2023; Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.15-16). A possible explanation could be that possible social background factors influences increases with age. Another interesting observation made is that children attending, or needing, special education is more likely to have parents with lower levels of education (Nordahl et al., 2018; Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p. 9). Additionally, research has shown that those needing special education is more likely to have behavioural issues and shows symptoms of neurodivergence and mental health issues (Torvik et al., 2020; Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.9). Interesting to note however is that children who have learning difficulties can just as good learning progression as other children as long as preventative measures at an early stage is implemented (Hattie, 2023; Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.17). Regardless, the link between social skills and academic performance is interesting when looking at teacher evaluations. Research has shown that students exhibiting

traits that are viewed as favourable in a school setting, like keeping quiet, raise their hands in class, speaking a certain way and such, are more likely to be assessed by the teacher to do well in a certain subject (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.14). This perpetuates that certain values and behaviours are more legitimised, as one can see these children being rewarded within the school system such as favourable grades and whether positive or negative attention is given (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.18). However, this apparent link of 'hard' work and 'talent' seems to not take into the account the parent's education level (Heckman & Landersø, 2022; Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023, p.18). This is problematic as highly educated people would be more likely to put higher value in schooling and be able to help their children with homework and such.

Another important topic of Norwegian educational politics is that of drop-out rates in upper secondary school, which have longed been seen as a problem. In Norway about 80,4% of Norwegian students in upper secondary school completes their education within five or six years. Those in general programmes have a higher rate of completing their education in comparison with those in vocational school programmes by almost 20% (Statistics Norway a, 2023). This could indicate that lower class students are more likely to drop out of school, given that vocational school is often reared towards jobs that pay less or that those of middle- and upper-class tends to attend higher education institutions. However, what is interesting about the overall completion rate of upper secondary education is that the number appears not to be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic as other countries internationally. However, it does not necessarily correlate with problem surrounding school anxiety, which has been increasing, and school motivation, which has been decreasing since the 1980s. It is just that Norwegian youth handled the pandemic better in comparison with other countries (Eriksen, 2022). The point of discussing drop-out rates is because of its relation to increase in youth claiming disability checks, which may correlate to the increase of mental health issues among children and youth today (Statistics Norway b, 2023; Bang et al., 2023). What is meant here is that mental health issues may interfere with cognitive functions, which may lead to learning difficulties and such. Hence, when making arguments of links between social background and school performance it is paramount to take into consideration the role of mental health issues. As it will be delved into later on, the teachers that were interviewed kept stressing how the individual mental health of their students were one crucial point for performance perimeters.

The educator logic versus reform logic

Regarding research on developments to the Norwegian education system the research traditions of pedagogy, educational historians, or political scientists regarding analyses of political document are the most prevalent. Hence, with this thesis I apply different literature from these different research traditions, but also applying organisational theory as a way to get as much as a nuanced understanding of changes and how they occur. Especially, to get a further understanding of the tension that seemingly exist between organisations and institutions within the organisational field, one must identify the different logics at display when discussing the education system and how political incentives are presented, tested and fulfilled. This is also prevalent in being able to identify potential points of conflict as the research question postulates. The first logic presented, which I have decided to call educator logic is of those working within the school itself. Their goal is to provide to the best of their ability sufficient education to achieve proper knowledge attainment and formation (known as "dannelse" in Norwegian). The ideal of formation has been a focal point of the educator since the 1700s as the education system has always been seen as the institution to prepare a child for adulthood and preparation to become a proper citizen of the state (Thuen, 2017). Educator logic is linked to that of professionalism logic. Therefore, the profession often expresses it link to its academic background. If not able to conduct this professionalism one could argue that taking control of controlled spaces, such as classrooms are of outmost importance. The second logic is referred to as reform logic. As this logic often pertains to bureaucrats, it will still be argued that though usually viewed as independent of politics as their culture of professional expertise is strong, within the educational organisational field they are not. This as through self-dentification, public administrative employees in this field views themselves as more of a supportive pillar of political agendas. This logic pertains to the idea, and political motivation, behind creating new reforms that shall encourage change within an institution. They share somewhat the same ideal as the educator logic - bringing quality education to the citizens and that this will benefit society in later terms - but it differs as the main goal of reforms are not only improvement, but what will ensure re-election as those behind creating reforms must oblige to the political power in place. Hence, aligning itself more with political motivations. There are circumstances where these logics could align, however history has shown how the different standpoints differ. This is when conflict and resistance from both sides occur. In addition, when it comes to educational politics educators and parents have shown to be very vocal when they disagree which have often been the result

of change as employees in public administrations found themselves pressured to alter their plans. It seems that today a lot of research investigates how it affects the teachers and educators, but little is shown of how those employees in public administration view the same problems outside analysing political documents through research populations and statements (what a politician states). Therefore, however not representative, it seemed fitting to perform some interviews to see how those in the public administration views would mirror that of politics.

The short summary of the Norwegian education system

To understand the evolution of the Norwegian education system it is fitting to talk of its history, but also understand how it is intrinsically linked to Christianity and the development of the welfare state. The modern education system of Norway can be linked to the 18th century were the Danish-Norwegian king Christian IV wished for an elevated sense of moral and religious belief for his subjects. This included amongst other mandatory baptism (Thuen, 2017, p.18). Baptism was a sign of adulthood and if not completed one could not marry or be eligible for work (Opplandsarkivet, 2023). To ensure that baptism was properly taught and understood schooling were necessary as to be able to among other read the Bible. Therefore, the king put into motion two laws about schooling which were introduced in 1739; one for the public school ('allmueskolen', also referred as the 'poor people school' later on) on the countryside and one for the scholar's school ('den lærde skolen'). The public-school law was meant as a way to establish the foundation for public schools in the countryside, while the law of the scholar's school was a way to create regulations on what was previously known as 'the Latin school'. These schools were primarily only available for nobility and clergymen, as they would need to learn how to read and write. The goal of the laws of 1739 was to make sure the link between the schools and the churches. It is hence of interest to note that king Christian IV advisors was mostly pietistic theologist, which is relevant when regarding the development of the welfare system, but more on that later (Thuen, 2017, p.18). Given certain criticism the law was changed in 1741 regarding the fact that local adjustments were not considered. Hence, the creation of school commissions, and the self-choice considering building of school structures, was introduced to engage local democracy, and differing financial situation. These concerns are somewhat still intact to this day, where curriculum and the concept of the local government as 'school owners' ('skoleiere') is being used to ensure

individualism within the state (Thuen, 2017, p.26). Additionally, to simply just ensuring baptism were conducted one must also understand that the Christian Lutheran movement at time, pietism, had a role in the establishment of the universalistic ideal. This as pietism heavily implied that in the eyes of God everyone was the same. Important to note was also the movements emphasis of helping those in need by doing good deeds further one's own salvation. In this regard, one can see the beginnings of social reforms and the Nordic welfare state as we know it (Thorkildsen, 2010, s. 135 & 138). Much of the influence of Christianity on subjects, teachers (that were clergymen) and school supplies would last up until the 1830s. Inspired by liberalism, the new generation in politics, primarily civil servants, wished to reform the school in accordance with their own interests in knowledge and how it accompanied careers of interests. Instead of leaning on morals of Christianity, values such as democracy and Norwegian nationalism was seen as more important. In other words, there was two main goals for the development of the school system; to get a sense of unity through nationalism and 'socio-economic benefits' as in every talent should be cultivated. In this way the civil servants took inspiration from the French by making a public school ('folkeskole') that should be accessible for all, regardless of one's social background (Thuen, 2017, p.40 & 55-56). This could be exemplified by the first law of public schooling of 1848 in the cities where the city council would be held responsible to help financially those who could not afford schooling amongst other things (Thuen, 2017, p.61). Further notable reforms of the 19th century are that of 1869 which were the beginning of the comprehensive school model where all levels of schooling are interconnected. This reform restructured the school system by splitting it into three; primary school level ('allmueskole'), lower ('middelskole')- and upper secondary school ('gymnas'). This would be a reform that would ensure a holistic perspective on schooling (Thuen, 2017, p.73). Though there are some notable changes from the 1880s towards 1930s, for example that primary and lower secondary schooling were planned separately from upper secondary during this period, these did not have as big of an impact on modern schooling as we know it today (Thuen, 2017, p.93). For this thesis the Kunnskapsløftet (the knowledge promise), especially the one made in 2020, has appeared to bring new changes to the way teachers should approach a holistic approach to teaching and emphasis on in-depth learning (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2023). By consensus of the informants interviewed, this reform seems to put more emphasis on dialogue and academic exploration which have been under debate in development of reforms since the 1970s (Thuen, 2017).

International influences and test culture

A common feature of modern education policy is the way countries are taking inspiration from each other. This seemingly have increased over the years, mostly likely due to the increased pressure of globalisation (Sahlberg, 2015, p.141). What is meant here is that though there were communication between countries before, the intensity, transnational negotiations and companies, communication technologies, trade routes and other dependencies prevalent today, has made globalisation a force to be reckon with. In addition, this is coupled with increase of market logic valued thinking and neo capitalistic structures. Therefore, political policies must keep up with no longer just internal demands, but also externally to keep up with new competitions taking place. One of the features of being able to compete in this competitive market is to have competent citizens that can provide the necessary labour power required. One belief in achieving this is through the education system, not only as it will create knowledgeable and better equipped workers for a future under constant change, but also diminish social equality as it will elevate living standards and encourage overall economic growth of the society. By making a comparative analysis it allows for exploration of the research question in regard to identifying were the institutional logics build their argumentative foundations on.

Usually, countries start with an assessment of their own education system. To see what is beneficial or hindering growth and quality, for then to look outwards to evaluate what the international community has deemed effective. Often most this is done by emulating or adopting models associated with a particular country, for then to implement it. One could argue that such criteria are dependent on the perceived idea of success, mostly linked to the idea of level of industrialisation, literacy and completed school level for its citizens. A more modern tool these days is that of international testing, and placement on said test, that are supposedly a way to determine the quality of an education system. In a way such testing are also used as tools to either condone or confirm the effectiveness of educational reforms; even as the reforms have already been evaluated before the test has been performed (Tan, 2019). Norway participates and engages with multiple international evaluations, but for simplicity this paper will only consider the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test as an example for discussion of international influences in educational policy making. In addition to Norway, China and Finland also participates in the PISA rankings. The two latter countries are usually at the top of said list. Then what is the reason for why these countries do it so well, especially given how similar Finland and Norway is? Therefore, in this subchapter

I will provide a short description of China's education history and approach to education policies, for then to give a short description of Finland's approach to education and how it differs.

China's education history spans back to the 7th century with is emphasis of the Confucius philosophy towards learning and living. Such values include: "[…] educatability for all, perfectibility of all, lifelong learning, learning through effort and willpower, and reciprocity of teaching and learning […]" (Oh, 2001; Zhong, 2013, p.2). In this way universalism is already heavily implied in the nature of education in the Chinese society, while also nodding its head to meritocracy in how it talks of effort and willpower. These values are similar to what we see in the Norwegian society today, the only difference is that philosophical justification is used rather than religious. Nevertheless, the Chinese education starts with what is referred to as the Mandarin system, which already established a clear relationship between state and education. This as the Confucius thinking believed that the government should be ruled by scholars. Therefore, the Mandarin system was established to allocate the most skilled and talented individuals in society. In despite of the idea of anyone was able to become educated, this system was however mostly exclusive to the Chinese elites in term of passing the exams. Consequently, it contributed to "[…] social reproduction, mobilising and distributing scarce resources of status, power and wealth." (Wu, 2002; Jin, 1990; Zhong, 2013, p.2-3). This system however did assist in ensuring broader educational distribution in terms of preparing for said exam as anyone may attend the preparations (Liu, 1996; Zhong, 2013, p.3). Subsequently, such a system contributed due to the legitimisation of the meritocratic beliefs it created a sustainable balance and inclusive social mechanism between the masses and well-educated groups, as well as intra-group differences in the educated group. In other words, justified hierarchy between the elites and the rest of society (Zhong, 2013, p.3). The unfortunate consequence of the Mandarin system is that the curriculum was far too narrow and the education too occupied rearing towards exam-specific knowledge. This would result in a narrow definition of what knowledge constitutes. In such a way it would not encourage creativity and critical thinking. Therefore, those more adept at memorising was selected, rather than those of 'talent' (Miyazaki, 1981; Zhong, 2013, p.3). The Mandarin system can still be found in traces today through the *Gaokao* examination. The *Gaokao* examination is a national entrance exam for higher education. It was created to ensure that individuals selected for higher education were properly skilled, but also ensure equity and social mobility. Hence education reforms, heavily intertwined with Confucianism, steer towards to ensure the quality of education fits

with the examination. As the People's Republic of China (PRC) came to power, China went from a predominantly agriculturally based societal structure towards rapid industrialization. As a result, the Chinese government had to evaluate the education system as the new labour market demands a higher degree of competence. Additionally, new values of the communist regime wished to eradicate social hierarchies and inequalities. Thus, it was believed that through education one would achieve social mobility (Zhong, 2013).

At the beginning the Chinese government wished to take care of the logistics of establishing schools throughout China. However, this was deemed to be too complicated of a task, hence decentralisation was introduced to the different provinces. In addition, this opened the education market for private schools as long as they followed guidelines set by the government. In this way competitive education market was established. Schools that are considered to be of high quality and highly sought out is referred to as 'key schools' (Zhong, 2013). Though in principle anyone should gain access to, through the ideals of universalism and meritocracy, they are effectively closed off from lower class citizens. This as they either cannot afford tuition, or the education they have received do not provide efficient tools to succeed in the *Gaokao* system. Particularly the differences between urban and rural China makes it even more apparent the differences of access to resources that ensures strong academic performance (Lin, 2006).

Finland has remarkably similar history and cultural understanding of the education system like Norway. Both countries justified universalistic education through Christian beliefs of compassion for others, that everyone is equal in the eyes of God and moral work ethics. Therefore, both countries implemented mandatory baptism, as this would be required to enter the labour force and marriage. As stated, mandatory baptism led to the establishment of the education system as such Christian schools offered literacy education (Sahlberg, 2015, p.99). In this way ideals of universalism and meritocracy built the foundation for both education systems. However, this would change in the 1980s and 1990s were political ideals and reforms would make the countries diverge politically in how they approached teaching and education. In his book "Finnish Lessons 2.0" Sahlberg (2015) references to the international movement 'The Global Educational Reform Movement' (GERM) where increased globalisation has led to standardisation of policy making and practices relating to educational reform (Sahlberg, 2015, p.142-143).

The emergence of the movement constitutes of three inspirations. Firstly, a new way of approaching teaching as more of a holistic evaluation appeared, where one shifted focus from teaching to learning. In other words, social skills were to be developed in accordance with conceptual understanding of knowledge, as to rid of the strict learning emphasising memorisation that was prevalent before. However, proficiency in literacy and numeracy was emphasised in creating educational reforms. Secondly, there was a shift in public demand towards effective and inclusive education that were guaranteed for all students. In this way teaching must be made so that it accommodates each individual needs. An outcome of such understandings is that it has led to increased expectations of all students as prevalent in curriculums and programs. Lastly, is the increasing trend towards decentralisation. In this way teachers and schools are made to compete for students and resources by holding them accountable for academic performance of their students. Hence, this led to control mechanisms in education as set standards, quantitative measures such as indicators and benchmarks for teaching and learning, while increasing assessments and testing (Sahlberg, 2015, p.143- 144).

In addition, Sahlberg identifies five common features of global policies and reforms that have transpired since the 1980s. Firstly, the increase in competition between schools by providing different teaching methods. Secondly, increased standardisation, with standardised testing, in schooling by shifting focus to learning outcomes rather than process. Thirdly, increased focus on core subjects in the curriculum like literacy and numeracy (writing skills, maths etc.) which corresponded with international testing. Fourthly, test-based accountability, making it so that school performance was heavily evaluated and inspected, leading to either awards or punishment. Then lastly, the concept of school choice as to give parents more control of their child's education by being able to choose which school they can attend (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 144-146). This often most presents itself in private schools showcasing religious or alternative methods of pedagogy. Finland's has mostly rejected these values or altered them to fit more their own ideologies. Instead of competition, Finnish school praises collaborations. This as they believe collaboration is a way to help and strengthen the quality of education and is reflective in the classroom by creating a culture for collaboration. Regarding learning Finnish teachers puts emphasis on personalised learning. Therefore, national curriculum is flexible making room for individual solutions that will meet national goals. Encouragement on school-based and individual solutions is believed to be fitting as it fits better with personalised education. Additionally, these flexible curriculums are also better

at adapting to students requiring special needs education. In terms of teaching subjects, instead of focusing on literacy and numeracy, Finnish teachers view learning as something that encompasses the whole child. Hence, such manner of learning and teaching methods focus on "[…] deep, broad learning giving equal value to all aspects of the growth of an individual's personality, moral character, creativity, knowledge, ethics, and skills." (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 149). Therefore, instead of finding talents in quantified means, the goals are to find each student's individual talent. Trust-based responsibility is valued over test-based responsibility. This entails that within the educational system teachers and principals are being trusted that their professional opinion will ensure that they know what is best for their students. In this way resources are specifically targeted towards schools and students that are at the risk of failing or falling behind. In addition, research tradition states that Finland uses sample-based student assessments instead of census-based assessments. Furthermore, policymaking is also not only informed via data, but also by thematic research. Lastly, Finland emphases equity of outcomes rather than school choice. All these aspects appear true still today (Ruud, 2023). This means that Finland explicitly states that a child's social background may influence what prospects they have regarding academic achievement. School choice leads to increase in social inequality. Hence, schools are funded according to their particular needs to cope with if such inequalities would appear.

Methodology and data

When formulating the research question, it appeared that the most appropriate way of being able to answer it was to use different qualitative methods. This because quantitative methods would not be able to answer the underlying social and cultural understandings behind the data acquired and is better suited for longer descriptive narratives (Silverman, 2001, p.29 & 33.). A qualitative approach would enable a way to get an overview of the education system in Norway, its relation to political process and how this is linked to social inequality. In other words, this method is believed to be able to establish an overview of what political and other potential social changes had impacted the development of the Norwegian education system from its conception up until today. Hence, to begin with there was done a literature analysis to get an overview of the history of the Norwegian education system, as well as existing research on education and its links to social inequality both in Norway and internationally. However, only doing qualitative methods pertaining to reading did not appear to fully cover

the diverging or convergence of intentions between the two institutions - that of the school and that of the public administration. Hence, it seemed appropriate to conduct interviews. In this manner I would be able to find underlying institutional logics of each institution on how they view the Norwegian education system. Furthermore, how they look at social inequality and academic performance.

Literature review

In the case of this thesis literature was primarily used as a way to get an overview of existing research and the history of the Norwegian education system. In addition, it would be helpful in establishing certain themes and problems the education systems face, as well helped conceptualising what questions should be asked in the respective interview guides. In relation to answer the research question it was of importance to establish a historical overview of the establishment, political reforms and programmes that have influenced how the Norwegian education system operates today. This is given importance due to how a historical perspective can portray how social changes contribute actively to how the education system is developed. Especially when one is to understand that bureaucracy and the school is prevalent institutions in society. Institution here is understood as a stabilising social structure, with defined cultural, moral, and legal features that guide the behaviour of its participants (Scott, 2013, p.57-58). Hence, institutions are closely imbedded in societal values. It is important to note that social norms and social constructions are, though slowly, malleable for change. These reasons entail that institution are therefore sensitive to its environment. In other words, when changes occur in society, for examples historical or reformative changes, this may impact changes within the institution.

In the beginning of the literature review it seemed most appropriate to look at books and articles pertaining to the historical overview of changes to the education system. This would provide more knowledge of the Norwegian education system as I had little knowledge of its history, and previously could only rely on my own lived experience. This is because having a sensitivity towards historical developments will give a better understanding on how we are governed currently (Silverman, 2001, p.9). Furthermore, as I discussed earlier, such an overview would prove itself useful when constructing the interview guides. This given that it would provide knowledge of prominent reforms, and then I could ask about how they

affected different populations in practice. In addition, a historical overview of when reforms and programmes were implemented would provide social context for the reasoning behind them. For example, when certain political parties where in power, as their ideologies would affect what they deemed "the best" for society and the education system at the time. Afterwards, I did somewhat look into the pedagogy research on the topic of curriculum changes and specific reforms changes from a sociological perspective as well as political science. However, I was troubled that this might colour too much of my perception of what the informants would explain to me, hence I deemed it better to look into these after the interviews were processed (as in transcribed and coded). By combining different research traditions, hopefully this would provide a more varied, and perhaps, deeper understanding of what problems the educational organisational field may face. This given that the education system, as a whole, consists of many different research traditions depending where in the system you are located, hence different logics as well. In addition, by acknowledging that there are many different viewpoints one can see how different participants views a "problem." This also as it assumed here that one does not acquire validity only from having knowledge from internal participants, but also understanding that other external viewpoints may provide new understandings or perspectives given that they are more distanced from the situation. Not to say that internal participants cannot assess a situation objectively, but many organisations will heavily socialise their group members into certain ways of thinking that could possibly limit their actions. In other words, organisational members will have been though specific cognitive scripts in how to behave in certain situations. In this way one could find converging opinions both in overall goal attainment for the organisation as a whole, but also identifying behaviour specific to section of the organisation (Gioia & Manz, 1985). Basically, cognitive scripts are a useful tool in understanding how loosely coupled states may appear in complex institutions as well as organisational fields.

Comparative analysis

Within this paper I will apply a comparative analysis, specifically in comparing different educational systems in the world. The purpose of such an analysis is to recognise the tension between national educational development and influences due to globalisation especially considering testing and making of reforms. This given that historical developments can account for developments in causal patterns, trends over longer period and a way to

generalise findings, while also considering geographical influences as it may interfere with what institutional logic may be at display, and therefore how it will operate and justify action (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; Ocasio et al., 2016; Ocasio et al., 2017, p.518 & 520-521). As one of the informants from the Ministry of Education and Research would emphasise was how Norway as a nation not only participated in international research and testing, but also was a part of the development of these types of evaluation to fit local requirements. The parameters of choice were done by comparing Norway's placement on the PISA listing and other higher performing countries. The reason for applying PISA as a measure of "success" is not because I necessarily believe it is a good judgement of the quality of a country's education system, but more as a fact of the Norwegian public administration have placed high value on it, especially after the PISA shock in 2001. Roughly explained, the PISA shock refers to when Norway, who believed they were at the top of the world when it came to quality of education, found themselves further down on the ranking that expected, especially in comparison to the other Nordic nations. After this it seemed within the public administration discourse that Norway was "school losers", and there needed to be made radical changes. It was in the beginning of these changes that Norway paid especially attention to Finland, as they had ranked as one of the highest in the PISA listing. It was for this reason that I believe it is important to look into and compare the two nations, not only given that they were previously looked up to, but that the Finnish education system is still considered one of the best. It will also be easier to compare and identify potential differences given that both Norway and Finland fall under the use of the Nordic model. The similar baseline of the welfare system of the Nordic countries would provide easier comparisons between the two countries, and potentially what each country does similar, for the better or worse. However, in recent years East Asian countries, Singapore, and China, has now topped this list. Given how I had more readily literature on China, I would focus on this education system.

Interview and transcription

In addition to literature review, semi-structured interviews were conducted. It is possible to argue that one should minimise the research one does before conducting the interview, however in this case I had no prior knowledge beyond my own experiences with the education system, I was afraid this might hinder fruitful conversation if I would repeatedly

ask for clarification on subjects and different terms. Furthermore, it was assumed that the interviews could provide more specific knowledge of working processes of different groups that participate in the Norwegian education system. This given that it was not covered in the literature. That of special interest were those working within the public administrational body of the institution, given that teachers (and to some extent principles) are usually vocal about the different topics and problems that arise within the institution though social media, articles, and similar public outlets. In other words, one hears little about the inner workings and developments that do shape the education system through reforms and curriculums, and the bureaucrats' views on the matter. In addition to ensuring a flow on conversation, I was also aware of the potential power imbalance in knowledge if I did not do some prior knowledge. In other words, I wanted to appear competent and caring about the subject. Furthermore, I felt my knowledge of some of the questions I wanted to ask were not up to standards or that I needed to establish a baseline of knowledge to know what questions were even valid to ask. In other words, what I try to communicate is that there is a delicate balance between an interviewer, and those being interviewed. One must show that you do possess knowledge to keep up with the conversation, but also that you are there to listen and obtain new knowledge. With these factors in mind, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as they would allow me to maintain certain was because it would allow me to have certain "controlled questions" (some questions were asked of all participants) but have enough flexibility in the questions that they are more open-ended so that the participants would be able to speak freely within the framework set (Dearnley, 2005). The use of control questions was an attempt to be able to find similarities within a population group, but also try to establish if there were any similarities across population groups. In addition, as explained above, semi-structured interviews open up for some freedom in discussion and could give room for individual opinions that would account for in-group variations and more in-depth coverage of the topic at hand. This is a way to try to get a more authentic understanding of people's individual experience (Silverman, 2001, p.13). All informants were made to sign a declaration of consent before any interview were held. Informants names were altered as to keep anonymity.

Given the limited time duration a master thesis presents, I wanted to limit participants in each population so it would be plausible to conduct, transcribe and code them appropriately. This given that "[...] defining sampling units clearly before choosing cases is essential in order to avoid messy and empirically shallow research." (Gobo, 2007, p.405). It also must be noted

that this thesis bases itself on 'theoretical sampling', meaning that the population would give a generalisation of the process rather than a generalisation of a population of interest (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Gobo, 2007, p.405). In this manner there will be used a sample, particularly as sub-set of informants of interest, rather than a representative sample (as representing the population as a whole) given a time limit mentioned earlier (Gobo, 2007, p.409). The analysis of the data will also be understood as a generalisation of what is deemed to be general structures rather than a set social practise (Gobo, 2007, p.423).

I applied two different non-probability samples such as convenience purposive sampling for the most part and snowball sampling (Gobo, 2007, p.409). The first sample method referred to me specifically asking for those who worked within the educational organisational field. The second method referred to how I got in contact with the second informant in the Ministry of Education and Research ("Kunnskapsdepartementet"), as their contact information was given through the first informant for this ministry. I hoped to have 2-3 participants, but due to logistics of setting up one meeting fell through, only 2 participants per population was conducted. Hence, there were two participants per population. The first population chose was that of educators/teachers from the primary education ("grunnskole") sector up to upper secondary education ("videregående skole") sector. I was able to complete this, however there was more representation for secondary education educators, than elementary. The intention was also to conduct interviews with principals, with the same perimeters of education level as the first group, however they I was not able to get a respond. However, given the nature of my question with the other populations I was able to gage somewhat lived experiences of principles. Do note that this is limited as I was only able to get the "perceived" experience through others, hence I decided to supplement these statements with articles written by principles of their own experiences within the education system. The last population would be those working within the public administration, in this instance the state, that pertains to the education system. I was specifically interested in the Directorate of Education ("Utdanningsdirektoratet") and the Ministry of Education and Research. However, I was not able to get in touch with anyone working for the Directorate of Education with the method I chose for choosing participants, and the time were limited to ask the directorate directly to potentially give me contact information to willing participants.

The population participants were selected through the method of using my own social circle. To account for selection bias, I would ask someone I knew that were familiar with anyone

working within the education system, and if they could ask on my behalf of the person, they knew would be willing to do an interview and if I could get their contact information. By using this method, it would provide me with more of a random sampling, but within the populations of interest. However, I do have to note that I cannot account for whether those asked for assistance in finding informants had any bias in who they picked for me to interview. The only instruction provided was that the one to be interviewed had to work as an educator, principal or a public administration employee that works with education. This method proved slow, so I ended up with taking advantage of social media by making a post on my personal Facebook page. This worked much better. In addition, I also took advantage of the snowball method, in which one informant leads to another, where one of my informants gave me the contact information of another interview subject. The interviews were recorded in an audio file, that were stored safely in third party storage unit that required 2-step authentication to log in. To ensure further safety the transcriptions were anonymised as they were being transcribed. The transcriptions would also be done using third party servers that also required 2-step authentication provided by the university. In addition to the audio recordings, I also made handwritten notes. However, these did not contain any information that would be identifiable and were rather "highlights" of the conversation when the informant said something of significant interest. At the end of the project the transcriptions and audio files would be deleted.

To be able to properly analyse the content of the interviews they would be transcribed into text. In this manner it would be possible to section certain lines or paragraph into an identifiable code that would correspond to a theme or topic. By applying such a method, it makes it easier to get an overview of the transcribed material, but also when needing more context associated with a code one can delve further into the text as whole. Additionally, by making more manageable codes it may be possible to cross reference and find similarities between participants' statements; both within individual population, but also across. However, any method has its weakness. In this instance the transcribed text as a whole must be put into very narrow contexts, and these contexts might be further "coloured" by my own opinions or what opinions I may have adapted through education by what research tradition I have adopted. These biases might collude with the meanings of the text or how the participants themselves believe are the intention in their statements. As a way of combatting this, I made sure that within my interview guide (attachment […]) I present a summary of how I have interpreted the answers orally during the interview, and thereafter ask the

participant if what I have presented is correct or if there is a misunderstanding they wish to correct. In this way I can somewhat ensure that the transcript themselves, the whole text if you will, is accurate. This seemed to be a well working method as it gave space for the participants to refute inaccuracies in the moment. I do acknowledge that there might be problems with this as I present summaries somewhat superficially, but all participants actively corrected me during this segment as to correct statements I misunderstood. In order to make the transcripts more eligible for reading, I corrected grammatical errors and cut of half sentences. Additionally, given how the interviews were conducted in Norwegian one must consider the nature of translation, as meanings might not be completely the same from one language to another. Hence, extracted quotes were presented in both languages next to each other.

Validity and reliability

In terms of ensuring validity of the texts, more particularly scientific papers, I applied the built in "check system" of the search engine Oria, that is gained access to through the University of Oslo's library. This "check system" refers to that each article is marked with a tag that states whether an article has been peer reviewed or not. This a way to determine that the research has been deemed sound and the data appear reliable. However, this system does not extend itself to larger literature works like books. As a way to combat this I chose to cross-reference the material presented in the book with either another book or article covering the topic in question. In terms of the validity of the documents analysed I assume that there has been done extensive work, and review of the data, by the individuals that has produced these different public administrational documents and different reports. However, I cannot personally ensure that this has taken place, but would like to believe that is the case.

In terms of validity and reliability of the data there is other concerns to consider. In terms of the validity of the interview data the common critique is that of anecdotalism. This meant by that the analysis of what the informant has discussed is not properly explained or elaborated especially when met with contrary cases or other evidence-based understandings. If not mindful of this particular problem one can be exposed to the unfortunate belief that the researcher themselves imposes validity on certain data when there is not (Silverman, 2001, p.34). Therefore, to the best of my abilities I did try to find either other sources that

confirmed my understanding of what the informant explained or directly rely back to them how I had interpreted the information given. Regarding reliability, one often concerns itself with 'authenticity' instead. This given that there is a want to have an 'authentic' perception of what experiences the informants relay to the researcher. It is believed that to gain this understanding one must apply open-ended questions as this would allow the informants express their opinions and feelings on the matter (Silverman, 2001, p.13). Furthermore, reliability is hard to acquire if one believes that social reality is in constant change. Hence, one cannot find one stable variable (Silverman, 2001, p.34). However, I tried my best with the limited time to held multiple interviews within each population to generate as much reliability in reference to data overlap between and within each population. This did indeed occur so it should be possible to make some generalisations within the data generated.

Limitations

The first limitation to the data collection was that of time. Specifically, the filling out and gaining approval for how the data would be handled in a secure matter. This had to be approved otherwise data collection would not be perceived as legitimate. Hence, acquiring and processing interview data was delayed quite a bit. Regarding the limitations of the interpretation of transcripts it would relate to the reliability of the analysis of it. This means that the reliability of the analysis of transcripts could be significantly weakened if not accounting for factors such as body movement, intonation and pauses of significance that seem insignificant, but could actually entail different understandings that what could appear 'neutral' on paper. Furthermore, analysis of transcripts can also entail the negatives of anecdotalism. That is that few examples are seen as some apparent phenomena but may only be relevant for the data in question. Otherwise, it can also be a problem if one is not to give room for alternative explanations to the findings (Silverman, 2001, p. 33-34). In other words, being to close minded by heavily leaning on personal biases one could fall for 'heuristic of representativeness' meaning: "people`s tendency to generalize based upon a few observed characteristics of events." (Gobo, 2007, p.407). This would weaken the reliability of the data. Furthermore, given the small sample size of informants I cannot claim that the sample is representative of the population, hence I could not claim to use procedures involving probability sampling. In addition, there is also not possible to claim representativeness of socio-demographics as something that represents opinions automatically nor that generalising

findings from said sample could actually possibly represent the rest of the population (Gobo, 2007, p.410-411 & 420). All are individuals, but for this reason, as explained earlier, I chose to base my sampling on theoretical factors. As such, I can only make assumptions and probability samples, however support with other data and relevant literature would strengthen statements made in the transcriptions.

Lastly, one of the limitations is related to the use of language and translation. When conducting interviews one can see that oral speech is a bit hindered, often littered with thinking pauses and half-finished sentences. This often results in odd sentences that does not make much sense. Because of this I made the decision at times to try my best to rewrite some of the transcript's part to coherent sentences given context clues of the conversation. Additionally, I also cut out pauses that did not add any significance to the topic or answer at hand as they did not seem like thinking pauses of significance, but rather pauses for processing what I had asked of them. This method can however potentially be a weakness given the possibility for personal bias in interpretation. Then there's the problem of translations. As this thesis is written in English, I had to translate the transcripts that were originally in Norwegian. The apparent limitation is that of the fact that no translation can be truly equal to the original text as there can be hidden cultural meanings behind statements, specific history behind phrases or simply no equal wordings from one concept or word to another. Therefore, one can only truly strive to get somewhat similar meanings and understandings of what the transcripts convey, but never truly completely accurate. A way to combat this is by putting the original text of language next to the translated work, which was done for this particular thesis.

Theory

An institution can be understood as a social structure which imposes certain restrictions by defining boundaries of a legal, moral, and cultural natures. These factors establish processes of stabilisation and meaning making which results in guiding behaviour of the organisational members which makes it resistant to change. In other words, given that institutions functions as a structure that imposes boundaries mentioned it will impose on what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable which in turn is a form of socialisation of its members. However, it does not entail that institutions are completely resistant to change (Scott, 2013, p.57-58).

Regardless, one could feel compelled to feel that one ought to choose theories that fit one of these aspects, however this thesis assumes a more meso-structure understanding of what an institution and its individuals ought to behave, or how it is shaped. By this it is meant that multiple theories are to be used to establish a more versatile understanding about how change and stability occurs within an institution. In understanding the overall structure and behavioural pattern of an institution one could look into more structural perspectives, but for understanding individual organisational member behaviour more microstructural perspectives might be more useful. However, it is firmly believed here that one perspective cannot exclude the other, if one is to get a full picture that is. Hence, this section will aim at giving an overview of each relevant theory that is to be applied to the analysis, but hopefully succeed in showing how they might overlap or at least complement each other. As mentioned earlier in the text, the research question was under continuous alterations, from focus on reforms and discursive language, until understanding that it was more communicative and definitions of problems and solutions that presented itself to be a possible explanation for how social inequality is reproduced.

Institutional logics

As the research question become centred around potential communicative conflicts, I found that the informants, dependent on what part of the education system they were located in, put different emphasis on structural and individualistic explanations for academic performance. And as explained earlier in the thesis, social background and performing well in studies are intrinsically linked. Then what would explain this definition gaps? Therefore, there was assumed that the education fields are complex, and definitions differ. The institutional logics perspective seemed an appropriate explanation for this phenomenon. Institutional logics perspective states that within an organization one would find multiple logics that will determine action. In other words, this theory tries to say that each organisation will be influenced by different logics presented resulting in pluralism and differences in cultural expressions (Ocasio et al., 2017, p.509). First and foremost, the institutional logics perspective is to be a way to analyse interrelationships between institutions, individuals, and organisations within social systems (Ocasio et al., 2017, p.510; Thornton et al., 2012, p. 2). It is a research tradition that investigates the manner in which multiple logics will enable change and provide organisational heterogeneity. Therefore, the theory is a way to explain

agency and how to approach micro processes in an institution (Thornton et al., 2012; Ocasio et al., 2017, p.514). This perspective differs from that of neo institutionalism that believes most institutions will strive to achieve isomorphism as to match their environment to ensure legitimisation of its actions (or production) so it may survive (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In other words, institutional logics argue that institutions are not only dependent on the environment, but also the inner workings to achieve the organisational goal. For example, most economic seeking businesses will have to apply the overall market logic (for example capitalism), but also whatever logic is faced within the particular market they are trying to reach (suppliers, buyers, political climate etc.). This perspective provides a more flexible approach in understanding how an institution operates within an organisational field(s). Organisational field is here understood as multiple organisation which "[…] constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products […]" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.148). Hence, for this thesis the education sector is to be seen as an organisational field because as "[…] multiple institutional logics become instantiated, interrelate, and have effects at the level of institutional fields, organizations and social interactions (Thornton et al., 2012). "(Ocasio et al., 2017, p.516). The term educational organisational field refers to the varying organisations and institutions involved in operating and maintaining the education system such as the public administrative institutions, counties, provinces, individual schools, research institutions, labour unions or other relevant participative organizations. Logics pertaining to a field or institution will help guide behaviour, even if they differ as suggested by Reay and Hinings (2009). They show in their research that competing logics may operate together as long as one have common goals but are able to keep separate identities (Reay & Hinings, 2009).

In addition, I argue that organisations within the educational field are loosely coupled. This given that the educational organisational field is riddled with complex structures making single aimed everyday work difficult. Mostly this is due to having different arenas of expertise, culture, and cognitive scripts for proper behaviour. Loosely coupled structures function well in complex institutions as they are able to find common goals and policies which functions as guidelines but make it so that they can work separately with their own identities within this framework (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Reay & Hinings, 2009). This is a reason perhaps for why separate institutional logics occur. The downside, however, is that loosely coupled structures make it so that inter group communication is very difficult as the

differing logics will limit how one is to view and behave in correspondence with a conflicting one. Loosely coupling causes isolation which makes work with complex problems, such as social inequality, difficult to deal with (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Meritocracy

A prevalent value in the education system today is the ideal of meritocracy. This aligns well with the cultural-religious work ethic of Norwegian as well appearing to fit with the ideal of universalism being 'for everyone'. Michael Young (1958) is said to have popularised the meritocratic ideal in his influential book "The rise of meritocracy" (Goldthorpe, 1996, s.255). Meritocracy is a theory on how goods and benefits of society should be shared among the citizens, especially in relation to income and job benefits. In this system distribution is done by measuring merits. Merits are calculated to be talents plus effort, and hence those with greater talents should be rewarded more as this is "fair" and "effective" (White, 2007). This relies on the assumption that those more "qualified" and "working harder" are more deserving, and that merits are something easily measured. In addition, the phrasing of fairness also lies in that those believing in meritocracy, also state that everyone should have ample and equal opportunity to unfold these talents (White, 2007). Basing himself on Young, Goldthorpe (1996) presents an overview of and the historical development of how meritocracy developed in the western world. Goldthorpe summarises this into three main arguments. The first statement is about how with the development of increase of the middle class and therefore how positions within the state administrations could be offered to those who were considered competent, rather a social position based on ascribed attributions (Goldthorpe, 1996, s.255). Secondly, it was about the development and the expansion of the educational system called into question of who were allowed access to further education. This was of increased importance as a result of the second world war, as there was a need for those particularly skilled to allow for economic growth and "military competitiveness" (Goldthorpe, 1996, s.256). For the last argument, Goldthorpe emphasises the influential prowess of American functionalism in the 1940s and 1950s. They emphasised that the shift from traditional society to the industrial made it so that there were other needs when it came to values and characteristics. Those you were "born with" might not benefit the new society when it comes to all types of social settings. Hence, the American functionalists emphasised

that positions should be given based on skills rather than social status. In addition, functional roles in society must be given appropriate rewards given the position or level of importance, and that this would be a source of motivation for the individual (Goldthorpe, 1996, s.256).

As mentioned earlier, meritocracy is often seen as something just and effective. In terms of efficiency, this relates to how work positions are given to those most qualified and that they will perform better at the position given. This assumption is based again on the merit part - those with merit tend to put effort into their talents and so on. When it comes to justice, this is interlinked with the efficiency argument; those who do the job they are qualified for are deserving of the position they possess. (Marshall & Swift, 1997; White, 2007, s.54). In other words, in what way you put in effort are what you are deserving of. However, this could easily be a way of justifying inequality as meritocracy does not demand equal outcomes, just equal opportunity (White, 2007, s.55- 56). In his article, Stuart White (2007) furthermore separates meritocracy into weak and strong meritocracy. Weak meritocracy will look into mechanisms that cause inequality, with particular interest of the functions of discrimination in public administration and private business. In private business they may discriminate on their own determined criteria (for example gender, ethnicity, religion et cetera.). This is seen as unfair as it will prevent the most qualified to be given the position. In public administration they are bound by laws to prevent discrimination. Hence, weak democracy emphasises that it is the public administration that must legislate laws prohibiting or preventing discrimination not only on their own sphere, but also extend this to the private sector, either with employers or within education institutions (White, 2007, s. 56-57). Strong meritocracy on the other hand already envelops the idea of anti-discrimination but expands on this idea to include those that cannot employ their talents to gain benefits because of their social background. Hence, strong meritocracy must not only look at law making, but also mechanisms on fortune, education, and socialisation processes such as the family environment (White, 2007, s.59- 61). This as fortune enables one to have something to fall back on, hence creating opportunities to make grand monetary risk with the potential of an even greater reward. This also applies to riskier educational routes. Consequently, education is popularly seen as an arena for social equalisation, however in the case where education does not seem to meet this goal a meritocrat would look at a child's socialisation as a potential explanation. As mentioned, the way families prep their child and emphasises schoolwork might be a factor into whether or not the child will accomplish educational

success (White, 2007, s.61- 63). As a result of all these reasonings of what strong meritocracy entails, it is often seen as fairer than the weak form (White, 2007, s.59- 61).

Implications of meritocracy can have heavy unintended consequences when looking at educational success or failure as dependent on merits. This especially when emphasising what lies behind the definitions of talent and merits, particular the tension that lies between the two concepts. Young that popularised meritocracy in the west seems to particularly not perceive this according to Goldthorpe. Talent lies in the inborn gift and *potential* for particular achievements, while merits is about *actual* achievements and are what is assumed to be of value. In this manner, the equation talent plus effort equals merit is already doomed to fail. That is because it implicitly gives the illusion that talent is only dependent on qualities through birth instead of looking at other potential explanations. To put this into perspective, it is plausible to look at this as another form of eugenics. To give a short definition, eugenics is the belief that some genetics are worth more than other, and one should perform selective breeding to improve the population genetics (Merriam-Webster, 2023). IQ- testing is a form a eugenic testing. Peter Saunders (2006) is one of those that use IQ as a way to explain how meritocratic societies still produce inequality: t « […] bright individuals who end up in higher-class locations will tend to produce bright children […] » (Saunders, 2006, s.187). That is because he believes he has found a link between childhood IQ and what social position a child would gain. After this comes motivation (Saunders, 2006, s.188). The main criticism of this is that he bases his findings on 11-year-old children which makes it hard to determine if it is a good measure of a child's "natural abilities". That is because at this stage it is difficult to exclude socialisation processes that might influence an individual's cognitive skills. Leo Feinstein (2003) found through his research that children's cognitive skills are very similar to each other up to the age of seven. It was after this age that "smarter" children lost this ability that could indicate that there are other factors determining cognitive skills or IQ, such as class distinctive determinators (Feinstein, 2003; White, 2007, s.67). Also, one has taken note into the fact that IQ testing is a very restrictive way of measuring intelligence. It does not account for individual characteristics and does not take into consideration on how information is understood or how cognitive skills are applied (Kovacs & Conway, 2019).

Universalism

As briefly explained in the subchapter of the Norwegian education system, universalism has had a strong hold on the scholastic ideal. With its previous religious justification of being morally right that everyone is given an equal chance, has now become an integral part of how reform politics are formed. Universalism prides itself on being a system that encourages fairness by ensuring that everyone get access to the same privileges. For clarity, one must be particular in how equal access are being view. Equality of opportunities informs reforms into given the same resources regardless of social background. This type of view does not take into account that some people start out with more disadvantages and will therefore perpetually fall behind. Equity of opportunity, on the other hand, already acknowledges that some have more disadvantages and therefore special resources must be put into use to ensure that they get to the same level as others better equipped, so to speak. As indicated by the core curriculum of the Norwegian education system, reforms align themselves more with the latter understanding of how universalism is to be interpreted. But as explained in the background section, this can be put into question when social background factors are not being properly taken into consideration when reforms and curriculums are established.

Analysis

As previously explained, the findings in the interview data created a shift in understanding how social inequality is understood and in what capacity it to be dealt with. There were two populations; one was two employees from the Ministry of Education and Research and two were teachers from upper secondary schools. Employees in the Ministry of Education came from two separate divisions. In the case of teachers, one was a subject teacher and the other a programme teacher. All varied in age and gender. However, given the small data set I cannot make any conclusions whether this had any significant impact on answers, biases, or such. The only generalised statement that could potentially be made of the factor in age is longer participation in the labour market of said profession. For example, one teacher who had less work experience often referenced to anecdotal conversations they had with colleagues. For this section I will divide it into parts based on topics that were discussed in the interviews.

Understanding the individual roles in the educational organisational field

All participants seemed to have a common understanding of how they view the role of the teacher in the education system. Teachers were to be a supportive and guiding authority in making sure that students reach their learning goals and becoming a competent member of society. Furthermore, values of the curriculum of fostering a good learning environment can be seen by the statement of Martin the vocational teacher when discussing mental health:

«Det er jo å se og være støtte for elevene. For vi kommer jo veldig tett på mange elever. [Tenkepause] Det er mye triste skjebner blant disse ungdommene, som trenger å bli sett og hørt. Så det å være en god rollemodell [er viktig] da. Og på en måte guide dem litt gjennom [problemene sine]. Og kanskje ikke være så opptatt av prinsipper […]. Noen ganger så er det bare nok med å bare få dem på skolen.» // «It's important to see and support the students. Because we get intimately close to many students. [Pauses to reflect]There's a lot of unfortunate fates among these youths. So being a good role model [is important]. In a way guide them through [their problems]. And perhaps be not too constrained to certain principles… […] Sometimes all that is needed is making sure they attend school."

When discussing the role of principals, they were often seen as someone that should support the students, the learning environment and ensuring that there was a good work environment. Some of the informants specified how they should decide for resource allocation. This indicates that most informants discussed the more administrative part of the job description. This according to Even, one employee from the Ministry of Education, was unfortunate as that is not necessarily the only role a principal should hold, as they are supposed to be a leader in pedagogy. In this way they should have a more proactive role in creating guidelines for teaching and methodological freedoms, however much time is spent on being an administrative leader instead:

«Til tross for praksis rundt omkring så er det jo det å være pedagogisk leder. Ofte så blir jo rektor oppfattet som […] administrasjonen. En del av administrasjonen, men en rektor er jo faktisk pedagogisk leder som skulle kunne ta noen overordnende føringer mener jeg hvordan gjør vi det her […] så legge til rette for at lærerne skal ha den fri undervisnings..eller metodiske friheten som de jo både lovmessig og på andre måter har krav på. Men samtidig, tenker føringer for hvordan man ønsker å gjøre det i denne institusjonen eller ved denne skolen.» // «Despite the practical work being done, it is about being a leader of pedagogy. Often most a principal is viewed as […] administration. Some part of the administration, but

a principal is in fact a pedagogical leader that should make more decisions makings in how we do it here […] present it so that teachers may have that instructional..or methodological freedom they legally and in other ways may demand. But at the same time, think of what decisions should be made in how this institution or schools should operate."

Lastly, the role of the administrative body was discussed. This on the other hand had more varied understandings. Both Even and the other administrative employee Sandra, both emphasised how the role would depend on what department or level of state one would belong to. However, both agreed that their role within the Ministry was to be supporting the ramifications of reforms and policies the political parties in power whished to implement. This is a shift in the understanding of bureaucrats expressing their knowledge based professional identity by claiming independency. As Sandra explains:

« […] man har jo gjerne et oppdrag sånn som enten dreier seg om å..iverksette politikk, eller utvikle politikk, eller nå..altså bidra til at man når en utdanningspolitisk visjon eller et mål.» // «[…] one do usually have a mission which either is about. Implementing politics, or develop politics, or now.. contributing in a way to make sure that one reaches an educational political vision or goal.»

This indicates that even though they may make use of their professional opinion and expertise, in the end it is the political forces at hand that makes the overall decision in what will be implemented. Furthermore, Sandra also discusses how there is mostly a top-down approach in how public administrative organisations implements decision making relating to curriculum changes or other legal ramifications. However, in her personal opinion this seems to change as the shift from a more teacher oriented to student-oriented approach to decision making is taking place. In this regard it has opened up for a more cooperative environment:

«Også vil jeg si at det har blitt en sånn mye større delings- og åpenthetskultur. Der hvor utdanningssystemet tidligere kanskje var litt mere isolert både i de ulike faglige, men også at man i større grad hadde [en] større avstand mellom det som skjedde i klasserommet, og opptil rektor, eller til skoleeier nivå og andre forvaltningsnivåer da. Ja, det har blitt litt sånn man deler mer og man har mer sånn felles team tilnærming til hvordan man skal drive opplæring.» // «Also, I would like to say that there has become a much bigger emphasis on a culture based on sharing and openness. Whereas earlier the education system was a bit more isolated in

each subject, but also that there were [a] greater distance between what happened in the classroom, up to the principal, or school owner level or other public administrative levels. Yes, it has become so that one shares and have more of a common teams approach to how to conducting teachings."

However, this sentiment was not necessarily shared among the teachers that illustrated how increased documentation and strictly top-down communication were hindering them doing proper work. As Martin poignantly exclaimed:

"Jeg synes det blir mindre og mindre tid til praksis da. […] Det er jo det det går på. Vi blir på en måte vingeklippa hele tida med alt som skal gjøres, dokumenteres og...ja." // I believe we have less and less time do to practical work. […] It is that what it accumulates to. In a way we are getting our wings cut off all the time with everything we are required, documentations, and…yes."

Ruth, the subject teacher, did however see some positive changes with the new Kunnskapsløftet from 2020, as it gave more room to make suggestive audits to the curriculum and such. This sentiment was not shared by Martin that explained how it was all the same:

"[…] det kommer hele tida med nye...for hver ny regjering skal ha sitt påvirkning av Kunnskapsdepartementet skal på måte vise til at nå har vi gjort noen endringer, nå er det plutselig blitt så mye bedre i skolen […] Men det er litt liksom...[…]. Same shit, new wrapping. Men det er begrensa hvor mye vi kan endre på..[…]» // «[…] all the time there is something new…for every new government wants their influence […] the Ministry of Education shall in a way try to showcase how changes have been implemented and how much better school is now […]But it is kinda like […] Same shit, new wrapping. But there is limitations to how much change one can bring […]"

In other words, one can assume that there are general mutual understandings of the purpose each role has in the educational system. However, there is discrepancy in how the teachers view the communication between the public administration and the schools. The top-down approach to management by objectives are not seen as favourable. Perhaps Kunnskapsløftet 2020 may bring changes, but it is far too early to say anything.

Views on international influences in the Norwegian education system

When ask directly if the informants could speak clearly of international influences the answers varied. Sandra and Even took a more structural approach referencing larger educational movements such as PISA and the Bologna-process (The Norwegian equivalent to the Lisbon-process were European universities implemented universal standards of credentials). The teachers talked more about how they noticed international elements is subject-specific learning such as sustainable development. However, when mentioning the PISA test there were more broad discussions on how they believed such testing made way for an increased test culture. Though they were not personally too affected by national testing as their colleagues in primary and lower secondary schools, they still found that increased documentation and testing had proportionally increased the last ten years or so.

Interestingly, Sandra a different views of whether or not PISA had such a big impact any longer. Sandra particularly pointed out that these days Norway does not simply stand idle by, put also engages in the creation of such testing credentials:

"Og det fins jo flere internasjonale undersøkelser […] som Norge deltar i. Og ikke bare deltar i […]vi representanter fra utdanningsforvaltningen også er med og styrer hvordan disse utarbeides. Og det er man jo med på å bestemme, sammen med alle de andre landende selvfølgelig, hva disse undersøkelsene skal inneholde, hva de skal måle [også videre]." // And there are other international tests […] that Norway participates in. And we do not just participate […] we also have representatives from the educational public administration that participate and steers how these are to be conducted. And it that case one is included in the decision making, together with the other countries of course, what these tests should contain, what they should measure [and such]."

However, later on she does admit that the PISA shock may have contributed in the self confidence in the Norwegian educational system. Therefore, one can say that international testing that was previously a narrower way of determining knowledge, new international collaborative efforts may make this more locally adaptive and stimulating holistic approaches to learning and evaluations of what constitute academic performance.

Structural and individualistic approaches to social inequality

What truly separated them on a more fundamental level was in what way they emphasised driver behind social inequality. Both populations did allude to social background differences, but teachers were more inclined to be hesitant to make generalisation into why certain children had lower or higher academic performance as exemplified with the statement made by Ruth:

«Det er utrolig sammensatt fordi det fins ingen like elever. Ehh..Så det å generalisere på det, blir bort imot umulig.» // «It is very complicated as no student is alike. Ehh...So making generalisation, that is pretty much impossible. »

Therefore, the teacher interviewed were more inclined to ensure individual solutions as the problem arised. It was not as they did not indicate that the students social background may have a factor in how they behaved, but they viewed it more as a problem with the individual student and parents. On the other hand, Sandra and Even expressed how they understood that structural forces behind social inequality occurred. However, especially Sandra, felt that there only so many ways they could contribute. Therefore, both emphasised that teachers needed access to competences and resources to do their jobs. Regardless, even with the new approach with differentiated instructions, Sandra understood it was not possible to encompass all, and one must be sensitive to the political forces at play:

«[…] politikere er har jo visjoner for politikken sin, men de er jo også opptatt av å treffe godt, og bli likt, og bli valgt igjen [eller] neste gang. Så det betyr jo at de hele tiden må balansere [dette med de] langsiktige politiske visjonene.» // […] politicans have political visions, but they are also occupied with hitting the mark, and being well liked, and being re-elected [or] the next time. So that means that they all the time must balance [this] with the more long-term political vision.”

In this regard, one can see that those working in the public administration is far more constrained to the political structures and forces. Additionally, being so far away up the system from the teachers they are more inclined to have a structural view of said problem. Teachers on the other hand are far more involved with the student's one-on-one which may result in them taking a more individualistic approach. In this regard the logics present provide an understanding of how communication does not occur, not only because of lack of

communication channels, but also that definitions and solutions to the problem of social inequality are viewed differently.

Discussion

In the case of public administration those interviewed exhibited understandings of a structural nature. For example, when discussing resource allocation, especially pertaining to IT knowledge, were not evenly distributed. Some counties are smaller and poorer, making it so they do not have access to certain needed assets. In addition, their logic pertains to that of the political nature of re-election. This contributes to the idea that the government should not be too involved in the privacy of each constituent as this could be seen as invasive and 'unnecessary' in the neo liberal mindset popular in modern society; over excessive control and policies could result in a political party becoming unpopular. In other words, policies that relates to structural changes within the education system needs a fine balance between state governance and private life as not to seem too invasive (Swift, 2004, s. 7-8). The problem of this in the question of social inequality is the fact that these differences start at a very young age, and most differentiating factors occur in the home; both socially and economically (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023). Therefore, strategies today mostly relating to providing economic assistance seems lacking when social decoding of the school system is more apparent factor in academic performance. Hence, future research and evaluations of social inequality in the education system should investigate and evaluate policies relating to preventative measures of the nature of learning and how to address 'unseen' codes relating to school. For example, Finland's policies around special education and learning environments from an early age as to prevent such social background factors (Sahlberg et al., 2015, p.65-68). This also of importance, as the teachers explained, kids that is considered to be 'struggling' in upper secondary schools are often undiagnosed and will therefore either receive help too late or not at all. This creates disruption and prevents proper educational attainment, and in worst case leads to them dropping out of school entirely (Nordahl & Nordahl, 2023).

In the case of the teacher's interviewed they used continuous language centring their student in their work and their individual qualities. When asking for generalisation that could group students into certain structural qualities (like social class), they expressed hesitation and emphasised learning variations as a differentiation quality independent of other factors. This

viewpoint could be a great asset when considering individual learning needs for students that require more attention than what the current curriculum and academic grading cannot necessarily accommodate. Individual based understanding of specific needs is great when creating individual strategies for measuring performance and interpreting the curriculum so that it is fair to the student struggling in question. This is also in line with the educator logic stating that the teacher shall provide, to the best of their ability, proper formation of the citizens and ensure a high level of knowledge attainment. However, a too heavy emphasis on mainly individual factors can diminish the real consequences of how social background most likely will be a significant obstacle for optimal performance in school. For example, both teachers interviewed put emphasis on mental health and cognitive skills as factors for how a student would perform. What can be initially interpreted as an individual quality, can be understood as a structural phenomenon when linking mental health, cognitive skills, and poverty. Research shows that poverty and mental health is linked in the way of stress, anxiety, depression et cetera, but also access to nurturing food that stimulates and maintain good cognitive development (kilde; Yu & Hannum, 2006). Therefore, to accommodate for this individual centred approach, future developments might have to look into the culture of teaching in Norway and how structural tendencies may be identified.

When making comparative analysis one can say that Norway falls somewhere behind Finland and China. Though Finland and Norway have similar cultural constitution and similar approaches to holistic teachings, they differ profoundly in the case of preventative measures in case of special needs. Finland starts in a much earlier stage, resulting in more kids developing techniques helping them along the way, where a bigger portion of the students no longer require special assistance (Sahlberg, 2023). Norway is more similar to China in the case of more frequent testing and are more inclined to use international results as a way to condone or praise educational reforms (Tan, 2019). This particularly true for the liberal party (Høyre) in Norway during the 2001 PISA shock where the results were used as argumentative leverage to implement decentralisation and management by objectives in the education system. However, implementing such narrow standardisation of knowledge is not necessary an indicator of a good education system, especially when thinking of in-depth learning as shown by example of Finland's academic success (Sahlberg, 2015). Nevertheless, newer reforms in Norway seems to shift more towards the way the Finnish organise their education system. There is increased focus on in-depth learning and more trust in academic exploration

as teachers are encouraged to choose more varied subject topics and methods for learning. In other words, teachers are more trusted to explore and take advantage of their academic profession.

Conclusion

This thesis assumes an institutional logics perspective to explain how the different logics within the educational organizational field is perpetuating social inequality reproduction in the Norwegian education system. In terms of explaining social inequality, the use of cultural understanding of class within the education system is assumed. This means that parental status and class specific knowledge will help the child of achieving good academic performance. Given that middle- and upper-class parents will have encouraged their children in advocating for their needs, appropriate behaviour for school, as well as help with academic and monetary assistance. In this way, children that are of lower-class parents are more likely to underperform academically, especially in learning progression and getting appropriate assistance for learning difficulties. This is in direct opposition to the universalistic ideal of the Nordic welfare model. Hence, one can assume that current reforms and pedagogical methods do not meet their intended goals. In addition, the reform logic and the educator logic complicate the matter further, as they have different understandings of how social inequality should be dealt with. The reform logic pertains to a structural understanding of how social inequality occurs but are forced to make generalised programmes and reforms, to hopefully reach as many as possible. However, these types of generalisations will benefit the majority, which is often most middle-class students. Additionally, they must also consider the different political influences of the political parties in power. This because they might have vastly different understandings of drivers behind social inequality. In the case of educator logic, they are more flexible in how they may approach a single student to adapt learning methods and evaluations that is the most beneficial. However, such an individualistic approach to learning difficulties may neglect the perspective of structural forces behind social inequality and academic performance. Subsequently, teachers may exhibit a too subjectively approach in evaluating students. As research has shown that what teachers may considered 'bad behaviour' might steer them towards linking social skills with academic performance. With these logics in mind, it is also important to acknowledge the purpose of education reforms. As shown previously, the core curriculum shows in multiple wordings that values of universalism are a highly coveted ideal and that teachers should facilitate this. However, the language is generic and do not provide specific tools in how to ensure this. Therefore,

teachers must apply their own logics of what quality education and fair treatment should be defined in their practical work. Additionally, such reforms and practices does not mitigate the problematic nature of meritocracy. Though appearing to be a fair system, one can see with the factoring of parental background and education level still matters more than simply 'effort' and 'talent'. Hence, reforms such as free school choice through the meritocratic practices of numeral grades in lower- and upper secondary school simply pits schools against each other. This will develop into dissimilarity and will create unequal resource allocations, due to number of students attending, increased homogenisation of the student mass and can either create stigma or fame for said school. Simply stated changes needs to occur in how pedagogical methods, financial practices, internationals testing, and professional development are being conducted in the Norwegian education system today. Especially international testing was of interest to perform a comparative analysis. Hence, two countries that have scored well in the PISA test was chosen, one that had a different cultural expression than Norway and one that was similar. These countries were China and Finland respectively. China is a country that went through, and are still experiencing to some degree, massive changes. From being mostly a farming country to massive industrialisation, the education system had to follow suit to keep up with the competence demands the new labour market required. Previously China's only form for schooling was done through the Mandarin system with its corresponding state exam, which were a way to ensure skilled individuals would become governmental officials as scholars were perceived as more fitting to govern. In the preparation for this exam all citizens were allowed to participate, however it was the elite that had the best possibility of completing said exam. Even so, this would lead to grand spread of literacy to most citizens of China. This sort of exam is still found traces of today through the *Gaokao* entrance exams for access to tertiary education. Such exams and schooling in general are highly valued due to the Confucius teachings that put heavy emphasis on learning and respect towards authority. As society progresses the Mandarin system were altered with western influences as it took hold of Chinese education reforms. This caused a hybrid of Confucius thinking and western teaching methods and structuring. Particular western influence is that of the use of PISA as benchmarking for evaluating the quality of the education system. In other words, PISA is valued as a teaching tool for further development (Tan, 2019). However, with the narrow focus on subjects and increased pressure of doing well in the *Gaokao*, social inequality is increasing as parents well off spend considerable resources ensuring that their children achieve the highest possible academic results. This as gaining access to 'key schools' is highly competitive. This results in parents of lower income

may not even able to give their children a proper education which in turn ensures social reproduction (Zhong, 2013; Lin, 2006). In juxtaposition, Finland does particularly well in PISA testing, but do not put much emphasis on these results. They believe that international and national testing in form of benchmarking is not a good indication of the quality of the education system as it is too narrow in how it defines knowledge. Similarities can be found in how both countries emphasises that all have potential to learn, but Finland inputs earlier preventative measures to combat social backgrounds factor that hinder academic progression. Such as early detection of learning difficulties and extensive guidance counselling relating to choosing subjects and further education possibilities. Other reasons behind Finland's success are how it rejected the GERM movement by not opening for school choice and emphasising teaching as an academic profession. Therefore, unlike other nations, most reforms in Finland are being constructed and implemented by teachers, researchers and other relevant actors specialising in education. As a result, Finnish students are well equipped in learning abilities and knowledge production. In this regard, Finnish students face less school specific anxiety and stress (Sahlberg, 2015). Through analysis of Finland and China one can argue that the Norwegian education system falls somewhere in between Finland and China. Like Finland they share the ideals of holistic educational approach with emphasis on differentiating education, equipping special education when needed. Furthermore, teaching as a profession is a highly sought out education with fierce competition, therefore those who wishes to become teachers are highly motivated. However, they differ as Finnish education put heavier emphasis on preventative measures by the understanding of what learning difficulties entails. Therefore, considerable time is used for special needs education in primary school, resulting in that some children no longer needs the services as they advance within the system. Another significant difference is that testing, evaluations, and benchmarking is not as prevalent in the Finnish school system as in Norway. As the findings suggest the constant evaluations and reports are not viewed favourable by teachers and seen as a source of stress and time consuming that could be used more efficiently helping students. In this way Norway is more similar to the Chinese education system, which has a narrower emphasis on testing certain knowledge perimeters and inefficient decentralisation tactics. This due to the target management public administration continue to emphasise on the educators that are not necessarily informed by other educators or researcher on the topic but rather politicians which have certain agendas they wish to push.

To conclude, the answer to the research question "How does different logics conflict within the educational organisational field in terms of mitigating social inequality in the education system?" is complicated. It appears that given the different positional views of the two institutions presented in this thesis, there is difficulty in unifying in defining and doing practical work to mitigate social inequality. Furthermore, the concept of social inequality is wicked problem as the topic is complicated and the solutions complex. If on is to put too strict limitations on the private life of individuals, which is where social background differences are formed, it would result in protest and dissatisfaction amongst the public. Therefore, the reform logic must implement reforms in an intricate balance of strict intervention and passive approach to factors leading to social inequality. This is why those in public administration are sensitive to the logics and ideologies pertaining to the political parties in power as they have motivations to be re-elected. In other words, politicians wish to pass policies that will continue their position of power. Hence, those involved in making reforms often take a more structural approach to solve issues. Additionally, by being distanced from practical classroom work they might be further removed for what methods and incentives that might be more effective regarding knowledge attainment and learning. On the other hand, the educator logic might be more reflexive regarding adapted education. They might be better at meeting the particular needs of a student exhibiting learning difficulties. However, such an individualistic belief might negate structural explanations for lower academic performance. This might lead to unfortunate biases, such as believing that social skills equate competence in a subject, even though one cannot make a clear correlation of this. The gap in understanding how academic performance and social inequality is linked makes it so that the educational organisational field is riddled with loosely coupled attachments as to try reach goal attainment. In other words, mutual goals of ensuring well educated and properly competent citizens may align. However, due to different logics organisational member must create separate identities and activities as to make sure the institutions function day-to-day due to their complicated structures and interdependencies (Reay & Hinings, 2009). Therefore, it is here argued that as of today the public administration, especially Directorate of Education, interferes with practical day-to-day schoolwork (testing, teaching etc.) to a degree that is more hindering than helpful in regard to developing the profession. What is meant here that is the pressure of benchmarking, evaluation, increased testing, and such makes it so that teachers spend less time with their students, lack time for collaborative endeavours, thus hindering teachers performing their professional expertise. Additionally, they are not rewarded time to furthering improvements

of pedagogical practices which can be argued is lacking, considering the complexity of the reasons behind differences in academic performance due to unequal advantages of social background factors. Therefore, policies and public administration should rather look at how they can perform a more supportive role in regard to legal and economic ramifications to ensure that social inequality as it appears in the academic system in Norway today. Focus should therefore be on preventative measures rather than trying to rectify issues that appears in later years.

Further research

Further research should investigate further the link between mental health issues and academic progression as it is currently increasing. Furthermore, it would be of interest to look whether there is correlation between the increase in mental health issues and a bigger percentage of youth getting disability benefits, as this might factor into drop-out rates in upper secondary schooling. Additionally, teachers from primary and lower secondary school should also be interviewed as they might shed more light on the balance of national, international, and regular testing as they appear more affected by it. Principals should also be investigated as they might have insightful observation in the role as middle management and its challenges within complex organisational fields.

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Word count: 18379

Attachments

Intervju guide - lærere

Innledning

- Presentere meg selv
- Informere om oppgavens hensikt og problemstilling
- Informere om lydopptaket
- Informere om taushetsplikt, behandling av konfidensiell behandling av data, anonymisering av personopplysninger og at prosjektet er godkjent av NSD.
- Opplyse om frivillig deltakelse og mulighet for å trekke seg når som helst i løpet av prosjekter

1. **Bakgrunn til intervjuobjektet**

    1. a. Kjønn:
    1. b. Alder:
    1. c. Utdannelse:
    1. d. Kort sagt; hvordan ser en vanlig arbeidsdag for deg ut?:

2. **Lærerrollen, rektorrollen og rollen som ansatt i offentlig forvaltning:**

2.a. Med dine egne ord, hva er det viktigste formålet en lærer har i utdanningssystemet?

2.b. Med dine egne ord, hva er det viktigste formålet en rektor har i utdanningssystemet?

2.c. Med dine egne ord, hva er det viktigste formålet en ansatt i offentlig forvaltning har i utdanningssystemet?

2.d. I den tid du har vært lærer, med dine egne ord, kan du forklare hvorvidt rollen som lærer har endret seg i den tidsperioden? For eksempel ansvar, posisjon i samfunnet, yrkesprofesjonalisering…

3. **Dialog**:

3.a. Med dine egne ord, hvordan oppfatter du dialogen mellom lærere og øvre statlige organer?

3.b. Med dine egne ord, hvordan opplever du formidling og forståelse av læringsplanene?

3.c. Hvis du ønsker endring i dialogprosessen, hva mener du må gjøres?

4. Reformer:

4.a. Hvilke reformer har du sett på som særlig viktige for utdanningssystemet og undervisningen? Og hvordan vil du si disse har bidratt til endring?

Oppfølgingsspørsmål:
4.b. I hvilken grad tror du PISA-sjokket i 2001 har påvirket hvordan skolereformer dannes?

4.c. Hva er dine tanker om Kunnskapsløftet – både den første fremlagt i 2006 og den senere reviderte planen i 2017?

4.d. Som nevnt presenterte du noen reformer som særlig viktige, er det noen av disse du mener jeg burde se nærmere på?

5. Lærerplaner:

5.a. Med dine egne ord, hvordan opplever du forholdet mellom internasjonale, nasjonale og lokale krav til skolen?

5.b. I den grad du har kunnskap om yrkesskolene sitt faginnhold, hva er dets forhold til næringslivet, og til hvilken grad?

6. Universalisme:

6. a. Hvordan synes du prinsippet om at alle skal ha like muligheter i skolen uansett bakgrunn blir benyttet i undervisningen eller utdanningssystemet som helt?

6. b. Med dine egne ord, hvordan ser du dette utspiller seg i hvordan ulike elever gjør det på skolen (karakterer f.eks)? Hvis du skulle trekke generelle hovedlinjer på hva som skiller dem, hvilke(n) er disse?

6.c. Hvordan oppfatter du konseptet om at makt og sosial status skal gis de med evner og ferdigheter som er best kvalifisert uavhengig av sosial bakgrunn? Videre hvordan tenker du dette relateres til utdanningsinstitusjonen i dag?

7. Strukturell påvirkning:

7.a. Opplever du at det tilrettelegges for lokale tilpasninger? Hvordan/hvorfor ikke?

7.b. Hva vil du si forholdet den enkelte skolen har til stat og kommune når det kommer til bestemmelser om skoleinnhold?

7.c. Med dine egne ord, føler du at din skole sine behov blir møtt av kommunen? Hvis ikke, hvordan gjør din skole, eller deg som individ, prioriteringer av innhold?

8. **Tilpasset undervisning**:

8. a. Hvordan imøtekommer skolen barn med lærevansker (ut ifra prinsippet om tilpasset undervisning)?

8. b. Hva slags tiltak gjøres hvis et barn ikke får utbytte av et fag?

8.c. Med dine egne ord, er det tilgang til tilstrekkelig kompetanse i det tilfellet en (eller flere) elever har særskilte behov?

9. **Møte med foreldre og skolesystemet:**

9.a. Med dine egne ord, hvordan opplever du at foreldre involverer seg i barnas utdannelse? Og hva mener du skiller dem i hvordan og til hvilken grad de involverer seg?

9.b. Er det noen ganger kommunikasjonsproblemer med foreldre (språk, forventninger de har etc.)? I så fall, med dine egne ord, hvordan vil disse «typisk» utspille seg?

9.c. I din karriere som lærer vil du si hvilken grad foreldre engasjerer seg i barnets utdannelse former barnets utdannings- og karrierevalg? Hvordan?

Oppfølgingsspørsmål
9.d. *I din mening, har involvering til foreldre endret seg utover din karriere?*

9.e. Med dine egne ord, hvordan vil du si foreldre forholder seg til egne barn som trenger tilpasset undervisning? Hva skiller de ulike foreldre i hvordan de involverer seg? Videre hvordan er dialogen – er det til den enkelte lærer, til rektor..?

10. **Avslutning**

10.a. Oppsummere

10.b. Er det slik at jeg har forstått deg riktig?

10.c. Er det noe mer du ønsker å tilføye?

Intervjuguide – Ansatte i offentlig forvaltning

Innledning

- Presentere meg selv
- Informere om oppgavens hensikt og problemstilling
- Informere om lydopptaket
- Informere om taushetsplikt, behandling av konfidensiell behandling av data, anonymisering av personopplysninger og at prosjektet er godkjent av NSD.
- Opplyse om frivillig deltakelse og mulighet for å trekke seg når som helst i løpet av prosjekter

1. **Bakgrunn til intervjuobjektet**
   1.a. Kjønn:
   1.b. Alder:
   1.c. Utdannelse:
   1.d. Kort sagt; hvordan ser en vanlig arbeidsdag for deg ut? (kan nok kuttes):

2. **Lærerrollen, rektorrollen og rollen som ansatt i offentlig forvaltning:**
   2.a. Med dine egne ord, hva er det viktigste formålet en lærer har i utdanningssystemet?

   2.b. Med dine egne ord, hva er det viktigste formålet en rektor har i utdanningssystemet?

   3.c. Med dine egne ord, hva er det viktigste formålet en ansatt i offentlig forvaltning har i utdanningssystemet?

   3.d. I den tid du har vært ansatt i offentlig forvaltning, med dine egne ord, kan du forklare hvorvidt rollen som lærer har endret seg i den tidsperioden? For eksempel ansvarsområde, posisjon i samfunnet….

3. **Dialog**:
   3.a. Med dine egne ord, hvordan oppfatter du dialogen mellom øvre statlige organer og rektorer? Videre, er lærere også inkludert dette?

   3.b. Med dine egne ord, hvordan opplever du formidling og forståelse av læringsplanene? Videre, er det noe feedback system som evaluerer dette?

   3.c. Hvis du ønsker endring i dialogprosessen, hva mener du må gjøres?

4. Reformer:

4.a. Hvilke reformer har du sett på som særlig viktige for utdanningssystemet og undervisningen? Og hvordan vil du si disse har bidratt til endring?

Oppfølgingsspørsmål:
4.b. I hvilken grad tror du PISA-sjokket i 2001 har påvirket hvordan skolereformer dannes?

4.c. Hva er dine tanker om Kunnskapsløftet – både den første fremlagt i 2006 og den senere reviderte planen i 2017?

4.d. Som nevnt presenterte du noen reformer som særlig viktige, er det noen av disse du mener jeg burde se nærmere på?

5. Universalisme:

5. a. Hvordan synes du prinsippet om at alle skal ha like muligheter i skolen uavhengig av sosial bakgrunn kommer frem i lærerplaner/reformer?

5.b. Hvordan oppfatter du konseptet om at makt og sosial status skal gis de med evner og ferdigheter som er best kvalifisert uavhengig av sosial bakgrunn? Videre hvordan tenker du dette relateres til utdanningsinstitusjonen i dag?

6. Strukturell påvirkning:

6.a. Hvis tilfellet, hvordan vil du si internasjonale faktorer påvirker reformprosessen eller utarbeiding av lærerplaner?

6.b. Hvis tilfellet, hvordan påvirker nasjonale motivasjoner og forståelser reformprosessen eller utarbeiding av læreplaner? (Norsk kultur, politisk klima, etc.)

6.c. Er det tilfellet at ansatte i stat og kommune i det dere utarbeider læringsplaner legger opp for lokale tilpasninger både i innhold og struktur av undervisningen?

7. Tilpasset undervisning:

7.a. Hvordan imøtekommer lærerplaner for barn som har lærevansker (ut ifra prinsippet om tilpasset undervisning)?

7.b. Hvis tilfellet, hva slags utfordringer oppstår når en skal utforme læreplaner med hensyn til tilpasset undervisning?

7.c. Har du noen refleksjoner rundt balansen mellom å fremlegge en fellesundervisning og samtidig tilpasse undervisning til den enkelte elev?

8. Avslutning

8.a. Oppsummere

8.b. Er det slik at jeg har forstått deg riktig?

8.c. Er det noe mer du ønsker å tilføye?