

Inclusive education as human rights for immigrant students in Faroese compulsory schools – a desktop study of Faroese policy documents and current Faroese research in the field



Fróðskaparrit 70 (2024), nr. 2: 60-89
Human Rights and the Faroe Islands
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Inkluderandi útbúgving sum mannarættindi hjá tilflytaranæmingum í føroyska fólkaskúlanum – ein kanning grundað á føroysk útbúgvingarskjøl og føroyska gransking á økinum

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Abstract

The desktop article studies the status quo regarding the inclusion of immigrant children in Faroese compulsory schools as a human rights issue through analysis of policy documents, relevant official documents and Faroese research in the field of inclusive education for the target demographic. Using content analysis, an attempt is made to study whether the policies are socially just, equitable and fall within the human rights of immigrant children and their right to equitable access to education. The policies are evaluated using the language orientation framework (Ruiz, 1984) to elicit the stance of policy towards immigrant children.

Existing research on Faroese educational policies for inclusion in education is used to determine if fit-for-purpose educational measures exist for immigrant

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children to learn Faroese, fulfil learning outcomes in school and integrate into the society while retaining their own first language and culture. It appears that language-as-problem dominates policy stance, and its implementation without consideration for the human rights of these children has potential implications for their integration, education and their becoming meaningful, full-fledged members of Faroese society.

Úrtak

Í greinini verður inklusjón sum mannarættindi hjá tilflytarabørnum í føroyska fólkaskúlanum kannað. Kanningin umfatar greining av útbúgvingar-politiksskjølum, viðkomandi almennum skjølum og føroyskari gransking um inkluderandi útbúgving fyri hesar tilflytaranæmingar. Við støði í innihalds-greiningum verður roynt at kanna, hvørt politikkurin er sosialt grundaður, rættvísur og lýkur mannarættindakravinum hjá tilflytarabørnum um rættvísa atgongd til útbúgving. Politikkurin er eftirmettur við støði í karminum um málstøðu (language orientation) (Ruiz, 1984) til tess at fáa støðuna hjá tilflytarabørnum fram í ljósmála.

Gransking, sum fevnir um føroyskan útbúgvingarpolitikk og inklusjón í útbúgving, er nýtt til at gera av, hvørt hóskandi útbúgvingarmál eru til taks hjá tilflytarabørnum at læra føroyskt, lúka læruúrtøkur og fella inn í samfelagið, samstundis sum tey varðveita sítt egna móðurmál og mentanina í upprunalandinum. Úrslitini benda á, at sjónarmiðið mál-sum-trupulleiki (language-as-problem), er ráðandi, og útinningarstigið ikki hevur fyrilit fyri, at manna-rættindastøðan hjá børnunum hevur møguligar avleiðingar fyri integrasjónina og teirra útbúgving í føroyska samfelagið og møguleikar at gerast týðandi, fullbúnir limir í føroyska samfelagnum.

Keywords: Educational policy, education as human rights, immigrant children, social justice, inclusion.

Leitorð: Útbúgvingarpolitikkur, útbúgving sum mannarættindi, tilflytarabørn, sosialt rættvísi, inklusjón.

Introduction

Globally, students with immigrant backgrounds face immense challenges during schooling ([OECD, 2015b](#), p. 1) and have less chance of success than native students ([OECD, 2019](#)). It is crucial to acknowledge that they have the potential to perform well, provided that they are afforded equitable access to education. Therefore, the Faroese Government and education systems as policymakers have a key duty and responsibility to ensure that Faroese immigrant students are given the opportunity to develop skills and competences through education ([OECD, 2015a](#), p. 2) that will enable them to claim a place and voice in Faroese society.

The Faroese context

The Faroe Islands, a part of the Danish Kingdom, has about 54,000 inhabitants (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2023) of whom roughly 10% are immigrants from 104 countries, which means there are speakers of 89 languages in the country (Ibid). In 2022-23 the total number of compulsory school students in the age group 7-16 was 7,285, with the two largest schools accounting for some 1,568 students, i.e., 21.5%. This distribution appears to have contributed to the teaching of Faroese as a second language (FSL) receiving greater priority in some areas of the country than others.

The need to teach Faroese as a Second Language (FSL) becomes considerable and vital for the education of immigrant students and for integration in the context of increasing immigration (Rasmussen & Vijayarathan-R, 2024). Immigration has resulted in an increase in first- and second-generation child immigrants, and the latest numbers available (which are from 2019), indicate the following demographic breakdown (Elambo, 2022, p, 44):

Table 1. Classification of immigrant pupil by citizenship of parents in the Faroe Islands	
Classification of immigrant students	No.
One non-Faroese parent and not a Danish citizen	878 (760 born in the Faroes)
Non-Faroese parents and not Danish citizens	115 (75 born in the Faroes)
Faroese born children with one parent of either Faroese or Danish origin	796 (born in the Faroes)
2019 Total	1,789 (about 24% of total school population)
<i>313 immigrant students benefitted from Faroese teaching for immigrants i.e., 17.4% of immigrant students, who make up 24% of Faroese compulsory school students</i>	

Figures available from the Faroese Board of Education (available only for 2021), show that 313 immigrant compulsory school students in the age group 7-16 successfully applied for and were admitted to extra classes in Faroese. It is important to note that this may not provide the complete picture of what is being done to help immigrant students. It cannot be assumed that all immigrant

children applied for FSL or that all who applied were admitted, as local schools decide which child is given access to additional/remedial classes in Faroese.

Additionally, there is no clear or defined approach to equip teachers with FSL qualifications. A one-time, first of its kind, part-time course on teaching FSL (master's diploma) was introduced at the University of the Faroe Islands on an experimental basis for compulsory and secondary school teachers for the period 2021 - 2024. At present (2024), this recent FSL course for compulsory and upper secondary school teachers is operating without any formalised policy i.e., there is no relevant executive directive for the course. As for the compulsory and upper secondary schools, a new curriculum for Faroese as a second language has been formulated and came into effect from August 2023.

So, it stands to reason that a majority of the teachers who are teaching this target group of FSA students may have no knowledge of second language acquisition (SLA) principles or how to teach a foreign language. They express a feeling of pedagogical helplessness with regard to teaching immigrant students as no clear infrastructure is provided as a foundation (Rasmussen & Vijayavarathan-R, 2024; Elambo, 2022; Lognberg & Atlason, 2022).

This conceptual or desktop article highlights two primary areas to be explored: the suitability of Faroese education policy to ensure education inclusion for immigrant children, and a critical evaluation of how the Faroese school system is geared to meet the needs of these children within the ethos of human rights demands on education. The intention is to “develop logical and complete arguments about these associations rather than testing them empirically” (Gilson & Goldberg 2015 in Jaakkola, 2020, p. 20) given that the article uses policy documents as its point of departure and no field research is involved.

The objective is to examine what might be learnt from previous Faroese research within the framework of inclusive education in the context of immigrant children. The knowledge gleaned would serve as a basis to evaluate if policy and practice engender opportunities and create a foundation for education as a human right for these children in the Faroese compulsory school system. Currently, inclusion in education is still very much at the nascent policy stage with sporadic implementation and enactment based on uninformed policy making in the islands (Vijayavarathan-R & Óskarsdóttir, 2023). The sections below offer relevant theories to build a platform for the focus of this article.

Theoretical underpinnings

The theoretical framework for the article is anchored in the ethos of education as a human right contextualised in Sustainable Developmental Goal (SDG) 4 and education policy for foreign language teaching for immigrant children in the compulsory school system in the Faroe Islands. Policy texts as contextually situated artefacts within the macrocosm of various societal

discourses reveal the attitudinal focus of policymakers. Their interpretation is significant as it impacts on how policy is implemented and enacted.

This article proposes to use Richard Ruíz's (1984) language orientations framework to analyse the current Faroese education policy regarding mother tongue (MT) and Faroese as a second language (FSL) for inclusion of immigrant students in Faroese compulsory schools based on the principle of education as a human right. The framework posited by Ruíz (1984) provides valuable parameters to assess the various orientations at play in the complexity of how language planning is negotiated. It also serves to analyse the influence of language ideologies on language policy.

Education as a human right

Education is a fundamental human right as touted in several international and national legal documents and regulatory frameworks (UNESCO, 1960, 1974, 2015b; United Nations, 1948, 1979, 1990a, b). Its significance cannot be overstated as it is an incontrovertible criterion for fostering inclusive societies.

For all children and youth to benefit from education equally, education policies must ensure their right to education (namely equal access to education); their right in education (fair treatment in the learning process), and their right through education (equitable outcomes and access to opportunities in all spheres of life) (Chavatzia, Engel & Hastedt, 2016, p. 4).

SDG 4 identifies the importance of

... inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning for all... Migrant children are often excluded from education due to language or socio-economic barriers (SDGs 4.1 and 4.5) ... focusing on socio-emotional learning, human rights and citizenship education in school curricula (SDG 4.7) can foster the inclusion of migrant children and enhance intercultural understanding among host-country children (Nicolai, Walses & Aiazzi, 2017, p. 5).

SDG 4 creates powerful arguments, both economic and social, for focusing on the education of immigrant students and establishes its significance for their integration from a holistic perspective of the student as person and learner.

Furthermore, the 4As defined as follows and endorsed by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) state that the essential features of education are: available (free education, fit-for-purpose infrastructure and qualified and trained teachers); accessible (non-discriminatory, accessible to everyone and proactive approach to include the most marginalised); acceptable (relevant, non-discriminatory education with relevant, non-discriminatory, culturally suitable, and quality education content and safe schools with professional teachers) and adaptable (fit-for-purpose education that adapts in

accordance with societal needs, appropriate for local needs and contexts) (adapted, RTE, Tomaševski, 2001).

On examining the issues highlighted above, it becomes clear that education is a meaningful and powerful conduit for inclusion. It has the unique quality of engendering a blend of social, cultural and economic factors that directly link to what makes for successful immigrant integration. The complexity of language learning and its role in social inclusion stems from several factors including attitude of the host society, the infrastructure for language learning and access to target language learning materials (Hoffman & Holm, 2022). Inclusive education is pivotal in fostering equity to facilitate the academic success of immigrant students, and it rests on the fulcrum of the ideologies of social justice, democracy, human rights, and full participation of all (Florian, 2009; Black-Hawkins, 2017). Its absence may threaten the very social fabric of a small-scale society and may increase the vulnerability of immigrant students to exclusion and alienation. The chasm that could come into being through lack of integration has socio-economic implications for Faroese society.

Nordic Language Policy

All language policy is coloured by language beliefs, ideologies and a plethora of non-linguistic factors influence attitudinal positions that are embedded in policy (Kiramba et al, 2023). Language policy design may be dictated using legislation, regulations and education institution (Emilsson, 2023). Language policies in education are often coloured by national ideologies, the increasing predominance of the global power of English and linguistic rights of the dominant population in society (Spolsky, 2005). If one focuses on language policy in the Nordic context, it is clear that multilingualism perspectives are given credence. The Nordic Council of Ministers in the first Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy drafted in 2006 (NCM, 2007) described the policy as “a democratic language policy for the multilingual Nordic community” (NCM, 2007, p. 92). It acknowledges the linguistic rights of all residents in the Nordic countries and their right to mother tongue language learning and preserving their own languages (Alisaari, et al., 2023).

Significantly, there is a difference in the role of teaching mother tongue or heritage languages and a second language. As Emilsson et al. (2023) indicate, the way that teaching is organised locally impacts both teaching of the second language and the mother tongue. Studying policy texts and comprehending what they convey (or not) allows some understanding of the factors that shape policymaking, implementation and enactment for Faroese as a second language for immigrant students.

Policy texts and interpretation

Any discourse on policy is complex, therefore, studying policy texts requires acknowledging that they are neither necessarily clear nor complete. They are often a compromise reached by various relevant stakeholders and reflect attitudinal perspectives (Ball, 1993).

Policy analysis – policy as Discourse

In analysing policy, Adams (2011) highlights the impact of a nation's "social, cultural and political milieu" that serve as a framework for studying policy in context (p. 15). He clarifies that the text is not policy per se, but a physical clarification of it and focuses on the textual form as but one focus of analysis. He underlines that "discursive processes" (p. 16), which involve interpretation and understanding of policy-texts "give form" (Ibid) to policy. Adams (2016) contends that policy as Discourse offers perspectives and dialectical positions moving away from the reduction of policy texts to precise portrayals of objectives to implement.

It is the language of the policy text that delineates policy as arising from a perception of it as either rules to be followed or as open to agentic interpretation. Therefore, an acknowledgement of the role of agency of the actors in the education field, i.e. school leaders and teachers who implement and enact at grassroots level, becomes relevant. Student agency is incontrovertibly significant to learning a language but is not relevant to the premise of this article, which centres on policy evaluation.

Discourse and discourse and its implications for analysing policy

Gee (2011) posits that discourse can be perceived as discourse or Discourse, the small 'd' being language in use and the latter "the role of doing and being in language" (p. 12). This has ties to one's identity, which is dynamic and influenced by the various contexts of our daily being. He highlights the fluidity of identity as "The kind of person one is recognized as being at a given time and place" (p. 99). One builds "identities and activities not just through language" (Ibid, p. 28), but through adopting and adapting roles that are determined by communicative contexts. The perception of the immigrant student can oscillate between various roles - language learner, insider-outsider negotiating roles chosen or allocated by society.

In social interaction, identities are negotiated in comparison to others and in positioning oneself. "Language-within-Discourses is always coloured by values and is "political" in the broad sense of "political", where it means involving human relationships where power and social goods are at stake" (Gee, 1996, p. 150). Discourse is "ways of being people like us" (Ibid, 1996, p. viii), so, competing Discourses arise from the conflict between them, which accounts for

the Discourse on labelling some students “other”. This “other” is meted different treatment (Gee, 2012), and Faroese immigrant students have an inescapable membership of this othering Discourse in the education system and society in the Faroe Islands.

Language ideologies and their influence on policy-making

Language ideologies are “beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use, which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states” (Kroskrity, 2000, p. 192). Consequently, they have a marked impact on the stance of language policies, which offer insight into how they impact the way languages are used in a society (Farr and Song, 2011). Defining language orientation as “a complex of dispositions toward language and its role, and toward languages and their role in society”, Ruíz (1984, p. 16), illustrates three distinct orientations to language: language-as-problem, language-as-right, and language-as-resource. Language-as-problem is underpinned by a monolingual and assimilationist stance and views linguistic diversity as a problem to be resolved (Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Ruíz, 1984). Linguistic uniformity is managed through policy to prevent linguistic diversity from threatening national unity and facilitate linguistic homogenising of society (Hult & Hornberger, 2016). Education provides the pathway to achieving linguistic unity for policymakers (Ruíz, 1984).

Language-as-right sees structural elements in individual or population identity and culture (Ruíz, 1984). So, individuals and linguistic minority communities are awarded certain rights acknowledging the role language has for the individual and the population. It addresses linguistic inequalities through the rule of law.

Language-as-resource posits the view that language is a “resource to be managed, developed and conserved” (Ruíz, 1984, p. 28). Linguistic minority communities are “important sources of expertise” (Ruíz, 1984, p. 28). Both intrinsic and extrinsic value of language are acknowledged (Ruíz, 1984, p. 27; 2010, p. 164). In education, this results in underscoring the importance of language teaching for linguistic majorities and minorities to develop linguistic skills in their societal spheres.

Hult and Hornberger (2016) have suggested that these orientations can provide a basis for analysing and making sense of “messy policy debate and negotiation” (p. 42). It is worthwhile noting that the orientations are “competing, but not incompatible approaches” (Ruíz, 1984, p. 18) as the contextual environment may prove conducive to one orientation rather than another. In the article, an attempt is made to classify Faroese language policy through analysing the policy documents using the orientations of language framework.

Methodology

The methodology used is conceptual or desktop research within the qualitative research ethos, wherein the decision-making and the analytical approach of the researcher (Holloway, 2005) are made clear in yoking together what research has revealed about policy on inclusive compulsory school education for immigrant students in the Faroe Islands. This approach is used to identify relevant arguments within what is a very little researched area in the islands and to synthesise existing research to frame lines of thought and argue for the importance of human rights in education. Knowledge is dialogic and contextually situated in research (Wegerif, 2013), and this study serves to identify what can be gleaned from this dialogic space. It seeks to cast light on and discover emerging patterns that provide a basis to explore another area of significance, i.e., attention given to the human rights of immigrant children in education policy in the Faroe Islands. The current political and policy debates in Faroese society afford relevance to this research topic.

Attitudinal perspectives and language ideologies in policies and other official documents on language offer one way of synthesising the various Faroese articles/studies available to elicit their findings and frame them within contexts. After analysing the various research articles/theses available with the specific focus of inclusion in education of immigrant children in the Faroe Islands, an overarching framework is identified to provide context and perspective from a critical viewpoint to arrive at the aims of the article.

Purposeful sampling was used to arrive at a research synthesis of existing Faroese research with a specific focus on education policy for inclusion and specifically for inclusion of immigrant children (Poulsen, 2023; Vijayavarathan-R, 2023; Vijayavarathan-R, & Óskarsdóttir, 2023; Elambo, 2022; Lognberg & Atlason, 2022; Hoffmann & Holm, 2022; Holm, O'Rourke, & Danson, 2020). The PhD thesis (Poulsen, 2023) focuses on inclusion in terms of special needs children while looking for policy evidence in education for inclusion in its essence.

The significance of using data from the bachelor theses of Elambo (2022); Lognberg & Atlason, (2022) and í Grund and Láadal (2020) lies in them serving as action-research, as these students observed the issues discussed in the theses through their practicum as part of the four-year Teacher Education course. They also followed up on their observations with further research for their theses. Given the scarce research on FSL for immigrant students in compulsory schooling, this data generated by trainee teachers is valid and their experiential and theoretical analyses carry intrinsic value.

The new knowledge sought herein is to decipher the language orientations that underpin Faroese policy design as evidenced in policy texts. A direct approach was used for content analysis built on a theoretical and conceptual framework. It provides the advantage of enabling a clearer understanding of

diffuse ideas and terms used in policy documents (Armstrong, 2021). Therefore, studies with a focus on inclusion in Faroese education policy were collected using a targeted sampling approach for language and inclusion. A deductive approach facilitated a critical analysis of the relevant policy documents and existing Faroese research in the field of education, in order to map the inclusion of the target demographic as fundamental to ensuring their human rights. In the next section, the documents and their relevance are outlined.

Faroese policy documents on inclusion in education in Faroese schools

The relevant policy documents for this context comprise the Faroese Public School Act (Løgtingslóg nr. 125 um fólkaskúlan, 1997), The National Curriculum (Námsætlanir fyrri fólkaskúlan, 2011) and the Executive Order on Teaching Faroese as a Second Language and Heritage Language teaching (Kunngerð nr. 144, 2020). Another document that is included is The Curriculum for FSL (Námsætlan fyrri Føroyskt sum annaðmál, August 2023). While it is not a policy document, it reflects current policy and is based on the aforementioned executive order on Teaching Faroese as a Second Language and Heritage Language Teaching (2020) and could provide further insights for consideration. Holm et al. (2020, p. 398) sum up the Faroese language policy as a top-down language policy, with an “interventionist approach (Cooper 1989; Fishman 1991), predominantly based on prescriptivist, monolingual ideologies of purism (Thomas 1991), has both created milestones and tensions in policies and practices on the ground (Knudsen 2010)).”

The table below identifies the relevant policy documents and official document that would be expected to consider inclusion in education as a human right and an enabler for equity and social justice for immigrant children in the islands. These documents could be tabulated as follows to reveal the perspectives they posit:

Table 2. Significance of the chosen Faroese policy documents	
Policy document	Perspectives on inclusion in education as embedded in documents
1. Faroese Public School Act (1997)	Overall foundation within which FSL can be contextualised can be deduced as lack of inclusion and the dominant positioning of Faroese culture and language.
2. The National Curriculum (2011)	Lack of inclusion deduced together with Christian values to be inculcated in education and the dominant positioning of the role of Faroese culture and language.

3. Teaching Faroese as a Second Language and Heritage Language Teaching (2020)	Acknowledgement of FSL, acceptance of importance of L1 for immigrant identity, within an assimilative attitude positioning Faroese language and culture as highest in the language and culture hierarchy.
4. Curriculum for FSL (2023)	Result of policy document 2 above.

In the following section, the findings based on an analysis of the policy documents highlights interpretation of Faroese policy documents as being entrenched in Discourse that indicates an “othering” stance. It results in identifying perceptions of a dominant in-group (“Us,” the Self) and out-groups (“Them,” the Other) with potential for differences becoming the basis not acknowledging the identity of the “other” and paves the way for discrimination (Staszak, 2009). In its implementation and enactment, it appears to echo the societal and political Discourse on immigrants from a deficit perspective in general in the islands.

Findings

The findings reveal that policy is not created in a vacuum as national governments’ intentions and attitudes towards immigration colour policy design and impact language policy. The analysis of Faroese policies reveals the absence of the term inclusion and the heavy influence of non-linguistic factors. The exclusive focus on Faroese language and culture as the most significant factors for immigrant students is repeatedly emphasised. The policies adopt an assimilative stance towards FSL learning, failing to account for education as a human right and show a distinct orientation towards Discourse of viewing language-as-a-problem.

Lack of the term *inclusion* in Faroese policies and lack of multicultural perspectives

The Faroese national education policy understood to be implicit in the Faroese Public School Act of 1997 (revised in 2005 and 2019) does not use the word inclusion, and neither is it to be found in the National Curriculum (Poulsen, 2023). If any commitment to inclusion is to be identified, it is peripheral and would have to be surmised from the aims of the Public School Act (ibid) paragraph 2 (1) which states: “The task of the public school is to ensure attention to the individual pupil and in cooperation with the parent that the pupil is taught skills, working methods, and language skills, which contribute to the individual student’s personal development” (Poulsen, 2023, p. 97).

Significantly, the silence on inclusion in both these key documents means that at policy level, an acknowledgement of the socio-personal and linguistic needs of immigrant children in the Faroe Islands appears to be overlooked.

Immigrant children's educational needs are perceived as identical to students with Faroese as L1. "As seen both in the Public School Act and the national curriculum, the purpose of school is still anchored in the maintenance of the Faroese language and culture and the preservation of Christianity" (Poulsen, 2023, p. 99) as focus is on promoting mastery of Faroese and Faroese culture. Any discourse in the education system is based on a monolingual, monocultural perspective and does not explore the intrinsic advantages of multilingualism and multiculturalism (Vijayarathan-R & Óskarsdóttir, 2023).

Poulsen (2023) contends that the Faroese authorities do not view the Faroese school as un-egalitarian, and therefore have not sought the inclusion paradigm as a possible basis for policymaking, implementation or enactment. Any reference to inclusion is only with respect to special needs, which implies that inclusion is concerned with the special educational needs field. She further acknowledges that Faroese policy documents:

...do not provide an explicit definition of how inclusion should be understood, nor do they elaborate on how inclusion should be practised. Hence, the documents give no help to the practice field to understand and practice inclusion. Instead, by their silence, they invite each school and professional to interpret their understanding of inclusive education and whether to strive to practice and develop inclusive education (p. 104).

The final policy document is the Executive Order on Teaching Faroese as a Second Language and Heritage Language Teaching (Kunngerð nr. 144, 2020). It reinforces the importance of immigrant children being taught Faroese language and culture, which indicates an assimilative stance:

§ 1. The aim is that students in the compulsory education age group who do not have Faroese as mother tongue should acquire the skills to speak, read and write Faroese. 1.2. In the subject Faroese as a second language students must learn to use Faroese as a medium of work and communication, so they become bilingual with the objective of enabling them to use both written and spoken Faroese. ... Culture and society should be part of teaching Faroese and Faroese as a second language (Kunngerð nr. 144, 2020, p. 1. Translated by author, 2023).

The Executive Order allows a quota of 20 hours of FSL/annum to be shared among students, and in big schools, this could lead to even fewer hours per student as it must be shared by proportionately more students. Teachers point out that in some instances as little as 30 minutes per week/annum is available to their students. The Board of Education does state that it is always possible to apply for additional hours, and that these hours are allocated based on need as evinced by the schools (Vijayarathan-R, 2023). Given that it takes anywhere

between 5 and 8 years to learn a language (Ortega, 2008), it is safe to conclude that the few hours available of formal learning of Faroese are woefully, and arguably, inadequate.

This Executive Order also states the rights of the immigrant children to be taught their own heritage language (L1) (first language/mother tongue) in one sentence. “Mother-tongue teaching will be organised geographically in areas where students share the same mother tongue” (Kunngerð nr. 144, 2020, p. 1. Translated by author, 2023). It can be viewed as an attempt to acknowledge the significance of ethnic cultural identity and heritage language to students’ personal development and integration. It does, in terms of possible intention, venture into language-as-right as it recognises the fact that the L1 has a key role to play in the lives of immigrant children. It does not detail, however, why this right has been given or explore its crucial role in the identity of the children. Nevertheless, in its primary focus on Faroese language and culture, it can also be categorised as pertaining to the language-as-a-problem orientation, as the emphasis on these students acquiring Faroese is given overweening importance. First language (L1) competency is important and child-family interaction in L1, continued formal instruction in it, and enabling parental attitudes to keep L1 active in the family are significant factors in a child’s development (Ball, 2011; McBrien, 2011). There is no policy based on this Executive Order, and in terms of implementation, this order is yet to be implemented or enacted in any form since its inception in 2020. The failure to proactively implement and enact this policy serves to further underline the assimilative approach that appears to overshadow the FSL environment and integration through education.

The curriculum for the FSL course titled *Føroyskt sum annaðmál* (2023) was designed for basic teaching in Faroese language, culture and society. It is divided into three levels and focuses on three core aspects of language teaching: spoken language, written language and culture and society. The main aim is two-fold: immigrant students should learn FSL based on the language skills they already possess to be able to understand, speak, read and write Faroese, and to strengthen Faroese language skills, so that the students can participate in the regular school system and complete their education as part of the mainstream. The curriculum outlines that teaching should support recognition and inclusion in school, society and community life. The document can be initially seen as foraying into language-as-resource in referring to the immigrant children’s L1 and existing language repertoire and cultural heritage.

On closer scrutiny, it becomes apparent that it is firmly entrenched in language-as-problem, given its singular focus on linguistic and cultural uniformity in the Faroese schools without taking into consideration the immigrant students’ language or culture. Significantly, the core component on culture and society states that:

...students should learn the Faroese language in various contexts. Teaching should enable students to participate in the Faroese community and society. Relevant social and cultural issues should be a part of teaching in order for students to learn about and understand Faroese society and culture. Students should learn about their rights and obligations in society, and what it means to be part of Faroese democracy with influence and responsibility (The Curriculum for FSL, 2023, p. 1 Translated by author, 2023).

Current research in the Faroese context has highlighted the challenges of uninformed policymaking and enactment as impacting the teaching of FSL (Vijayavarathan-R & Óskarsdóttir, 2023). The indications are that language-as-problem is the approach that dominates policymaking. The overarching policy overtly and covertly prioritises the preservation of Faroese language and culture, and its insular approach fails to consider the human right to language and identity for immigrant children. The implicit decision criteria, which lies in the pronounced interest and recognition given to Faroese language, culture and society, is narrow in its focus on preserving all that is Faroese. In its unnuanced attitudinal stance, it cannot lay convincing claims to being conducive to integration in today's multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic Faroese society.

Immigration does affect education systems, especially if the host country lacks infrastructure and resources – both people and funding – to meet the needs of this demographic, and there are indications that this foundation is lacking in the Faroe Islands (Vijayavarathan-R, 2023). Insufficient human and monetary resources can limit inclusion in schools and impact the quality of education. Schools could experience a reduction in education quality with a diverse student population leading to a complexity in linguistic repertoire, demands on teacher and teaching competences and challenges to the status quo of social norms in the host society (Vijayavarathan-R & Óskarsdóttir, 2023).

This does not imply that education policy or institutions can ignore the challenges and difficulties involved. Instead, there must be a concerted effort towards establishing inclusive education with a well-developed platform to facilitate the sustainability of a society. This should include fair educational policies, appropriate teacher education, training and appropriate curriculum, and, not least, school-home cooperation and engagement in the wellbeing of the child (Shutaleva et al., 2023). The implementation and enactment of policy also requires knowledge of the field, in order to form policy through engaging with it to the benefit of a particular student or school. All these factors build and support the ethos of education as a human right.

The issues illustrated below focus on the status quo in the Faroe Islands within the context of theoretical underpinnings that are incontrovertibly important for inclusion in education.

Education of immigrant children as a human right

For immigrant children, culture and language are significant contributors to identity (Costigan et al., 2010; Dahan, 2011; Phinney, 2002). Often this is presented in opposition to the dominant culture, language and socio-political attitudes, leading to ‘othering’, which may affect their sense of belonging. Othering is defined as “discursive processes by which powerful groups, ... define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups” (Jensen, 2011, p. 65). The resultant binary grouping juxtaposes the self with the other – a discourse that is apparent in the us and them (Gingrich, 2004) that define the norm and deviations from it (Borrero et al., 2012) with the potential consequence of one group taking the position of superiority for granted and engendering othering.

The United Nations in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) definitively outlines the obligations of nations to afford immigrant children quality education in its declaration:

... education of the child shall be directed to: (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own....

Faroese policy seems to fail to take into account Article 29 and implicit respect for the immigrant identity. The bias is towards the child learning Faroese and becoming cognisant about the Faroe Islands and its culture with very little focus on commitment to knowledge of the child’s cultural background or development of L1.

Access to education is indisputably an instrument for the facilitation of successful integration of children in both school and societal environments (Çelik & İçDuygu, 2018; Hamilton & Moore, 2003). There is no evidence of any strategic plan (Poulsen, 2023) or infrastructure for creating inclusion in education in the Faroe Islands (Vijayarathan-R, 2023), which undermines the chances for providing equitable access to education. The emphasis on education is necessary as it offers access to individual development, social and structural instrumentals that enable access to the essential labour and education opportunities needed to become contributing members of a society (Cebotari, 2015; Çelik & İçDuygu, 2018; Mansur, 2019).

Schools provide the initial contact for immigrant children with the new country they have entered, and therefore play a very significant role in their integration. (Anderson, 2003; European Education and Culture Executive Agency and Eurydice, 2019). “Given the education challenges that children encounter at destination, it is important to conceptualize the social, learning and emotional needs of immigrant children as they access the school system of the host country” (Arnot & Pinson, 2005 in Desmée & Cebotari, 2023, p.1465). Schools should lead from the front when it comes to inclusion, but if education policy adopts an assimilative stance, as it appears to in policy documents, then the role of schools becomes restrictive and limited as implementers and enactors of policy. The education infrastructure needs to be solid, supportive and inclusive to bridge the gap between immigrant students and Faroese society. Polemic Discourse, which sees the purpose of education of immigrant students as solely preserving Faroese language and culture, cannot fulfil the demands made on education to prepare students for 21st century challenges.

Research is unequivocal in recommending a multicultural stance in education for immigrant students (Anderson, 2003; Çelik & İçDuygu, 2018). Immigrant children have three paramount needs – social, learning and emotional, and these are described as significant contributory factors in their education. Cerna (2019) explicates these three needs: Social need refers to wanting to feel a sense of belonging, of being able to communicate and have a self-identity. Learning needs comprise language learning, keeping pace with school work and adapting to a new and different education system, and the emotional needs of wanting security and coping with the multiple challenges faced by these students given the complexities of their lives. Learning a new language, adapting to a new system of education in a foreign culture and becoming a part of the social milieu through interacting with peers and forming friendships all decidedly impact their performance (Dusi et al., 2014; Jørgensen, 2016, Loewen, 2003). The three needs must be incorporated in any approach to inclusive education for this target group (Arnot & Pinson, 2005).

These needs could enable focus on the wellbeing of the child; lay the foundation for a holistic approach to education for immigrant children; highlight the complexity of the task involved in ensuring a human rights approach to the education of immigrant children and its long-term contribution to the host nation. This entails designing curricula that reject othering and deficit thinking (Desmée & Cebotari, 2023). “Put simply, deficit approaches blame individuals for not meeting certain academic and social standards, not the systemic barriers in place” (Reyes & Duran, 202, p. 9). In its marked leaning towards assimilation, Faroese policy disregards these three needs of immigrant children, while seemingly embracing the othering approach towards immigrant children in its description of the demands on immigrant children from a deficit viewpoint.

Immigrant children must have the time and opportunity to come to terms with the new culture and customs and make sense of how they could intertwine elements of the culture of their country of origin into the adopted one (Frater-Mathieson, 2003). Learning can take place only when they are socially and psychologically equipped to accept the values and norms of the language to be learnt (Çelik & İçDuygu, 2018; Loewen, 2003). Furthermore, they must have a sense of belonging to the host society so that they can create “a positive self-concept of identity” and avoid negative impact on their well-being (Over, 2016, p. 1). Student wellbeing finds no mention in Faroese policy documents on FSL. The focus is primarily on the immigrant students learning Faroese and Faroese culture and is presented as the only key to belonging in Faroese society.

Teacher readiness significant for inclusive education

Research indicates that schools and teachers are not necessarily equipped to cope with the education needs of immigrant children (Essomba, 2017; Katsigianni & Kaila, 2019; Koehler & Schneider, 2019). Studies identify that teachers lack know-how and the capacity to provide an inclusive environment for culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant children; they often have insufficient knowledge and competences to provide equity in education that promotes inclusion (Harju-Autti & Sinkkonen, 2020; Iversen, 2020; Kimanen et al., 2019; Rodriguez-Izquierdo et al., 2020; Tarnanen & Palviainen, 2018).

Teachers also create policies through their teaching approaches in classrooms (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). Their policies are shaped by language ideologies and gain importance as their actions in the microcosm of the classroom impact students' language use, learning opportunities and outcomes (Godley, Reaser, & Moore, 2015). Teachers who value linguistic and cultural diversity are in a position to offer immigrant students informed pedagogical practice. “When teachers do not understand or value students' home languages, differences can be mistaken for deficits, and students whose linguistic repertoires differ from their teachers' can “suffer negative consequences” (Bernstein, Anderson, Close & Rodriguez Martinez, 2023, p. 191).

Crucially, teacher training to afford insight into cultural diversity and teaching linguistically diverse immigrant students carries the potential to help pre- and -in service teachers reflect on and gain awareness of their language ideologies (Fitzsimmons-Doolan, Palmer, & Henderson, 2017). This is the first step in helping them mould their beliefs to better serve the multilingual needs of immigrant students (García & Guerra, 2004).

A possible route to building teacher and teaching competences lies within the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2004; Fantini, 2009). Gay (2010) defines CRP as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make

learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). Deardoff (2006) defines intercultural competence as the “ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 247). To provide education equity, focus must be on preparing teachers to meet diverse students (Florian, 2009) and encourage teachers to explore and be open towards acquiring knowledge of their students’ culture and interest in them (Howard, 2003).

Teachers and other professionals should be trained to support the specific needs of immigrant children. They may need to be trained in intercultural competence (Barrett et al., 2013) to understand and fulfil the needs of this vulnerable target population (Miller et al., 2005). Teaching praxis must be grounded in principles of open discussion and critical thinking from a variety of perspectives and teacher awareness of their cognitions about immigrant children and teaching them. As Nehr (2001) points out, immigrant children need their L1 for a sense of self and identity, as also functional proficiency in the majority language to access learning processes to be able to interact with teachers and peers and find a sense of belonging within the community.

Teacher competences to teach immigrants in classroom requires preparedness to facilitate SLA (Bunar et al., 2017), which Cerna (2019) argues involves three focus areas: 1. teaching with a knowledge of legal and policy frameworks, understanding cultural diversity and approaches to it. 2. To inculcate an open-minded approach in teacher-student and teacher-parent communications that engenders respect within the school, empowers student engagement and manages conflict to counteract marginalisation. 3. In both management and teaching, factors to be taken into consideration comprise understanding of socio-cultural diversity in classrooms, creating an inclusive classroom so students can feel safe and secure to be able to learn, student-centred teaching and using culturally responsive teaching.

In the Faroese context, teacher preparation for FSL does not appear to take priority, despite the Executive Order (2020) which states that teachers must be qualified to teach FSL. Pre-service teacher graduate theses used here as internal secondary data (Elambo, 2022; Lognberg & Atlason, 2022) highlight the challenges faced in dealing with diverse students in the Faroese compulsory education system. The findings established by Elambo (2022) include: the need for pre and in-service teachers to be taught intercultural competence, the lack of government policy on interculturalism that makes “it difficult for educational administrators to properly determine necessary guidelines and instructions for development of intercultural education. Policies are crucial if changes should be implemented and followed” (p. 49); the lack of student-centred teaching to reach diverse students in the classroom to ensure inclusive education; and Elambo also recommends that Intercultural Education be included in the university curriculum for pre-service teachers.

Crucially, she adds that teachers acknowledge the challenges of immigrant students, but do not pursue training courses to acquire knowledge and competence in the field. She acknowledges that it would be difficult for teachers to teach in a culturally responsive manner if they have not been taught how to do so.

Lognberg & Atlason (2022) tackle how culturally responsive teaching (CRT) can help pre-service teachers; the prerequisites for helping teachers to be culturally responsive; and how teachers in the Faroe Islands are supported by school leadership to serve FSL learners. They quote representatives of compulsory school principals and of teacher qualification courses who agree that “there is no doubt that multiculturalism, multilingualism and multiculturalism are the greatest pedagogical challenges in the Nordic compulsory school system” (Lognberg & Atlason, 2022, pp. 23-24. Translated by author).

Lognberg & Atlason (2022) in their findings from the two biggest schools clearly indicate that in the two biggest compulsory schools, which represent a majority of immigrant children in the Faroe Islands, teachers do not receive the necessary support to understand or include multicultural and multilingual students in their teaching in an appropriate manner (Ibid). They conclude that the focus of the education system is on “Only student ability (in Faroese) and assimilating them and moving them into Faroese culture” (Lognberg & Atlason 2022, p. 33. Translated by author). They identify that deficit thinking (Hammond, 2015) and assimilation colour the cognitions of pre-service teachers. It appears that the language orientations of both pre-service teachers and school leaders point to language-as-problem.

Discussion

The current status of education for immigrant children in the Faroe Islands does not appear to fulfil the tenets of human rights in its inequitable access to learning FSL. Policy silence in the form of lack of interest and drive to promote immigrant children’s heritage languages cannot engender the necessary and desirable outcomes in an economically advanced nation. A dearth of resources in terms of FSL trained teachers and teaching materials to facilitate the inclusion of immigrant children together with assimilative attitudinal perspectives are cause for concern.

Policy measures must go beyond looking at language-as-problem and focus intensively on language-as-right and language-as-resource, if they are to serve the needs of this demographic in human rights terms and ethos. The multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic nature of Faroese society today necessitates perspectives that foster a discussion on how education can create awareness of the significance and importance of inclusion.

The challenges that face the Faroese education system are considerable and have consequences for teaching-learning and society at large, if human rights cannot be guaranteed. Faroese policy documents that ought to have a “governing effect on the actors mediating, regulating, and authorizing and co-ordinating people’s activities” (Smith, 2001, p. 160) are disregarded, leaving decision-making to individual schools, heads and teachers to struggle and adopt undefined, unstructured ad hoc measures to practise inclusion in some form (Poulsen, 2023). The Discourse promoting the lack of knowledge of Faroese language and culture as a problem impacts decision-making in policy implementation at school leadership level.

The very designation as immigrants has a strong impact on immigrant students. “[Newly arrived] migrant children’s anxieties as to be accustomed to a new language, academic rules, routines, buildings, and groups of people to function within their school environment... how individuals respond to such significant life events is dependent on inner strengths or vulnerabilities” (Hamilton, 2013, p. 174). Spratt (2016) defines the relationship between student and teacher – the “pedagogical relationship” – as one where teachers are cognisant of student needs and help them achieve learning outcomes. This relationship contributes to student wellbeing and offers a caring and secure environment through which such relationships create the basis for a safe and caring environment for students (Norozi, 2019, 2020). This implies that teachers need specific training for optimal teaching of immigrant students.

Lack of teacher preparation and readiness challenges the competence of teachers to deal with immigrant children and may contribute to teacher stress. When teachers are stressed the teacher-student relationship is also threatened (Wentzel, 2010), as is the ability of teachers to support their students. “If they perceive that they are unable to help the immigrant students, then emotional exhaustion, cynicism (depersonalization), and low levels of self-efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). ... Inefficacy comes from excessive demands and not enough resources to meet those demands; it is defined by self-perceived ineffectiveness...” (Herman et al., 2018, p. 91).

Teachers who teach immigrant children FSL do share their sense of helplessness and lack of self-efficacy. They are aware of the structural weaknesses and lack of commitment from several directions, which makes them feel that they are not doing their best (í Grund & Láadal, 2020). Ereş (2016) draws attention to the main difficulties reported by teachers and school leaders with regard to the education of immigrant children. He identifies the circumstances created by both the absence of a national policy and a structured framework for the education of immigrant children together with lack of teacher preparation. This status quo affects the ability to enact policy for quality teaching in the Faroese context and bears out this complexity.

Conclusion and implications

Faroese policy does not decisively underpin education as a fundamental human right that can facilitate inclusion of the immigrant student population. The infrastructure for inclusion, which could support and sustain education, is yet to be established. This means that school leaders and teachers, who otherwise play a significant role in education, have no clear direction or plan to adopt for policy implementation or enactment. All indications based on policy analysis appear to demonstrate that Faroese schools have not been equipped with the tools necessary to include immigrant children. In this melee of uncertainty, immigrant children appear to be stranded, and as evidenced in the article, these circumstances cannot amount to providing education as a human right.

Multicultural diversity is in the Faroe Islands to stay, and it demands that a transformative and inclusive policy be designed by policymakers, implemented by school leaders and enacted by teachers in the Faroese school system to secure a fundamental human right for immigrant children – education. It is critical to acknowledge that school leaders and teachers do need support and help if human rights are to be attained through inclusive education. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) can support and work with immigrant students' sense of self-worth, acceptance of their culture and individual skills – the different ethnicities are accepted and valued (Gay, 2010). CRT might allow teachers to develop teacher and teaching competencies for immigrant students and enable teachers to feel that they have self-efficacy in teaching. Diversity can provide a platform to include and empower these students as resources to give the best of themselves by emphasising their worth and contribution (Garcia et al., 2010 in Acosta & Sanczyk, 2019).

Inclusive education for immigrant children is complex, and it is crucial to acknowledge that all levels of school as an organisation have to be equipped to create best practices for this target group. Governments carry a tremendous responsibility in the creation of a dynamic education system, where inclusion is actively sought and underpinned by enabling policy, as well as educating teachers and school leaders to prepare them for the challenges arising from diversity in schools. The high level of uncertainty around how to optimally serve this target group creates an urgency, which must be addressed as a first and pivotal step to ensuring human rights, equity and social justice in education for immigrant children in the Faroe Islands. It must be concluded that there is some way to go in shaping Faroese education policy, before it is in a position to claim that inclusive education as a human right is being facilitated and prioritised in the education strategy for first and second-generation immigrant children in the Faroe Islands.

Further research

The article affords little voice to the perspectives of teachers or school leaders as the focus is on policy. The rationale is that while policy cannot and does not fully dictate action, it does serve to create accountability among education authorities. In the Faroe Islands, education is governed top down with multiple demands on schools and little room for negotiation. In the absence of policy, bottom-up coping mechanisms develop, and these may generate less than ideal ad hoc practices for teaching immigrant students, which appears to be the situation in the Faroe Islands. It would therefore be relevant to study how principals and teachers implement and enact policy to achieve inclusion of Faroese immigrant children.

No conflict of interest has been identified in preparing this conceptual or desktop study. No funding was sought or received for this article.

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