

Intercultural Competence in the English and Foreign Language Curricula in Norway – Good Intentions, Vague Expectations?

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Unter dem Einfluss des "Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmens für Sprachen" (GeR) führten die politischen Entscheidungsträger bei der Lehrplanreform 2006 (LK06) die interkulturelle Kompetenz in den norwegischen Bildungskontext ein, insbesondere in den Lehrplan für Englisch und den Lehrplan für Fremdsprachen. In der Lehrplanrevision 2020 (LK20) wurde die interkulturelle Perspektive verstärkt. Anhand einer thematischen Dokumentenanalyse wird in dieser Studie untersucht, wie sich die Erwartungen an die Entwicklung der interkulturellen Kompetenz von Schülerinnen und Schülern, wie sie vom Europarat (2001, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2022) definiert wurden, in den Lehrplänen LK06 und LK20 widerspiegeln, wobei die Lehrpläne für Englisch und für andere Fremdsprachen verglichen werden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Lehrpläne im Allgemeinen mehr Wert auf interkulturelle Dezentrierung legen als auf politische Aspekte und kritisches kulturelles Bewusstsein. Zudem wird deutlich, dass interkulturelle Kompetenz in den Englisch-Lehrplänen und den Lehrplänen für andere Fremdsprachen gleich häufig angesprochen wird, obwohl die Schülerinnen und Schüler in Norwegen über höhere Englischkenntnisse verfügen. Letztlich verdeutlichen die Ergebnisse, dass die Lehrpläne hinsichtlich der Erwartungen, wie interkulturelle Kompetenz im Sprachunterricht gefördert werden kann, vage bleiben.

1. Introduction

At the turn of the 21st century, intercultural competence within language education was addressed extensively in international studies (e.g., Byram 1997; Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet 1999; Byram, Gribkova & Starkey 2002; Guilherme 2002) and in education policy documents (e.g., Council of Europe [CoE] 2001; UNESCO 2006). In Norway, at the time, research on intercultural competence in second and foreign language education was only beginning (Fenner 2001; Simensen 2003), and the concept was introduced into the 2006 national curriculum (hereafter LK06) and later reinforced in the 2020 national curriculum revision

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(hereafter LK20). Both LK06 and LK20 are heavily influenced by CoE definitions of intercultural competence (Speitz 2020; Heggernes 2022; Speitz & Myklevold 2022).

However, in Norwegian curricula, there seems to be a difference in interest in interculturality across language subjects, with more explicit emphasis on intercultural competence in what is called the 'foreign language' subjects (e.g., French, German, and Spanish) than in the English subject. This can be seen as paradoxical, as Norwegian students generally have a higher proficiency in English than in other foreign languages. In the Norwegian educational system, English is separated from other foreign languages in the national curricula, and scholars consider English to be in transition from a foreign to a second language (Simensen 2014; Rindal 2014a, 2014b). Hence, one would assume that learners of English in Norway have a better linguistic basis for engaging in intercultural encounters than that of learners of other foreign languages. To address this seeming paradox, this article investigates expectations toward developing students' intercultural competence as expressed in LK06 and LK20, comparing the English and the foreign language curricula. A comparison of these curricula is particularly salient in the Norwegian educational context, not only because of the difference in status between English and other foreign languages but also because the changes between the two reforms enable a possibility to trace the inclusion of intercultural competence in policy documents on language education over time. Hereafter, I will refer to the English curriculum from 2006 as LK06-E and the one from 2020 as LK20-E. Likewise, I will refer to the curriculum for foreign languages from 2006 as LK06-FL and the one from 2020 as LK20-FL to clearly differentiate between English-specific curricula and curricula for other foreign languages. As there is no comprehensive curriculum for all foreign languages but a separate one for the English subject, the structure of these curricula does not follow the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (CEFR) in this respect.

In the following, I present how selected European policy documents conceptualize intercultural competence (Section 2), account for the educational and linguistic context in Norway (Section 3) and review previous research on the role of intercultural competence in Norwegian national curricula (Section 4). Subsequently, the methodological approach is addressed (Section 5) before the findings are presented (Section 6) and discussed (Section 7).

2. European policy documents on intercultural competence

Numerous theoretical-conceptual publications exist which propose different definitions of intercultural competence (e.g., Byram 1997, 2021; CoE 2001,

2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2022; Guilherme 2002; Deardorff 2006; Risager 2007; Lid-dicoat & Scarino 2013; Dervin 2016). Definitions put forward in policy documents published by the CoE (e.g., CoE 2001, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2022) are largely affected by Byram's (1997) work on intercultural competence. The definitions formulated by the CoE constitute the theoretical basis for this article, as they are central to the understanding of intercultural competence expressed in LK06 and LK20.

Byram (1997: 34) proposes a model of intercultural communicative competence, consisting of five *savoirs*: attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical cultural awareness/political education (*savoir s'engager*). He thus highlights the complexity of intercultural competence, ranging from practical skills to knowledge, attitudes, and critical thinking. Moreover, Byram argues in favor of replacing the commonly accepted native speaker ideal in second and foreign language education with the ideal of the intercultural speaker, who seeks to "decentre" (ibid.), both to better understand the other's viewpoint and to see their own culture from the outside. Similarly, Guilherme (2002: 125) defines the intercultural speaker as a "border-crosser [...] who negotiate[s] between the universal and the particular".

Byram's (1997) work on intercultural competence has been central both to scholars and policymakers. It has, however, also met critique, notably by Dervin (2016: 15), who argues that Byram views identity as something stable and fails to notice that "who I am is unstable, contextual, and has to be negotiated with others". Dervin also considers Byram's model to be "somewhat naïve" (ibid.: 76) – notably because of its emphasis on curiosity and openness – and posits that one should constantly "question one's attitudes about self and other" (ibid.). Byram has met some of the critique in the revised edition of *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence* published in 2021. While detailing this debate is beyond the scope of the present article building strongly on Byram's hypotheses, it is important to point out that Byram's work on intercultural competence is not unanimously acclaimed.

Several aspects of Byram's (1997) understanding of intercultural competence found their way into CoE policy documents. The ideal of the ability to decenter is brought into the CEFR as "knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community'" (CoE 2001: 103). The CEFR argues that this kind of intercultural awareness includes an understanding that there is "regional and social diversity in both worlds" (ibid.). In the "Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture" (RFCDC), intercultural competence is defined as the ability to respond appropriately to intercultural situations, that is, situations

that "arise when an individual perceives another person (or group of people) as being culturally different from themselves" (CoE 2018a: 31), emphasizing the relation between the self and the other. In addition, the RFCDC proposes a model that includes several of Byram's (1997) *savoirs* as important competence areas – namely 'knowledge and critical understanding', 'skills', and 'attitudes' – and adds the competence area of 'values', reinforcing Byram's (1997) complex understanding of intercultural competence.

The latest edition of the CoE's *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters. Context, Concepts and Theories* (CoE 2022: 14) defines "interculturality" as "the capacity to experience cultural otherness and to use this experience to reflect on matters that are usually taken for granted within one's own cultures and environment". The CoE (2022) further highlights the importance of "being open to, interested in, curious about and empathetic toward people from other cultures" (ibid.), argues that such attitudes will help learners develop greater "self-knowledge and self-understanding" (ibid.), and posits that learners should seek to develop intercultural citizenship to "transcend a diversity that is divisive and one that draws people together" (ibid.: 21).

In sum, Byram's (1997) and the CoE's (2001, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2022) complex understandings of intercultural competence emphasize, first, the importance of being able to decenter, in the sense of trying to understand the other and oneself. Second, they stress the edifying aspect of respect, tolerance, curiosity, and empathy (edifying in the sense that learning and expressing these attitudes is seen as morally and intellectually beneficial to the students). Third, they contain a political dimension, with an explicit focus on citizenship and democracy. Fourth, they highlight the importance of critical cultural awareness. These four aspects are central to my understanding of intercultural competence in this article and will be used as categories in the thematic document analysis (see Sections 5-7).

Of note, Byram (1997: 34) defines the "ability to decentre" as a "willingness to suspend beliefs in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging". Here, I interpret decentering in the context of language learning in a broader sense, arguing that to understand people with another cultural background, it is always necessary to decenter to some extent. Thus, my understanding of this concept encompasses, on the one hand, insight into and understanding of foreign cultures and, on the other hand, the ability to compare this with one's own cultural experiences and reinterpret one's own beliefs. This is also an important aspect of the intercultural *Bildung* perspective, understood as "transforming one's own perspective in encounters

with others" (Bohlin 2013: 391f.). In the following, I present the Norwegian educational and linguistic context before I review research on intercultural competence in the Norwegian national curricula.

3. The Norwegian educational and linguistic context

The CEFR (CoE 2001) and later the RFCDC (CoE 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) had a major influence on the Norwegian educational reforms LK06 and LK20 (Speitz 2020; Heggernes 2022; Speitz & Myklevold 2022).

The LK06 curriculum consists of three parts: 1) the core curriculum, 2) the quality framework, and 3) the different subject curricula. The core curriculum was not renewed (from 1993) but is the overriding ideological document, together with the quality framework, which establishes a new set of principles adopted by the Norwegian National Assembly in 2006. The curricula for each subject were renewed in 2006, following the same structure, comprising a set of basic skills (i.e., oral, written, reading, digital, and numeracy skills) to be present in all subjects, with subject-specific descriptions for each skill and subject-specific competence aims for the students to achieve, organized into so-called main subject areas. Teachers are granted methodological freedom for how to help students achieve their competence aims (Imsen 2020).

The LK20 curriculum revision consists of two parts: 1) a new core curriculum (from 2017) grounded in the Education Act (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2009) and 2) new subject curricula. The new core curriculum (2017) replaces the former (1993) and highlights the importance of in-depth learning. The subject curricula contain subject-specific information on basic skills and competence aims, but the former emphasis on main subject areas is replaced by core elements. In addition, each subject integrates one or more interdisciplinary topics, of which "democracy and citizenship" is included in both LK20-E and LK20-FL, a topic that is closely related to intercultural competence (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training [NDET] 2017: 16). Table 1 provides an overview of the structure of the two curricula.

Table 1: Structure of the Norwegian national curricula LK06 and LK20²

LK06		LK20	
Core curriculum (1993)		Core curriculum (2017)	
The quality framework (2006)			
English curriculum (LK06-E)	Foreign language curriculum (LK06-FL)	English curriculum (LK20-E)	Foreign language curriculum (LK20-FL)
Purpose	Purpose	Relevance and central values	Relevance and central values
Main subject areas: - Language learning - Oral communication - Written communication - Culture, society and literature	Main subject areas: - Language learning - Communication - Language, culture and society	Core elements: - Communication - Language learning - Working with texts in English	Core elements: - Communication - Intercultural competence - Language learning and multilingualism - Language and technology
		Interdisciplinary topic: - Democracy and citizenship	Interdisciplinary topic: - Democracy and citizenship
Basic skills	Basic skills	Basic skills	Basic skills
Competence aims: After year 2 After year 4 After year 7 After year 10 After year 11 (general studies) / 12 (vocational studies)	Competence aims: After year 10 (level 1) After year 12 (level 2)	Competence aims and assessment: After year 2 After year 4 After year 7 After year 10 After year 11 (vocational studies and general studies)	Competence aims and assessment: After year 10 (level 1) After year 12 (level 2)
Teaching hours	Teaching hours	Teaching hours	Teaching hours

Both LK06 and LK20 state that at age 6, Norwegian children begin their ten years of compulsory education, divided into primary (years 1-7) and lower secondary school (years 8-10). Upper secondary education (years 11-13) is voluntary. English is a mandatory subject throughout years 1-11 and optional in years 12-13.

2 Competence aims relevant for this article are in bold. "Purpose", "Basic skills", and "Relevance and central values" refer to separate sections in the two curricula.

Students can choose a foreign language (e.g., French, German, or Spanish) in years 8-10 (i.e., level 1) and continue with the same language in years 11-12 (i.e., level 2) or choose a new one in years 11-13 (level 1). In the 2022-23 school year, 73 % of Norwegian year 8 students chose either French, German, or Spanish as their foreign language subject. The majority of the remaining 27 % did not choose a foreign language subject but the practice-oriented subject "Working life" (*Arbeidslivsfag*) (Norwegian National Centre for English and other Foreign Languages in Education 2023).

Overall, significantly more time is allotted to learning English than to learning other foreign languages in the Norwegian school system. At the end of lower secondary school (year 10), the students have had a total of 588 hours of English (years 1-10) and a total of 222 hours of foreign languages (years 8-10). In addition, students in Norway have easy access to English-speaking cultures outside school (Brevik 2019; Brevik & Holm 2022) but limited access to other foreign languages (Vold & Brkan 2020). While English is transitioning from a foreign to a second language, foreign languages, such as French, German, and Spanish, are considered "truly foreign" (Vold 2022) – a distinction that is also implied by the existence of separate subject curricula for English and foreign languages.

4. Literature review on intercultural competence in the Norwegian national curricula

The aim of this section is to present an overview of studies on intercultural competence in the Norwegian national curricula for the English and foreign language subjects over time.

Studies on the LK06 reform identify intercultural competence both in LK06-E and LK06-FL. Lund (2008) argues that although intercultural competence is implicitly expressed in the purpose section of LK06-E, this is not reflected in the competence aims expected to be reached by the students, making it unclear how teachers can bring intercultural perspectives into the English classrooms. In line with these findings, Dypedahl (2007) and Heggernes (2014) note the presence of an intercultural perspective in both LK06-E and LK06-FL but argue that this perspective does not go beyond the expected student competence to compare traditions, customs, and ways of living within and across the target language areas and Norway. Concerning LK06-FL, Vold (2014: 9) posits that the intercultural dimension is subordinate to the acquisition of linguistic skills: "[W]hen practical and immediate utility, skills, and assessment of progression are so strongly em-

bedded in the teaching, the intercultural *Bildung* dimension is easily overshadowed by the focus on skills and utility" (translated from Norwegian, JCU³). Finally, Brown and Habegger-Conti (2017: 18) identify a "broad and united push for intercultural competence" in LK06-E but argue that the understanding of intercultural competence is vague because largely dependent on teachers' interpretation of the Norwegian verb *å drøfte* 'to discuss'.

Shortly after the publication of the LK20 reform, several studies addressed aspects of intercultural competence both in LK20-E and LK20-FL. Brown (2021: 16) posits that the intercultural dimension was only implicitly present in LK06-E, and that it was characterized by a "view of culture as related to nations". She argues that in LK20-E, intercultural competence had a more central role. She bases this finding on several factors: the term "intercultural competence" is used explicitly in the curriculum, it is no longer related to specific national cultures, and the curriculum encourages a critical approach to cultures (ibid.: 20). However, she also takes a critical stance on LK20-E, observing that "similar to LK06, the LK20 curriculum remains relatively unspecific in terms of both content and methods" (ibid.: 19) without detailing this lack of specificity. Speitz (2020: 35) investigates developments in LK20-FL in general and posits that the interdisciplinary topic "democracy and citizenship" is "closely related to the core element *Intercultural competence* (emphasis in original)", whereas Speitz and Myklevold (2022) find that there is a significant emphasis on the interconnection between multilingualism and intercultural competence in LK20-E. Their findings align with Heggernes (2022: 151), who argues that intercultural competence plays a more prominent role in LK20-E than in LK06-E and connects this to the finding that LK20-E "has a stronger focus on English as a Lingua Franca". Finally, Hoff's (2022: 186) study on 21st century skills and English language literature in Norway concludes that the LK20-E presents complex definitions of culture, stating that "the curriculum reflects an understanding of culture and identity as dynamic, multifaceted concepts", although arguing that LK20-E does not provide a definition of the term "intercultural competence".

Although a considerable number of scholarly research exists on the relevance and inclusion of intercultural competence in the LK06 and LK20 English and foreign language curricula in Norway, most studies investigated the English curricula, with few studies explicitly comparing LK06 and LK20, and no study systematically comparing the English and the foreign language curricula. This comparative aspect is necessary to allow a general reflection on the role of intercultural competence across second and foreign language education. In addition, although

3 If not specified otherwise, the translations from Norwegian to English are conducted by the author.

the studies presented above establish a presence of intercultural competence in the curricula, they do not clearly state how intercultural competence is conceptualized in these documents. To address these research gaps, this article investigates the following research question: Which prominent differences and similarities between expectations toward developing students' intercultural competence in the English and the foreign language subjects can be identified across the subject curricula and over time?

5. Methodology

In this study, I use document analysis as my interpretive framing. In this section, I explain how I proceeded with the analysis of the documents included for analysis: the two core curricula and the four subject curricula. To conduct a thematic document analysis, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase guide. In addition, to compare the English and the foreign language curricula, I used explicit qualitative comparison (Palmberger & Gingrich 2014), emphasizing similarities and differences between the documents. In the following, I present the six phases of my analysis.

Phase 1, data familiarization (Braun & Clarke 2021): I read and re-read the data and noted initial ideas about the presence of intercultural competence in the selected documents.

Phase 2, data coding (ibid.): I looked for words, expressions, and sentences that corresponded to relevant CoE definitions of intercultural competence. Examples of such words or expressions included, but were not limited to, 'culture', 'cultural', 'intercultural', 'multicultural', 'pluricultural', 'plurality', 'values', 'attitudes', 'skills', 'knowledge', 'understanding', 'insight', 'tolerance', 'respect', 'identity', 'criticism', 'critical', 'differences', 'democracy', 'citizenship', 'cultural diversity', and 'cultural complexity'. Examples of relevant sentences were "deeper understanding of others and of oneself" (LK06) and "insight into how we live together with different perspectives, attitudes and views of life" (LK20). I have read all the documents in their original Norwegian version but quoted from the official English translations.

Phases 3-5, generating, developing, and defining themes (Braun & Clarke 2021): I collated the observed words, expressions, and sentences thematically (phase 3), verified that the chosen themes were relevant for the English and the foreign language curricula (phase 4), and defined the following themes (phase 5): 1) use of the word 'intercultural'; 2) decentering (including a *Bildung* perspective of both understanding the other and understanding oneself); 3) edifying aspects of intercultural competence (e.g., respect, tolerance, curiosity, valuing diversity);

4) political aspects of intercultural competence (e.g., democracy, citizenship); and 5) critical cultural awareness.

Phase 6, writing the report (*ibid.*): Finally, I wrote up my analysis in five parts corresponding with the five themes (Section 6), before I discussed the findings (Section 7).

6. Findings

In this section, I present the findings of the thematic analysis. As indicated in Section 3, the Norwegian national curricula comprise both a core curriculum – covering all subjects – and additional subject curricula. In this article, I systematically compare expectations toward developing students' intercultural competence across the English and foreign language curricula from both reforms, focusing particularly on lower secondary school (years 8–10). However, I also briefly refer to the core curricula in the beginning of each section, since they constitute an overriding framework that teachers of all subjects must consider in their teaching. The study involves two comparative lenses: one is the longitudinal comparison across the LK06 and LK20 reforms, and the other is the interdisciplinary comparison across the English and foreign language curricula. These findings will be presented according to the five themes presented above: the term 'intercultural', decentering, edifying aspects, political aspects, and critical cultural awareness.

6.1 The term 'intercultural'

The term 'intercultural' (theme 1) does not occur in the 1993 or 2017 core curricula, nor in the 2006 Quality framework. However, as we will see in the sections below, several passages in the three documents correspond to intercultural perspectives as defined by the CoE (2001, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2022), both concerning decentering (theme 2), edifying aspects (theme 3), political aspects (theme 4), and critical cultural awareness (theme 5).

Concerning the LK06, findings show that while the term 'intercultural' appears in the curriculum, it only does so in one subject. It does not appear at all in LK06-E. In contrast, 'intercultural competence' occurs once in LK06-FL, in the purpose section, where it is stated that "competence in several languages and intercultural competence are prerequisites for successful communication and participation in many areas" (NDET 2006b: 2). This inclusion as one of the subject's purposes indicates the prominence of interculturality in foreign language education in Norway, as opposed to English education, although no definition was offered.

In contrast, the LK20 curriculum explicitly refers to the term 'intercultural' in both subject curricula and in several sections. In LK20-E, the 'relevance and central values' section states that "English shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" (NDET 2019a: 2), indicating that interculturality concerns both social and cognitive aspects of human life and communication. Furthermore, intercultural competence is referred to in the core element 'working with texts in English', emphasizing critical thinking: "by reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus, the pupils will develop intercultural competence" (ibid.: 3).

Similarly, the 'relevance and central values' section in LK20-FL indicates that the subject "can help pupils to develop their intercultural understanding" (NDET 2019b: 2), although with no definition of the term. Moreover, a new core element is dedicated to intercultural competence, including a definition: "Intercultural competence means developing curiosity about, insight into and understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity, both locally and globally, to interact with others" (ibid.: 2f.). This definition touches upon intercultural attitudes (curiosity), knowledge (insight, understanding), and skills (interact). In addition, the expression "cultural and linguistic diversity" links this definition to the intercultural competence of valuing cultural diversity in the CoE (2022: 39). The term also figures briefly in three other sections in the LK20 foreign language curriculum: in the basic skills section related to reading, in the core element section related to 'language and technology', and finally in the section 'assessment of coursework', which establishes that "the teacher shall award a grade in the foreign language on level 1 based on the pupil's communicative and intercultural competence" (NDET 2019b: 5). It is not, however, specified which aspects of intercultural competence shall be assessed by the teachers, nor how it shall be assessed.

In sum, from a purely terminological perspective, counting the occurrences of the term 'intercultural', intercultural competence was clearly more present in both LK20 subject curricula, while only in the foreign language curriculum in LK06. Further, the presence was more prominent in LK20-FL than in LK20-E. Both LK20 subject curricula refer to "intercultural understanding" in the section 'relevance and central values', whereas the term "intercultural competence" is used six times in LK20-FL, in various sections, but only once in LK20-E, in the section 'working with texts in English'. While the only explicit definition is found in LK20-FL, LK20-E contains specific presentations of the term, associating it with communication, reflection, interpretation, and critical thinking in order to understand social and cognitive aspects of human life.

6.2 Decentering – understanding the other and oneself

Despite the relative lack of terminological explicitness on intercultural competence, the intercultural decentering perspective is clearly present in both core curricula and in the four subject curricula. In the 2006 Quality framework, it is established that education shall enable students "to acquire knowledge on different cultures [and] cultural understanding and develop self-insight and identity, respect and tolerance" (NDET 2006a: 3). In the 2017 Core curriculum, revised in preparation for LK20, the decentering aspect is highlighted in several passages, which posit that the "experiences the pupils gain in the encounter with different cultural expressions and traditions help them to form their identity" (NDET 2017: 6) and establish that the "teaching and training shall give the pupils a good foundation for understanding themselves, others and the world" (ibid.: 10).

All four subject curricula contain aspects of intercultural decentering in three respects: (a) through words such as 'insight' and 'understanding', (b) by comparison with students' own cultures, and (c) through a *Bildung* dimension.

a) 'Insight' and 'understanding': First, in all four curricula, the words 'insight' and 'understanding' are often used in sentences implying intercultural perspectives. These two words imply profound knowledge, suggesting that the curricula highlight the importance of not only acquiring superficial or factual knowledge about different cultural backgrounds but truly getting to know them as if experiencing them from within, decentering from one's own cultural background.

In LK06-E, this was established in the purpose section, stating that "the subject of English shall contribute to providing insight into the way people live and different cultures where English is the primary or the official language" (NDET 2013: 2), and in the description of the main subject area 'culture, society, and literature', establishing that it should provide students with "cultural understanding in a broad sense [...] connected to social issues, literature and other cultural expressions" (ibid.: 3) in English-speaking countries. Similarly, LK06-FL stresses that learning languages "can increase our understanding of how people live and think" (NDET 2006b: 2) and that the main subject area 'language, culture and society' is concerned with "cultural understanding in a broad sense" (ibid.: 3).

While the LK20 curricula include these terms more infrequently, they nonetheless state that the English subject should provide "insight into ways of living, ways of thinking and traditions of indigenous peoples" (NDET 2019a: 3) and that the foreign language subject should help the students "gain understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity" (NDET 2019b: 2).

b) Comparison with one's own culture(s): Second, in addition to the use of specific terms that imply decentering, the curricula often call for students to conduct comparisons with their own culture(s), suggesting students should learn

about decentering and how to be open to other perspectives than their own. Such comparisons are mostly proposed in the four curricula's sections on competence aims.

In LK06-E, the competence aim that most clearly pertains to intercultural competence is to enable students to "discuss and elaborate on the way people live and how they socialise in Great Britain, USA and other English-speaking countries and Norway" (NDET 2013: 8). In LK06-FL, students are expected to be able to "talk about daily life, persons and current events in the language region in question and in Norway" (NDET 2006b: 4) and to "compare some aspects of traditions, customs and ways of living in the language region in question and in Norway" (ibid.: 4). Whereas the competence aims in the LK06 curricula often focus on nations (Great Britain, the USA, and Norway – and "the language region," in singular), this partly changes with the LK20 curricula.

In the competence aims for LK20-E, there is no reference to either Great Britain or the USA, and instead, the students are expected to "explore and reflect on the situation of indigenous peoples in the English-speaking world and in Norway" (NDET 2019a: 9). In LK20-FL, two competence aims explicitly connected to the core element 'intercultural competence' (NDET 2019c) include a comparative aspect: "explore and describe ways of life, traditions and geography in areas where the language is spoken and identify connections to one's own background" (NDET 2019b: 5) and "explore and describe artistic and cultural expressions from areas where the language is spoken and express one's own experiences" (ibid.: 5). In the English subject, then, the change from focusing on Great Britain and the USA to the English-speaking world signals an intercultural shift toward global perspectives, although the students are still expected to compare with Norway. Conversely, in the foreign language subject, the singular "language region" (LK06-FL) is changed to "areas where the language is spoken" (LK20-FL), and Norway (LK06-FL) is replaced with "one's own background" and "one's own experiences" (LK20-FL). While the comparative aspect is present in all four curricula, it is more clearly present in the foreign language curriculum than in the English curriculum, both in LK06 and in LK20.

c) *Bildung* dimension: Finally, the third aspect of decentering found in all four curricula is an intercultural *Bildung* dimension, in which students' encounters with foreign cultures shall contribute to forming their identity and enriching their understanding of themselves and their cultural backgrounds. LK06-E states that the reading of literature could "instil [...] a deeper understanding of others and of oneself" (NDET 2013: 2), whereas LK06-FL posits that learning a foreign language will provide "insight into the way others live and their views on life, values and cultures, which might lead to greater awareness of one's own culture" (NDET 2006b: 2) and that working with different cultural forms of expression from "the

target language country" (ibid.: 3) can "enhance one's insight into one's own living conditions and identity" (ibid.).

In LK20, the *Bildung* dimension is reinforced. The English subject is presented as being important for students' "cultural understanding [...] and identity development," opening "for new perspectives on the world and ourselves" and developing students' "understanding that their views of the world are culture-dependent" (NDET 2019a: 2). This ideal of students realizing that their worldview is culture-dependent is repeated in the presentation of the interdisciplinary topic 'democracy and citizenship'. Moreover, the core element 'working with texts in English' shall enable the students to see "their own identity and others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context" (ibid.: 3). Similarly, in LK20-FL, it is argued that "knowledge of other cultures and ways of life" will provide "valuable insight into one's own and others' backgrounds" and that learning about "different identities, values and ways of thinking [...] in areas where the language is spoken" will help the students "develop an understanding that our views of the world are culture-dependent" (NDET 2019b: 2). In almost the same wording as LK20-E, LK20-FL also states that knowledge about "cultures, ways of life and ways of thinking open for new perspectives on the world and ourselves" (ibid.: 3).

In sum, I identified similarities between the terminology used in the English and in the foreign language curricula. These similarities highlight parallels between the two subjects regarding intercultural decentering aspects in the curricula. In both the English and foreign language curricula, the words 'insight' and 'understanding' are used to describe the knowledge students should have of other cultures, not only across the subjects but also across the LK06 and LK20 reforms. Moreover, the comparison with students' own cultural backgrounds is highlighted in the competence aims, and the *Bildung* perspective is present in all four curricula, although reinforced in LK20. Finally, there is also a change toward a tendency of a more open understanding of the term 'culture', particularly in the foreign language curricula, where the singular "language region" (LK06-FL) is changed to "areas where the language is spoken" (LK20-FL), and "Norway" (LK06-FL) is replaced with "one's own background" and "one's own experiences" (LK20-FL).

6.3 Edifying aspects of intercultural competence

The third notion of interculturality, present across both core curricula and all four curricula, pertains to edifying aspects (i.e., proposing moral or intellectual instruction relating to intercultural competence), although the terminology is somewhat different in the various documents. The 1993 Core curriculum establishes that

education in Norway shall "counter prejudice and discrimination and promote mutual respect and tolerance between groups with different lifestyles" (NDET 1993: 5), while one of the purposes of education, according to the 2017 Core curriculum, is to "provide insight into cultural diversity and show respect for the individual's convictions, [...] and] promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking" (NDET 2017: 3).

In LK06-E, 'respect' occurs twice (NDET 2013: 2f.), notably in this passage: "cultural insight can promote greater interaction, understanding and respect between persons with different cultural backgrounds" (ibid.: 2). Similarly, LK06-FL establishes that "cultural insight can promote greater interaction, understanding and respect among people with different cultural backgrounds" (NDET 2006b: 2), and that working with cultural forms of expression "can develop interest, understanding and tolerance" (ibid.: 3).

In the LK20 subject curricula, edifying aspects are often presented by expressions such as 'curiosity', 'diversity', and 'prejudice'. LK20-E argues that students' understanding that their worldview is culture-dependent can "open for new ways to interpret the world, promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudice" (NDET 2019a: 2). Notably, similar phrasing is used in LK20-FL, stating that students should be "open for additional ways of interpreting the world, help to cultivate curiosity and engagement and prevent prejudice" (NDET 2019b: 3). LK20-FL also includes the word 'tolerance' in the purpose section, stating that students should learn about "different identities, values and ways of thinking", which would enable them to "develop tolerance" (ibid.: 2). A main difference between LK06 and LK20 concerned the word 'diversity', which occurred four times in each LK20 subject curriculum, whereas it did not occur in any intercultural context in the LK06 subject curricula.

Overall, the edifying aspect of intercultural competence is clearly present in all four subject curricula. I found that the choice of words in one subject mirrors the choice of words in the other, with small variations, such as 'tolerance' in the foreign language curricula and 'curiosity' and 'preventing prejudice' in LK20, whereas LK06 emphasizes how the students should develop respect.

6.4 Political aspects of intercultural competence

While decentering and edifying aspects of intercultural competence hold a significant presence across both core curricula and all four subject curricula, political dimensions are less apparent. The 1993 Core curriculum states that education in Norwegian schools shall "further democracy, national identity, and international conscience" (NDET 1993: 3), thus partly addressing the political dimension of

intercultural competence mentioned in CoE documents concerning the importance of democracy. This political dimension is, however, more clearly addressed in the 2017 Core curriculum through the interdisciplinary topic 'democracy and citizenship'.

In LK06, the purpose sections of both subject curricula emphasize political aspects. LK06-E argues that "cultural insight can [...] strengthen democratic involvement and co-citizenship" (NDET 2013: 2), whereas LK06-FL states that "cultural competence contributes to a sound upbringing and fosters democratic commitment and responsible citizenship" (NDET 2006b: 2).⁴ This aspect is however not elaborated elsewhere in the documents, with the exception of one competence aim in LK06-E, in which the students should develop competence to "describe and reflect on the situation of indigenous peoples in English-speaking countries" (NDET 2013: 9). Bearing in mind denials of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination around the world, this is not only a historical but also a political issue (Amnesty International 2023).

Conversely, in LK20, the political aspect is strengthened by the inclusion of the interdisciplinary topic 'democracy and citizenship', which is clearly connected to intercultural competence in both subject curricula. In addition, both documents stress the importance of promoting the students' "engagement", linking this to their ability to "prevent prejudice" (NDET 2019a: 3; NDET 2019b: 3), which can be interpreted as a political commitment. Nevertheless, this aspect is not elaborated elsewhere in the documents. Instead, the competence aims address cultural issues that are not explicitly political, except for one competence aim in LK20-E, in which a comparative aspect was added. The aim states that the students shall be able to "explore and reflect on the situation of indigenous peoples in the English-speaking world and in Norway" (NDET 2019a: 9).

6.5 Critical cultural awareness

Both core curricula explicitly emphasize critical cultural awareness as addressed in CoE documents. The 1993 Core curriculum posits that "tolerance does not mean indecision and indifference" and that "the encounter between different cultures and traditions provides both new impulses and a basis for critical reflection" (NDET 1993: 5). Similarly, the description of 'democracy and citizenship' in the 2017 Core curriculum states that the students "shall gain insight into the fact that democracy has different forms and expressions" and "train their ability to think

4 'Citizenship' and 'co-citizenship' are slightly different translations of the Norwegian term *medborger-skap*.

critically, learn to deal with conflicts of opinion and respect disagreement" (NDET 2017: 16).

While political aspects of interculturality are less prominent than other intercultural aspects across the four subject curricula, the intercultural principle of critical cultural awareness is even more scarcely represented in these documents. In the LK06 English and foreign language curricula, students are encouraged to exercise critical awareness of sources and digital tools but not to reflect critically on cultural encounters. It must, however, be stressed that, as mentioned above, this aspect is present in the 1993 Core curriculum – which all teachers were expected to use as a basis for their teaching. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this aspect of interculturality is absent both from the English and the foreign language curricula in LK06.

Conversely, in LK20, critical cultural awareness is explicitly present in both subject curricula. In LK20-E, the core element "working with texts in English" states that students should be "reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English", thus acquiring "knowledge of culture and society" (NDET 2019a: 3). In addition, in the section on assessment, critical thinking is explicitly stated as a competence to be assessed: "The teacher shall plan and facilitate for the pupils to demonstrate their competence in various ways, including through understanding, reflection and critical thought" (ibid.: 10). The importance of critical thinking is also highlighted in LK20-FL, related to the interdisciplinary topic "democracy and citizenship", in that the subject shall train students' ability "to think critically and learn to deal with differences of opinion and respect disagreements" (NDET 2019b: 3). This emphasis on differences and disagreement as something that should be dealt with and respected is not addressed in the English curricula or elsewhere in the foreign language curricula.

7. Discussion

In this final section, I will discuss the implications of the findings. The first finding is that intercultural competence in the core curricula and in all the English and foreign language curricula pertains to decentering, edifying aspects, political aspects, and critical cultural awareness. However, in both subject curricula, there is more emphasis on decentering and edifying aspects than on political aspects and critical cultural awareness, and this difference is more prominent in LK06 than in LK20. The observation of this prominence of edifying aspects over critical cultural awareness aligns with Hoff (2014, 2018, 2022), who observes a somewhat naïve tendency in intercultural scholarships that focus on edifying aspects of intercultural encounters, calling for an approach that acknowledges the existence

and the value of disagreement. LK20 partly answers this call, encouraging teachers to enable English students to engage in critical thinking and foreign language students to deal with differences of opinion and respect disagreements. However, the edifying aspect is clearly dominant also in LK20. While it is essential for today's students, the world citizens of tomorrow, to learn to respect each other and value diversity, it is just as important that they learn to interpret the world around them critically, take a stance, and know how to handle disagreement when it arises.

The second finding is that there is a greater overall focus on intercultural competence in LK20 than in LK06, both in the core curricula and in the English and foreign language subject curricula. Notably, the importance of citizenship education is more prominent in LK20. This finding is in line with previous research on the English curricula (Brown 2021; Heggernes 2022; Speitz & Myklevold 2022).

The third finding observes a shift from a national conception of culture in LK06 to a more complex understanding of culture in LK20. This finding is in line with Brown (2021) and Hoff (2022), who argue that the understanding of culture in LK20-E was more dynamic and less connected to national cultures than in LK06-E. As this article shows, this shift also took place for foreign languages between LK06 and LK20, maybe even to a greater extent, because English students were still supposed to compare foreign cultures to Norway, whereas the foreign language students should compare with their own background, acknowledging that students in Norway have various cultural backgrounds. This shift can be seen more generally as a shift from a (trans)national view of culture to global citizenship ideals (e.g., Lütge, Merse & Rauschert 2022).

The fourth finding is that the presence of intercultural competence in the English curricula equals the one in the foreign language curricula, both in LK06 and LK20, although the term 'intercultural' was used less frequently in the English curricula than in the foreign language curricula. Since Norwegian students not only have a higher proficiency in English than in foreign languages (Simensen 2014; Rindal 2014a, 2014b; Vold 2022) but also are expected to be on a higher level at the end of lower secondary education (i.e., A1 in foreign languages and B1 in English; see Brevik & Helness 2018; NDET 2020), this juxtaposition of intercultural competence expectations has at least two implications for the teaching of English and foreign languages in Norway.

The first implication concerns the requirement to assess the intercultural competence of foreign language students, which may be considered problematic. Several scholars point to the vagueness of the subject curricula, specifically concerning requirements toward intercultural competence in the competence aims (Lund 2008; Brown & Habegger-Conti 2017; Brown 2021; Hoff 2022). The present study has shown that despite this vagueness, teachers in Norway are required to

assess students' intercultural competence in foreign languages, which is a controversial expectation according to recent research (Dervin 2010; Hoff 2014, 2018). It is even more so considering the lack of similar expectations in the English subject. Although LK20-FL contains significant information on what intercultural competence is and how it can be understood in an educational context, it remains vague on how one can assess students' actual intercultural competence, and it does not reflect on the ethically problematic aspect of assessing students' intercultural attitudes and values.

The second implication relates to teachers' approaches to intercultural instruction in English and foreign language classrooms in Norway. Since intercultural competence is just as important in the foreign language curricula as in the English curricula, one would assume that it should be just as important in foreign language classrooms as in English classrooms. I will argue that it is of utmost importance to examine whether this is the case or whether there are differences between the two subjects. Considering the differences in expectations toward intercultural competence and actual language proficiency, does the LK20 foreign language curriculum expect too much of the students, or does the LK20 English curriculum expect too little? Should there have been clearer differences between the two subject curricula? These are important aspects to analyze in future classroom studies, to investigate how the delicate balance between students' language proficiency and policy requirements regarding intercultural competence is addressed in English and foreign language classrooms in Norway.

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