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Teacher perspectives of challenges within the Norwegian Educational system

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This research examines teacher perspectives' of educational challenges in Norway. Norway is one of the most well-resourced, prosperous, social welfare states in the world, yet the OECD (2011) recognized students' weak basic skills and insufficient teacher ability in content and pedagogy, along with engagement and imbalanced resources as points for educational improvement. An open-ended questionnaire was administered to 138 teachers practicing in Norway to explore challenges from their perspective. Teachers reported the following challenges: completing government paperwork with competing pedagogical demands, adapting teaching to each student due to large class sizes, motivating students, managing social and emotional problems of students, and meeting society's increasingly unrealistic expectations. Teachers perceived their challenges to be a result of a poorly built educational system, not from deficits in their teaching skills. We concluded from this study that teacher voice and participation in improvement decisions are needed, given some discrepancy in perceived challenges among these findings, international surveys, and policy-related reports.

Keywords: Norway; educational challenges; teacher perspectives; student outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Norway is one of the wealthiest, most successful social welfare states in the world. The UN Human Development Index positions the country first out of 187 countries/territories (UN, 2014) in the collective dimensions of a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, and having a decent standard of living. It is a politically stable, modern, and highly developed Nordic state ranked second among countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in which people are most satisfied with their lives (2014). Yet, the OECD reports that Norway's educational system is unsatisfactory (2011). Students' weak basic skills and insufficient teacher ability to deliver content and pedagogy, along with need for better engagement and a better balance of resources, are the major points highlighted for educational improvement.

All teachers face challenges, but teachers in Norway face specific challenges: "Many national and international surveys show the Norwegian school faces challenges with regard to both the quality of the teaching and the learning of the pupils" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training [The Directorate], 2009, pp. 90-91). The Directorate has recognized challenges relating to administrators and their leadership, educators and their teaching, and students and their learning. Compared to other European

nations, Norway was ranked among the three lowest in terms of decision making at the school level (Midthassel, Bru, & Idsöe, 2000). Findings from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), a comparative study of 23 countries, revealed school leaders in Norway place greater importance on administrative tasks than instructional leadership. Teachers reported school leaders are not very active when it comes to observation of teaching and feedback. Sadly, teachers also reported tolerance for poorly executed, substandard work (Moum, Troan, & Emstad, 2011, p. 198). *The Leadership in Education European Synopsis* asserted that school leaders claim to also be "squeezed between increasing expectations from both the political and bureaucratic level, in addition to a continuously growing load of tasks that the schools are asked to follow up on behalf of society" (Moum et al., 2011, p. 200).

According to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2010), another major challenge is gaps in teachers' pedagogical knowledge; many Norwegian teachers are unqualified in the subjects they teach. The TALIS notes:

> Many Norwegian teachers follow up their pupils less than teachers in most other participating countries. They rarely correct homework and the pupil's workbooks, rarely set clear learning goals and are less likely to follow up the pupils' learning. The teachers leave a lot up to the pupils, but not very many pupil-oriented practices are conducted either, and the pupils are not very often included in the planning of teaching . . . That suggests that many Norwegian teacher have an unclear way of teaching. (The Directorate, 2009, p. 92; Vibe, Evensen, & Hovdhaugen, 2009)

And while the TALIS concluded teacher-student relations were good in Norway, effective teaching practice was not documented. This might be explained by Norwegian teachers' egalitarian training to be more a guide/supervisor (Stephens, Tønnessen, & Kyriacou, 2004) than an authoritarian teacher (Czerniawski, 2009; Kron, 2000). Czerniawski notes the term "friend" is embedded within Norway's framework for teaching documentation. It proved a dominant theme in his 2009 qualitative study on positioning the values of early career teachers in Norway. This "unclear way of teaching" has created tension between the democratic ideal of what being a teacher in Norway should be and what is pragmatically possible as a classroom practitioner (Czerniawki, 2009).

The OECD notes that formative assessment needs to be more firmly embedded in regular teaching practices and competency goals for students are not specific enough to guide teaching and assessment. However, an interesting finding is that Norwegian teachers have the highest self-efficacy according to the TALIS (Vibe et al., 2009), yet they are among those who participate the least in organised academic and professional development. Teachers have expressed strong interest for increased opportunities to improve their qualifications but encounter lack of support and facilitation from school leaders/employers (The Directorate, 2009; Vibe et al., 2009). School leaders "have to deal a lot with economic and staff-related matters, which make some school leaders feel forced to give less priority to pedagogical leadership" (Moum et al., 2011, p. 200). The OECD also found that there is no guarantee teachers would receive appraisal/feedback on their teaching practices. The OECD recommends that teacher appraisal needs to be more closely linked to professional and school development. The conclusion of the OECD is that school leadership could play a stronger role in driving quality improvement for schools.

With these challenges documented by international surveys and policy-related reports, the aim of this paper is to discuss the educational challenges in Norway *based on teacher*

perspectives: What do teachers in Norway actually see as the biggest issue impacting student outcomes? The research described in this study is the voice of teachers in Norway on this question. The paper consists of five parts: this introduction; a discussion of contextual background and conceptual framework; then an explanation of the research methods and results; a discussion of the findings of the study; and, finally, conclusions and recommendations.

NORWAY'S EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Education in Norway is a major mode of social progress, impartiality, and wellbeing. The required schooling up to the lower secondary level (grade 10) is intended to bring together all children regardless of class, gender, and origin (Allmendinger, 1989). Schooling is both centralized and decentralized (Huus, 1960); funding is provided by both the national parliament and local communities under the advisement of the national commission on education and city leaders. The city (i.e., *kommune*) places the task of budgeting into the hands of each individual school rendering the principal (i.e., *rector*) as the authority figure and business manager.

Schools are divided according to grade level. Grades 1 through 7 are considered to be the primary level and grades 8 through 10 the lower secondary level. The upper secondary school system, grades 11-13, is run independently from all other schools by the council for the municipality (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2007). At age 16, students apply to upper secondary schools for either a general education path leading to university entrance or a professional path leading to a vocational career (Huang, 2007).

Norwegian class size is regulated: 24 students when there are two cohorts (grade levels) in a class, 28 students when there is one cohort at the primary level (grades 1 to 7), and 30 students when there is one cohort at the lower secondary level (grades 8 to 10) (The Directorate, 1995). Yet, according to the OECD (2010a), the average Norwegian class size for primary schooling is 19.3 pupils, and for lower secondary schooling 22.8 pupils. The ratio of students to teaching staff in educational institutions is 10:8 for primary and 10:1 for lower secondary (OECD, 2010a).

Characteristically, the Norwegian educational system is one that values equality "over and above cultural and academic achievements" (Czerniawski, 2009, p. 425; Tjeldvoll, 2002) with the cultural belief that everyone should be treated the same way (Stephens et al., 2004). Equality is achieved through accessibility and adaptability. All students have access to their local schools while having their education adapted to their unique learning needs (i.e., adaptive teaching). Work plans are developed to manage student learning, and both students and teachers report this has a positive impact on the learning environment and on motivation (The Directorate, 2012, p. 62). Kindergartens are educationally important for children with disabilities. Early intervention is a priority because children with special needs are first to be admitted to kindergarten (ages 1-5), and special needs education is a right if a student does not, or cannot, achieve satisfactory learning (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2007). Rates of immigration have increased dramatically, which correlates to the need for more adaptive teaching and more instruction for language minorities (The Directorate, 2009, p. 42). There is also an emphasis on parental involvement in all processes. Ultimately, a student tracking system based on perceived abilities is not favoured (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006, p. 288).

In the *OECD reviews of evaluation and assessment in education: Norway*, Nusche, Earl, Maxwell, and Shewbridge (2011) outlined the main features of the Norwegian teaching profession. Teachers are salaried, public sector employees with pay progressions determined by education level, seniority, and additions for extra responsibilities and achievements. A recent introduction, which has decreased the number of qualified applicants to initial teacher preparation programs, is that, to become a teacher, individuals must meet minimum overall upper secondary grades and minimum grades in Norwegian and mathematics as entrance requirements. There are three main teacher preparation options: the state's four-year general teacher education, a university teacher education program, or a one-year graduate-level program following a degree relevant to teaching (p. 76). There has also been an increased focus on professional development and on improving the status of the teaching profession (p. 77). A new initiative, *Competence for Quality*, was established to create a permanent system for continuing professional development at no cost to teachers. The government has entered into a binding partnership with key stakeholders to improve the status of the teaching profession. The partnership looks to do this through recruiting campaigns, improving the competency of school leaders, better teacher training and improved teacher competence (Nusche et al., 2011, p. 77).

Fundamental areas of teacher competence were outlined for the Norwegian Parliament in the document titled: *The white paper on teacher education "The teacher—the role and education"* (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2009). This defined the teachers' primary tasks as: "to prepare and guide the pupils' learning process in a systematic manner" (p. 1). Teachers are required to develop a "year plan" denoting the curriculum to be covered each week. For students with special needs, the teachers provide adaptive education, which consists of providing written work plans that adapt instruction to the special needs of the student. Pupils with an immigrant background also receive an adaptive education until they are proficient in Norwegian. For all students, learning outcomes are measured by means of marks (i.e., grades). Teachers must document formative assessment data and marks, and meet once per term with students and their parents to discuss progress.

The national education context in Norway is directed by *The national curriculum for knowledge promotion*, which is an "objective and quality framework for primary and secondary education and training" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2007). The foci include: the core curriculum, quality framework, subject curricula, distribution of teaching hours per subject, and individual assessment. National standards are addressed through curricula decided by local schools in order to attain standards for reading and writing set for all European nations. Even though Norway is not a part of the European Union, it is part of the same testing system, where 30 European countries review and compare test results for individual pupils at school and national levels in an effort to learn from each other's experiences (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2009). Many of the underlying reasons for school decision-making in Norway are based on the liberal nature of Norwegian politics and basic differences in cultural structure.

And when it comes to student learning, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported Norway's results are at or above average depending on the subject. Yet, these outcomes are not considered satisfactory given Norway's annual expense per student is about 45 percent above other participating countries (Nusche et al., 2011; OECD, 2010a). Moreover, dropout rates in upper secondary school is a major concern with "as much as 20-50% of the students within certain studies drop out during

the 3-4 years they are supposed to attend school" (Moum, et al., 2011, p. 198). In a global education economy where international comparison has great public meaning, these concerns are significant when occurring in a country that, by all current measures of success, is expected to have high levels of student performance (Egelund, 2012).

Given this economic and educational context, this paper discusses the challenges faced by Norway's education system from the perspective of individuals engaged in it; that is, from the teachers' perspectives.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To ensure that everyone receives the education he or she is "entitled to," The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training critically examines education in regards to progress on *The national curriculum for the knowledge promotion* (hereafter *Knowledge promotion)*. One element of *Knowledge promotion* includes the *Quality framework*, a description of the system, expectations, beliefs, and desired results of education in Norway (Maxwell, 2005, p. 33). The *Quality framework* includes factors related to quality education: social and cultural competence, student motivation for learning and use of learning strategies, pupil participation in democratic decision-making, adaptive education and equal opportunities, competency of teachers, and cooperation with the home and community.

The education mirror is the annual analysis of the educational system in Norway, which provides facts and information for reference during supervision of schools and making improved decisions regarding key *Knowledge promotion* indicators. Since the 2009 edition was the last published prior to collecting data for this study, it served to inform the research design. It drove the exploration of how a resource-rich system can face the identified and considerable challenges.

The results from *The education mirror 2009* analysis were presented using the following categories: facts about primary and secondary education and training, resources, learning outcomes, the learning environment, recruitment, completion and competence achievement in upper secondary education and training, and quality improvement of teachers and school leaders (The Directorate, 2009). Within these categories, The Directorate detailed the current status of the system, identifying both strengths and challenges. What guided this study was the numerous challenges identified (see Appendix) given the noted discrepancy in Norway's high resource allocations to education and comparatively low outcomes of student performance. While The Directorate, international organizations, and comparative surveys provided vital information about educational progress, *teachers' opinions* of strengths and challenges have not been explicitly studied. As such, this qualitative study provides an exploratory investigation from this vital perspective.

METHOD

Participants

The sample for this study consisted 138 teachers actively teaching in Norway during the 2011-2012 school year. Of the 138 participants, 68 were male and 162 female; 12 percent had been teaching for 0-2 years, 18 percent for 3-6 years, 18 percent for 7-10 years, 38

percent for 11-15 years, and 50 percent for 16 or more years. Teachers represented 13 out of 19 administrative districts (i.e., *fylke*) within Norway, from the sparsely populated areas of the Arctic Circle to the heavily populated areas around major cities. Participants were from 25 primary and lower secondary levels. The teachers represented 68 percent of all schools visited during one academic-year by the first author who was a scholar in the US-Norway Fulbright Foundation's Roving Scholar Program, a distinct, cross-cultural exchange opportunity. The program brings American teachers to Norway for one academic year to travel throughout the country giving presentations, seminars, and lectures to teachers and students, and to share a sense of the American teaching experience. The Roving Scholar directly contacted all schools with previous visits, from a list compiled in the preceding 24 years of the program. Schools could also request a visit directly from the Fulbright organization or the The Norwegian Centre for Foreign Languages in Education (i.e., *Fremmedspråksenteret*). Through each school's contact person (either a lead teacher or administrator), all schools visited were asked to participate in the study. Not all schools replied in the affirmative. Those who agreed to participate were provided with the purpose of the research, and it was clarified that participation was independent of both the Fulbright program and the Norwegian government. The position of Roving Scholar granted unique access to many areas of the country.

Research question and data collection

One central question was investigated in this study using an open-ended questionnaire format. This method was founded on Creswell's (2007) recommendation that researchers should "state the broadest questions they could possibly pose about the research problem" (p. 108). The question read: *What is the biggest issue facing teachers in Norway today?* This central question was designed to ascertain teachers' perceptions, as well as to offer additional insight. The question was left open and broad for a number of reasons: to encourage critical thinking, to elicit unbiased and unlimited opinions of the respondents, and explore responses perhaps not considered by the researchers nor found in literature review. As Creswell (2007) reflected, an open-ended question is asked to provide an opportunity to listen to the participants and to resist making assumptions about the best questions to ask from the role of "expert researcher" (p. 43). This allowed for the suspension of judgment and pre-suppositions until results could form a foundation for analysis and connection to other studies (p. 58). For translation into Norwegian from English, word selection, clarity, and intention were analysed to reflect the intricate nature of words and their meanings within a language; the question was offered in either language.

Data were collected from September 2011 to May 2012. To account for cultural variables and approaches to work, the questionnaire was explained and distributed in person, both in English and Norwegian, at each school by either the first author or the contact teacher. The method by which schools decided to disseminate the questionnaire varied from school to school, which fitted with the Norwegian system of great local autonomy in decision making (Moum et al., 2011). At some schools, the principal directed the voluntary completion; at others, the contact teacher addressed the whole school; and at yet other schools, only the languages department completed the questionnaire. Sometimes, the author was given time to formally address all teachers within a planning meeting, or simply through discussions during breaks. Some questionnaires were collected immediately after completion with the author present in the school building; others were returned by mail or email giving participants more completion time. Where this occurred, follow-up emails to

contact teachers were sent approximately three weeks following distribution. No incentives were provided for completing the questionnaire, but discussions were held about the opportunity to examine the results. An acceptable response rate of 60 percent was achieved.

Data analysis

The open-ended question was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis as a guideline because their process places meaning and understanding at the root of analysis. The process promotes discursive interpretation of data because individual codes may cross-reference multiple themes. Braun and Clarke explain how this approach is utilized to report experience, meaning, and the reality perceived by participants without limiting interpretation to themes supported by a pre-determined, potentially irrelevant, theory. Data analysis began with a classification procedure known as open coding. Through constant comparison and reconceptualization, codes were then analysed using a pattern coding method, called categorization, to identify *categories* from relationships amongst codes. Next, a search for patterns among these categories was employed to identify *themes*.

For the purpose of validation, data were first analysed by a colleague who: (a) had never travelled to Norway, (b) had no affiliation with Norway's educational system, nor (c) had any form of contact with the study's participants. This strategy was employed to ensure the words/perspectives of teachers were objectively analysed by reducing any bias of the author, who had lived in Norway for one year and had worked with these teachers. Next, the author conducted an audit of the findings for consensual verification to validate the trustworthiness of the findings within the cultural context. Lastly, the findings were validated through a process known as member checking. Twenty-five participants (i.e., members) identified as the school contact person were sent an electronic form of the analytic scheme (see Table 1). On the form, participants were to select *Yes* if they determined the results accurately represented teachers' challenges in the Norwegian educational system, or *No* if they found inaccuracies. If *No*, they were asked to explain specifically what they felt was inaccurate and why. No pattern of inaccuracies was identified.

RESULTS

Teachers were to identify and explain the *biggest issue facing teachers in Norway today*. This open-ended question was qualitatively analysed to determine categories and themes. Findings included four categories and fives themes (see Table 1).

Table 1: The biggest issue facing teachers in Norway today

Analytic Schema
Category 1; Temporal challenges
Theme 1: Governmental imposition of documenting "everything" has increased the amount of paperwork, ultimately making the teaching profession more clerical than pedagogical.
Category 2: Instructional challenges
Theme 2: Due to limited financial resources, class sizes are large; consequently adaptive teaching is difficult.

Category 3: Behavioural challenges

Theme 3: Motivating students is difficult due to their low work ethic and limited connection to real-life application.

Theme 4: Teachers are challenged with managing the increasing social and emotional problems of students, which are affecting the learning environment.

Category 4 Societal challenges

Theme 5: Societal changes have lowered the status of teachers while producing increased, unrealistic expectations; consequently, this is affecting recruitment of competent teachers.

Category 1: Temporal challenges

Theme 1

Government requirements to document "everything" has increased the amount of paperwork; ultimately, making the teaching profession more clerical than pedagogical. "Bureaucracy," "office work," and "secretary job" were how some teachers (60%) described the government requirement to document "everything." One teacher identified "defend[ing] the year plan" as a specific paperwork challenge, whereas, most of the teachers responded with generalities. With this paperwork expectation, teachers (45%) felt their workloads have not only increased, but are "not directly related to teaching." Teachers are challenged with finding the "time" to implement the pedagogical practices central to planning, teaching, and reflecting. Beyond this, several teachers (25%) were concerned with limited opportunities for collaboration "to research courses together" because of "too little time." Ultimately, this "bureaucratization of the profession" has taken "time from direct contact with students" and from "time to prepare so that the teaching is of higher quality."

Category 2: Instructional challenges

Theme 2

Due to limited financial resources, class sizes are large; consequently, adaptive teaching is difficult. Adaptive teaching in Norway is a practice of differentiating instruction to meet all students' individual needs. Such teaching is difficult due to the temporal challenges delineated above, but also because of "large" class sizes. However, teachers in this study did not quantify their perception of "large." Several teachers (45%) noted the "economy" as the causation of large classes because schools had limited finances to increase human resources. Some teachers (10%) remarked it was even "difficult to 'see' all the students." More importantly, large class sizes resulted in "large differences in skills" which made it challenging to individualize lessons for all students and to follow up with each of them and, according to the teachers, this was especially difficult when time for planning and collaboration had been compromised.

Category 3: Behavioural challenges

Theme 3

Motivating students is difficult due to their low work ethic and limited connection to real-life application. Interestingly, some teachers (30%) attributed students' low work ethic to Norway being a "nanny state and [having] an excellent welfare system" as well as to students being too "laid back." One teacher used "laissez faire" while another teacher suggested students are "spoilt" because they demand without taking any responsibility. Some teachers (25%) also attributed students' lack of motivation to not understanding the relevancy between curriculum and real-life application. Teachers asserted students are not able to "see a use of education," and they possess a "lack of need to succeed to make their own future." Effectually, students' lack of motivation is an impediment for students to "receive teaching" in order for them to do "well in school." Seventy-five percent of teachers expressed considerable concern about students' motivation.

Theme 4

Teachers are challenged with managing the increasing social and emotional problems of students, which are affecting the learning environment. Teachers expressed concern with students' increasing mental health/psychological issues, personal issues, and social behaviours. Teachers perceived the classroom environment becoming more "turbulent" which "weakens the professional performance" largely because learning is interrupted. Teachers (40%) questioned the appropriateness of managing behaviours "rather than teaching," especially when a few teachers perceived this to be the responsibility of parents and psychologists. One teacher connected the increase in students' behavioural problems to not having "enough time and resources to make a good class environment with calm[ness], order, and respect and a wish to learn something that stands in focus."

Category 4 Societal challenges

Theme 5

Societal changes have lowered the status of teachers while producing increased, unrealistic expectations; consequently, this is affecting recruitment of competent candidates to the field. Many of the teachers believed that public perception of teachers has changed in Norway. First, some teachers' (35%) perceptions were that there is "little respect for the work we do," and "the line of work has a lower status than before, and to be perceived as more of a service profession." In support of this, some teachers (30%) identified low salary as the cause of this recruitment issue. Moreover, some teachers (30%) reported that "demands" and "problems" in society are increasing expectations on schools to "fix" them. Interestingly, one teacher wrote, "We are not trusted as a group. Teachers get a lot of negative media attention." The causal relationship to this lowered status is "low qualified applicants [applying] for new positions." Unfortunately, many teachers (55%) believed this societal challenge was compromising a quality education for students. The majority (85%) of teachers stated they were fulfilling their professional responsibilities by trying to engage in pedagogically sound practices (e.g., lesson planning, collaborating, reflecting, researching).

DISCUSSION

Norway has a long tradition of broad local freedom. Although local control remains on *how* to reach the learning goals of the national curriculum, government accountability (measured by the national test system and expected documentation of *how* goals are going to be met) have seemingly made the profession more clerical than pedagogical according to teachers in this current study. A major challenge for schools and teachers has been the increased tightening of control and accountability from public governance (Moum et al., 2011), which may be due to many national and international surveys indicating challenges with quality teaching and learning (The Directorate, 2009). The major implication for increased paperwork has been reduced time on pedagogical tasks. Teachers identified the following manifestations of having reduced time: ill-prepared lessons, reduced time with students, no time for collaboration with colleagues, and limited engagement in reflection and research.

Another implication resulting from increased paperwork was that teachers felt their workload had increased. Justifiably, they noted an increase in new tasks without the removal of older ones. Teachers felt this resulted in too many classes to teach and too many job assignments not related to teaching. Some teachers noted that their increasing job responsibilities were disproportionate to the amount they were paid. On the other hand, *The education mirror* (2009) illustrated how Norwegian teachers' planned teaching time was lower than the average for other OECD countries.

The majority of teachers in this study found it challenging to implement adaptive teaching due to large class sizes comprising varying ability levels, which is a result of limited financial resources. However, the average class size is well under the national requirement (OECD, 2010a) and has remained almost unchanged (The Directorate, 2013). Comparatively, national data do not support the perception that class sizes are too large. So, are teachers' expectations realistic, or are there other confounding variables influencing their perceptions? A variable to consider is the number of students receiving special needs education because, although the number of students has not increased, the learner characteristics have changed. The Directorate (2009) reported that the number of students with special needs has increased, along with the immigrant population, and that teachers need more competence on how to teach those with special needs. These diverse learner groups have a right to an adaptive education that is more individualized, thus requiring increased time for planning and teaching.

Another challenge teachers identified in this study was students' lack of motivation due to a pattern of low work ethic and limited connections to real-life. Teachers reported the causation of this is a result of student choice and not a result of non-motivational teaching practices. However, the Pupil Survey 2011, given to pupils in the primary and lower secondary schools every spring since 2002, showed the pupils are satisfied with their teachers, have inner motivation, and put forth effort (The Directorate, 2012). When comparing findings from the pupil survey to those in this study, a dichotomous relationship exists between teachers' and students' perceptions of motivation displayed in the classroom. Inarguably, motivation must be considered with student motivation gradually declining between grades 5-10 (Nusche et al., 2011), with dropout rates as high as 50 percent (Moum et al., 2011), and with the OECD review team recommending Norway offer a relevant curriculum that gives some flexibility and choice (Nusche et al., 2011). Remarkably, teachers in this study did not correlate a perceived lack of motivation from

students with students not receiving adequate differentiation through adaptive teaching. One could hypothesize that there is a causal relationship between these two variables.

In *The education mirror* (2009), the Norwegian Directorate concluded: "It appears that school leaders put the most emphasis on classroom management, pupil discipline, pupil conduct, and the relationship between teachers and pupils as criteria for assessment" (p. 92). Contrary to the good teacher-student relations and school leaders' emphasis on behaviour management, teachers in this present study were challenged with managing the increasing social and emotional problems of students. They perceived this problem to be so severe it was affecting the learning environment. Norwegian researchers have also found emotional and behavioural problems to be on the rise (Ogden, Hagen, Askeland, & Christensen, 2009; Stephens, Kyriacou, & Tønnessen, 2005).

Noteworthy is how teachers perceived instruction to have been compromised due to increased workloads and larger class sizes, yet they made no correlation to how students' behaviours were affected by ill-prepared lessons and reduced student-teacher interaction. The OECD (2010a) cites studies illustrating how, in Norway: (a) students do not receive adequate academic challenges; (b) teachers may be relatively indulgent in that they provide generous praise but little critical academic response to students; and (c) Norwegian teachers applied structured teaching practices to a lesser degree than most other countries. Research supports that when students experience academic success, behavioural challenges are typically reduced; Jacob Kounin (1970) titled this consistent association *instructional management*. Interestingly, The Directorate (2012) embraced Kounin's concept of class management to "reduce disturbances in the learning effort" (p. 58). According to Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003), students in classrooms with the most effective teachers gain about 52 percentile points in their achievement while students with the least effective gained only 14 percentile points (p. 2). Effective teaching, he asserts, involves a teacher's instructional strategies and their uses, classroom curricular design, and classroom management. In addition to teacher effectiveness, student motivation is equally critical to classroom management and academic achievement. Skinner and Belmont (1993) investigated motivation in the classroom and found reciprocal effects of teacher behaviour and student engagement; meaning, teacher behaviour influences student engagement and student engagement influences teacher behaviour.

The final challenge identified by teachers relates to the negative perceptions and demands from society. In this study, teachers' perceptions were that society placed unrealistic expectations on them. Perhaps this is due to Norwegian teachers generally being viewed as trusted professionals among different stakeholders (OECD, 2011); conversely, teachers in this study did not feel trusted. Teachers also expressed concern about the lowered status of teachers and its impact on recruitment. A report for the Nordic Council of Ministries in 2009, confirmed the declining status of teachers in society and the difficulties of attracting young people to education, largely due to the lack of good role models, negative media attention, and low salaries (The Directorate, 2009). Teachers in this study did not identify a declining morale nor decreasing motivation in spite of the aforementioned challenges. Although teachers' perceptions are not necessarily reality, one might question how morale and motivation can prevail in working condition with unrealistic demands, hard-to-manage student population, disproportionate compensation, and loss of professional prestige.

CONCLUSION

We conclude from this study that Norwegian teachers perceive their challenges to be a result of a poorly built educational *system* largely due to limited resources (i.e., time and money). However, the societal challenge is the only one strongly supported by international and national data; the temporal, instructional, and behavioural challenges are conflicting. Evidentially, Norway's educational resources are adequate, if not substantial, so this is perhaps not the underlying issue. What may be disguising itself as a resource issue, however, is a growing teaching staff with limited qualifications. The Directorate (2009) reported that the percentage of teaching staff without a teaching degree had almost doubled; hence these teachers may have "substantial professional competence, but lack teaching qualifications" (p. 37). Without specialized training in the art and science of teaching (i.e., pedagogy), these teachers are undoubtedly challenged by a student population that is becoming more diverse with students who have special needs and those who are from an immigrant background. If teachers' primary task is to "prepare and guide the pupils' learning process in a systematic manner" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2009, p. 1), how are teachers producing high quality instruction when they are, albeit competent, not qualified to teach? Potentially, this is the leading factor in Norway's less than satisfactory student outcomes.

Limitations of study and recommendations for future research

This study's purpose to ascertain the biggest issues/challenges facing teachers in Norway today, based on teachers' self-reports, is not meant to be representative of the national teaching workforce nor the administrative districts (i.e., *fylke*) embodied, rather central to the small sample of 138 teachers. However, this qualitative and interpretive small-scale study is revealing in that it recognizes the social reality of teachers working within the confines of both national and local contexts. Another limitation is that the sample represents only the teachers who participated in the US-Norway Fulbright Foundation's Roving Scholar Program. Only schools involved in the program were solicited as participants (www.fulbright.no).

A recommendation for future research is to conduct a qualitative inquiry using individual interviews and focus groups to query teachers further about the implications of these temporal, instructional, student, and societal challenges as well as their recommendations for overcoming them. Further, a quantitative analysis that correlates these four challenges would be beneficial to understand causal relations between and among them, especially how lower quality instruction affects student motivation and behaviour.

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APPENDIX

The Education Mirror 2009: Challenges

Category	Challenge
Facts	Large schools increasing, small schools decreasing Schools closing due to low numbers of pupils, poor economy and improved use of resources Problems recruiting teachers to rural areas % of pupils with special needs education and % of time spent on SNE increases Number of immigrant students who need adaptations until proficient in Norwegian has increased by 80% % of teachers without teacher training has increased Many teachers and leaders near retirement
Resources	Pupils have substantially fewer teaching hours than other countries Great variation among municipalities in the expenditure per pupil Percentage of teaching staff who do not have an approved degree has almost doubled Vocational programs are more expensive Great variation in how teachers spend their time on academics & non-academics within & among schools Planned teaching time is lower than the average in other OECD countries
Learning Outcomes	Poor competencies in math; a consistent and steady decline since 1990s, signs of improvement Wide range of skills demonstrated on math tests between weak and strong pupils Poorer math test results for pupils in the smaller municipalities Homework rarely followed up by the teacher
Learning Environment	Under half of schools have developed written routines for investigation and notification of bullying
Upper Secondary	Low completion percentages; higher completion rate for general studies than for vocational Relatively common that pupils and apprentices to drop out of their education and disappear from the education system at times

Quality Improvement	Recruitment to leadership positions is weak
	Quality of the teaching & quality of the learning of the pupils
	Teachers are among those who participate the least in organized professional development
	Competence needs related to teaching pupils with special needs, ICT skills and assessment practices
	Teachers experience a lack of support and facilitation from the school for professional development
	Very few specific & formal measures are taken for induction of new teachers
	Greater importance from the school leaders on administration rather than instructional leadership
	Teachers follow up with their pupils less than in other TALIS participating countries
	Teachers rarely correct homework or set learning goals
	Teachers leave a lot up to the pupils but do not conduct many pupil-oriented practices
	Pupils are not very often included in the planning of the teaching
	Norwegian teachers have an unclear way of teaching
	Substandard work is tolerated by the collegium of the school
	Little teacher collaboration is to promote academic improvement or for reflection/ improvement practice
	Knowledge and use of tools for local external & internal assessment is relatively weak in the system
	There is need for competency building of teachers
	Teachers have insufficient specialization
	Modification of the teaching and a change in the role of the teacher might appear to be contributing causes of the big decline in pupil performance
	Teachers making students responsible for their own learning
	Declining status of teachers in society
	Difficult to attract young people into education
	Pay stands out as the most important reason why young people do not choose teacher training
	Lack of good teachers as role models
	Negative media publicity