

Article

Teaching Practice on Sámi Topics in Schools: A Mixed Methods Study from the South Saepmie Region of Norway

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Abstract: The Norwegian primary and secondary school curriculum from 2020 (LK20) clearly states that the history, cultural life, and rights of the indigenous Sámi people should be included in the school practice. This study addresses how objectives in the subject-specific plans with Sámi content are taught and explores, in addition, teachers' experiences and reflections on these topics. To investigate this, an electronic questionnaire with open and closed questions was sent to all primary and secondary schools in the South Saepmie region of Norway. The results indicate that a high degree of the respondents include Sámi culture and tradition in their teaching, and there is a variation in their teaching from happenings on February 6th to interdisciplinary projects. The teachers report a lack of competence and call for a greater emphasis on Sámi topics in the teacher education programs. A lack of available teaching aids is experienced even though many found other resources locally and, e.g., on the internet. They experienced, however, an increase in the availability of teaching aids in recent years. The respondents pointed out, however, that inadequate teacher competence and a lack of teaching aids strongly limited the respondents' possibility to teach Sámi topics in school. Consequently, more teaching aids should be developed, and Sámi content in continuing and teacher education programs should be strengthened.

Keywords: Sámi; indigenous; Norwegian primary and secondary schools; curriculum; teaching aids



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1. Introduction

1.1. Sámi and Indigenous Topics in the Norwegian School

Indigenous people are living all over the world, and learning about their history and culture is included in many countries' curricula. The Sámi people were ratified by the Norwegian government (ILO Convention no. 169) as an indigenous people in Norway in 1990 (*Kommunal og Distriktsdepartementet* 2020). In addition to Norway, the Sámi people are located in three other countries: Russia, Finland, and Sweden.

In Norway, the Sámi people have been subjected to a colonialization (Norwegianization) approach from the 18th century (*Olsen* 2020). Schools were the most important arenas for this process. This was finally toned down, and the period after the 2nd World War was characterized by silencing, as no Sámi topics were integrated in school. The first curriculum mentioning Sámi topics was M74 (from 1974), and a period of inclusion started. A gradual change arose, and The Norwegian Education Act of 1998 states that regulations for the Norwegian curricula explicitly shall formulate that Sámi topics are included in various fields of study (*Opplæringslova* 1998, §6-4). The first curriculum for Sámi students appeared in 1997 (LK97S), where "S" refers to Sámi. The "S" variants of the curricula contain a description of learning one Sámi language, and an extended focus on Sámi topics in general is included.

The perspectives formulated through LK20 and the corresponding LK20S represent an indigenization. The term indigenous education in Norway carries a double meaning; Sámi people shall be educated within their own language and culture, and all students in the country shall be educated in topics concerning the Sámi people (*Andreassen and Olsen*

2020b). LK20 emphasizes that through education, the students should gain insights into the indigenous Sámi people's history, culture, society, and rights. It is specified that the topics should be taught not only in municipalities where the Sámi people are traditionally and administratively located but also in the whole country of Norway.

There are 10 different Sámi languages in the Saepmie region, which represent a great variation in cultural expression (Hermanstrand et al. 2019). Other cultural expressions are, e.g., variations in clothing and traditional knowledge. There are three official Sámi languages in Norway (South, Lule and North Sámi), where the largest proportion of the Sámi people, with an estimated population of 55,000, are residents (Olsen 2020). This variation is also pointed out in LK20 as important. LK20 states that every student should gain knowledge and learn about the diversity and variation within the Sámi culture and society, and it is desirable to involve local municipal resources when teaching these topics in Saepmie.

The curricula are composed of core curricula and objectives in the subject-specific plans, which in this study are referred to as the subject's competence goals. In LK20 and LK20S, the core curricula and the subject competence goals became more conformed, and as in many Western countries, the content shifted from a content-driven curriculum to a more competence-oriented curriculum (Sundby and Karseth 2022). The core curricula became of greater importance and the volume of the subject competence goals was reduced. The competence goals are formulated both implicitly and explicitly in the core parts and the subjects' parts of both LK20 and LK20S.

Regarding LK20, Sámi content is an integrated part of the core curriculum and is explicitly formulated through the term "Sámi". It is thus implied that these topics should be applicable for all subjects in school (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2017). Intentions of Sámi content in the core curriculum are also implicitly formulated through terms such as indigenous, diversity, society, history, and cultural heritage, which all point to include some Sámi topics in the subjects. In addition, these terms are present in various subject-specific parts of the curriculum as well. All subjects are nonetheless strongly influenced by the core curriculum part of LK20. Sámi content is also specified in the description of some subjects' relevance and central values.

All teachers must, however, assess when and how the learning activities shall take place and how they are implementing the whole curriculum. Generally, there is an impression that teachers mainly focus on the subject's competence goals when planning teaching activities (Sem and Kolberg 2022). This study thus focuses on the teaching of Sámi content in subjects where these are mentioned explicitly or implicitly in the subject's competence goals. Table 1 gives an overview of competence goals (shown as keywords) containing Sámi or indigenous content in various subjects in the Norwegian curriculum.

Three subjects (Norwegian, Social Studies and Natural Sciences) have more than one competence goal addressing Sámi topics. Competence goals in English do not explicitly mention the term "Sámi" but the implicit term "indigenous" is used instead (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2019).

There is, however, little research addressing school practice when teaching Sámi topics in Norway (Andreassen and Olsen 2020b; Evju and Olsen 2022). Studies indicate that the intentions of the Sámi aspects in LK20 and LK06 (Saabye 2008) are not fully implemented, particularly outside the Saepmie region (Evju and Olsen 2022; Lile 2011). These aspects are in general often found to be deprioritized (Olsen 2022). The Norwegian National Human Rights Institution (NIM), an independent governmental institution, performed a survey on attitudes and knowledge of the Sámi people and national minorities in Norway in 2021 (Dawson et al. 2022). The respondents were people older than 18 years who had attended Norwegian elementary school. Concerning Sámi topics, the study found that half of the respondents had learned little or nothing about this in school. These findings were supported by Lile (2011) who found that 9th grade students from 15 different schools had experienced little or no teaching on Sámi topics in school. An increase was, however, found by Dawson et al. (2022), who reported that at an overall level, teaching Sámi topics in school

had increased in scope every decade. In addition, there are indications of a development in the direction of more inclusive practices in school (Evju and Olsen 2022).

Table 1. Subjects with Sámi themes included in their competence goals in 2021, the year of this study (denoted by ‘x’). There are elements from the curricula of 2006 (LK06) and 2020 (LK20) because they had an overlapping period of two years (2020–2022).

Theme	Norwegian	Social Studies	English	Natural Sciences	Religion Education	Arts and Crafts	Music	Food and Health
Sámi traditional use of animals, plants, and fungi *				x				x
Constellations of stars				x				
Social conflicts **		x						
Sámi pre-Christian religion and tradition					x			
The politics of Norwegianization		x						
Sámi language and linguistic rights	x							
Sámi texts	x							
Sámi/indigenous culture *	x	x	x	x		x	x	x

* One in competence goal in Food and Health can be seen in conjunction with these themes. ** Conflicts between reindeer husbandry and other societal interests, such as predator conservation and nature management interests.

The deprioritization of the Sámi content in the curricula might be explained by the findings by Olsen (2022); teachers and pedagogical leaders struggle to find human, economic, and pedagogical resources to implement the curriculum goals with Sámi perspectives. This is also partially found in a study on aboriginal perspectives in the Australian high school curriculum (Booth 2014). This study identified four key factors affecting the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content by non-Aboriginal teachers: time management, school culture, teacher interest, and preconceived ideas of both teachers and students.

The partial implementation of Sámi aspects particularly found outside the Saepmie region by Evju and Olsen (2022) and Lile (2011) are in line with the findings of Kavli (2019). Kavli (2019) found that deprioritizing Sámi topics in teaching happens more frequently outside the administrative areas of the Sámi language where teachers obtain less cultural knowledge and support from Sámi institutions. Kavli also reported that this could be the case within Sámi administrative areas where teachers often believe students have knowledge on these topics, even though this is not always the case. Further, Dawson et al. (2022) report, based on the self-reported knowledge of Sámi people, that the knowledge of Sámi people is higher for respondents from geographical areas traditionally associated with the Sámi group.

1.2. Sámi Content in Teaching Aids

Studies addressing teaching aids presenting Sámi people and national minorities in secondary schools and high schools showed that these topics were given little attention and were found to be linked to historical relations rather than today’s situation (Midtbøen et al. 2014, 2017). Sámi people are still found to be portrayed and imprinted as stereotypes in teaching materials (Askeland and Aamotsbakken 2016). It seems though that increasingly more teaching aids are developed around these topics. An example of a newly developed resource is a book for teachers and teacher students about indigenous and national minorities in Norway (Andreassen and Olsen 2020a). Another example is internet resources with teaching tools and updated knowledge on Sámi language, culture and society, such as Reaidu (2023). This new trend may counteract the lack of knowledge and teaching aids on Sámi topics in school.

A study of textbooks in Social Studies and Religious Education for secondary schools showed that most books did not deal with the Christianization of the Sámi people very thoroughly (Olsen 2017). The Christianization process might in addition be regarded as a strategy of colonialization. When discussing colonialization, the textbooks did not contextualize this to the Sámi people in Norway, but they rather connected colonialization to foreign and overseas indigenous people. These textbooks were, however, published before the present curriculum, which was implemented in 2020 (Opplæringslova 2020), and Sámi cultural, historical, and societal perspectives are strengthened in the core values of the present curriculum compared to the previous one from 2006 (Evju and Olsen 2022).

In Religious Education, a critique of the fourth core element of the curriculum has been made in an analysis of governmental documents (Eggen 2022). This element presents an awareness of Sámi perspectives as part of learning about diversity. The term “diversity” can be misinterpreted, as it addresses Sámi perspectives in a manner that may cause readers to think of the Sámi people as one of an increasing number of minorities in an originally Norwegian society, not as a people indigenous to Norway. Eggen (2022) points out that it can be interpreted as a violation of ILO 169, Article 31 and CRC, Article 29.

In Norway, “Sámi guides” (Meld. St. 28. 2007–2008, p. 62), a group of youth lecturing on Sámi topics, offer visits to elementary and upper secondary schools (Samiske Veivisere 2023). Their function and purpose are to create a dialogue between Sámi and non-Sámi youth, to counteract ethnic discrimination, and to supplement teaching and learning on Sámi identity, culture, and society. A parallel to the “Sámi guides” is the Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers. These officers are found to have an impact at the school by being present as Aboriginal individuals and by giving information and support to the teachers (Booth 2014).

1.3. Sámi Topics in the Teacher Education Programs

The curriculum presented in LK20 has considerable ambitions regarding the possibilities of the inclusive practice of Sámi topics (Eriksen 2018). The intentions of LK20 will only have an impact if teachers have the competence and motivation to implement them (Andreassen and Olsen 2020b; Evju and Olsen 2022). However, within an educational system that lacks sufficient competence on Sámi culture, this might be difficult to achieve. This might be the consequence of a deprioritizing of knowledge and teaching on Sámi and national minorities in teacher educations (Olsen 2022). There is a gap between intentions and actual teaching and learning in the teacher education programs regarding Sámi historical, cultural, and societal perspectives (Andreassen and Olsen 2020a). This is particularly evident when compared to other countries and educational systems with an emphasis on indigenous peoples’ perspectives.

Today, the term Sámi is explicitly mentioned in the core values of the guidelines that apply to all teacher education programs (UHR 2018). To what degree Sámi and other national minorities are included in teacher educations varies in Norway (Lile 2011). It depends on the competence of the teacher education employees and which syllabus/textbooks they are using. Consequently, Lile (2011) argued that Norway had not accomplished the intentions of the ILO convention no. 169 because teachers and students lacked basic knowledge on Sámi topics. In addition, there are indications that the school owners are not prioritizing continuing education on Sámi topics when colleges and universities offer these (Ballovra 2015). In 2015, multiple colleges and universities had to cancel further education in Sámi culture, history, and social studies due to few applicants and because school owners did not prioritize sending teachers to the courses.

NIM suggested further research on how teacher education should include Sámi and national minorities in their education programs and argued for more research on how this competence should be strengthened (Dawson et al. 2022). They recommended that the Ministry of Education and Research in Norway initiates a national competence boost on Sámi and other national minorities for all teachers and teacher educations. This is also proposed by Olsen et al. (2017). They proposed developing courses in continuing

education, internet resources, and networks in the teacher education sector. The Sámi Parliament should be a cooperating partner to ensure the content quality. The development of competence on Sámi and national minorities for teachers and teacher educators is a prerequisite for implementing the Sámi curriculum goals and the guidelines for teacher educations.

1.4. Aim of the Study

This study addresses how Sámi topics are taught in Norwegian primary and secondary schools in the South Saepmie region (Åarjel-Saepmie). The study also addresses the teachers' experiences and reflections on these topics.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Mixed Methods Design

This study combines qualitative and quantitative data in a mixed methods design (Creswell 2009). This was performed by collecting data with a questionnaire containing closed and open questions. The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed and are presented separately. In the discussion section, qualitative and quantitative data are integrated through the interpretation of the results. The quantitative part maps the overall pattern of teaching practice of Sámi elements in different subjects. The qualitative part presents a more in-depth view into the teachers' opinions and experiences regarding teaching Sámi topics in school. The closed questions were analyzed in a quantitative manner and the open questions were analyzed qualitatively.

2.2. Respondents and Questionnaire

The participants in this study were teachers in primary and secondary schools in the South Sámi territory of Norway—from Elgå in the south up to Rana in the north (Hermanstrand et al. 2019, p. 7). An electronic questionnaire was sent by e-mail to the headmasters/contact persons at 321 schools identified through the municipality's webpages. This also included three Sámi schools (Åarjel-saemiej skuvle). One reminder to participate in the study was sent. This resulted in responses from 190 respondents and a considerable part of these respondents also provided information through the open-ended questions. The survey was carried out in the period of May–June 2021. During this period, four curricula were valid in the Norwegian schools (Table 1), LK06/LK06S from 2006 and LK20/LK20S from 2020. However, the implementation of LK20 and LK06 is the focus of this study.

The closed questions addressed background variables such as gender, age, subjects taught, teaching levels, average numbers of students in the class, and urban or rural school locations. All putative subjects were given as alternatives. Furthermore, the questions focused on elements of the Sámi culture and tradition when teaching various subjects. More detailed questions focused on to which degree respondents teach Sámi culture and tradition in different contexts. The alternatives were “Never”, “As a single event”, “Occasionally”, and “As an integrated part of the subject”. At the end, the participants were asked to which degree they teach South Sámi culture and traditions specifically. The alternatives here were “Never”, “As a single event”, “Occasionally”, “Often”, and “Others”. The informants were encouraged to give additional comments related to the closed questions and to elaborate their experiences and reflections on teaching Sámi topics in school. Table 2 presents an overview of the various background variables for the respondents.

Table 2. Background variables for the respondents to this survey.

Variables	Comments	
Population	N ≈ 3210. With an estimate of an average of 10 teachers per school	
Sample	n = 190	
Response rate		~5.9%
Gender	2 informants did not want to state their gender or other gender identity	
Female		77.4%
Male		21.6%
Age	Percentage is given for age groups, age in years	
<35		19.4%
35–55		56.9%
>55		23.7%
Grade	Percentage is given for different grades *	
1–4	74.7% of the informants teach only grades 1–4	38.4%
5–7	17.4% of the informants teach only grades 5–7	40.0%
8–10	7.9% of the informants teach only grades 8–10	54.7%
School size	Percentage teaching in different school sizes, in students	
<100		25.8%
101–200		30.5%
201–400		25.8%
>401		17.9%
City	Percentage of schools located in a city	17.4%
Subject	Percentage teaching different subjects **	
Norwegian		61.6%
Mathematics		50.5%
Social Studies		43.2%
English		37.4%
Natural Sciences		35.8%
RE	Religion Education	34.2%
Arts and Crafts		30.0%
PE	Physical Education	28.4%
Music		25.8%
Food and Health		15.3%
Others	Foreign languages, Sámi language, elective subjects, interdisciplinary themes, etc.	16.3%

* The respondents have the possibility to tick off multiple levels. ** Presented in an order that reflects the subject's magnitude in the Norwegian schools. Informants can teach multiple subjects.

2.3. Analysis of Quantitative Data

Due to the low response, the quantitative data are presented as descriptive statistics. The number and percentage of “answers” for each question are presented to obtain an overview of the participants’ implementation of Sámi culture and tradition in their teaching. The degree to which they implement different elements of Sámi culture and traditions found in the curriculum is also presented. Furthermore, their implementation of specific South Sámi cultural and traditional aspects are highlighted. The alternatives “As a single event” and “Occasionally” were merged into one category in the results. Responses on the subject Sámi language are not specified in the results to maintain the anonymity of the respondents. However, their responses are integrated as a part of the qualitative analysis.

2.4. Analysis of Qualitative Data

The responders had the option to comment freely after each closed question in the questionnaire. They could also comment freely at the very end of the questionnaire. All these comments were collected into one document containing a volume of 4934 words organized in sentences. This text was subjected to a thematic analysis according to [Braun](#)

and Clarke (2006). The initial codes were obtained with an inductive approach resulting in eight codes (Table 3). Examples of statements annotated to each initial code are shown.

Table 3. Codes and examples of statements from the responders. The statements are translated from Norwegian into English. The number of statements assigned to each code are indicated.

Code	Number of Statements	Example of Statement
Resources	34	There is not enough funding in the school to visit museums or resource centers.
Sámi in all subjects—curriculum	7	I wish it could be more integrated in the subjects, but I feel that we, the teachers, lack enough knowledge to practice that.
“Theme day”, “theme week”, Sámi National Day	13	We have Sámi children at our school, and we celebrate February 6th with flag raising and singing.
Oppression and colonialization	5	It is especially important in topics that deal with Norwegianization and conflicts.
External resources	47	A visit of two Sámi people talking about their history and childhood.
Competence	14	Unfortunately, I do not know the Sámi culture and tradition well enough to distinguish between different Sámi cultures.
Teacher education	8	I hope the teacher education programs today have better training and that future teachers will be better qualified to teach about Sámi culture and life.
South Sámi	17	We need more resources on the South Sámi language and culture. The text-books are mostly focused on Northern Sámi conditions.

The final coding results were analyzed and discussed between the authors of this paper to ensure a common understanding and interpretation of the text. The codes were then organized into three categories according to the research questions in a more deductive approach (Table 4).

Table 4. The eight initial codes were organized into three broader term categories.

Categories	Codes Assigned to Each Category
Content and implementation of the teaching	Sámi in all subjects—curriculum “Theme day”, “theme week”, Sámi National Day Oppression and colonialization
Competence	Competence Teacher education
Teaching aids	Resources External resources South Sámi

Quotes are translated from Norwegian into English when presented in the Results and Discussion chapters.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The study followed the general ethical standards approved by the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2022). The electronic questionnaire was anonymous; however, since some of the respondents could be identified by combining background variables and other information, measures were taken to keep the respondents anonymous.

3. Results

The quantitative results are presented in Tables 5–7. Table 5 shows to what degree Sámi topics are taught in the various subjects, Table 6 presents teaching aids used when teaching

Sámi culture and traditions in different subjects, and Table 7 shows to what degree South Sámi culture and tradition specifically are implemented in ordinary teaching. The school subjects presented are those that have Sámi elements explicitly stated in their competence goals or in the core element of the subject. The qualitative results are presented at the end of the Results section in the context of the categories.

Table 5. The reported degree of teaching Sámi culture and traditions in various subjects.

Subject	Norwegian N = 102	Social Studies N = 78	English N = 18	Natural Sciences N = 36	Religion Education N = 49	Arts and Crafts N = 57	Music N = 42	Food and Health N = 28
Values Given below Are Numbers of Participants That Reported Teaching in Sámi Topics for the Alternatives Never, As a Single Event/Occasionally and As an Integrated Part of the Subject.								
Sámi traditional use of animals, plants, and fungi	29/64/9	15/47/16	10/5/3	0/25/11	24/17/8	21/28/10	34/5/3	1/15/12
Constellation, of stars	60/34/8	40/30/8	16/2/0	14/18/4	26/19/4	33/21/5	35/6/1	26/1/1
Social conflicts *	29/61/12	7/43/28	5/11/2	9/18/9	18/23/8	41/16/2	34/6/2	18/9/1
Sámi pre-Christian religion and tradition	29/55/18	14/46/18	10/6/2	17/13/6	2/18/29	31/21/7	28/10/4	21/5/2
The politics of Norwegianization	18/47/37	9/37/32	6/9/3	18/13/5	11/21/17	40/16/3	27/14/1	20/7/1
Sámi language and linguistic rights	3/55/44	10/44/24	3/12/3	16/15/5	17/17/15	34/21/4	15/23/4	19/8/1
Sámi texts	10/61/31	24/43/11	11/5/2	18/17/1	16/20/13	34/21/4	11/25/6	23/4/1
Sámi/indigenous culture	11/69/22	8/53/17	4/9/5	11/23/2	9/23/17	0/33/26	0/21/21	12/10/6

All subjects in the questionnaire are not included, only subjects that have Sámi elements in their competence goals. N indicates the number of informants teaching Sámi elements in the various subjects. Themes that are included in the subject competence goals are indicated with grey shading. * Conflicts between reindeer husbandry and other social interests.

Table 6. Number of informants reporting which type of teaching aids they have used when teaching Sámi culture and tradition in various subjects.

Teaching Aids	Norwegian N = 102	Social Studies N = 78	English N = 18	Natural Sciences N = 36	Religion Education N = 49	Arts and Crafts N = 57	Music N = 42	Food and Health N = 28
Use textbooks	53	52	10	18	25	10	11	9
Visits to resource centers, etc.	22	21	2	7	10	15	3	3
Visits of external resource person	25	20	1	9	10	14	8	3
Use other teaching aids	91	68	17	33	45	50	36	23

Table 7. Percentages of 168 informants reporting various degree of implementation of South Sámi culture and tradition in their ordinary teaching.

Degree of Teaching in South Sámi Aspects	Number (%)
Never	55 (32.7%)
As a single event	34 (20.2%)
Occasionally	52 (31.0%)
Often	25 (14.9%)
Other	2 (1.20%)

The informants represent a variety of background characteristics, such as gender, age, teaching levels, school sizes, and teaching subjects (Table 2). Overall, of the total 190 respondents, 168 (88.4%) reported that they implemented Sámi culture and traditions in their teaching. Some informants reported never teaching Sámi topics at all in the following subjects: Norwegian—15 of 117, Social Studies—4 of 82, English—53 of 71, Natural Sciences—32 of 68, Religion Education (RE)—16 of 65, Arts and Crafts—0 of 57, Music—7 of 49, and Food and Health—1 of 29.

Table 5 shows that in the subject Norwegian and Social Studies, most of the teachers' state teaching Sámi topics as a single event/occasionally or as an integrated part when it comes to themes reflecting the competence goals of the subject. Moreover, teaching is not only limited to themes explicitly formulated in the curriculum, and a considerable part of the teachers include other Sámi topics in their teaching. Concerning teaching aids, about one-quarter report using resource centers, etc., in both subjects (Table 6). In Norwegian, about half of the teacher's report using textbooks as teaching aids and about 2/3 in Social Studies. However, a considerable portion of the teachers are also using other teaching aids (Norwegian 91 of 102 and Social Studies 68 of 78).

In English, a considerable part of the participants teach Sámi topics as a single event/occasionally and as an integrated part of the subject according to the curriculum (Table 5). The informants also report teaching in various themes that do not directly belong to the English curriculum. The reported usage of teaching aids was for a large part textbooks and other teaching aids (Table 6).

In Natural Sciences, a large part of the participants report teaching themes related to competence goals as a single event/occasionally and even some as an integrated part of the subject. For the theme "Sámi traditional use of animals, plants, and fungi", all informants reported teaching this theme and about one-third (11 of 36) taught as an integrated part of the subject. For Natural Sciences, half of the respondents report teaching themes not specified in the competence goals of the subject. A similar proportion reports using textbooks, and some report using resource centers and external resource persons (18, 7, and 9 of 36, respectively). Almost all informants report using other teaching aids as well (33 informants).

When teaching Religion Education (RE), nearly all respondents state teaching the theme "Sámi pre-Christian religion and tradition", the only specified competence goal, as a single event/occasionally or as an integrated part of the subject (18 and 29 of 49, respectively). Additionally, in this subject, respondents state teaching other Sámi topics to some extent. Regarding teaching aids, about half of the respondents report using textbooks, one-fifth report visiting resource centers, etc., one-fifth state using visits of external resource persons, and nearly all use other teaching aids (25, 15, 14, and 45 of 49, respectively).

In Arts and Crafts, all respondents report teaching within the only subject-related competence goal of "Sámi culture (music, art and craft)", where about half the respondents teach this theme as an integrated part of the subject. A considerable fraction of the informants also state teaching in the other themes in the questionnaire. This is shown for the theme "Sámi traditional use of animals, plants and fungi". Only 10 of 57 of the informants report using textbooks, some use resource centers, etc., and visits of external resource persons (15 and 14 of 57, respectively). Nearly all use other teaching aids (50 informants).

In Music, there is one single competence goal related to “Sámi culture (music, art and craft)”, where half of the respondents report teaching this as a single event/occasionally or as an integrated part of the subject. A minor fraction states teaching within other themes in the questionnaire. However, in relation to the theme “Sámi language and linguistic rights” and “Sámi text”, more than half of the informants report teaching this as a single event/occasionally. A few respondents use textbooks, resources, and external resource persons, but a larger part uses other teaching aids (11, 3, 8, and 36 of 42, respectively).

For the subject Food and Health, the majority of the respondents report teaching within the two themes “Sámi traditional use of animals, plants and fungi” and “Sámi culture (music, art and craft)”. Both themes are related to the competence goals for the subject. In addition, a few respondents report teaching other themes as a single event/occasionally. Similar to the subject Music, a few respondents use textbooks, resources, and external resource persons, but a larger part report using other teaching aids (9, 3, 3, and 23 of 28, respectively).

The only subject without competence goals stating Sámi/indigenous mentioned by the respondents was Mathematics. For this subject, 4 of the 96 informants reported teaching elements of Sámi culture and tradition, mostly related to the theme “Sámi traditional use of animals, plants and fungi” as a single event/occasionally. These respondents used teaching aids such as resource centers and external resource persons and other teaching aids.

A total of 168 participants of 190 (88.4%) reported implementing elements of Sámi culture and tradition in their teaching. More than 30% (55) never implemented South Sámi aspects in their teaching (Table 7). However, more than 50% (86 participants) reported teaching South Sámi aspects specifically as a single event/occasionally and 14.9% (25 participants) reported teaching these aspects often.

Furthermore, the texts obtained from the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively and resulted in three major categories of information: *content and implementation of the teaching, competence, and teaching aids* (Tables 3 and 4).

3.1. Content and Implementation of the Teaching

Several informants stated that they taught Sámi topics mainly on February 6th, the Sámi National Day. One informant even wrote that it was not allowed for the school to raise the Sámi flag on February 6th due to municipality regulations (!). Other informants practiced a more extensive teaching on Sámi topics by organizing thematic weeks and interdisciplinary projects for the students. Examples of learning activities were comparing Sámi suits of clothing, Sámi arts and crafts (*duetie*), and Sámi music and language (greeting and counting). Many respondents pointed out that movies with Sámi thematic contents were shown and discussed with the students (Sámi Blood, Pathfinder, and Kautokeino Rebellion). In addition, relevant documentaries, videos, and teaching about oppression and Norwegianization were also mentioned. In general, many pointed out that there is too little focus on Sámi topics in the Norwegian school system. This can be illustrated by one respondent who wrote the following: *“In the Norwegian school Sámi topics are taught mainly on February 6th. Little is done during the rest of the year”*.

3.2. Competence

Many of the respondents wrote that their own competence in Sámi topics was insufficient and several teachers meant that this was a general problem in the Norwegian school. In addition, several wrote that they did not know the difference between different Sámi groups. This can be illustrated by one teacher stating the following: *“I do not know anything about the difference between the North and South Sámi people. I would like to have more knowledge”*. One respondent commented that the work of the Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Høybråten et al. 2023) could result in more knowledge of Sámi culture and tradition.

Several of the respondents claimed that their own knowledge and experience of Sámi culture and tradition was the enabling key for teaching these topics in school. Furthermore,

they stated that the teacher education programs had not delivered adequate focus and learning on Sámi topics. Two respondents pointed out the following: *“Knowledge of Sámi societies, culture and language should be a mandatory part of the teacher education programs”*. Another teacher wrote the following: *“My experience is that among teachers in Norway the competence within Sámi themes is scarce”*.

3.3. Teaching Aids

The respondents seem to experience a lack of teaching aids, texts, and resources when teaching Sámi topics. Most of the available teaching aids are in addition based mainly on the North Sámi culture and tradition. Accordingly, many teachers report that they develop and make their own teaching aids often based on digital resources like the internet, YouTube, governmental television (NRK school), and resource sites like *“Gávnos, Salaby, Tidsreise Sàpmi and Baalka.se”*. The latter is a Swedish resource site focusing on South Sámi culture and history.

Several respondents state that the best teaching and learning is performed by getting resourceful local people to visit their classes. Examples of such people are reindeer herders and people with traditional knowledge of Sámi crafts and culture. Visiting local reindeer herders during animal gatherings was also mentioned, and schools in the proximity of resource sites and museums such as Saemien sijte, were used these for class visits. Such class visit activities were however limited by the school economy according to several respondents, which can be illustrated by the following statement: *“There is not economy in the school to visit museums or Sámi cultural centres”*. One teacher, however, pointed out that teaching on Sámi topics seems to be in progress.

Other examples from various subjects are, e.g., for the subject Norwegian internet resources, articles on Sámi culture, and television documentaries. In particular, the movie *Sámi Blood* was mentioned by several, and the movie seems to be highly appreciated, which can be illustrated by the following statement: *“Sámi Blood proved to be a rare diamond in the glaring shortage of teaching aids”*. The teachers also mentioned the importance of local resource persons and fieldwork, including visiting nearby Sámi sites. In Social Studies, informants highlighted Sámi students in the class and internet resources (YouTube, NRK, Gávnos, Salaby, Tidsreise Sàpmi and Baalka.se).

In Natural Sciences, teachers specify using experience and knowledge from their own students, outdoor field activities, and South Sámi traditional practices. Informants also report interdisciplinary approaches for teaching Sámi-related topics. In Religion Education, one teacher specified that *“the textbooks contain vanishingly little information about Sámi pre-Christian religion. The content is basically related to Laestadian Lutheranism and Sámi ceremonial drums. And besides, the impression is that the South-Sámi people is forgotten”*.

In Arts and Crafts, several respondents report using internet resources and visits from Sámi traditional craftsmen (*duedtie*). Examples of activities mentioned are clothes, the use of colors and patterns in a Sámi cultural context, and making jewelry of reindeer antlers and leather. In Music, the respondents elaborate that other teaching aids used are internet resources and teaching with inspiration from Sámi artists. One informant specified the Sámi song tradition, yikes (*joik/vuelie*), as an important source of inspiration: *“Yikes is an important topic in the Music subject. We are listening to Sámi music and yikes. The students are composing their own yikes, which they perform to each other”*.

For the subject Food and Health, internet resources were highlighted. In addition, one respondent wrote *“I bought meat of reindeer containing a wrapping with Sámi symbols and information written in the Sámi language. This was further used in a theoretical/philosophical discussion while the meat was boiling”*. In Mathematics, the respondents mentioned Sámi ways of counting, the good opportunities the Sámi traditional ornaments offer in learning geometry, and the design of mathematical problems within a Sámi context.

4. Discussion

This study investigated how Sámi topics in the current curriculum are taught in Norwegian schools in the South Saepmie region. The study also addresses the teachers' experiences teaching Sámi content. The quantitative results are discussed in light of the qualitative categories *Content and implementation of the teaching, competence and teaching aids*.

4.1. Content and Implementation of the Teaching

Overall, both quantitative and qualitative data indicated variations in teaching Sámi topics. A considerable part of the respondents report implementing Sámi culture and traditions in their teaching (88.4%). Many of the respondents in this study seem to teach Sámi topics according to the subjects' competence goals to a large or some extent. Generally, there seems to be little indication that Sámi content is taught as an integrated part of the teaching. As Lile (2011) reported that there was little focus on teaching Sámi topics in the North Saepmie region, our results might indicate that there is a somewhat higher focus on these topics in the South Saepmie region. This seems to be somewhat contradictory to the findings by Dawson et al. (2022), where knowledge of Sámi culture and tradition seemed to be higher in the northern part of Saepmie. The apparent difference could also be a result of the 10 year time lap between Lile (2011) and our study, and the curriculum LK20 was not yet implemented at the time of the study. However, the relatively unexpected high percentage of teaching Sámi topics might also reflect that the selection of respondents might be biased and not representative (see Strengths and Limitations of the Study).

How Sámi content is taught ranges from a "happening" on February 6th, the Sámi national and official flag day, to a more extensive teaching organized as thematic weeks and interdisciplinary projects. This corresponds to the study by Evju and Olsen (2022), reporting that interdisciplinary teaching in general, and on February 6th in particular, is a preferred way and opportunity to work on Sámi projects. Further, schools and kindergartens are found to be important arenas for marking 6 February, and in urban areas, this national day is often celebrated with public events (Andreassen and Olsen 2020b). A concern might be that this day ends up being the only day teachers are addressing Sámi content in school. The latter is also reported in studies that indicate that schools and teachers do not prioritize these topics, and this might be due to little knowledge of Sámi topics among teachers (Dawson et al. 2022; Evju and Olsen 2022; Lile 2011; Olsen 2022). One example in our study illustrating this concern is that one respondent experienced that the school did not allow the raising of the Sámi flag on February 6th due to municipality regulations. This is disturbing because February 6th has been an official flag day in Norway since 2004 (Olsen 2022).

A considerable part of the respondents also report teaching themes not directly found in the curriculum of the various subjects. This was found throughout all subjects. Teaching Sámi topics through interdisciplinarity may explain the respondents reporting teaching themes that are not directly stated in the various subjects' curricula. Respondents answering the questionnaire may not differ between the teaching implemented exclusively in the subjects or as an interdisciplinary project. Interdisciplinary approaches were commented on particularly for natural sciences, and interdisciplinarity is found to be preferable for teaching Sámi topics (Evju 2022; Evju and Olsen 2022; Murray 2022). An explanation might be that teachers may have the tendency to focus on the subject's competence goals and to a lesser extent implement the core curriculum in their teaching activities (Sem and Kolberg 2022). Anyway, the core curriculum of LK20/LK20S is at present of greater importance than previously, and it has many terms addressing Sámi topics where some are explicitly formulated (Sámi) and some have a more implicit nature (indigenous, diversity, society, history, and cultural heritage). Interdisciplinary projects and "happenings" might be a way to fulfill the intentions of the core curriculum.

4.2. Competence

The respondents emphasized the importance of their own competence as insufficient and they reported having limited knowledge, especially in the variations in Sámi culture

and tradition. In general, the impression was that the teacher education programs in Norway had to significantly improve in order to meet the need for knowledge. This is also reflected in the quantitative results, where 30% of the respondents report never including South Sámi aspects specifically in their teaching, where English (75%), Natural Sciences (47%), and Religion Education (24%) were most prominent. This is consistent with the findings by [Olsen \(2022\)](#), who reported a lack of training in Sámi topics in teacher education programs and continuing education for teachers. In addition, there are indications that when colleges and universities offer continuing teacher education on Sámi content, school owners do not prioritize these kinds of courses ([Ballovvara 2015](#); [Olsen et al. 2017](#)).

The respondents in this study claim accordingly that their own acquired knowledge and experience enabled them to teach these topics. This shows a necessity for continuing education, which is also recommended by the Norwegian National Human Rights Institutions (NIM). NIM proposed continuing education as one of their recommendations to improve the overall knowledge of Sámi people in Norway ([Dawson et al. 2022](#)).

One intention of the curriculum is to give students knowledge on Sámi topics and knowledge on the diversity of Sámi aspects ([Kunnskapsdepartementet 2017](#)). Our study shows that this may not be fully practiced, which also was found by [Evju and Olsen \(2022\)](#) and [Lile \(2011\)](#). The intentions can only be implemented if teachers have the corresponding competence. Our data indicate that this lack of implementation might be due to incomplete teacher competence, as previously reported ([Olsen 2022](#)).

4.3. Teaching Aids

The lack of teaching aids is experienced to some extent by the respondents of this study. Accessible teaching aids are also reported to be unilateral, as they seem to mainly deal with North Sámi aspects. This may negatively affect the possibility to fulfill the intentions of the curriculum to teach on the variety in Sámi culture and tradition ([Kunnskapsdepartementet 2017](#)). Developing more internet resources is one of the national recommendations to improve access to teaching aids on Sámi topics ([Dawson et al. 2022](#)). *Reaidu* is a good example of such a newly developed internet site ([Reaidu 2023](#)).

However, the quantitative results indicate that respondent teachers are using a mixture of textbooks and external resources in all subjects (centers and persons). Little is mentioned about the textbooks in the qualitative data, but one respondent stated that the textbook used in Religion Education contained little information about Sámi pre-Christian religion. This informant also pointed out that South Sámi perspectives seems to be forgotten in that textbook. This is also a finding by [Midtbøen et al. \(2014, 2017\)](#), where Sámi aspects were linked to historical themes and pictured stereotypes ([Askeland and Aamotsbakken 2016](#)).

The current curriculum, LK20, is pointing out that the use of local resources is desirable ([Kunnskapsdepartementet 2017](#)). There are several examples in our study that local resources seem to be overall important, and local resources are found to provide authentic learning contexts and to facilitate efficient learning processes ([Sinnes 2021](#)). In addition to providing an authentic learning context, such a teaching strategy might give a greater legitimacy and relevance compared to other teaching aids. The use of resource persons and indigenous guides is also found to be important in learning about Aboriginal Australians and the Māori of New Zealand ([Booth 2014](#)).

Teachers in this study seem to use local resources extensively; however, for schools outside the Saepmie region, the access to external resources such as persons and centers may be more limited. This may lead to the deprioritization of Sámi topics outside the Saepmie region, as found by [Evju and Olsen \(2022\)](#) and [Lile \(2011\)](#). In addition, respondents in this study report that the economy is a limiting factor for organizing school trips to resource centers. Although Sámi guides are available in the whole of Norway ([Samiske Veivisere 2023](#)), Sámi guides were not mentioned by our respondents.

For all subjects, a high degree of the respondents report using other teaching aids than textbooks and external persons and centers. Some respondents state using students in the class as resource persons. Using students has great potential; however, this must be

performed with caution and in compliance with the parents (Andreassen and Olsen 2020a). Further, many of the respondents seem to find movies as an important teaching asset. One example is in the subjects Norwegian and Social Studies, where the respondents reported using the movie *Sámi Blood*, which is unique as it is the only movie with a South Sámi narrative and language (Anderson 2020). This could be due to outdated and/or limited textbooks, as found by Evju and Olsen (2022), where teachers in Social Studies reported the extensive use of internet resources because teaching textbooks were outdated. Other resources mentioned by our respondents are internet sites developed and maintained by the governments of Norway and Sweden. One example is Baalka.se, which is unique because it is the only site dedicated to the South Sámi language and culture (Baalka 2023). These reported assets are relatively new, and our respondents experienced an increased accessibility of teaching aids, which corresponds to the findings by Dawson et al. (2022) and Olsen (2020). In this context, another teaching aid worth mentioning is the book *Ávdnet* (Figenschou et al. 2023), which is presenting ideas for teaching Sámi topics in different subjects.

Several respondents report an insufficiency of teaching aids. It is unclear why some teachers seem to find a lack of teaching aids, as others provide a range of examples of teaching aids. One explanation proposed by Evju and Olsen (2022) might be the time-consuming effort to search for resources that are relevant and the quality is assured.

4.4. Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The potential number of teachers in the study area is unknown. As the questionnaire was sent to the headmasters and other contact persons, the actual number of respondents receiving the questionnaire is unknown, but we estimate a response rate of approximately 6%. The estimate is based on the assumptions of 321 schools with an average staff of 10 teachers. This is considered to be very low, and our results may therefore carry the risk of lower validity. A low response rate could imply an underestimation of the spread of the underlying population, and the responding group may not be fully representative of all teachers in the South Saepmie area. An indication of this might be the relatively high percentage of the respondents reporting teaching Sámi content to a large or some extent compared to previous studies. Further, the open-ended questions indicate that many of the respondents have a personal interest in this field. We therefore interpret the results as valid for only a certain part of the teachers. It is nonetheless important to explore these dedicated teachers' reflections on teaching Sámi topics because they are familiar with the opportunities and difficulties concerning this. We consequently focus mainly on the qualitative results.

Among the potential respondents in this study, teachers at a few schools (Sámi schools) were teaching according to LK06S/LK20S. Although the questionnaire focused on LK06/LK20, the survey addressed themes that are recognizable in standard and "S" variants of the curricula. In addition, the respondents had the opportunity to give reflections in open-ended questions.

Due to the low response, inferential statistics were not applied and excessive differentiating based on different background variables was not performed. Moreover, the respondents seem to be representative when it comes to variables such as subjects, gender, age, school sizes, and grades taught (Table 2). In the quantitative analysis, we therefore strived to obtain an overview of the data, giving only descriptive statistics. We therefore argue that the study's validity is relatively high in the context where we are discussing the results.

The questionnaire could be perceived as insufficient with respect to electable alternatives, as not all themes were exactly formulated as found in the competence goals (Table 1). One example is "indigenous people and identity", which could be experienced as a "missing" alternative for those respondents teaching Social Sciences. However, the questionnaire gave the respondents multiple opportunities to add additional comments on insufficiencies, etc., that could be found in the questionnaire.

5. Conclusions

The current curriculum, LK20, emphasizes Sámi content in both the core curriculum, values, and principles for primary and secondary education, and in the competence goals of the different subjects. Teaching about indigenous and national minorities has two purposes: to gain knowledge and build attitude-forming values; and to understand and meet people with respect and human dignity (Andreassen and Olsen 2020a). The school has therefore an important role in counteracting prejudice and discrimination by fulfilling the intentions of LK20 and promoting an understanding of diversity, democratic values, and attitudes. This is evident when Sámi people and national minorities report an experience of discrimination and hatred to a larger degree than the average population (Dawson et al. 2022). Our study indicates that the teachers in South Saepmie are to some extent implementing Sámi content in their teaching. The reported interdisciplinary- and project-based teaching might be an implementation of the core curriculum intentions, in addition to subject competence goals. However, there seems to be a felt lack of competence and teaching aids that may lead to an unfulfillment of the curriculum objectives. Therefore, a prerequisite is that there is a greater emphasis on Sámi content in teacher education programs, and, subsequently, there is a need to further investigate how this is managed in schools and teacher education programs. The development of more emphasis on Sámi content in the Norwegian curricula is an indication of a development towards indigenization (Andreassen and Olsen 2020b). A similar development is also found in Aotearoa/New Zealand with an increased focus on the Māori in the curricula as a recognition of this indigenous people (Ritchie and Skerrett 2014). One possible interpretation is that our findings and other studies are signs of ongoing international development in the direction of indigenization in the educational systems and the societies of various countries.

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