General description of research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

'Quick' global and European level policy comparisons increasingly inform national state's policy making (Grek & Lawn, 2009, 2012, Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Lundahl and Waldow (2009) identify how 'quick languages' of national and international tests frame up and make educational policy discourse accessible to wider circles of participants. The issue of policy borrowing have been thoroughly researched (Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012) with increased attention given to supranational organisations' (Dale, 2005) influence on national states' policy making (Grek, 2009, 2013; Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm & Simola, 2011). Prøitz (2015) demonstrates a sequential approach of uploading and downloading that shaped OECDs (2013) policy review *Synergies for better learning*, and note that domestic policies' impact on international policy reviews is under-researched. In this paper we illuminate processes that inform the construction of supranational representations of national policies by examining selected frameworks and processes for nation states’ self-representation of educational assessment policies within the EU and OECD. The purpose is to illustrate the complexity of this information and its validity as source of constructing national policy.

Addressing the large presence of educational assessment practices on the governing agenda, Meadmore (1995) identify 'the political balancing act of keeping the language of policy making in accordance with what is in the child’s best interests as well as satisfying the needs of government to 'know' a population so that it can act in ways which are considered to be appropriate to state building' (p. 9). The increased influence of supranational organisations on education policy have been characterised by Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm & Simola (2011) as the governance turn, describing the shift from the practice of policy and administration within the state-form (government) to more involvement of other agents and agencies such as EU and the OECD. Indeed, initiatives from global and European actors have lead to national discussions as to what is required by a nation and its inhabitants to excel in the international competition. The so-called 'knowledge economy' legitimizes external involvement in national education systems (Forsberg, 2014).

We identify examples of governments' attempt to legitimise new policy implementation claiming a need for coherence with the European 'normality'. We illuminate tendencies of European policy isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) guided by misinterpretations or inferences based on global and European level information concerning policy structures that cannot be substantiated. These modes of legitimising policies create new national semantics for governing education.

Nations' borrowing is mediated by structural comparisons that are constructions developed through procedures for representation and data reduction that may be standardized and not (see also Lundahl 2014). This type of policy borrowing is often not made explicit. This is problematic in policy areas of which the juridical and political terms are highly institutionalised and embedded in the nations’ distinct tradition. Educational assessment, particularly the formal assessments and national instruments underpinning meritocratic procedures, often relies on 'taken for granted' information because ‘all’ members of the national political contexts have undertaken these assessments (Lundahl & Tveit 2014). This implicitness becomes problematic when self-reported representations of national policies inform other countries’ policy making.

We address the validity of these inferences by examining: (1) What can be said and compared with regards to grading policies based on European and global level information? (2) Who are the authors of national states' self-reporting to global and European level information services?

(3) Further, addressing other sources of information and scholarly articles, we examine how the self-reported and supranational mediated policy information stand the test of scrutiny based on scholarly articles addressing selected countries’ policies for educational assessment.

Up to 600 words – now 583.

Methods/methodology

The paper compares three sources of data facilitating an overview and in-depth insight into characteristics of European countries’ policies on educational assessment:

1. Primary source for the overview is the information provided by the European Commissions’ *Eurydice Network*. Facilitated by the European Commission's Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice provides European-level analyses and information developed to assist policy makers responsible for education systems and policies in Europe (Eurydice, 2014). Information was gathered from their online platform *Eurypedia* during the fall 2014.
2. Country background reports from the 13 countries that formed part of OECD’s Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes published from 2010 to 2013: Austria, Belgium
While the content addressed is policy on educational assessment, the paper investigates comparison issues that arise with regards to the various producers of the Eurydice and OECD review data. A problem, which indeed is what the Eurydice network aims to help policy makers with, is the issue of sharing information that for the most part is available in the particular nations’ domestic language. For researchers it is important to examine other sources and particularly scholarly articles about countries’ education policy, in order to control for misinterpretation or biased representations of national policies (Dale & Robertson, 2009). Thus mastering the relevant language is pivotal. Further, procedure for validating the generated policy information and our own inferences is undertaken to address the challenge of ensuring functional equivalence (Schriewer, 2003) of both policy structures, and legal and political terminology.

The paper addresses methodological challenges with regards to classification. Years/levels in Eurydice may not be fully comparable. Thus different interpretations across the countries may cause variations in the reporting on e.g. what age students are when receiving formal grades. Furthermore, the interpretation of policies for progression of students (and how usual retention is) is likely to differ both among constructors of the Eurydice data and between them and the users of the database. These problems of constructing and borrowing supranational representations are addressed both with regards to policy implications and the methodological challenges for researchers.

**Expected outcomes/results**

We identify examples where supranational organisations’ mediation of national states’ policies are underestimated. Preliminary analyses illuminated:

1. Inconsistent use of the terminology grading and marking
2. Various use of the terms formative and summative assessment
3. Implicitness with regards to the high stakes of teacher judgments’ and their relation to national instruments
4. Uncertainty as to what Year (and age of students) formal grades have a certification or other high-stakes functions

Our preliminary analyses identify that ‘all’ European countries except Switzerland formed part of the Eurydice data, while 13 countries formed part of the OECD review. Four of the OECD country background reports only list individual’s names as authors. Five list the respective Ministry of Education (or equivalent) as the single author, whereas 2 have the Ministry as the co-author with either a university department. Norway is the only country where the government education agency responsible for policy implementation is the author. In three countries university departments are the only authors. Denmark is the only country which has a consultancy company listed as one of the authors.

There is not much written about representations of countries’ educational systems (Lundahl 2014). To what degree, and why does it for example matter who wrote them and from what perspective? There seem to be a lack of standardisation in the Eurydice representation of country systems concerning the use of concepts and the level of description. We also expect to find differences in the descriptions between the different kinds of country reports. Furthermore the Eurydice material may leave more for interpretations, yet claim to be more factual. In our analyses we relate these differences both to other sources but also to awareness of the ambiguities of educational terminology. We expect to find more rigours definitions of the terminology when turning to scholarly texts.

**Intent of publication**


**References**


