

## Mother tongue education in four Nordic countries – problem, right or resource?

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*The Declaration of a Nordic Language Policy stipulates that all Nordic residents have the right to preserve and develop their mother tongue and their national minority languages. Hence, this article investigates the question of mother tongue education for linguistic minority students. Through four ‘telling cases’, the article explores how four Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, orient towards mother tongues, Indigenous and national minority languages in their educational policies. Drawing on Ruíz’ (1984) framework of orientations in language planning, we investigate the following question: In what ways are mother tongues framed as rights, resources, or problems in four telling cases of educational policy in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden? The analysis of the telling cases shows that although all four countries provide various forms of mother tongue education, thus apparently aligning with the intentions in the Declaration of a Nordic Language Policy, there are important differences between the provisions. Nevertheless, across the four countries, the official national languages are placed at the top of a language ideological hierarchy. The official national languages are followed by national minority languages as mother tongues. These languages are awarded rights but are not considered resources for the whole population (e.g., Ruíz, 1984). The Danish telling case inserts a supranational layer in the hierarchy, namely mother tongues with status as official languages in the European Union. The hierarchy of mother tongues thus reflects how some types of mother tongues are more readily granted rights and considered to be resources than others.*

*Keywords:* mother tongue education, orientations in language planning, linguistic minority students

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## 1 Introduction

In the late 1990s, prominent Norwegian researchers, Thor Ola Engen and Lars Anders Kulbrandstad wrote that there is most likely no other topic in education that incites such strong emotions and causes as much debate as the question of mother tongue education (MTE) for linguistic minority students (1998, p. 163). More than two decades later, this is still the case. Therefore, this article revisits the topic of MTE for linguistic minority students. Through four ‘telling cases’, the article aims to explore how four Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, orient towards mother tongues, Indigenous and national minority languages in their educational policies. With the term *educational policy*, we refer to the various documents, laws and regulations regarding MTE in the national curriculum of the four countries as well as their translation into educational practice. In this article, we understand MTE in a broad and inclusive sense ranging from subject provision of MTE in languages other than the official language(s) to institutionalized uses of mother tongues as learning support. In line with previous studies (Salö et al., 2018), we use the term ‘mother tongue’ to refer to the language used by linguistic minorities with migration background or by Indigenous or national minorities. Drawing on Ruíz’ (1984) framework of orientations in language planning, we investigate the following question: In what ways are mother tongues framed as rights, resources or problems in four telling cases of educational policy in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden?

In the following sections, we first describe the Nordic context that we are investigating in terms of its current demographics, as well as its linguistic history. We then present the theories on language ideologies and orientations in language policy and planning that drive our analysis. Next, the telling cases from each country are analysed, compared, and discussed. Finally, we discuss the ideological underpinnings of educational policy described in the four telling cases.

## 2 The linguistic landscape in four Nordic countries

In this article, we focus on the four Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, highlighted in blue in the map in Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1.** Nordic countries in focus: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden

This selection extends beyond Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), but does not cover the entire geopolitical area of the Nordic Region (the five Nordic countries

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden and the three autonomous areas Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland). The four selected Nordic countries form a coherent regional unity, but simultaneously constitute four separate independent nation states, demarcated by national boundaries and symbolized by the four national flags. The countries not only vary in terms of size, demographics and population, but also when it comes to language and policies regarding multilingualism. In the following, we provide a brief sketch of the linguistic landscape in each of the four countries (listed in alphabetical order).

Denmark has a population of 5 873 420 inhabitants (Statistics Denmark, 2023). There is no Danish language act, and while the constitution is written in Danish, it does not explicitly declare Danish the official language of Denmark. However, Danish is recognized as an official EU language and de facto serves as the official language of Denmark (see Jarvad, 2001). No official information is available on the number of languages other than Danish spoken by inhabitants in Denmark since official national statistics focus on national origin rather than language. National statistics rely on the categories ‘immigrants’ and ‘descendants of immigrants’ (cf. Statistics Denmark, 2023) with roots in more than 200 countries across the world. Among immigrants, those from Poland currently constitute the largest subgroup followed by immigrants from Syria, Romania and Turkey. Among descendants, the largest group is from Turkey followed by Lebanon (including Palestine), Iraq, Pakistan and Somalia (Statistics Denmark, 2023). In primary and lower secondary school, immigrants and descendants currently constitute 14% of the student population.<sup>1</sup>

In Finland, there are 5 550 066 inhabitants (Statistics Finland, 2022). At the end of 2021, 8.3% of the populations had a first language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi (Statistics Finland, 2023). Between 2000 and 2019, this percentage has increased by 400% (Kuntaliitto, 2020). Finland is constitutionally bilingual (Finnish and Swedish languages), with the constitution and European Charter for Regional and Minority languages also defining the status of some languages. For example, there are several Sámi languages spoken in Finland, and they have an official status in Northern Finland. In the school year 2021 - 2022, 43 800 students attended Finnish or Swedish as a second language instruction in Finland (Vipunen, 2023). In 2020, 22 041 students participated in MTE in a total of 57 languages other than the official languages in Finland (EDUFI, 2023). Although these numbers do not represent all students with a migrant background in Finland, they are the only statistics available. Immigration has become more intense and changed character in Finland (Kuntaliitto, 2020), and therefore methods for collecting and analyzing such statistics are still being developed.

Norway has a population of 5 488 984 (Statistics Norway, 2023). Both Norwegian and Sámi are official languages, whereas Kven, Romani and Romanés are considered national minority languages. There are 877 227 immigrants (defined as persons born abroad to two foreign-born parents and four foreign-born grandparents), representing 16% of the total population. 213 810 are defined as Norwegian-born to immigrant parents (persons born in Norway to two foreign-born parents who in addition have four foreign-born grandparents), representing 3.3% of the total population (Statistics Norway, 2023). In common with Denmark, there are no statistics in terms of languages spoken, but rather countries of origin. The five largest countries of origin for immigrants are Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Syria and Somalia, and for Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, the five largest country groups are Poland, Lithuania, Somalia, Pakistan and Sweden. In 2021, 19% of all children in kindergarten were so-called minority language children, that is, that both the child and both parents have a mother tongue other than Norwegian, Sámi, Danish, Swedish or English (NDET, 2022). There are no statistics

regarding the number of minority language children in schools, but 6,3% of all students in primary and lower secondary school receive basic training in Norwegian (NDET, 2022).

The population of Sweden is 10 521 556 (Statistics Sweden, 2023), making it the most populous country of the four. The official national language is Swedish and the national minority languages are Finnish, Meänkieli (Tornedal Finnish), Yiddish, Romani Chib (all varieties) and Sámi (all varieties). As is the case in Denmark and Norway, there are no statistics in terms of languages spoken, but some statistics on language education exist. In the academic year 2021/22, 29% of students in primary and lower secondary education were registered as using a language other than Swedish at home on a regular basis with at least one caregiver (SNAE, 2022a), thereby being eligible to study that language through the elective subject of Mother tongue. 180 languages were taught through the subject of Mother tongue in 2020/21, and the five largest language groups (the languages studied by most students) were Arabic, Somali, English, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and Kurdish (SNAE, 2021). These figures, while only relating to the education in primary and lower secondary education, provide an approximate reflection of the linguistic diversity in broader social contexts in Sweden.

As the statistical accounts suggest, the linguistic landscape in the Nordic countries is much more complex than the simple isomorphic situation that Figure 1 may at first glance suggest: Four countries, four languages. Alongside the dominant official national languages – in some countries more than one language – we find various national minority languages and a large number of migrant minority languages. While speakers of migrant minority languages such as Somali or Turkish are dispersed throughout the four countries, the national minority languages often pertain to a specific regional space. Sámi and Swedish are cases in point. Geographically, the Sámi speaking space extends across three of the four countries including the northern-most region of Norway, north-western Sweden and northern Finland, where various Sámi languages are spoken. Apart from Sweden, speakers of Swedish also inhabit western and southern coastal areas of Finland.

This complex linguistic landscape in the Nordic Region is acknowledged in the first Declaration on a Nordic language policy (NCM, 2007). The declaration was issued by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2006 and is described as “a democratic language policy for the multilingual Nordic community” (NCM, 2007, p. 92), and a central part of the declaration is a statement of the linguistic rights of all residents in the Nordic countries. These include the right to acquire skills in languages essential to each society, languages of international importance, and also mother tongues other than the official languages. The declaration thus stipulates that all Nordic residents have the right “to preserve and develop their mother tongue and their national minority languages” (NCM, 2007, p. 92).

In this article, we explore how this intention is translated into the educational policies related to MTE in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Mother tongue maintenance and development can take place both in informal settings and through the educational system; our focus is the latter. Table 1 provides an overview of forms of MTE in primary and lower secondary school in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden:

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
<b>Official terminology in Danish/Finnish/Norwegian/Swedish</b>	Modersmåls-undervisning	Oppilaan oma äidinkieli	a) Morsmålsopplæring for språklige minoriteter b) Tospråklig fagopplæring	a) Modersmål b) Studiehandedning på modersmålet
<b>Literal translation to English</b>	Mother tongue teaching	Student's own mother tongue	a) Mother tongue education for linguistic minorities b) Bilingual subject education	a) Mother tongue b) Study guidance in the mother tongue

**Table 1.** Provision of mother tongue education in the four Nordic countries

Table 1 shows that provision for some kind of MTE in languages other than the national language(s) is available in primary and lower secondary school in all four countries. However, the table also suggests that there are important differences in extent, organization and nature of MTE in the four Nordic countries – differences which can be understood as reflections of language ideological positions and orientations to language planning. Selected differences are highlighted in the four telling cases from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Before we move to the telling cases, we present the theoretical framework and the methodological and analytical approach in the following sections.

### 3 Language ideologies

The study of language ideologies has attracted numerous sociolinguistic researchers for the past decades, and their findings are highly relevant for educational contexts (Kroskrity, 2000; Paulsrud & Rosén, 2019; Piller, 2015). Kroskrity (2000) defines language ideologies as “beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states” (p. 192). After studying language ideologies in education, Conteh and Meier (2014) concluded that “which languages are taught, and through which languages content is taught [...] are based on socio-political discourses and ideology” (p. 4). For instance, Nørreby (2020) has shown how so-called Western languages, such as English and German, are valued highly in the Danish education system, whereas Non-Western languages, such as Arabic and Somali, are not valued to the same degree. Similar tendencies are seen in the other Nordic countries (Bijvoet, 2020; Iversen, 2021; Nikula et al., 2012; Saarinen, 2012).

Danish research on language attitudes has documented a systematic hierarchy in attitudes to accented Danish. Investigations based on matched guise techniques establish a consistent accent hierarchy in which standard Danish spoken by so-called mother tongue speakers of Danish is systematically evaluated more positively than Danish with an accent – especially accents attributed to speakers of migrant languages such as Turkish or Arabic as a mother tongue (Jørgensen & Quist, 2001; Kirilova, 2006; Ladegaard, 2002). Even among primary school children, “stylized immigrant Danish” is evaluated remarkably more negatively than other kinds of Danish (Hyttel-Sørensen, 2011). In a recent Norwegian study of language ideologies among student teachers in

Norway, Iversen compares the student teachers' attitudes to the linguistic rights of speakers of Sámi and Somali in Norwegian schools (Iversen, 2021). Even if Norway is reputed for intense dialectal variation and a relatively high social tolerance for linguistic variation (see Kulbrandstad, 2007), Iversen found that the student teachers are much more positive towards the linguistic rights of speakers of Sámi, an Indigenous language, than to the linguistic rights of speakers of Somali, an example of a migrant minority language.

In many countries, socio-political discourses and ideologies are linked to monolingual convictions rooted in nation building across 19th century Europe, as well as nation state ideology (Conteh & Meier, 2014; Kroskrity, 2000). This ideology considers language policies as part of nation building and promotes the idea of one language, one people, one nation (Conteh & Meier, 2014; Dewilde, 2017). When researchers analyse how language ideologies influence societies, they often study the policies regulating language use in various sectors of society. The study of language policy and planning has brought forth multiple analytical frameworks to investigate how language ideologies influence language policy and planning (see Kroskrity, 2000). In the next section, we introduce one such framework, developed by Richard Ruíz (1984), about different orientations in language planning.

#### 4 Orientations in language planning

Ruíz' (1984) framework of orientations in language planning has been a useful analytical tool for researchers of language policy and planning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Hult & Hornberger, 2016), language ideologies (De Jong, Li, Zafar & Wu, 2016; Iversen, 2021), and language beliefs (Alisaari, et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, et al., 2020) for nearly 40 years. Hult and Hornberger (2016) have argued that Ruíz' framework over the years has "not worn out with time but has only become more powerful" (p. 30). Ruíz (1984) defines a language orientation as "a complex of dispositions toward language and its role, and toward languages and their role in society" (p. 16). Specifically, he describes three distinct orientations to language at a societal level: language-as-problem, language-as-right, and language-as-resource. Hult and Hornberger (2016) have suggested that the orientations can function as useful analytical tools for deductive analyses of "messy policy debate and negotiation" (p. 42).

Language-as-problem is an orientation to language in society, which originates from a monolingual and assimilationist mindset, where certain languages and linguistic diversity are considered a problem that needs to be solved (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 34; Ruíz, 1984, p. 19). In many societies, linguistic diversity has been considered divisive and threatening to national unity. Consequently, provisions have been implemented to compensate for the problems caused by certain languages or linguistic diversity in a given society (Hult & Hornberger, 2016). Such measures have included initiatives to forge unity through linguistic standardization by linguistically homogenizing the population. Ruíz (1984) has shown how education has functioned as a key tool for policymakers to achieve the goals of linguistic unity.

Language-as-right is an orientation to language in society where languages are considered fundamental components in an individual's or a population's identity and culture (Ruíz, 1984). Hence, individuals and linguistic minority communities are granted certain rights based on a recognition of the significance of language to the individual and the population. Such rights can include the right to receive information from public authorities in one's own language and to receive an education through the medium of one's own language. Nevertheless, language-as-right is still a compensatory orientation

in so far as it seeks to address linguistic inequalities through legal provisions. Furthermore, Ruíz (1984, p. 24), argues that to provide language-minority communities with stronger linguistic rights might accentuate tensions between different groups in society and could lead to confrontation and conflict, as some groups are granted stronger rights than others.

Language-as-resource is an orientation to language in society where all citizens' languages are considered "a resource to be managed, developed and conserved" (Ruíz, 1984, p. 28), and where linguistic minority communities are regarded as "important sources of expertise" (Ruíz, 1984, p. 28). Moreover, languages are considered to have both an intrinsic, as well as an extrinsic value, for example for diplomacy, trade, and education (Ruíz, 1984, p. 27; 2010, p. 164). In an educational context, a language-as-resource orientation would lead to a greater emphasis on language teaching in school both for the linguistic majority and minority, and the linguistic minority communities would be encouraged to develop and apply their linguistic resources in diverse domains of society.

Ruíz (1984) notes that these orientations should be considered "competing but not incompatible approaches" (p. 18) and that different orientations can be more desirable than others in a particular context. Since its publication, the framework has also been met with criticism. In an attempt to clarify the framework, Ruíz (2010) has admitted that a focus on economic and military utility of linguistic resources and a conceptualization of linguistic resources in instrumental terms is incomplete. Furthermore, he has explained that a language-as-resource orientation is insufficient without legal rights (Ruíz, 2010). We consider Ruíz' three orientations as typologies, as researchers have repeatedly shown how different orientations are simultaneously present, interacting, and operating at different levels (Alisaari et al., 2021; Iversen, 2021).

## 5 Methodological and analytical approach

Ruíz (1984, p. 16) presented the three orientations above both to guide critical analyses of tendencies in language policy and planning, and to advocate new possibilities for language policy and planning. In the study at hand, the research team has used Ruíz' framework to guide a deductive analysis of the current policies related to MTE for linguistic minority students in four Nordic countries.

Based on the research team's in-depth knowledge of our respective contexts, we started out by identifying telling cases from the different countries, which could illustrate how Ruíz' framework manifests itself in current policies regarding MTE for linguistic minority students, and to call attention to the connections between these policies in the four Nordic countries. In traditional case studies, according to Mitchell (1983), the case in question usually serves to illustrate the typical and also tests and develops relevant theory. However, Mitchell (1984) argued that researchers instead should identify "a 'telling' case in which the particular circumstances surrounding a case, serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent" (Mitchell, 1984, p. 239). Andrews (2017) elaborates on Mitchell's understanding of the telling case by clearly distinguishing the telling case from the "exemplary case" (p. 459), because the latter gains its significance from its atypicality. The objective of the telling case is neither to illustrate what is typical, nor to illustrate what is atypical. Rather, the telling case serves to accentuate previously poorly understood theory and identify the necessary conditions for this theory's importance (Andrews, 2017, p. 459), regardless of whether the case is typical or not. In the article at hand, we perform a deductive analysis of how

Ruíz' (1984) language orientations are reflected in educational policies related to minority languages in primary and secondary education in four Nordic countries.

The telling cases were selected to demonstrate theoretical connections between data and the phenomena under investigation (e.g., Andrews, 2017; Mitchell, 1984). Since the cases we present are neither typical nor atypical of the phenomena, the case depends on the validity of the subsequent analysis. The objective of our analysis was not necessarily to generalise from a particular case. Instead, we have applied Ruíz' (1984) framework of language orientations to analyse the telling cases in order to gain new insights into the contemporary situation regarding MTE for linguistic minority students. Through regular digital meetings, we presented and discussed relevant telling cases from the different Nordic countries and selected cases for this article that could illustrate different aspects of language policies and describe the variety of tensions that exist in the field of mother tongues in education in the Nordic countries today. The selection of telling cases were based on the research team's analyses of core curricula and Language Acts, as well as recent research illustrating the implementation of these policies, as presented above. In the selection process, we decided to focus on cases that point out needs for development in MTE policies in the four countries. From the Finnish context, we analyse the discrepancy between language policy and teachers' language beliefs to illustrate that policy is not sufficient to create a linguistically inclusive education system. From the Norwegian context, we analyse how language rights are connected to particular geographical regions and how speakers of certain languages obtain or lose language rights depending on where they settle. From the Swedish context, we present the educational provision of Study guidance in the mother tongue (SGMT). From the Danish context, we analyse MTE in the Danish national curriculum and shed light on a remarkable language ideological distinction between mother tongues with and without status as official EU languages.

## 6 Four telling cases

In this section, we will present the telling cases from each country's context separately, analysing how Ruíz's framework of language orientations is reflected in them. We start with the cases that apply for several countries (Finnish and Norwegian cases) and conclude with more unique cases (Danish and Swedish cases).

### 6.1 A telling case from Finland: Resourceful policy, problematic implementation

In the Finnish telling case, we investigate tensions between policy guidelines and their implementation. In the Finnish Core Curriculum for Basic Education (EDUFI, 2014), language is explicitly framed as a right and resource (see Ruíz, 1984): People's right to their own languages is highlighted with a reference to the Constitution of Finland, Non-Discrimination Act and the UN's Universal Declaration of the Human Rights (EDUFI, 2014). Considering how different languages are presented in the curriculum, it is evident that there are some tensions: The curricula for national and foreign languages are part of the main body of the curriculum, whereas the MTE curriculum is a separate attachment to the Core Curriculum. Thus, the value of MTE is diminished, contradicting the orientations of language-as-right or language-as-resource. A separate attachment is a non-mandatory guideline for education providers of MTE, and the availability and accessibility of MTE differs noticeably between municipalities and even schools. This might have consequented in the current situation where less than half of the students who are entitled to MTE participate in these classes (Tainio et al., 2019).

Another language-related principle in the curriculum emphasizes the “parallel use of various languages in the school’s daily life as natural” (EDUFI, 2014, p. 26). Thus, on the policy level, multilingualism is valued as a resource, and languages are seen as having value for thinking and learning, identity construction, self-esteem, and inclusion into society (e.g., Cummins, 2001; Hult & Hornberger, 2016). However, recent research results on Finnish teachers’ language attitudes and orientations as well as practices do not fully align with the principles of the curriculum. Although teachers’ reported attitudes mainly reflect language-as-right or language-as-resource orientations, language-as-problem orientations are also explicitly expressed and monolingual ideologies presented (Alisaari et al., 2019; 2021; Bergroth & Hansell, 2021; Björklund & Björklund, 2021; Harju-Autti & Sinkkonen, 2020; Repo, 2020; Shestunova, 2019). Alisaari and colleagues (2021) shed light on the phenomenon by showing that teachers in Finland perceive language-as-right and language-as-resource mainly at the individual level, and language-as-problem at the societal level. The fact that teachers emphasize the value language has for individuals, not for societies, differs from Ruíz’ (1984) original ideas which emphasizes that all languages should be regarded as valuable resources for the whole society, not only for individuals.

In the general part of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education is it stated that “education supports the students’ development as versatile and skillful users of language, both in their mother tongue and in other languages. They are encouraged to use even limited language skills to interact and express themselves” (EDUFI, 2014, p. 19). Further, the curriculum of MTE states that “the students are encouraged to use their own language diversely in the lessons of different subjects and in other school activities” (EDUFI, 2014, p. 557). Contrasting the curriculum with classroom realities, studies show discrepancies: Some languages are valued more than others, language hierarchies exist in classrooms and in student interactions (Lilja et al., 2019). Migrant languages are seldom considered resources, and migrants are frequently regarded as lacking language proficiency, rather than being speakers with a broad linguistic repertoire that enriches Finland (Alisaari et al., 2019; Lilja et al., 2019).

Thus, mainly non-European languages are considered problems, not resources. In sum, the Finnish educational documents require teachers to value and support the development of all of students’ linguistic resources reflecting language-as-right and language-as-resource orientations. However, when contrasting policy documents with recent studies concerning teachers’ attitudes, orientations and practices, there are some discrepancies between policies and practices, and even language-as-problem orientations remain visible in the implementation of the policies. Thus, clear variation in practices indicates that progressive policies are not enough. Consequently, if teachers are not supported in reflecting their monolingual attitudes and professionally developing their competencies, the policies cannot be fully implemented.

## *6.2 A telling case from Norway: Geographical regions and language categories*

When it comes to opportunities for learning certain languages in Norway, the Norwegian Education Act (1998) imposes a divide between geographical regions and language categories. For some students the education act becomes an important right, whereas for others it creates unfortunate restrictions. On the basis of different minority language categories (Indigenous, national minority, migrant) and geographical regions that have emerged through historical processes, there is a clear language-as-right orientation (Ruíz, 1984) in Norwegian educational policy. However, it also includes elements of language-as-problem and language-as-resource orientations, as we describe

below. We critically analyse relevant paragraphs in the Norwegian Education Act (1998) and argue that reconsidering these demarcations is important for moving towards a resource orientation to minority language learning (see Ruiz, 1984).

All Sámi students in primary and secondary school have the right to instruction in Sámi as a subject, either at their school or by means of digital teaching (NEA, 1998, §6-2). Additionally, in the administrative area for Sámi language, all primary and lower secondary school students have the right to education through the medium of Sámi (NEA, 1998, §6-2). Outside of this area, when there are at least ten Sámi students who request education through the medium of Sámi and in Sámi language as a subject, they are entitled to such education and the education is continued for as long as there are at least six students left in the group. In upper secondary school, all Sámi students have the right to education in the subject Sámi (NEA, 1998, §6-3). It is thus clear that this language-as-right orientation towards the Sámi language strengthens the opportunities for Sámi students in the administrative region for Sámi language to learn Sámi. However, outside this region, the opportunities are restricted. While the numbers of Sámi students studying Sámi as first or second language has been stable over the past years (Statistics Norway, 2020), there are no statistics on Sámi students living outside the administrative area who want teaching in and through Sámi. Demarcating learning opportunities based on geography turns the language-as-right into a language-as-problem orientation where knowledge of Sámi language is not prioritised for students outside the administrative area. Extending the rights of Sámi students living outside the geographical boundary is important to enhance the status of the Sámi languages and its speakers outside the administrative area for Sámi languages (see Ruíz, 1984).

There is a similar language-as-right and language-as-problem divide when it comes to the opportunities to learn the national minority language, Kven. When at least three students with a Kven/Norwegian-Finnish background in primary school in the county Troms og Finnmark in northern Norway request it, the students have the right to instruction in Kven or Finnish (Niiranen, 2011). From the 8th grade onwards, the students themselves decide whether they want such education (NEA, 1998, §2-7). Students with a Kven/Norwegian-Finnish background living outside of Troms og Finnmark are not entitled to education in Kven or Finnish. As was the case for the Sámi language above, the geographical restriction signals that Kven and Finnish are not valued as resources for students outside the county of Troms og Finnmark, suggesting a language-as-problem orientation in the regulation of Kven education. For the past years, there has been a decline in students studying Kven or Finnish due to the lack of information about the instruction and of qualified staff, as well as the fact that Kven is only to a limited degree a living language in the local community (see also The Language Council of Norway, 2018). The restriction to three students seems to be an organisational one. With the increase of technological possibilities for distant learning, it is legitimate to question this restriction and the language-as-problem orientation.

Students who speak languages other than Norwegian, Sámi or one of the national minority languages at home, only have the right to MTE or bilingual subject education if the school is of the opinion that they do not have sufficient proficiency in Norwegian to follow mainstream teaching (NEA, 1998, §§2-8, 3-12). Contrary to Sámi and Kven, the right to MTE and bilingual subject education is not demarcated geographically but rather is based on the students' Norwegian language skills. It is thus a restorative (Kjelaas & van Ommeren, 2019) and language-as-problem orientation where "the central activity remains that of problem solving" (Ruíz, 1984, p. 21) and not valuing these students' mother tongues as a resource in themselves and important to their identity development as multilingual speakers. From 2009-2010 onwards there has been a

decrease in the number of students receiving mother tongue teaching and bilingual subject education (NDET, 2022). Finding ways to formalize MTE and bilingual subject teaching beyond students who do not have sufficient language skills in Norwegian is important to move towards a resource orientation, giving legal status and increased symbolic value to the languages spoken by newer minorities in Norwegian society.

### 6.3 A telling case from Denmark: Privileging of mother tongues with official status in the European Union

The Danish case focuses on the establishment of hierarchies between various mother tongues within MTE in the Danish curriculum for primary and lower secondary school over the last decades. The case builds on an analysis of curricular documents regulating MTE over time and highlights how access to education in some mother tongues has been secured with reference to supranational legislation while access to education in other mother tongues has been reduced and destabilized. The Danish case thus displays an inconsistent and ambivalent orientation exhibiting a language-as-right orientation regarding mother tongues with status as official language in a membership state in the European Union and a language-as-problem orientation for all other mother tongues (e.g., Ruíz, 1984).

In Denmark, MTE was introduced in the National Curriculum of 1975 (Daugaard, 2015; Kristjánsdóttir, 2006; 2020). It took, however, 25 years for the first executive order concerning MTE to be issued (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2001), and the first pedagogical guide containing objectives for the MTE to be developed. Only one year later, in 2002, this was replaced by a new executive order introducing radical changes in the scope, content and access to MTE in Denmark (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2002). With the new legislation, a sharp distinction was established between mother tongues with status as official language in membership states of the European Union on the one hand and all other mother tongues on the other hand. Whereas it was mandatory for Danish municipalities to offer MTE in all languages until 2002, the new regulations stipulated that the municipal obligation pertained exclusively to provision of MTE in EU languages. The new executive order on MTE thus explicitly and exclusively applies to children from EU membership states, children from European Economic Area countries (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and children from Greenland and the Faroe Islands which are self-governing nations within the Danish state. For all other languages, it has since 2002 been up to the Danish municipalities to decide whether and under which circumstances, they want to offer MTE. Furthermore, the state funding of MTE in non-EU languages was withdrawn. For many municipalities, this lack of funding contributed to the decision to abolish non-EU MTE. Other municipalities maintained MTE in non-EU languages, but at the expense of the families (see Kristjánsdóttir & Timm, 2011).

Generally, the legislative change has led to a dramatic – and politically intended – decrease in the number of Danish municipalities offering MTE in languages other than official EU languages. In a 2011 report with the telling title *Denmark suffers from mother tongue ache* (Danish: ‘Danmark har ondt i modersmålet’), Kristjánsdóttir and Timm estimated that no more than 7% of all ‘bilingual students’ participated in MTE in non-EU languages – a drastic decrease from the estimated 41% participation in 1997 (Kristjánsdóttir & Timm, 2011, p. 78). Today, the figures may be even lower, but no official national statistical information on the extent of provision of MTE – either in EU languages or other languages – in the Danish municipalities is currently available. This

lack of information reflects the lack of both attention and priority accorded to MTE, both in Danish society at large and in the current educational debate.

Overall, the development in the Danish curriculum for MTE reflects a distinct language-as-problem orientation (see Ruíz 1984). Mother tongue teaching is not viewed as an integral part of the national language curriculum in primary and lower secondary school and is relegated to a peripheral position on the margins of the educational system. Whether a child has access to mother tongue teaching or not is highly dependent on local municipal dispositions, and if the municipality does not offer mother tongue teaching, the families rely on provision of alternative mother tongue teaching by local actors such as religious or cultural organizations or private arrangements. However, as described above, the pronounced language-as-problem orientation does not apply to all mother tongues, but specifically to mother tongues without status as official language in an EU membership state. For mother tongues with official EU status, a simultaneous language-as-right orientation emerges since the intended national withdrawal of support for all MTE was impeded on supranational level by EU legislation stipulating the right to mother tongue teaching for children of migrant workers from EU membership states.

In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a new dimension has been added to the Danish hierarchy of mother tongues. Like in other Nordic countries, Ukrainian newcomers were accorded special rights and privileges in terms of residence permit and access to the labor market, but special provision was also made for Ukrainian children in primary and lower secondary school in terms of medium of instruction. While other groups of newcomers are taught in Danish only, special legislation allows for both Danish, English and Ukrainian to function as medium of instruction for Ukrainian children (Ministry of Children and Education, 2022). While this is not a case of MTE proper, it demonstrates an extraordinary flexibility in relation to the choice of medium of instruction accorded to the Ukrainian language as a mother tongue. Since Ukraine is not a member of the European Union, the remarkable language-as-a-right orientation to the Ukrainian language cannot be explained by reference to the established demarcation between mother tongues with and without EU status. Instead, the privileged position of Ukrainian as a mother tongue highlights how the handling of a geopolitical crisis can have serious language ideological repercussions circumventing educational policies.

#### *6.4 A telling case from Sweden: Study guidance in the mother tongue as transitional support*

In Sweden, the Swedish Language Act (Swedish Ministry of Culture, 2009) is central in defining the linguistic rights awarded to different groups of inhabitants. It states that persons whose mother tongue is not Swedish, one of the five national minority languages or the Swedish Sign Language are to be given “the opportunity to develop and use their mother tongue” (Swedish Ministry of Culture, 2009, §14-15). These wordings reflect language-as-a-right and language-as-a-resource orientations (e.g., Ruíz, 1984). Moreover, there are several forms of education resulting from policies that have created ideological and implementational spaces (see Hornberger, 2005) for the use and development of mother tongues other than Swedish; firstly the elective subject of mother tongue, which provides a space for the use and development of mother tongues other than Swedish and secondly, SGM, where students’ mother tongues or other languages that they speak are leveraged to support learning in Swedish. In the Swedish telling case, analysis of legislature, including sections of The Swedish Language Act (Swedish Ministry of Culture, 2009) and the Swedish Education Act (Ministry of Education and

Research, 2010), a handbook on SGMT (SNAE, 2022) as well as research on SGMT, illustrates and how organizational and implementational challenges limit the potential that languages other than Swedish have to be resources, and create a risk that they will instead be reframed as problems

SGMT is not a school subject, but has been a regulated, temporary form of multilingual tutoring in primary and lower secondary education in Sweden since the 1960s. Any student whose level of proficiency in academic registers of Swedish prevents them from reaching the learning goals in one or more school subjects has the right to SGMT (Ministry of Education and Research, 2010). Newcomers enrolling in Swedish lower-secondary schools have a stronger right to SGMT and should be provided with SGMT “unless it is clearly unnecessary” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2010). School principals have the jurisdiction in schools to decide who is to be provided with SGMT, based on either the initial assessment of the newcomer’s knowledge, or teachers’ assessment of the multilingual student’s learning progression (SNAE, 2022b).

During SGMT, the students and their tutor work through subject content, which is delivered in Swedish, using the student’s mother tongue or their strongest school language, or both, alongside Swedish. SGMT provides a space for the use of a wide range of resources, modalities, analog and digital tools and media from different contexts (Reath Warren, 2021; Rosén et al., 2020). This unique but temporary space for translanguaging helps students who have linguistic and school backgrounds in other countries to understand words, concepts and tasks in subjects in the Swedish school, as well as raising their metalinguistic awareness and understanding of the Swedish school and social context (Reath Warren, 2016; Rosén, 2017; Rosén et al., 2020).

Students who participate in SGMT thus, appear to be enacting their rights, as defined in the Language Act (Swedish Ministry of Culture, 2009) to have access to and be able to use Swedish in all areas of society, by leveraging the knowledge they have in languages other than Swedish. However, although the languages that newcomers speak are framed as resources and as rights in policies relating to SGMT, in practice SGMT is provided on a temporary basis only and for the explicit purpose of gaining academic literacies in Swedish. This can be interpreted as reflecting a language-as-problem orientation (e.g., Ruíz, 1984). Once the student is deemed to know sufficient Swedish to be able to participate in classroom instruction in Swedish and gain a passing grade, SGMT is usually stopped. From this perspective, SGMT, although providing a valuable space for language and subject knowledge development is also one in a range of educational measures designed to linguistically homogenize the whole population.

There is in addition, a tension between the policies relating to SGMT, and other chapters in the Swedish Education Act that decree that students who can easily pass school subject are to be given the classroom support and stimulation to reach their full learning potential (Ministry of Education and Research, 2010, ch. 3 §2). This support and stimulation can be provided by giving students SGMT on a longer-term basis, yet in practice, this rarely happens. Nilsson Folke (2017) contributes a critical perspective on the quality and organization of SGMT, highlighting specifically the challenges newcomers in mainstream classes face when the provision of SGMT is not based on the student’s needs, rather, their class placement or length of time in Sweden. The language-as-problem orientation in SGMT is also reflected in limited opportunities for collaboration between the tutors and subject teachers, lack of access to teaching materials in the relevant languages from reliable sources, the diglossic nature of some languages and also the limited time allocated to SGMT (Avery, 2016; Rosén et al., 2019, 2020). Furthermore, there are no formal prerequisites to become a tutor and no educational programmes that prepare tutors for the relatively high-level academic and subject-

specific literacies in every school subject in at least two languages that are needed to conduct SGM of good quality (see Rosén et al. 2019, 2020; SNAE 2018). All the above issues significantly limit the potential that languages other than Swedish have to be leveraged as resources for learning in SGM.

## 7 Comparison of telling cases

A cross-Nordic comparison of the telling cases from Finland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden reveal that all of Ruíz' (1984) three orientations are present in all telling cases. Languages other than the official national languages are generally framed as resources for learning in curriculum and steering documents, but which languages and for which purposes differs across the contexts. In what follows, we discuss some of the most salient similarities and differences between the four countries.

On the surface, there seem to be many commonalities between four Nordic countries, but our analysis reveals that there are many discrepancies. For example, it seems that language as a right or a resource is explicitly present in MTE policies in all the four countries. Students who participate in MTE or SGM are, in a very concrete manner, enacting their rights, and languages are seen as resources for learning. However, a closer look reveals some outliers of this tendency. In Sweden, SGM is offered only until the students know sufficient Swedish and are able to learn through classroom instruction in Swedish (SNAE, 2022b), and in Finland, the MTE curriculum is only an attachment to the curriculum. In Norway, outside of certain regions, the opportunities for studying national minority languages are restricted. In Denmark, a language-as-right orientation concerns only mother tongues with status as official language in a membership state in the European Union and a language-as-problem orientation exists in regard to all other mother tongues. Thus, there are many features of language-as-a-problem orientation present in relation to the MTE policies. In some cases, students have the right to language education and their languages are seen as resources, but sometimes these same languages are seen as problems or only as a medium for learning the majority language of instruction. This contravenes the recommendations of the Nordic Declaration (NCM, 2007, p. 746), wherein Nordic residents whose mother tongue is a non-Nordic language are recommended to be provided not only with thorough instruction in each country's official language, but also the opportunity to use and develop their own mother tongue.

A remarkably discordant language orientation seems to exist in Denmark exhibiting a clear language-as-right orientation in regard to EU mother tongues on the one hand and a just as clear language-as-problem orientation for non-EU mother tongues on the other hand. This hierarchical ranking of mother tongues and the Eurocentric privileging of mother tongues with EU status in some ways echoes the valorization of the Sámi language described in the Norwegian case. However, while the Norwegian case illustrates how Indigenous languages are accorded a privileged position in a national context, the Danish case shows how supranational legislation can be imported by national political actors and enter national language policy and planning where it contributes to the establishment of sharp demarcation lines between protected mother tongues originating within the borders of the European Union and "lawless" mother tongues from the rest of the world.

Furthermore, the research referred to in each of the telling cases indicates that the same languages that are framed as resources in policy documents become problems that are difficult to solve in the contexts in which they are supposed to be implemented. For example, even though Finnish educational documents require teachers to advocate for

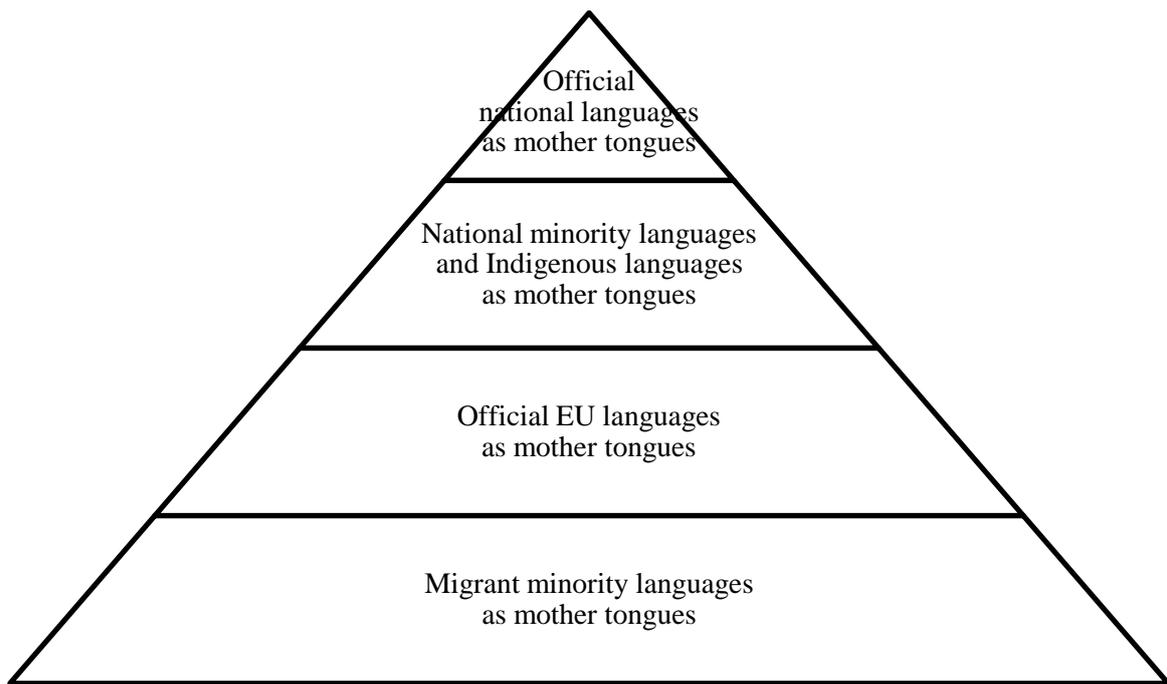
all students' linguistic resources reflecting language-as-right and language-as-resource orientations, language-as-problem orientation remains visible in the implementation of the policies. This indicates a need for pre- and in-service training to support teachers in implementing the policies in their practices.

Another implication of only partial actualization of students' right to develop their mother tongue is that local municipal dispositions influence the possibilities that a child has to access MTE both in Finland and especially in Denmark. In both these countries the responsibility for MTE in non-European languages is relegated to individual municipalities who, using funds out of their own budget, decide themselves whether to offer it or not. In Sweden, the resources required to implement SGMTE successfully (e.g. functioning collaboration between teachers and tutors) are not always available. In Norway, regional inequalities and restrictions for non-Sámi's opportunities in Sámi education and the lack of information about the instruction and of qualified staff in Kven and Finnish instruction highlight a language-as-problem orientation where knowledge of Sámi, Kven or Finnish language is less valuable than the knowledge of Norwegian. Clearly, language ideologies influence language education policies from the top down and from the bottom up, impacting both on state-funding as well as willingness to implement policies in contexts where different values are attributed to different languages.

## **8 Conclusion: A cross-Nordic hierarchy of mother tongues**

The aim of this article has been to explore the language ideological orientations towards MTE in languages other than the official national languages in the four Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Using Ruíz's (1984) framework of language orientations, we asked the following research question: In what ways does MTE reflect orientations to language as rights, resources or problems in educational policy in four telling cases from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden?

The analysis of the telling cases showed that even if all four countries provide various forms of MTE, thus at first glance aligning with the intentions in the Declaration of a Nordic Language Policy, there are important differences between the provisions. As described earlier, the declaration stipulates that all Nordic residents' have the right "to preserve and develop their mother tongue and their national minority languages" (NCM, 2007, p. 92), thus exhibiting a strong orientation to language-as-a-right. However, as pointed out in the declaration itself, it is "not legally binding and thus has not been put into effect in the legislation of the five Nordic countries and three autonomous areas" (NCM, 2007, p. 89). In this light, it is not surprising that important differences exist in the implementation of the principles of the declaration. The declaration itself somewhat anticipates this ambivalence or tension. On one hand, the declaration strongly asserts that "We in the Nordic countries consider all languages to be equal"; on the other hand, this remarkable language-as-a-right orientation is followed by an important modification: "They do not, however, all play the same role" (NCM, 2007, p. 91). The cross-Nordic comparison shows that the different mother tongues spoken in the Nordic countries in focus not only differ in function but are also valued very differently. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, the comparison of the telling cases reveals a remarkable cross-Nordic hierarchy of mother tongues:



**Figure 2.** A cross-Nordic hierarchy of mother tongues

Across the four Nordic countries, the official national languages are placed at the top of a language ideological hierarchy. As mother tongues to the majority population, they are consistently considered to be resources for the whole population and enjoy the strongest rights (e.g., Ruíz, 1984). The official national languages are followed by national minority languages as mother tongues – for instance Sámi in Norway, Swedish in Finland and Meänkieli in Sweden. These languages are awarded certain rights but are clearly not considered resources for the whole population (e.g., Ruíz, 1984). The Danish telling case inserts a supranational layer in the hierarchy of mother tongues, namely mother tongues with status as official languages in the European Union. These mother tongues are privileged over migrant minority languages, such as Somali and Turkish, which neither have status as official EU languages nor as national minority languages, such as Sámi. The hierarchy of mother tongues thus reflects how some types of mother tongues are more readily granted rights and considered to be resources than others. While the migrant minority languages at the bottom of the hierarchy are more likely considered a problem, the more prestigious mother tongues at the upper levels of the hierarchy are more likely to be considered resources and granted rights accordingly. This hierarchical ranking of mother tongues resonates with recent sociolinguistic research in the Nordic countries (Iversen, 2021; Nørreby, 2020; Saarinen, 2012), which has described how different languages are valued differently and consequently ranked hierarchically ranked by speakers and in official policy documents.

The Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy casts the Nordic countries as “a linguistic pioneering region” (NCM, 2007, p. 95) and states that “the Nordic language community is characterized by its members’ endeavors to understand and respect one another’s mother tongues” (NCM, 2007, p. 95). Our analysis suggests that this may be the case for mother tongues with status as official national language or national minority languages (and in the case of Denmark for mother tongues with official EU status), but not to the same extent when it comes to migrant minority languages as mother tongues. If the Nordic countries are to function convincingly and reliably as linguistic pioneers

when it comes to MTE in migrant minority languages (e.g., NCM, 2007, p. 95), further knowledge as well as further action is required.

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<sup>1</sup> Percentage has been calculated using the official database of Statistics Denmark at <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/UDDAKT20>. According to figures per 1.10.2022, the total number of students in primary and lower secondary school is 682.424. Of these, 583.204 are 'of Danish origin', 39.920 are 'immigrants', 58.121 'descendants of immigrants' and 1.179 'undisclosed'.

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