

Mobility for teacher students or teacher students for mobility? Unravelling policy discourses on international student mobility in the context of teacher education

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journals.sagepub.com/home/eer**Tea Dyred Pedersen** 

NIFU - Nordic Institute for Studies in innovation, research and education, Norway

Abstract

Forming part of the efforts to internationalise European higher education, international student mobility has become a key activity strongly supported and promoted by policymakers. In particular, the mobility of teacher students has become a more prominent issue over the past decades. However, to this date there is a lack of research focussing on this specific aspect of higher education mobility policies. Drawing on the analytical framework of discursive institutionalism, this article critically explores policy discourses on teacher student mobility as they emerge in a range of historical and contemporary European and Norwegian policy texts. Subsequently, it discusses how such discourses presuppose the function of teacher education and future teachers in the political agendas on internationalisation and mobility. The study finds that mobility in the context of teacher education is legitimated and promoted with discourses of harmonisation, professionalisation and instrumentalisation, and argues that these discourses are ambiguous and obscure the purpose of both the activity of mobility itself, as well as teacher education and what it educates for, with potential implications for how mobility policies can be realised. In doing so, the article contributes to a critical discussion about the drivers behind contemporary policies for internationalisation and mobility in higher education.

Keywords

Teacher education, higher education, internationalisation, international student mobility, European policy discourse, Norwegian policy discourse, discursive institutionalism

Corresponding author:

Tea Dyred Pedersen, NIFU – Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, Økernveien 9, Oslo 0653, Norway.

Email: Tea.dyred.pedersen@nifu.no

Introduction

Both in terms of visibility and promotion international student mobility is currently among the most prominent features in the efforts to internationalise higher education across European, national and institutional levels (Teichler, 2017). Symbolised by its crucial role in both the ERASMUS-programme and the Bologna Process student mobility has over the past decades been an activity surrounded by intensifying political interest and promotion at the European level (Papatsiba, 2006). In parallel the mobility of teacher students has apparently become a more prominent issue over the past decades (Zgaga, 2008). Indeed, this was made a priority in the European Higher Education Area in 2015, the highest-level and perhaps most influential European policy cooperation for student mobility, which stated that: *'We also wish to promote the mobility of teacher education students in view of the important role they will play in educating future generations of Europeans'* (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2015). Across different national contexts the same observation can be made, as reforms which aim to support internationalisation, and in particular increase student mobility, have been implemented in teacher education (Wernisch, 2016). As for the case of Norway, this is illustrated with the latest reform of teacher education for primary and lower secondary school in 2017, which aimed to increase internationalisation and mobility based on the assumption that it would enhance the quality of the education (Skagen and Elstad, 2020).

Arguably, the strong political focus on mobility contributes to creating effects and contexts for thinking about it (Brooks, 2018; Robertson, 2010), but to this date there is a lack of research which critically addresses potential implications of political ideas and discourses that legitimate the intensified political promotion of teacher student mobility. Drawing on inspiration from the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008), this paper explores and compares the development of contemporary European and Norwegian policy discourses on student teacher mobility as promoted in key policy texts over the past decades. It specifically asks *how* and with *which ideas* mobility is being promoted and *why*; that is, how does this form discourses which legitimate this particular targeting of teacher education and teacher students. Analytically these questions are approached through (1) mapping the *ideas* conveyed in such discourses and (2) *discussing* how this presupposes the role and function of future teachers in internationalisation and mobility agendas. In light of the amount of attention and resources currently being paid to student mobility across policy and institutional levels, it is crucial to take a step back and critically examine both the political aims and purposes driving this agenda. Thus, this paper aims to contribute to a critical discussion about the drivers and rationales of contemporary higher education policies for mobility.

Situating the study: Norwegian teacher education context and the policy prominence of international student mobility

The study presented in this article aims to analyse and contrast ideas about teacher student mobility conveyed in European and Norwegian policy discourse. While mapping the European discourse(s) alone would suffice as a way of gaining insight to institutionalised ideas about mobility from crucial policy actors in the field, including a comparative national case is arguably highly relevant with teacher education being the main focus of the study. Although the Bologna Process and the EHEA as well as the EU strategies in education and research influence teacher education and are international by nature, *'(. . .) teacher education policy – related to national systems of pre-tertiary education – remains to a large extent nationally based'* (Zgaga, 2013: 348). Teacher education across Europe therefore cannot be treated as *one* sub-field, and including a national case thus seem relevant to contextualise and contrast the findings on the European level. Specifically the study

concerns Norwegian teacher education for primary and lower secondary school which at the political level is both continuously heavily debated and substantially changed (Expert Group on the Teacher Role, 2016). It is somewhat representative of a Nordic model for teacher education with a relatively strong state regulation aimed at supporting the comprehensive education system which constitutes the Nordic education model (Prøitz and Aasen, 2017: 221). Thus, as a political institution, this field involves tensions around structure, aims, content etc., and hence ‘(. . .) *different discourses of teacher education as professional qualifying will exist at the same time*’ (Garm and Karlsen, 2004: 738).

More generally Norway provides for an interesting national case due to the significant amount of resources which has been put into ensuring the opportunity for all higher education students to undertake study periods abroad (Stensaker et al., 2008; Vabø and Wiers-Jenssen, 2014). The still stronger emphasis placed on mobility is evident by the number of white papers, strategies and initiatives initiated by policymakers over the past decades which promote mobility (Meld. St. 7, 2020–2021; Meld. St. 16, 2016–2017; St. Meld. 14, 2008–2009; St. Meld. 27, 2000–2001). Today it is a stated long-term objective that 50% of all students taking a degree in higher education should have had a stay abroad when finishing their degree (Wiers-Jenssen, 2019), and while the reality of this ambition can be discussed, it illustrates the commitment to this agenda in Norway. It thus provides the study with a rich national case for studying ideas about student mobility and their development over time.

Though not being a member of the EU, Norway participates fully in the EU education and research programmes in terms of rights and duties, and it has been argued that its higher education internationalisation policy shares many common ambitions with the European agenda on this matter. This is illustrated by the fact that Norway both joined the ERASMUS-programme and signed the Bologna Declaration in their early stages, and its general keenness to implement the associated changes (Gornitzka and Langfeldt, 2008; Wiers-Jenssen, 2019). This serves as an important backdrop for exploring ideas about mobility specific to teacher education, which has only formally/legally been included in the Norwegian higher education system since the mid-1990s (Garm and Karlsen, 2004). Thus, the comparative temporal analysis of the two discourses respectively allows for a rich analysis of the variety of ideas employed to promote teacher mobility, as well as how such ideas have gained legitimacy and become prominent – on the policy level – in the institutional context of teacher education.

Existing research: Discursively oriented perspectives on mobility policies

The intensified policy focus on teacher students’ mobility has been observed and commented on by more scholars (Pedersen, 2021; Wernisch, 2016; Zgaga, 2008). Yet to this date the ideas and discourses supporting it have not been critically explored. In the general higher education literature, a number of studies have attended to the underlying political ideas about student mobility (e.g. Brooks, 2018; Courtois, 2018a, 2019, 2020; Papatsiba, 2009), but for teacher education as a sub-field of higher education, internationalisation issues are left rather unexplored (Pedersen, 2021; Zgaga, 2017). Arguably, this is problematic because these issues concern and cut across higher education and the disciplines in general, as well as teacher education specifically, for instance in terms of how to enable teachers to handle the increasing internationalisation in schools. Thus, following the call made by other scholars in the field to approach teacher education from the perspective of higher education at large (Zgaga, 2013), the present study aims to shed light on the discourses specific to teacher education by *maintaining* focus on its position in the broader context of higher education.

Existing studies have demonstrated how policy texts are replete with claims about the benefits and qualities of mobility for the individual student, higher education institutions, society and the economy more generally (Powell and Finger, 2013; Teichler, 2017). It has been argued that policies tend to emphasise the individual competences supposedly developed through mobility such as language acquisition, intercultural competence, and self-confidence, but that these qualities are often promoted within a framework conceptualising them as a useful instrument for the economy and society (Courtois, 2020; Dvir and Yemini, 2017; Papatsiba, 2006, 2009). In this vein, more scholars have argued that the past decades have witnessed a shift in internationalisation policies towards commercialisation symbolised by the focus on student mobility (Castro et al., 2016; Chankseliani and Wells, 2019; Robson and Wihlborg, 2019), as well as an instrumentalisation of student mobility itself, where economic aspects are emphasised at the expense of social, academic and intercultural aspects (e.g. Abdullah et al., 2017; Courtois, 2019, 2020; Dvir and Yemini, 2017; Findlay et al., 2017; Pedersen, 2021; Powell and Finger, 2013).

In the broader context of education policy this discursive shift has also been observed in relation to compulsory schooling, in terms of how the capacities mentioned above can be developed among *pupils* (Dvir and Yemini, 2017). In relation to this the role of teachers become increasingly important, as they are positioned as *responsible* for developing these capacities among pupils, and thereby ultimately for mediating social and economic issues in society (Biesta, 2017; Caena, 2014). By implication, the quality of teachers – and thereby also teacher education – has moved into the political and public limelight, and multiple discourses (both professional and political) compete in constructing a certain view on teachers, their work, their role and their quality (Garm and Karlsen, 2004; Robertson, 2012). In this way, educational reforms and policies discursively draw on positioning teachers in certain ways to support their aims, and thus impose ‘professionalism from above’ as a way of fostering appropriate (professional) conduct among teachers (Evetts, 2013). As teacher education is both a subfield within higher education at large, and closely linked to compulsory education as the arena for future professional practice, different framings, demands and challenges can be found placed upon it in various policy texts (Wernisch, 2016), and analysing and comparing these may therefore reveal different discursive constructions of teachers as professionals.

As policy meets the context in which they are to be implemented (in this case teacher education, and subsequently schools), such discursive positionings can become challenged, as actors ‘*are positioned differently and take up different positions in relation to policy, including positions of indifference or avoidance or irrelevance*’ (Ball et al., 2011: 625). While it is beyond the scope of this article to analyse the implementation or effects of mobility policies, policy discourses can clearly influence *how* they can be realised in different educational contexts. That is, the language and concepts used are likely to become part of dominant, taken-for-granted discourses which can affect how the phenomenon under scrutiny is thought about in the first place (Brooks, 2018; Saarinen, 2008). That is, although mobility is ultimately a matter of choice and agency exercised by the individual student, it is ‘*also animated, and set in motion, by external forces*’ (Courtois, 2020: 239), meaning that how mobility is *promoted* can in itself influence what mobility *is about*. Thus, the contribution of the present study is both empirical and analytical; focussing on teacher mobility as a hitherto understudied aspect of higher education internationalisation, and approaching mobility policies as a critical window to the surrounding structure for mobility by using discourse analytical techniques

Discursive institutionalism and the role of ideas in policymaking: An analytical framework

The paper approaches the study of mobility discourse by drawing on inspiration from the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism (Lynggaard, 2019; Schmidt, 2008, 2010). This

framework aims to understand policy in context by linking a perspective on the *communication* of ideas through discourse with a perspective on the *institutional context* in which this communication takes place (Schmidt, 2010: 4). This implies that ideas are seen as ‘*the “atoms” enabling the production of a discourse*’ (Lynggaard, 2019: 38), and discourse as the interactive process through which ideas are conveyed, adopted and adapted by actors within a given institutional context (Lynggaard, 2019: 38). This implies that discourse can be found at many levels and in many forms, and is not about top-down political communication (Schmidt, 2008: 305). However, the present study limits itself to explore the discourses circulated and promoted at the most official level of European and Norwegian policymaking, as it is assumed that the most general formulation of the ideas can be found here.

Within this framework ideas are approached as being crucial for political discourse, because they are seen as shaping our understanding of political problems, contributing to defining our goals and strategies and are used to communicate about politics thereby providing guides for action (Béland and Cox, 2010). When ideas are promoted in discourse, a collective discursive context can be formed, which actors can draw on and act within to legitimate their political choices (Lynggaard, 2019: 12). Inspired by this framework, the present study aims to map ideas about mobility for teacher students across various policy texts, and how they link together in discourses which legitimate the political actions being taken on this issue. To do so, the concept of ideas is operationalised by differentiating between *normative* and *cognitive ideas*; Normative ideas can be seen as ‘problem definitions’ in policies, as they function as envisions of future development in relation to ideals about what is desired/undesired in an open and uncertain future. Cognitive ideas can be seen as ‘problem solutions’, by way of introducing the means to various policy objectives, and thus filling out the space for decision-making by providing ‘*the recipes, guidelines, and maps for political action*’ (Schmidt, 2008: 306).

As the two types of ideas can be mobilised at the same time to shape policies, they are not easily separated (Courtois and Veiga, 2020). Analytically, however, they can serve as useful categories for mapping *how* mobility for teacher students is promoted (level of cognitive ideas), and *why* we see this particular targeting (level of normative ideas). Analytically these concepts contribute to shed light on how various ideas have contributed to justify and legitimise the intensified policy promotion of this matter across different policy levels and in different institutional contexts. The ‘materials and methods’ section provides an illustration (Table 2) of how the study relates these analytical concepts to features of the policy texts under scrutiny, that is, how they are operationalised to support the empirical investigation, as well as examples from the analysis.

Analysing policy texts: Materials and methods

While the paper treats policy texts as a valuable empirical source for exploring the development of mobility discourse, they are not transparent representations of an underlying social reality, but rather *constructed* as data (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011). Therefore, a careful and transparent outline of how texts are selected, coded and analysed is necessary (Ashwin and Smith, 2015). Thus, the material under scrutiny comprises a corpus of 22 policy texts which have been selected based on their ability to provide insights into policymakers’ ideas about teacher student mobility. The relevant policymakers in this context are delimited to the European Union and its official subsidiary directorates/agencies, and The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (two main political actors promoting mobility), as well as shifting Norwegian governments and agencies. As for the types of policy texts analysed, this both includes formal policy documents, such as legislation, as well as white papers, reports, statements and other types of communication, which contribute to establishing some kind of justification for policy decisions.

The selection of texts is first of all based on them being publicly available online (EU and national libraries, official government websites etc.) and was supported by active engagement with secondary research literature as well as a range of criteria. There had to be either an explicit mentioning of (a) teacher education/training/students (thus excluding in-service teachers¹), (b) international student mobility, or related terms such as exchange, study abroad, etc. ‘Internationalisation’ and ‘globalisation’ were also included as more general concepts to support the selection. Given that the aim is to map a discursive development, the timeframe is circa 1990-present, which is a period in time marked by a stronger political interest in mobility; in Norway by a more prominent focus on quantitative objectives of mobility (Elken et al., 2015: 65), and on the European level by the launch of the ERASMUS programme in 1987 (Papatsiba, 2006). However, this does not suggest that this is the ‘historical origin’ mobility discourse, but mainly serves as an analytical starting point. An overview of the analysed documents can be found in Table 1. Though not all cited in the findings sections, detailed information about the policy texts can be found in the reference list. Not all the Norwegian policy texts exist in English versions, but when they do, these are used as references, though their content is often more compact than the original version.

Table 1. Analysed documents (issuing body, title, year. For full reference see bibliography).

European policy texts	Norwegian policy texts
European Commission Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community (1991)	Ministry of Education and Research (previously named Ministry of Church Affairs, Education and Research)
Green Paper on the European Dimension of Education (1993)	NOU 1996: 22 (Official Norwegian Report) Framework plans for teacher education (1994, 1999, 2003, 2010, 2016)
Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (2009)	White Papers from the Ministry of Education and Research
Green Paper on Promoting the learning mobility of young people (2009)	St. meld. 27 (2000–2001). The quality reform of higher education.
Supporting the Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes (2012)	St. Meld. 16 (2001-2002). Quality reform of new teacher education.
Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (2020)	St. Meld. 14 (2008-2009). Internationalisation of Education in Norway.
Council of the European Union Improving the quality of teacher education (2007)	St. Meld. 11 (2008-2009). The Teacher - the role and the education.
On the professional development of teachers and school leaders (2009)	Meld. St. 16 (2016–2017). Quality Culture in Higher Education.
Bologna Process/EHEA Bologna Follow-up Group on Internationalisation and Mobility Report of the 2012-2015 (2015)	Meld. St. 7 (2020–2021). A world of opportunities - International student mobility in higher education.
Yerevan Communiqué (2015)	Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education Norwegian students on exchange (2019) NOTED Call for applications (2019)

Analytical process: Mapping ideas and discourse

After the selection process described above, the documents were coded and analysed using NVivo software through a series of steps. Table 2 provides an overview of these analytical steps and how

they were operationalised in the analysis. The analytical process moved abductively and iteratively between the insights gained from the literature review, the analytical framework and the empirical material itself, thus allowing both for using the theoretical backdrop as sensitising lenses, as well as an empirical openness towards unexpected and puzzling findings calling for other theoretical perspectives (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018; Lynggaard, 2019). To substantiate own interpretations, they were continuously discussed with other researchers and contrasted with findings from existing studies in the general context of higher education.

Specifically, the first step of analysis was to map the ideas expressed across the documents, focussing on *normative* and *cognitive* ideas and how they are mobilised. This involved coding any statements about assumed purpose, value, or outcome of mobility (problem definitions), as well as any statements about objectives, instruments or actions to be taken (problem solutions). Next, these ideas were categorised by linking them together in broad common characteristics, which were then treated as discourses (common meaning systems). More specifically, the following examples illustrate this analytical step: ideas touching upon individual and professional aspects, such as intercultural competence, language acquisition and increased self-consciousness, were categorised as '*professionalisation*'. Ideas pertaining to structural aspects of teacher education/higher education such as removing barriers for mobility, standardisation of administrative procedures, as well as aims quality enhancement and fostering more comparability between teacher education and other sub-fields of higher education were labelled '*harmonisation*'. Finally, ideas about mobility in quantitative terms, incentives to increase mobility, and statements promoting mobility itself without further justification (e.g. that teachers are key to fostering a culture for mobility) formed a discourse of '*instrumentalisation*'. A more detailed example of analysis can be found in Table 2.

Hence, the three discourses of professionalisation, harmonisation and instrumentalisation broadly capture crucial features of both the European and Norwegian discourse, though they also differ in some respects. Thus, as the last analytical step, the findings from both respective contexts were compared in terms of the normative/cognitive ideas employed, their temporal development, and ultimately how they presuppose the role/function of future teachers. Focussing on both similarities and differences provided a rich picture of the ideas employed to promote teacher mobility, and thereby contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of how the (seemingly similar) contemporary discourses promoting teacher mobility have gained legitimacy in this particular institutional context.

Table 2. Analytical concepts, identification in the data and example from analysis.

Analytical concepts	Identification in the data	Analytical example
Ideas: the substantive content of discourse (a) Normative (problem 'definitions') (b) Cognitive (problem 'solutions')	(a) Which assumptions about mobility are present in the text? Which challenges/aims are mobility seen as the solution to (on individual, institutional, societal level?) (b) In which ways are teacher education/teachers promoted as a solution/answer to such challenges/aims?	Fostering a European dimension of education contributes to strengthening the internal market/European project (normative) – teacher students should have mobility experiences because they will eventually become political levers for spreading European values (cognitive)

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

Analytical concepts	Identification in the data	Analytical example
Discourse: the interactive process through which ideas are conveyed to articulate and legitimise policy in a given institutional context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does ideas identified in a + b link together in producing relevant and meaningful statements about mobility for teacher students? • Which general interpretations of the social world do ideas identified in a + b communicate about the role and function of teachers? 	<p>Mobility as related to aspects of professionalisation: develop knowledge about global issues, language acquisition, increased self-confidence, intercultural competences</p> <p>Future teachers are professionals who should be equipped for working in a context marked by increasing cultural and linguistic diversity among pupils</p>

Findings: Teacher student mobility between professionalisation, harmonisation and instrumentalisation

This section presents the findings of the study first by outlining the identified ideas and how they form discourses in the European and Norwegian context respectively. The three discourses labelled *professionalisation, harmonisation and instrumentalisation* convey a range of ideas about mobility as a ‘solution’ to a number of ‘problems’ on individual, institutional and societal level, which, in turn, create different links between future teachers and mobility, and hence legitimate political action (e.g. further promotion) to be taken on the matter. This is found expressed in at least three different ways; teachers as individuals who can benefit professionally from mobility experiences, teacher education as a field which lacks quality due to barriers for student mobility and that teachers function as political levers to ‘inspire’ mobility in society more generally, which will be further discussed after the presentation of the findings.

Mapping the European discourse

Table 3. Ideas and discourse in the European policy texts.

Ideas	Found in (text)	Discourse
Mobility supports the European dimension of education; Teachers need mobility experiences to spread European values in school	European Commission (1991; 1993)	Professionalisation/ Instrumentalisation Oriented towards political aims
Mobility supports teachers’ professional development; Teachers need mobility experiences to meet the diverse needs of their pupils	European Commission (2005) Council of the European Union (2007, 2009)	Professionalisation Oriented towards the individual and the school system
Learning mobility should be an integrated aspect of all education; Teachers need mobility experiences to be able to motivate pupils for mobility	European Commission (2009) Bologna Follow-up Group (2015)	Instrumentalisation Oriented towards political and economic aims
Mobility enhances the quality of higher education; Barriers to teacher student mobility must be removed to increase mobility and improve the quality of education	European Commission (2012) EHEA Ministerial Conference (2015) European Commission (2020)	Harmonisation Oriented towards teacher education institutions being part of higher education

In the European context, the promotion of mobility of teacher students is found to have accompanied the general mobility discourse as it accelerated in the late 1980's (Table 3). The general discourse foregrounded mobility as an instrument to strengthen internal market and support the political project of a single union by fostering a feeling of 'European belonging' among young people (Papatsiba, 2006). In light of this, teacher student mobility is found to be promoted as a way of disseminating European values into schools by providing students with both a European knowledge- and value foundation, as for instance identified in the Green paper on the European dimension of education:

"Teacher training is the main tool in the development of teachers' pedagogical practices (. . .) They are therefore the main players in integrating the European dimension into the content and practice of education (. . .) It is therefore crucial to strengthen initial and in-service teacher training. Here again, the accent should be put on transnational cooperation between teacher training institutions, especially in the form of European networks, using the medium of exchanges" (European Commission, 1993: 9–10).

As indicated in the extract, mobility is both promoted as a 'practical solution' to realising the normative ideas about the European project by drawing on the professional mandate of teachers in relation to the school system, yet, also on a somewhat instrumental idea about teachers as passive political levers for realising political agendas. In a similar vein, in the 1991 Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community, the idea that teacher student mobility could contribute to some harmonisation of the various European education systems is also found to be promoted:

"The acquisition of European experience by teachers would also be supportive of the more widespread understanding of the different systems of education and of their aims and philosophies and would help to define the areas of common approach and of possible convergence, which would facilitate catering for the education of a more mobile European population" (European Commission, 1991: 31).

Thus, in light of education otherwise being outside of formal EU competence, teacher student mobility represents a 'practical solution' to support the emerging aims of convergence between education systems. Arguably, such ideas contribute to the formation of a discourse of instrumentalisation, which instates an ambiguous relationship between teachers' professional practice and overall societal aims far beyond such practice, and in which mobility is both a means and an end. Generally, the instrumentalisation discourse with its ambiguous set of ideas about teacher professionalism, is found to characterise several policy texts, in particular in the wake of the EU's Lisbon Agenda in 2000. With the ambition of 'becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world', enhancing the quality of the European education systems was a crucial aspect which subsequently pulled teacher education into the political limelight (Zgaga, 2013). This is found to shape mobility discourse in terms of a new emphasis on ideas about foreign language acquisition and intercultural competences, which are justified as being an essential part of teacher professionalism in the increasingly multicultural European schools. Such ideas are for instance identified in the Common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications, where mobility is promoted as one out of four principles expected to:

"enhance the quality and efficiency of education" by enabling teachers to *"(. . .) encourage intercultural respect and understanding (. . .) have an understanding of the balance between respecting and being aware of the diversity of learners' cultures and identifying common values"* (European Commission, 2005: 3–4).

Yet, this professionalisation discourse is clearly also linked to the lifelong learning discourse in which employability is the ultimate goal and learning mobility a key instrument to achieve it. As for teacher students, this implies that mobility is also promoted as a solution to how to provide young people with skills and knowledge for competing in the global knowledge economy. Thus, while at the level of cognitive ideas, mobility is promoted as essential to teacher professionalism, substantially, this is closely intertwined with ideas about how to support economic success and prosperity in Europe. This instrumentality is found to be further reinforced as ideas about teachers as ‘*multipliers of mobility*’ emerge. With this, future teachers are not only seen as professionals who can promote the qualities and values associated with mobility as such, but the *activity* of mobility itself, as for instance identified in The Green Paper on Promoting the learning mobility of young people:

“an enthusiastic teacher (. . .) who has been mobile him or herself, can be an important motivator for young people to undertake a mobility period abroad. Such individuals have the credibility to explain the benefits of and act as an ambassador for youth mobility” (European Commission, 2009: 7).

Finally, a shift introducing a harmonisation discourse is identified in the wake of the initiation of the Bologna Process and the ambitions of creating a European Area for Higher Education. This discourse conveys normative ideas about the quality of European higher education as supported through harmonisation and in turn, cognitive ideas about student mobility as a crucial instrument to this. Hence, student mobility emerged as both one of the decisive reasons for establishing the EHEA, and at the same time its expected outcome, and as such became a goal in itself (Papatsiba, 2006). Arguably, by instating mobility as a proxy of quality in higher education (among many others), this promotes a view on mobility as an activity with inherent value irrespective of its paedagogical content. In the context of teacher education, this is found to imply a continuous problematisation of structural barriers hindering mobility, which is thus assumed to stand in the way of enhancing quality, however, arguably also for the presumed function of teachers as multipliers of mobility. Thus, as illustrated in the following extract from a report by the Bologna Follow-Up Group, the ‘lack of mobility’ promoted with the harmonisation discourse is linked with ideas about teachers’ multiplier function rather than ideas pertaining to the professionalisation discourse:

“High importance should be given to teachers as multipliers and motivators for their students to understand the advantages of intercultural competences, which can only be acquired by personal experience. Fair and transparent recognition (proper credit transfer) is still a problem, and curricula are generally too restricted (. . .) While the mobility of teacher training students carries a great potential for future generations of pupils and students, they belong to the least mobile groups” (BFUG Working Group on Internationalisation and Mobility, 2015: 13).

As such, this also illustrates that the ‘problem solutions’ promoted in the harmonisation discourse are mostly of a practical character related to recognition and removal of structural barriers. In this vein it seemingly reinforces a view on the purpose of mobility as mobility *itself*, and not as something substantially linked to any educational – or professional – purpose. Hence, it also illustrates the ambiguity between the professionalisation discourse on the one hand, and the instrumentalisation discourse on the other, which the normative idea about teachers as multipliers of mobility come to represent.

Mapping the Norwegian discourse

Table 4. Ideas and discourse in Norwegian policy texts.

Ideas	Found in (text)	Discourse
Internationalisation of society is an external force which challenges national culture; strengthening national identity is a prerequisite for developing an international identity as well	Ministry of Church Affairs, Education and Research (1994, 1999) NOU 1996: 22	Professionalisation (as counterpoint to effects of internationalisation)
Mobility enhances the quality of HE through structural harmonisation; The structure of teacher education is a barrier to harmonisation and mobility	Ministry of education and research (1994, 2003, 2010, 2016) St. meld. 27 (2000–2001), St. Meld. 16 (2001–2002)	Harmonisation Oriented towards institutions for teacher education as part of higher education
Mobility levels reflects level of quality within HE; levels of mobility need to increase in teacher education to enhance quality	Meld. St. 16 (2016–2017), Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (2019b)	Instrumentalisation Oriented towards the quality of higher education in terms of outcomes
Mobility supports development of personal and intercultural competences; Teacher students need mobility experiences to cater the diverse needs in schools	St. Meld. 11 (2008–2009).	Professionalisation Oriented towards the individual and the school system
Mobility is an essential part of all HE and must be supported by developing a culture for mobility; Teachers are multipliers of mobility within education and society at large	Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (2019a), Meld. St. 7 (2020–2021)	Instrumentalisation Oriented towards political and economic aims

Although various policy texts on internationalisation of higher education have been introduced in Norway since the late 1980s, a particular focus on teacher education cannot be identified before 2003, where the Bologna Process was implemented with the Quality Reform. Looking specifically at teacher education policy before this (marked with grey colour in Table 4), there are no references to mobility, and as a normative idea, aspects of internationalisation/globalisation is mainly referred to as an external force which challenges and has consequences for society. In this vein, the ‘solution’ is to strengthen teacher students’ national cultural awareness as part of their professionalisation, and as something which can support the development of an increasingly necessary international identity.

Notably, then, the emergence of a mobility discourse in this context is found to be linked to higher education at large and ideas about structural adaptations, rather than substantial ideas about the educational purpose and content of mobility or teacher students as such. Arguably, this discursive shift is made possible *mainly* in relation to harmonising teacher education with higher education at large, in a way which somehow challenges the otherwise dominant idea about the distinct national mandate. Thus, early on, this is found to draw on the ‘problem definition’ that the structure (and to some extent culture) of teacher education is a barrier to harmonisation, and thereby a barrier for student mobility. In the revised national curriculum regulations following the Quality Reform

in 2003, an example of this way of legitimising mobility with regards to structure rather than content is identified:

“The institutions which provide teacher education shall ensure integration of the international perspective in all subjects and course modules. They must be receptive to ideas from teacher education in other countries, provide more courses held in English and make provisions for student exchange. At the same time, students must become better acquainted with their own culture through contrastive analyses including analyses of the education system” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2003: 3).

Given that this is the only justification of mobility present in the text, it arguably draws on scarcely substantiated ideas about the purpose of mobility, and also continues to emphasise the national orientation of teacher education. However, in the wake of a new reform in 2008, a shift towards a professionalisation discourse is identified which promotes mobility (and internationalisation more generally) as central aspects to teacher professionalism, as illustrated in the following extract:

“More teacher students need knowledge about language and culture and can benefit greatly both personally and professionally from staying in a foreign environment. Internationalisation of teacher education is also important in order to promote multicultural knowledge and understanding in school and society” (St. Meld. 11, 2008–2009: 26).

Notably, this discursive shift should be seen in light of another parallel white paper (St. Meld. 14, 2008–2009), which outlined a new comprehensive strategy for internationalisation of the education system at whole. This indicates that more substantial pedagogical ideas about teacher mobility are legitimised with regards to the institutional context of the school system and teachers’ future professional practice. Yet, the professionalisation discourse is not found in any of the other analysed texts, which rather seem to reinforce the harmonisation discourse, and thus take for granted that mobility in teacher education does not differ greatly from higher education at large. This discourse is found to increasingly convey more instrumental ideas about mobility, such as stronger output-orientation in terms of instating levels of mobility as a proxy for educational quality. Arguably, this marks a discursive shift towards an instrumentalisation discourse drawing on normative ideas about mobility as a ‘deficit’ in teacher education in the sense that mobility levels are too low, and by implication, the quality of the education as well. This problem definition is found to have become predominant in the past decade and has therefore allowed for continuous political and institutional measures to be taken. This is illustrated by how several of the more recent policy texts emphasise the need to *increase* mobility rates, for instance in the description of a new centralised funding programme for internationalisation projects in teacher education which aims to:

“(. . .) improve the quality of Norwegian teacher education and schools. The programme seeks to achieve this through supporting projects that lead to: Increased quality and internationalisation of teacher education programmes in Norway (. . .) Increased student mobility within the framework of strategic partnerships between Norwegian teacher education institutions and partners abroad” (Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education, 2019b: 2).

Thus, this rather self-reinforcing set of ideas linking internationalisation, mobility, and quality together discursively, draws on a ‘problem definition’ where *levels* rather than *purpose(s)* of mobility become the overall aim. Interestingly, the instrumentalisation discourse is found to have become even stronger in the wake of the Norwegian policymakers’ ambition of ‘creating a culture for mobility’ in higher education (Meld. St. 7, 2020–2021; Meld. St. 16, 2016–2017), in the sense that mobility should be a natural and integrated part of all higher education programmes. In the context

of teacher education, such ideas reinforce ideas about ‘a mobility deficit’, yet, the associated ‘problem solution’ is now not only a matter of structural adaption, but the need for *cultural change* to support more student mobility (cf. Meld. St. 7, 2020–2021: 56). As for the idea about teachers as multipliers of mobility identified in the European policy texts, it is interesting to note how this aspect of the instrumentalisation discourse can also recently be detected in the Norwegian discourse. In a recent report by a government agency, the ‘mobility deficit’ in teacher education is addressed in the following way:

“The transition to 5-year teacher education can lead to higher mobility rates in this field as well. This is important because one out of ten students are teacher students, and therefore the number within this field has a huge impact on the national average. In addition, it is important because teachers are key actors in relation to a future culture for international exchange within the Norwegian education system” (Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education, 2019a: 17).

Arguably, rather than addressing potential underlying explanations or challenges to mobility in teacher education, the contemporary instrumentalisation discourse seems to allow for continuous political action to be taken on the matter, that is, new pressures, incentives and sanctions can be put on teacher education institutions to meet the aims of increasing mobility levels. The initiation of the new funding programme for internationalisation projects in teacher education mentioned above illustrates this very well.

Discussion

Paving the way for mobility and the ‘mobility deficit’

As argued above, the discourses of professionalisation, harmonisation and instrumentalisation can be found in both the European and Norwegian policy texts. Yet, the comparison also shed light on their different trajectory over time and the multiplicity of ideas conveyed. This suggests that despite the apparent similarity and shared ambitions of fostering more student mobility in teacher education present in policy today, student mobility have not always had a self-evident status as valuable in the institutional context of teacher education. Rather, though the study finds a strong interest in the mobility of teacher students on the European level drawing on a wide range of ideas, in the Norwegian context mobility ‘found its way’ into policy mainly by being justified in terms of the structural adaptations following Norway’s implementation of the Bologna aims. As such, it is a common pattern that reforms of teacher education in Norway related to higher education mainly concern general changes, such as degree structures or quality work, whereas changes linked to the compulsory education system revolve around the specific content and work forms in teacher education (Expert Group on the Teacher Role, 2016). Thus, while it is not surprising that the harmonisation discourse ‘paves the way’ for mobility in teacher education, the analysis sheds light on how this discourse is scarcely substantiated with regards to the educational/professional purpose inherent to the activity of mobility and the potential complexities arising from this.

As noted by Papatsiba (2006) *‘In the context of the Bologna process (. . .) The goal of mobility is said to be both important and unproblematic in terms of legitimacy and popularity’* (p. 97). Arguably, as ideas about student mobility became institutionalised in the broader context of higher education, teacher education was ‘discovered’ as an institutional context where such ideas held less legitimacy, that is, did not necessarily resonate well with existing ideas. In this vein, the policy push for mobility in teacher education in Norway early on was *external* rather internally founded in the purpose and needs of teacher education, and the institutionalisation of the harmonisation

discourse allowed for a new set of normative ideas concerning the undesired ‘mobility deficit’ in teacher education, and subsequently for continuous political action to be taken on the matter. As argued by Lynggaard (2019), ‘*in order to produce relevant and meaningful statements and to be accepted as serious and legitimate, political actors must express themselves through a set of commonly recognised ideas*’ (p. 38). As the present study has only analysed official policy discourses, it cannot claim that ideas about mobility are not accepted as legitimate in the institutional context of teacher education, or that this explains ‘the mobility deficit’. Yet, it is interesting to note how ideas pertaining to the professionalisation discourse were not discernible in the Norwegian context until a few years later and in relation to political changes of the compulsory school system. This points to the complexity involved when it comes to internationalisation of an educational field which is stretched out between the needs of the national school system (and society more generally), and the influence of global ideas and expectations of internationalisation in higher education.

Thus, as argued by Zgaga (2013), in this particular context, there is much more at stake concerning internationalisation than students going abroad; it is a discourse which implies demands about flexibility and other ways of organising education, which can have fundamental implications for the education itself (Zgaga, 2013). For instance, Pedersen (2021) discusses this challenge from the perspective of ground-level policy actors in teacher education and argues that while the predominant understanding of mobility is linked to the professional relevance for teacher students, it increasingly competes with academic and bureaucratic conceptualisations of mobility, that is, resembling the discourses of harmonisation and instrumentalisation. Ultimately, the increasingly instrumental discourse reflects a one-size-fits-all version of internationalisation, where student mobility is the predominant activity and symbol of otherwise complex processes across higher education (Courtois, 2019). It can therefore be further discussed whether the institutionalisation of mobility through discourses of harmonisation and instrumentalisation potentially contributes to obscuring both the purpose and characteristics of teacher education in a way which leaves little room for addressing the preconditions and challenges concerning mobility at institutional ground-level.

Mobility for teachers or teachers for mobility?

While the above discusses how the mobility of teacher students became an issue of interest for both European and Norwegian policymakers in relation to general changes to higher education, another central finding of the study concerns how these changes discursively position teachers as crucial actors for accelerating the mobility agenda. The study finds that the professionalisation discourse, though being the one conveying the most substantial ideas about mobility, is closely intertwined with the instrumentalisation discourse promoting ideas about mobility as something of essential value in *itself*. As an implication, the study finds that the policy texts, put a bit simplistically, ambiguously promote a view on mobility as both something important *for* teachers, and teachers as being important *for* mobility more generally.

Emphasising the need for student teacher mobility can on the one hand be seen as an important contribution to supporting equal access to – and participation in – mobility for all higher education students. However, being linked to still more instrumental ideas, this discourse implies a view on teachers as political levers rather than professionals. Thus, while teacher education is obviously mandated to provide students with the appropriate knowledge and skills needed to prepare pupils for participation in a rapidly changing society at any time, the instrumentalisation discourse contributes to narrowing the purpose of teacher education, and hence future teachers, to being instruments whose function it is to ‘deliver’ various political agendas (Biesta, 2017; Robertson, 2012),

in this case, fostering mobility. As argued above, this instrumentalisation is currently being strongly reinforced by various ideas about teachers as *multipliers of mobility*, which makes teacher students responsible for realising aims which are basically outside the realm of their future practice through their individual choice of mobility.

This is a discourse which thus constructs teachers as ‘policy enthusiasts’, that is, policy actors who ‘*embody policy in their practice and are examples to others, policy paragons*’ (Ball et al., 2011: 630). The policy discourse expects teachers to uncritically be receivers and champions of the aims of mobility policy by way of imposing it as a form of ‘professionalism from above’. In this case, the mobility of teacher students is promoted as a necessity for being a professional in national contexts (and classrooms) marked by increased social complexity and diversity, but in a way where the activity of mobility *itself* becomes the precondition for this aspect of professionalisation – that is, the only viable way to support teachers in developing such qualities. Thus, in a quite contradictory manner, the professionalisation discourse promotes the idea that going abroad *itself* contributes to developing the anticipated professional skills and competences, regardless of students’ previous experiences, motivation, etc., and the content of the mobility experience more generally. This implies that the activity of mobility itself, while linked to ideas about experiencing and learning to appreciate European values, is promoted as something not linked to any specific purpose beyond being able to inspire pupils to be mobile themselves; that is, the individual capacity to constantly be in motion, flexible and adaptive in a global labour market (Courtois, 2020). This stands in striking contrast to the normative ideas about teachers as counterpoints of the effects of globalisation found in the earliest Norwegian documents.

As such, it is not surprising that the present study confirms the instrumentalisation of mobility suggested in other studies (e.g. Abdullah et al., 2017; Brooks, 2018; Courtois, 2019, 2020; Dvir and Yemini, 2017; Findlay et al., 2017; Papatsiba, 2006). In a similar vein, the study by Dvir and Yemini (2017) critically discusses how policy texts on mobility often take an ‘*exceptional “jump” from macro-economic problems traditionally tackled at the government level to micro-level solutions focussing on advancing individual agency and capacity*’ (Dvir and Yemini, 2017: 205). Yet, the present study adds to the existing literature by highlighting the field of teacher education as one of the *means* through which the instrumentalisation works, and demonstrating how mobility, although being promoted as something beneficial for the individual teacher, forms part of a discourse substantially aimed at supporting economic and competitive aims. Ultimately, it can be argued that the current policy discourse is not particularly a discourse of substance, but rather one which draws on vague and ambiguous ideas about the appeal of mobility as such. By implication, seen from the level of policy discourse, it is difficult to comprehend why mobility should be of even *greater* importance to teacher students than other higher education students. In this vein, it can be speculated whether mobility policies driven largely by taken-for-granted ideas about its value, irrespective of academic contexts and students alike, risk standing in the way of their own aims and ambitions.

Concluding remarks

This paper set out to explore the hitherto understudied observation that an intensifying promotion of teacher student mobility can be detected in European and Norwegian policy texts, and that this involves a positioning of teachers as central policy actors to the realisation of the political aims of mobility. The study finds that the political promotion of mobility for teacher students draws on a range of ideas pertaining to *teacher students* in relation to their future professional work, *teacher education* as such and in relation to higher education, and *society* more generally. Such ideas are argued to form three overall discourses of professionalisation, harmonisation, and

instrumentalisation, which, in turn, are found to create a range of discursive ambiguities in terms of justifying why mobility for teacher students should be an issue of particular importance. In this vein, ideas about mobility are argued to hold a complex position in the institutional context of teacher education. The comparison of ideas over time and across the European and Norwegian level thus reveals that while mobility *could* have been differently legitimised and promoted, contemporary discourses take the value of mobility for granted, and position teacher education as a malleable instrument, and teachers as passive receivers and deliverers of policy ideas, in this case, for realising and accelerating the political aims of mobility. As such, the study contributes to the existing scholarly debate about the instrumentalisation of internationalisation via student mobility by foregrounding teacher education/teachers as yet another aspect of this instrumentalisation. It thereby provides an imperative for considering whether policies aiming to increase participation in mobility and enhance the quality of (higher) education would provide stronger arguments if driven by more substantial pedagogical and learning-oriented ideas allowing for re-contextualisation across different academic contexts. This ultimately provides a call for researchers to pose more critical questions to the current state of affairs regarding how student mobility is driven at policy level.

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ORCID iD

Tea Dyred Pedersen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8757-299X>

Note

1. In the context of the European Union, the professional mobility of teachers formed a key part since the Treaty of Rome, and has been supported in different programmes (Sayer, 2006). Yet, this analysis is limited to teacher education/students only.

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Author biography

Tea Dyred Pedersen has an MSc in Education Science and is currently a PhD student at the Nordic Institute for Studies in innovation, research and education located in Oslo, Norway. Her research focuses on internationalisation and international student mobility in the context of teacher education from the perspective of both policy and practices.